

In Memory Of
Private

PERCY HENRY HOWELLS

Service Number: 19943

1st Bn., Worcestershire Regiment who died on 30 August 1915 Age 18
Son of Mr. W. H. and Mrs. M. A. C. Howells, of Rose Cottage, Boraston, Tenbury Wells, Worcs.

IN THE MDST OF LIFE WE ARE IN DEATH

Remembered with Honour

RUE-DAVID MILITARY CEMETERY, FLEURBAIX

I. C. 13.



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COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
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COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

Remembrance Sunday Talk - 2020

Percy Henry Howells, the next of our parish fallen, who was only 18 when he died in a quiet sector of the Western Front on August 30th 1915. Although he wasn't the first serviceman from our parish to lose his life, he was certainly the youngest.

Percy Henry Howells was the second of the two children born to William H Howells and Mary Ann Colbourne Howells (nee Bradley) in the first quarter of 1897 – and he was at least the 3rd generation of the Howells family to be born in Boraston.

On the 1901 Census we find Percy aged 4 living at the 23rd entry for Boraston village, in a cottage which is described as being “near the church” (probably Rose Cottage – now Ramblers Way - where the family was still living when the next Census was taken in 1911). Percy lived with his widowed grandfather, James H Howells, the head of the household; his parents, William and Mary Ann Howells; his uncle, Arthur Howells, and his older sister, Sarah, aged 10.

Percy's grandfather and his Uncle Arthur were both bricklayers and his father, William, was a painter and decorator – so, with 3 skilled workers in the house, the family would have been quite well provided for by the standards of the time. Percy's mother, Mary Ann, grew up at the New Inn at Knighton on Teme, where her father, William Bradley, was landlord.

There were quite a few changes to the household at Rose Cottage between 1901 and the next Census in 1911. Percy's uncle, Arthur Howells, got married in 1904 and settled at Knighton-on-Teme where his 2 daughters were born in 1906 and 1907; and his sister, Sarah, qualified as a teacher and had moved to Wiltshire. In 1911 we find her aged 20 lodging with a family of farm labourers at Winterborne Bassett (near Swindon) and teaching at the village school. Percy, who was then 14, was still at school and still living with his grandfather and both parents at No 1 Rose Cottage, Boraston.

Private Percy Henry Howells served with the 1st Battalion Worcester Regiment on the Western Front; and we know from his pension and Medal Roll records that he was unmarried because his outstanding pay and medals were returned to his father as next of kin.

Before the War, the Worcesters already had 8 Battalions:- 4 of regular serving soldiers (2 abroad and 2 in the UK) plus 2 battalions of Special Reserve (Militia) and 2 Territorial Army battalions. During the war another 14 battalions were raised, making a total of 22 at the Armistice. When war broke out, the 1st Battalion had been out in Egypt for 2 years. The men and horses set sail for home on 30th September 1914, arriving in England on the 16th of October for a couple of weeks to train and re-equip before going out to the Western Front on the 5th of November 1914.

Unfortunately, Percy's army service record is one of the 50% that was destroyed when a German bomb struck the War Office repository in September 1940, so

we don't know exactly when and where he enlisted – although most volunteers had several months training in the UK before they were sent to France. Another local soldier, Private F J Abley of Eardiston, who was only 2 years older than Percy and who also served with the 1st Battalion Worcestershire Regiment, enlisted at Tenbury in 1914. So - we can assume that the two boys probably joined up together, even though Percy would only have been 17. Private Abley was killed in action a couple of months before Percy, on the 28th of June 1915 near Neuve Chapelle where the 1st Worcesters were holding the line after the battle.

Private Percy Henry Howells was only 18 when he died on 30th August 1915. He is buried in Plot 1 Row C13 in the Rue-David Military Cemetery at Fleurbaix; a cemetery which was begun by the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers in December 1914 and closed to Commonwealth burials in December 1917. At the Armistice it contained 220 graves, including Percy's - although it was significantly enlarged after the War when other burials were brought in from the surrounding area. The Rue-David Cemetery is now the final resting place for 898 Commonwealth soldiers, 429 of whom are unidentified.

After the Battles of Neuve Chapelle in March 1915 and Aubers Ridge in May, the area the 1st Worcesters found themselves in to the south of Armentieres was relatively quiet. The Allied and German armies had dug in after the battles, and soldiers on both sides of the line had become accustomed to the stress and monotony of trench life. Each 3-4 day spell in the front line was followed by 3-4 days in the support trenches, then a period of rest in the rear. While in the rear, the troops would work at night bringing up supplies or repairing trenches and barbed wire, and by day they would train and rest.

In Lyn Macdonald's book "1915 – The Death of Innocence", Private F Bastable of the 7th battalion Queens Own (Royal West Kent) Regiment, who was in the same part of the Front that summer, describes the death of his friend, Bill Beckington, who was shot by a sniper while patching up a few feet of damaged trench. I imagine that Percy Howells may have met his death in similar circumstances; a cruel waste of two young lives.

Here is Private Bastable's recollection, in his own words:- "The first casualty was my mate. It wasn't very nice. The trenches had been fired on and they'd broke them all up, and we had to go in there and make them up tidy again with sandbags. This was right in the firing line, so we both went in there, Bill and me; one had to hold the sandbag open while the other filled it up. We were just arranging it between us and thought nothing of it – we were well used to digging trenches". "Anyway, when we'd filled a few, Bill went up on the top with the sandbag where the hole was all broke down to make it up. I was standing down below while he was standing up doing it and the bullets started coming over.

I said to him "Look out Bill, they've got you spotted!" Well – he didn't bob down quick enough. The bullet just missed me and went to the back of the trench; made my ears whistle, the noise of it - and the next moment before Bill could say anything, he got it right in the head. It blew his head open and his brains was all coming out". "We went up the same night with the padre and gave

him a proper burial. ... I couldn't get over it! The first man killed in the battalion and it was my own mate. And all we was doing was sorting out the trench".

Because Percy Henry Howells was the youngest First World War casualty from our parish, we know less about him than some of the others – so he is almost symbolic of the Unknown Soldier, who was interred in Westminster Abbey on Remembrance Day in 1920. It is also 100 years since the “new” Cenotaph was unveiled, a stone copy of Lutyens’ wooden original from 1919 which has served its purpose down the years as a focus for our national Remembrance.

The lych gate here at Boraston Church was erected in 1920 as a monument to the young men from Nash and Boraston who served in the First World War. It seems fitting that today during the Covid lockdown we are gathered outside under it to remember one of our own.

Reflecting on those who survived and had to live with their memories is just as important as honouring those who died – including Percy’s uncle, Arthur Howells, who was conscripted only a few months after Percy was killed in action. By then Arthur was 39, and he served in the Army Labour Corps attached to the Royal Berkshire Regiment on the Western Front from July 1916 until the end of the War, when – unlike Percy – he came home to his wife and daughters.

Bobbie Matulja

8th November 2020

Sources

- Ancestry.co.uk
- Wikipedia
- Imperial War Museum website (www.iwm.org.uk)
- The Worcestershire Regiment website - www.worcestershireregiment.com – for the War Diary of the 1st Worcestershire.
- worcesterandmercianregimentmuseum.org – details of the battalions of the Worcester regiment and the routine of trench life
- The Commonwealth War Graves website (www.cwg.org) – Information about Rue- David Cemetery at Fleurbaix and the inscription on Percy Henry Howells’ grave
- Wartimememories.com – The Wartime Memories Project
- temevalleynorthparish.co.uk and friendsofthealdershotmilitarymuseum.com – for information about other soldiers who served with the 1st Battalion Worcestershire Regiment
- 1915 The Death of Innocence by Lynne Macdonald – 1993, Headline Book Publishing
- Facebook page - The Great War 1914-1918 ‘The Rage of Men’ for articles and a timeline of events

1911 Census showing Percy living with his grandfather and parents at No 1 Rose Cottage, Boraston

1911 England Census for Percy Henry Howells
Worcestershire > Nash and Boraston > ALL > 02

Save

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE last birthday and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE				PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards.		BIRTHPLACE of every person.	NATIONALITY of every person born in a Foreign Country.	INFIRMITY
			State for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of—	Children born alive to the present Marriage (if no children have since been born, write "None" in Column 7).	Children born alive to the present Marriage (if no children have since been born, write "None" in Column 7).	Children born alive to the present Marriage (if no children have since been born, write "None" in Column 7).	Children born alive to the present Marriage (if no children have since been born, write "None" in Column 7).	Personal Occupation.			
James Henry Howells Head	47	unmarried				Bricklayer 220	Worker	Shropshire			
William Henry Howells Son	14	married 30				Printed & Book Binder	Worker	Shropshire			
May Ann Williams Daughter	40	married 20	2	2		school		Shropshire			
Edy Henry Howells Grand-daughter	14							Shropshire			

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: James Henry Howells
Parish Address: No 1 Rose Cottage, Nash, Worcs

1901 Census Record

1901 England Census for Percy H Howells
Shropshire > Boraston > ALL > District 2

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The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the

ROAD, STREET, No. and No. of FLAKE of HOUSE	HOUSES	Names and Surnames of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN
12 The Lane	1	John Hunt Head	Head	45	General Agricultural Labourer	Shropshire
		Mary Hunt Wife	Wife	34		Shropshire
		Wm Do Son	Son	14		Shropshire
		Florence Do Daughter	Daughter	12		Shropshire
		William Do Son	Son	10		Shropshire
		Fredrick Do Son	Son	7		Shropshire
		Rose Do Daughter	Daughter	4		Shropshire
		Edwin Do Son	Son	5		Shropshire
		Albert Do Son	Son	2		Shropshire
14 La House	1	John Holmes Head	Head	40	Farmer	Shropshire
		Mary Do Wife	Wife	40		Shropshire
20 The Stone Cottage	1	Thomas Brown Head	Head	66	General Agricultural Labourer	Shropshire
		Ann Do Wife	Wife	62		Shropshire
21 Boraston Village	1	Thomas Powell Head	Head	54	General Agricultural Labourer	Shropshire
		Mary Do Wife	Wife	48		Shropshire
22 No 10 The Lane	1	Sarah J Howells Head	Head	38	Farmer	Shropshire
		John Do Son	Son	8		Shropshire
23 Do	1	James H Howells Head	Head	57	Bricklayer	Shropshire
		William Do Son	Son	32	Bricklayer	Shropshire
		William Do Son	Son	24	Bricklayer	Shropshire
		Mary Do Daughter	Daughter	30		Shropshire
		John Do Son	Son	11		Shropshire
		Fredrick Do Son	Son	4		Shropshire
24 Lower House	1	Benjamin Harris Head	Head	42	Farmer	Shropshire
		Ann Do Wife	Wife	44		Shropshire
		Benjamin Do Son	Son	56	General Agricultural Labourer	Shropshire

Total of Schedule of Houses and of Persons with less than Five Rooms: 7

Total of Males and of Females: 15 / 12

NOTE—Draw your pen through such words of the headings as are inapplicable.

Percy Henry Howells - Service Medal and Award Rolls 1914-1920

Worcestershire REGT. REGIMENT OR CORPS. 301 and 266 of 1918

ROLL OF INDIVIDUALS entitled to the Victory Medal and/or British War Medal granted under Army Orders

Regt. No.	Rank	NAME	In sequence Corps and Corps previously served with by each individual and Regt. No. therein; the highest rank, whether substantive, acting or temporary, reached as having been held for any period in a Theatre of War, unless referred for antecedents, being shown against the name of the regiment or Corps which is to be inscribed on the medal.	Theatre of war in which served	Clasp awarded (to be left blank)	Record of disposal of decorations			REMARKS
						(a) Presented	(b) Dispatched by Post	(c) Taken into Stock	
22553	Pte	HOWELLS Leonard J	10th Worc R. 22553 - Pte						
19943	Pte	HOWELLS Percy	1st Worc R. 19943 - Pte						
2	Pte	HOWELLS Richard W	9th Worc R. 18692 - Pte 9th Worc R. 18692						
44117	Pte	HOWELLS Sidney C	11th S.W.D. 49769 - Pte 2/8th Worc R. 44117						
27171	Pte	HOWELLS Sydney J	11th Worc R. 27171 - Pte						

I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals named in this ROLL are entitled to the Medal or Medals as detailed above.

Place Warwick
Date 28 SEP 1920

A Gower
Signature and rank of Officer certifying. Lieut. Colonel
4/o Infantry Records, WARWICK

Percy Henry Howells - WW1 Medal Roll

Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
HOWELLS	Worc. R.	Pte	19943
Percy.	1st		

Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	2/102 B/15	33/18	Keel A.
BRITISH	do	do	
15 STAT	4/5 B	101	

Theatre of War first served in U/1 France
Date of entry therein 2.5.15.

K 1282.

Correspondence.

Address.

1918-1921 Wt W 107-117 621 100m. K20 H. 21 Est 440023

Plan of WW1 Battlefields around Neuve Chapelle (March 1915 and Aubers Ridge (May 1915) Fleurbaix, where Percy Henry Howells died and was buried is midway between Armentières and Laventie. When he was killed in action on August 30th 1915 it was a fairly quiet sector considered suitable for new volunteers arriving on the Front. (Map reproduced from Wikipedia)

