

FORGET ME NOT

A WW1 TALE OF TWO SISTERS - LUCY & ELIZABETH CONGREVE MALCOLM BRITTON'S GREAT AUNT AND GRANDMOTHER.



Lucy (born 1880) and Elizabeth Congreve (born 1882) were two of the five children of a South Lincolnshire farmer, George Congreve and his wife Eliza. Both married and both lost their husbands during the Great War in very different circumstances. Lucy married Percy Webster, a "threshing machine attendant", and Elizabeth married George William Parish, a farmer. Both Percy and George were 37 when they died.

Percy Webster was born and lived in Glington, near Peterborough. He was the second son of Henry and Fanny Webster of Bleach House. Married to Lucy Congreve, he enlisted at Peterborough as a Private (16624) in the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment.

Local newspapers reported that Pte Webster was wounded in the arm by shrapnel on 8th July 1916. After recovering in hospital in Nottingham, he returned to France and was killed in action on 24th September 1918, aged 37. Pte Webster is buried in Berthaucourt Communal Cemetery, Pontru, which has over 70 casualties, mainly from the 1st Northamptons killed on 24th September 1918.

The 1st Northamptons were involved in "The Advance to Victory" which was the last major action of the First World War. On 24th September they attacked a sunken road on a ridge of land between the villages of Pontruet and Gricourt near St Quentin, France. Their casualties during this action totalled more than 250.

I remember Auntie Lucy living in a little semi-detached thatched cottage in Hundleby in the 1950's. Her water supply came from a well in the garden and newts would occasionally be pumped up in the water. When she died in 1959, aged 79, she had been a widow for 42 years.

George William Parish was a farmer and, as such, he was in a reserved occupation. In April 1917 he suffered a burst appendix and because medical help was not readily available, he died of peritonitis leaving a widow, aged 35 expecting their third child, a 5 year old son and a 2 ½ year old daughter.

My grandmother had to give up the farm and took over a shop in the nearby market town selling children's clothes many of which she made herself. Her son, the man of the house, became a Petty Officer in the Royal Navy and went down with HMS Grimsby in World War II. Her elder daughter's husband was a prisoner of war for the duration of World War II. Their son was 2 years old at the outbreak of war and for the first two years after her husband was captured she had no news of his fate. The younger daughter served throughout World War II as an officer in the WRNS. Her fiancé was killed and she never married, dying at the age of 96 in 2013. Grandma Parish died aged 94 in 1976 having been a widow for 59 years.



George Parish



Percy Webster

FRANK GODFREY SHEILA ROBINSON'S GRANDFATHER

My grandfather was born in 1893 and when war broke out he was a miner at Nailstone Colliery which is between Ibstock and Market Bosworth. Coal was vital to the war effort and like many miners grandfather was exempt from military service and did not serve in the forces. In those days coal was hewn by hand and eventually grandfather became a chargeman in charge of a staul, or section of coal, from where coal was mined in blocks.

This would have been worked by a group of six or eight men and my uncle Don tells me that amongst grandfather's responsibilities was the collection and distribution of wages. Working conditions for miners were very bad in those days. In addition to the physical dangers, disputes between owners and workers were common-place and therefore wages could be irregular. Miners were recruited into the army to dig attacking tunnels under enemy lines. I believe initially many men viewed fighting in the trenches as an escape from the hell of working in a private mine. As they quickly found out, as well as enduring the usual dangers of mining, tunnellers constantly faced the risk of subterranean counter attacks by the enemy and almost certain death if the tunnel they were working in was blown up. I think my grandfather might have considered himself fortunate to have been in a reserve occupation. Unfortunately no photographs of my grandfather have survived. He died aged 89 having spent all his working life as a miner.

