

## **PRIVATE WILLIAM ALFRED WYBREW.**

South Staffordshire Regiment 41813.  
Machine Gun Corps 162025.

### *The Story of a Great War Survivor.*

Recently at the launch of the SLHS book entitled *High Wych, Sawbridgeworth and the Great War*, I was given a photocopied sheet containing much interesting personal information on this named soldier of the Great War. I was rather remiss in not obtaining the name of my informant whom I assume was a relative/descendant. If it was you and you read this, please contact SLHS and we can give you due credit. I have expanded on the information I was given to produce the following article which I hope meets with your approval.

William Alfred Wybrew was born late in the year in 1898 at Mill Hill (now Station Road), Sawbridgeworth and was baptised in the new year, 1899. William was the youngest of six children born to Henry and Florence (nee Boatman) Wybrew. William had a brother and four sisters. In the 1911 census return the family was living with William's maternal Grandmother Emily Boatman and William was still at school, (probably Fawbert and Barnard).

With the coming of the Great War there were many changes locally, one of these being the stationing of troops nearby. In Sawbridgeworth it was the 1/5th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment, but in Bishop's Stortford it was the 1/5th and 1/6th Battalions of the South Staffordshire Regiment and the South Staffordshire Yeomanry. These Territorial South Staffordshire battalions were resident from November 1914 until February 1915. As well as their training activities, they also set up a recruiting office and it was here in late November (from his service number) that William enlisted. He would have just have been 16 years old, so must have lied about his age which was a very common practice at that time.

From the information I was given about his service, and comparing it to Battalion records, after initial training, William must have been posted in 1916 to the 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment. This was a 'Regular' Battalion to which William would have been posted as a replacement.



*South Staffordshire Regiment Cap Badge*

In 1916, William's Battalion was involved at the Battle of the Somme. It was here that William was wounded and very nearly killed. William was shot in the chest, the bullet passing right through his body and exiting his back between his shoulder blades. William was fortunate in that the German bullet completely missed all of his vital parts and was fired from such close range that it actually cauterised the wound as it passed through, preventing severe loss of blood. William lost consciousness for a time, but upon coming to, managed to crawl back to the British lines where he received treatment. He was then sent back to Gateshead in England to convalesce.

Upon recovery from his wound in 1917, William re-embarked to join his Battalion which was now in Flanders. William survived this spell of service unscathed and went on to be posted to the Machine Gun Corps. William's new service number of 162025 shows that this transfer took place in March 1918 and that he was transferred to the newly formed (17 March 1918) 41st Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps.

With the Armistice, part of Germany (the Rhineland) was occupied by Allied forces. William's Battalion entered Cologne in December 1918. They were to remain there until late May 1919 being responsible for the left section of the bridgehead, after which they were stationed at Neumar until March 1920 when the Battalion was disbanded.

With peace came a return to normality. William was a keen sportsman. He played cricket for Sawbridgeworth, and football for both Sheering and Sawbridgeworth. In 1927 he was part of the football team which won the Herts Junior Cup. William was also a proficient swimmer and tennis player, so clearly his wound did not impede him physically.

In 1931 William married Ada Stone who was 10 years his junior and began family life. They were to have two sons named David and Ivan. (It is Ivan whom I believe may be my informant). William was reticent when talking of his Great War service. He would however, occasionally show his son a small red mark left of centre in his chest which was the entry wound, and a small white mark in his back which was the exit wound.

Sadly, in 1956 William died whilst still relatively young. His wife Ada though lived to old age finally dying in 2001.



*William Alfred Wybrew (1898-1956)*

#### **REFERENCES.**

Ancestry.com

Clare D, Downing C, Turner S, (2014) *Bishop's Stortford in the First World War*. Amberley Publishing, Stroud.

Familysearch.org

Forces War Records. *Records, Units*. [www.forces-war-records.co.uk](http://www.forces-war-records.co.uk)

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies. *Herts and Essex Observer 1914-1919*. Hertford.

National Census Records. 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911.

National Records Office. Kew.

Wikipedia.

Wybrew Family. *Pte William Alfred Wybrew*.

Flt Lt Douglas Coe BSc RAFVR(T) Ret'd.

November 2018.