

# THE PERCYS OF DAMERHAM



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The original ancestors of the Percy family came from Downton. Martin and Jane Percey had three sons, Joseph born 1777, William born 1778 and Stephen who was born in 1760. Joseph who became a Master Blacksmith was the ancestor of the Percey family of Rockbourne. He has descendants who still survive today. William was also a Master Blacksmith and ancestor of the Percy family of Damerham.

William married Sarah, who was born in Cranborne. They had nine children, and two of them became blacksmiths, John Percy and Charles Percy

## ***John Percy 1813-1902***

John Percy became a blacksmith in Poole in Dorset. He had two children Charlotte and John. Young John was a manager in a seed-merchants at Poole but he came back to Damerham later in life and became a Churchwarden at St. George's. His grave and that of his wife Agnes can be seen in the churchyard.

## ***Charles Percy 1830-1907***

Charles Percy who was born in 1830 married Mary Anne White. He had two sons by her, George and Edwin Charles, but sadly she died of tuberculosis at a young age. Subsequently, he married Sarah Bridgit with whom he had

one son, James Bruce who left Damerham when his mother died in 1909.

## ***George William Percy 1859***

George William Percy was apprenticed to Trollope and Company in London, as a wood carver. He did a great deal of work in the church at Wilton. There did exist a carved statue of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child which stood at the top of the stairs in the house in Damerham, which was subsequently given to St. Paul's church in Salisbury

## ***Edwin Charles Percy.1860-1942***

Edwin Charles became a blacksmith and for a while worked in Tuckton near Bournemouth. He married Hannah Stubbs from Hale and they had five children, Charles William, Agnes, Mabel, Arthur Lewis, and Edwin George. Edwin George went to the Bishop School in Salisbury, and became a teacher. His son John also became a teacher. He had a daughter and a son. The son lives in Australia and is the only male Percy left to carry on the family name, at the present time, for this branch of the Percy family. Arthur Lewis worked for G.P.O. telephones in Tonbridge Wells where he contracted tuberculosis and died as young man. The two girls married and left Damerham. Agnes went to Bournemouth and married Jack Jones and Mabel married Raymond Newport in Wokingham. She only had one daughter Phyllis.

Edwin Charles was Parish Clerk. He lived until 1942. By then he had given up working as a blacksmith and spent much of his time in the garden. He spent the last year of his life in

Wokingham after his wife had died, with his daughter Mabel.

## ***Charles William Percy 1884- 1964***

Charles William Percy was the last Percy blacksmith in Damerham. He was apprenticed to his Uncle John in Poole, and came back to Damerham as his father got older and needed help. Before the Second World war and during it, farmers still used horses on the land and there was a living to be earned as a blacksmith. Later he had a hire-car and a bicycle shop. He did well selling bicycles which he had assembled from second-hand parts. Charles William married Elizabeth Downer the daughter of the blacksmith at Pitton, and they had four children. Doris Percy born in 1909 is the latest Percy descendant to be buried at Damerham. Doris married Arthur George Witt who was in the RAF. He was killed on a raid over Amsterdam when the aeroplane which he was piloting was shot down. His name is on the war memorial in the Church and by the Village hall. They had three daughters, Betty, Eileen and Rita. Betty lived in Damerham until 1938, and came back as an evacuee during the war.

In 1948 Charles William had an offer for his business from Jacob Delves. He was then sixty-four years old and decided that he had worked long enough. He went briefly to Cranborne and then to Poole in Dorset and died from a stroke in 1964 after a long and happy retirement.

## ***Ronald Charles Percy b1911***

Ronald Charles married Eva Parker from Fordingbridge and for a while they lived in Cornpits lane in Damerham. Then he worked briefly in Salisbury as a butcher but was called up at the beginning of the war and when he came back did not want to work as a blacksmith. They had two sons, neither of whom had any children.

## ***Arthur Donald Percy***

Arthur Donald Percy was born in 1915. He worked at David Greigs in Southampton immediately before the war, and as he belonged to the Territorial Army was one of the first to be called up on the outbreak of war. He came home from Dunkirk in an Irish cattle-boat and arrived in Damerham ragged and dirty having walked from Fordingbridge. Subsequently he served in East Africa, Italy and Germany. After the war he married Ivy Palmer from Preston in Lancashire. They only had one son, Donald Arthur born in 1946. Arthur Percy lived in Damerham in West Park Lane for a while, before moving to Fordingbridge where he worked in the Post Office. Donald went to school in Damerham for a while. Donald Percy has two daughters but no son to carry on the name.

Thus the association of Percys with Damerham seemed to have finished, however such is the sense of Damerham being home, that succeeding generations have come back to Damerham for their final resting place. On the right-hand side of the Churchyard are a large number of Percy graves. Poor Mary Anne is on the left side of the path all on her own, as Charles Percy was buried with Sarah Bridgit.

Where all of the Percy children of the original William and Sarah went, we shall never know.

# GRANDFATHER PERCY AND HIS WIFE HANNAH



BETTY WITT (NEE PERCY)

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My great-grandparents were quite old when I first knew them. Grandfather was virtually retired from the business. Although he did make some horse shoes, the heavy work was beyond him and he spent most of his time looking after his garden. He usually had a pig in the sty at the end of the garden and they had some chickens. There were a lot of apple trees in the garden and when they were picked in the autumn my grandmother used to store them in the closets in her bedroom and on the floor under the bed in the middle bedroom.

Consequently the bedrooms smelt of ripening apples from October until January when they were either all eaten or were beginning to go off. Grandmother was notoriously mean with her apples. On the day of her funeral, while the coffin was making its way up to the church on a hand-barrow, Great-aunt Annie, her eldest sister, who had been judged too frail to go to the church, decided that this was a golden opportunity to get rid of some of Hannah's apples. She went upstairs with my mother, who was nine months pregnant, and got down on the floor to choose some of the prized apples. Being all of 90 years old she could not get back up again. However, between them she was eventually restored to her feet before the other mourners returned.

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Grandmother Percy was a great wine maker and would go out to gather dandelion flowers while the dew was on them. She made many different varieties and they were potent enough to make the most seasoned drinker unsteady if he had too much.

In those days they had not heard of cholesterol and a common lunch would be fat, boiled bacon, with mashed potatoes and plenty of butter and milk in them, with apple dumplings and custard. This was all from the same plate with a piece of bread used to clean the plate.

On pig-killing day all the women of the family would gather to clean the chitterlings. This was done by rinsing them through with copious jugs of water, then turning them inside out, and washing again. They were then plaited and boiled. Then they were sliced and fried for breakfast.

They were a good old couple. Granddad lived for the church. He was parish clerk and used to get up early on Sunday morning to light a huge black stove at the back of the church near the door. When she was younger my great-grandmother used to clean the church on Saturday morning and my mother, who was a schoolgirl at the time, dusted the pews for a penny. After the death of my great-grandmother, great-grandfather went to live in Wokingham with Aunt Mabel, but he did not live for long afterwards.

# DORIS PERCY'S ACCOUNT



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The first thing I remember as a child was when my brother Arthur was put into short trousers and was sent to my grandmother's, next door, so that she could see him. In those days little boys wore dresses until they were out of napkins.

I remember when Charles Downer, my mother's brother, came home from 17 years in the army in India. My brother, Ronald, and I went with my mother and father to Pitton by carrier's van which was drawn by a horse. The carrier was a Mr Parsons. At Salisbury we changed to another van to travel the final six miles to Pitton. We spent Christmas with my Downer grandparents and my uncle. He was in the Wiltshire Regiment and was sent to France and then Belgium where he was killed in the battle of Mons on 24 October 1914.

One of my uncles, Arthur, was a post office clerk. He came home from Tunbridge Wells where he had been working, with tuberculosis. My father, Charles, used to carry him out to the cricket field to be in the fresh air but he died on 12 June 1912 aged only 22 years.

Another brother of my grandfather, Edwin, was a wood carver who worked for Trollope and Company in London. He was involved in the carving in Wilton Church and we did have a

statue of the Virgin and Child which he had done, but Ronald, my brother, gave it to St Paul's Church in Salisbury. I did not know him but his widow, my Auntie Laura, came down to stay with us during the First World War when London was being bombed by the Zeppelins. She told me stories of them which frightened me so much that I still dream about them.

My Uncle Ted (Edward) was born to my grandparents late in life and he was educated at Bishop Wordsworth's school in Salisbury and subsequently became a teacher. He married Laura Anderson from Woolston and had one son, John, who is about two months younger than my daughter, Betty.

My Aunt Mabel went to Wokingham into service and she met and married Raymond Newport, a butcher. They only had one daughter, Phyllis, who never married.

Auntie Agnes (Sis) went to Bournemouth and eventually acquired a dressmaking business. She met and married Jack Jones who was involved in the local electricity business. When the business was taken over he received enough money to ensure that he did not work again. He spent his time tending his garden. He had a large family - twins, Clarice and Jack, then Beryl, and Nancy. I went to Bournemouth for a while to help Auntie Sis look after them.

Grandfather Edwin married Hannah Squibb whose parents had a farm at Holt near Wimborne. He met her when he was apprenticed to John Percy, his uncle, who was a blacksmith at Poole. John Percy and his wife, Millicent, came to Damerham to retire.

He became a church warden. He had two sons, Meredith and William - the latter became a tailor in Poole.

My grandmother used to take me to Salisbury to see a Maud Percy whose father worked in the railway station at Salisbury as a ticket collector. Probably these Percys were the descendants of the large Percy family who lived in Rockbourne.

Well-known people I remember in Damerham included Mrs Phillips who was the village midwife and who delivered most of the children in my generation. She had a very sad life as her husband, Bert, was crippled in the First World War. She helped Mrs Tiller carry the body of my brother, Leonard, who died at 12 days old to the churchyard for burial. My father and I were there at the service as I must have been 12 years old at the time. My mother was still in bed following his birth. It was a very sad occasion.

Miss Annie Kenchington was well known in Damerham. She lived in the Barracks with her bachelor brother who was a gardener at West Park. She was a wonderful cook who had retired from service. She prepared my wedding breakfast. She was a Sunday School teacher. She was an excellent needlewoman and made most of my dresses. Many years later she was postmistress during the Second World War.

Mr Tiller, who lived up the High Street, had also lost a leg during the First World War and had been taught to mend shoes. He continued with this trade all through the Second World War.

I remember being taken down to Cornpits to see my first aeroplane. I also saw the Graf Zeppelin which went over when I was at school, after the war was over.

After the war was over there was a Spanish 'flu epidemic during which many people died. My father, who had been overworking during the war, fell victim to it and developed pneumonia and we were lucky that he recovered.

At the end of the war we had a party in the village hall. This hall had been given to the village to celebrate the coronation of George V and Queen Mary by the Cootes.

Uncle Raymond came home from being a prisoner of war in 1918. In 1921, when I was 12, I went to school in Fordingbridge, leaving there to go and help my Auntie Sis. When I came home from there I went into service.

## BETTY WITT'S (NEE PERCY) ACCOUNT

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Although my name is not Percy, I am a descendant of that family. I was born in Salisbury Infirmary and came back to Damerham to live with Charles and Elizabeth Percy, my grandparents. My mother was working over at Rockbourne Manor for Colonel Burke, his wife, daughter, and son, Patrick. My father was in the RAF and for nearly all of the first years of my life was in Egypt.

I lived through the momentous years just prior to the Second World War in Damerham and came back, not only at weekends after we went to live in Salisbury, but for long periods during the war.

My first indelible memory was coming back from church on a Sunday evening with Granddad and Great-grandmother and seeing, glistening in the evening sun, a large dirigible. This must have been the Hindenburg on its fateful journey to America where it so tragically crashed in flames with great loss of life. I must have been three at the time as the Hindenburg crashed in 1936. My time in Damerham with my grandparents was the happiest of my life.

My other grandparents, Walter and Louisa Witt, lived in Court Lodge at the top of Court Hill as he was gamekeeper on the West Park Estate.

There follow some of my memories of Damerham.

Before the Second World War Damerham had few of the amenities that we take for granted in 1999. There was no electricity, mains water or gas. Waste disposal was primitive as there were no sewers.

The water supply either came from a well or a pump which in some cases was shared by several families. In the winter the pumps often froze and a kettle of water had to be heated and poured down the pump to melt the ice - but not too much or the cast iron pump would split. Most families had several clean buckets which were filled at night by the man of the family, ready for the next day. If the public health inspector decided your pump or well was too near the privy then the water could not be used for drinking, so drinking water had to be fetched from the nearest approved well. Water for washing was boiled in a copper using faggots of wood. The whites were boiled and other washing done by hand in a galvanised bath. There were four or five baths full of clean water for successive rinses and the last one had a blue bag added to whiten the white clothes and sheets. The clothes were either wrung by hand or through a wooden mangle. It was no wonder that my grandmother had chilblains on her hands. Ironing was done by heating flat irons on the range. Because of the effort involved in washing, my grandfather only had one working shirt a week, with two collars. He then had a white shirt for church on Sunday. He did not wear pyjamas, just his shirt and vest in bed.

Cooking was done on a range in winter and by paraffin stove in summer. Kindling wood was used for the first cup of tea in the morning. Grandfather had probably done two hours work in the forge before breakfast. We did not have much butcher's meat but eggs were plentiful. There was a side of bacon hanging up in the alcove by the fireplace. Vegetables and potatoes were grown and we had our own fruit trees for fruit in season. Besides this we went out and collected blackberries, mushrooms, hazelnuts and chestnuts. Cockerels were fattened for Christmas. My grandfather kept bees so we had honey. A lot of sugar and fat was eaten in this pre-war diet but everyone was healthy and lived to a ripe old age.

There were no refrigerators, and milk either was scalded to help it to keep, or it was stood in a pan of cold water. A downside of cooking on the range was the fact that it had to be blackleaded and the hearth holystoned to keep it clean.

Lighting was by candles or oil lamp which had to be filled every day and the wick trimmed. The globes and chimneys of the lamps had to be washed and dried to keep them shining. Great-grandmother had a Tilley lamp which vaporised the paraffin by using a methylated spirit starter, and this gave a far superior light.

The electricity to run the radio came from an accumulator which was full of sulphuric acid and had to be taken to Fordingbridge to be re-charged. A gramophone which was wound by a key.

Going to the lavatory was a primitive affair. We had a brick-built privy at the end of the

garden. Inside was a seat with a hole in it and a bucket underneath. Newspaper was used for wiping and the political persuasion of the family could be ascertained by the newsprint on their bottoms! Some families had a cesspit under their privy and it was these which caused the problem with the water supply. Both bucket and cesspit had to be emptied - an unpleasant and noisome task. At night a bucket was used, or a chamber-pot.

The Wilts and Dorset bus company ran a service from Fordingbridge to Damerham and Rockbourne and the railway ran through Sandleheath from Salisbury to Bournemouth. In addition George Young ran a carrier service into Salisbury market on Tuesday and Saturday. Public transport in those days was better than it is now.

The greater part of the village belonged to the West Park Estate and the Coote family. Their ancestor was Sir Eyre Coote who served in India with Clive and was commander of the British Army at the Battle of Wandewash. The Estate had to be sold when Colonel Coote died and his mother, Lady Evelyn Coote, came to live in the village. This gave my grandfather the opportunity to buy his house.

Before the war many jobs were done by steam power, including rolling the roads and threshing the corn. We had a cider apple tree and the steam engine used to come with a cider press and press our apples to make scrumpy. It was very sour but improved no end if it was warmed and a teaspoon of honey added. This was guaranteed to cure the most stubborn of bad colds, or at least to ensure no pain was suffered!

Wheel binding was another job undertaken by the blacksmith. Billy Tiller the local builder-cum-undertaker used to make new wheels, or sometimes it was old wheels which needed new metal tyres. A huge bonfire was built and the iron hoop was heated until it expanded enough to allow it to go over the wooden wheel. Then it was picked up by two men with tongs who then ran to the wheel which was supported on a large circular metal plate. They ran round beating it on with large hammers and then it was doused with cold water to make it contract and fit on the wheel.

At that time most of the breadwinners were farm workers or farmers. They did all the jobs on the farm - ploughing, sowing, milking the cows - and in the winter did a skilful job laying the hedges and digging.

## EVACUATION

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In 1940 my mother went up to stay with my father who was stationed on the aerodrome at Driffield in Yorkshire. It was decided that I would go back to Damerham and go to school there for the time being.

This period coincided with the acceleration of the German blitzkrieg, when children from many of the big cities were being evacuated to the country. In Damerham we had children from the Shirley area of Southampton with Miss Marshall, one of their teachers, accompanying them. She was billeted with my grandparents and became a third teacher at Damerham school.

The school had three classes which served the whole range of ages from 5 to 14, the school leaving age at that time. It must have tested the ingenuity of the teachers, faced as they were with such a wide range of age and abilities. Miss Tiller took the younger children, Miss Marshall the middle class and Miss Barnes, the headmistress, the senior children. In addition Miss Tiller was charged with teaching the girls how to knit. She must have suffered as none of us were particularly adept, my effort being a bright orange fluffy creation which started with 20 stitches when I cast it on, and ended with about 40 stitches when the time came to cast off! I wasn't even allowed to take it home with me to show how well I had done unless it was to be unpicked for future pupils to try their hands at knitting.

We were favoured mortals in some ways as everyone was keen to make up to us for the fact that we were away from home and the family. I felt a fraud in this respect as there was nowhere else I would rather have been than in Damerham with my grandparents. Nevertheless, I was treated as all the other evacuees and allowed to go to a party in Dr Brown's house and later to a Christmas party at Wellsteads in Fordingbridge. When my mother did return she was a nervous wreck, having endured German raids on the aerodrome at Driffield and then an horrendous journey when the lines were being bombed and the trains had to keep diverting their journey through the countryside to avoid air raids.

For several nights she insisted on sleeping under the stairs at my great-grandparents as there were still German planes turning over Damerham after bombing Southampton.

Eileen, who was still a small baby, and I had to accompany her. However, I think my grandmother persuaded her to sleep in bed again and eventually we went back to Salisbury.

Nowadays small schools like the one in Damerham are being closed, which is a shame, as all the children left there at least able to read, write and do simple arithmetic, and were also given a set of values.

## THE SOLDIERS

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During the war Damerham, probably because it was off the beaten track, had a lot of soldiers stationed there. In the period of the phoney war West Park was requisitioned by the army and there were raw recruits struggling to gain a modicum of fitness before being thrown into the war in France. At that time they had no weapons and I vividly remember the night of a raid on Southampton when the soldiers were parading round the village streets with sticks in their hands while overhead could be heard the drone of German bombers. In the south the sky was lit by the fires of the burning city. Then all of a sudden they were all gone.

Then there was excitement in the air. The King and Queen were coming to Breamore to inspect a tank corps stationed there which was going to France. It was Sunday morning, we leapt into the car and drove the few miles to Breamore. There were very few people about and able to see the King and Queen Elizabeth from close quarters. How the news of the visit

had reached Damerham in the days of few telephones I do not know. Later we were to hear, again by the mysterious grapevine, that the tanks had all been destroyed.

Then the Americans appeared. First a group of white Americans who again took over West Park House and also built Nissen huts in the meadows behind the village hall. They were very kind, particularly to the children, and as they could get rations which the villagers had not seen for years, were very popular house guests and always turned up with a small parcel of things like Spam, tinned butter and fruit. Later there was a large contingent of coloured Americans. They were very likeable and friendly. One, Johnny McLinton, was a blacksmith and used to help my grandfather in the forge as at that time he was struggling to keep the local horses shod, do bicycle repairs and run his taxi business. Johnny was very taken with my sister, Eileen, who was very pretty with curly, golden hair. He used to bring her sweets and oranges which she was eager to have but was not at all sure that she wanted to be too friendly with this strange dark-skinned man.

The soldiers used to have recreation on every fine day and played baseball on the cricket field behind the house. After they had finished playing there were huge wads of chewing gum all over the field, much to my grandfather's disgust.

When D-Day was imminent there was a huge build-up of forces within twenty miles of the south coast and once again British soldiers were in the district. All around the village, under trees and along the edges of tracks, were

great piles of shells and bombs of all kinds. At one time there was a tragedy. Several British soldiers were blown up when a land mine they were handling was dropped and set off a spontaneous explosion of several others. They were buried in Damerham churchyard with military honours. The other exciting thing that happened, just after all the munitions had been removed, was that a large land mine was jettisoned over Damerham by a German aeroplane and came down without exploding in the water meadows outside of Damerham on the way up to Toyd. A courting couple who were seeking a little privacy along this quiet track were disturbed by the happening, but it was not realised at the time that the bomb had not exploded due to the soft nature of the ground. It was some years later that the Royal Engineers found and defused it by which time it was deep into the earth and very unstable.