

Lest we Forget – (Wilfred) Percy Young

We continue with our occasional articles on those who lost their lives in military service during World War 1 and are remembered on our War Memorial in the grounds of St Mary's.

Percy sounds as if he was a normal lad for his time; he was born and raised in Wick as part of a large family who had lived in the village for several generations.

Percy was born in 1890 and was one of 7 children of Charles and Sarah Young. By the time he was 11 years old, Percy had already lost his Dad and his Mum was left to bring up the family on her own. The Census of 1911 shows that Percy, now 21 years old, was still living at home with his mother and some of his siblings but by then one of his younger sisters had also died. Like his father and older brothers, Percy was employed as an agricultural worker. However, around this time it seems that Percy made the decision to seek his fortune further afield and, like so many other young men and women of that generation chose to emigrate. For a number of years, Canada was actively seeking new citizens from across the world to help build up the country and assisted passage and bonuses were made available to encourage migration, with farming experience being one of the sought after skills.

Upon making his way to Canada, Percy was then referred to as "Wilfred" - it not being uncommon for people to often swap between using their first and middle names. There is not any information available to show how successful Wilfred was in his new life but it was a relatively short experience for him. World War 1 had commenced in Europe and Canada were required as part of the Commonwealth to send over troops to join in the fighting.

On 7th January 1915 at the Recruitment station in Virden, Manitoba, Wilfred found himself signing up to now be known as Private 425515 Young WP of the Royal Canadian Regiment. His enlistment papers show he was a healthy young man, 5ft 8 ½ ins. tall with light brown hair and grey eyes.

With the rest of his Regiment, Wilfred soon was crossing back over the Atlantic but this time he was heading for France rather than back to England.

Between 1st July – 18th November 1916 there was what we now know as the Battle of the Somme. Over this period, 1,000,000 men were killed or injured, making it one of the bloodiest battles in human history. The Canadians were thrown into the 3rd Phase of the offensive (September to November) which involved heavy fighting in and across the trenches and it was then that Wilfred fell during one of the many attacks that took place. He was 26 years old.

In the language of the Army, the official report states:

"Previously reported Missing, now for Official Purposes, presumed to have died on or since 8-10-16"

The report goes on to advise that his body was initially buried in a cemetery ¾ mile north of Courcellete and 5 ¾ miles north east of Albert. At the end of the conflict, Wilfred's remains were exhumed and he was finally laid to rest in a War Grave at Regina Trench Cemetery

Grandcourt in France along with over 1.200 other men from the British and Commonwealth forces.

His next of kin was shown as his Mother, Sarah, who was still living back in Wick and she was informed that she had lost her son. It was no doubt Sarah that then arranged for the following photo to appear in the Berrow Saturday Supplement Journal of 8 December 1917 as a small reminder of her boy, Percy.

