



## Percy Robert Tidnam

16925 Private, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He died from wounds on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1917 in France, aged 23

Percy is commemorated on the Arras Memorial at Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery

The Tidnams were not really a local family. In 1851, the only Tidnams in the Depwade district were William, a 30-year-old Wheelwright (employing an apprentice) and his wife Mary Ann, living in Starston between the Rectory and the Gate Public House. By 1861 this pair had moved out of Depwade and in 1861 and 1871, the token 'blow-ins' were James Tidnam and his wife Mary, both living in Hempnall, their 5 oldest children had been born in Woodton, the youngest two in Hempnall. In 1881 it was these children and their children, somewhat dispersed who represented the Tidnams in Depwade, all 10 of them including four under the age of 4!

Back in 1861, James' fifth child was recorded as Anthony W Tidnam although in future censuses, and in fact all legal records I have found, he sailed under the name of William – I am assuming using his middle name. This William Snr. married Hannah Maria King from Shottisham in early 1876. Both William Snr and his father-in-law, Farm Bailiff Benjamin King were illiterate whilst both Hannah and her assumed mother, Sarah Ann King, signed their names fluently.

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
137	January 28 1876	William Tidnam Hannah Maria King	Full Age Full Age	Bachelor Spinster	Labourer —	Hempnall Shottisham	James Tidnam Benjamin King	Labourer Farming Bailiff
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Established Church of England</u> by me, <u>Charles Thomas King</u>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>William Tidnam</u> his mark <u>Hannah Maria King</u>		In the Presence of us,		<u>Benjamin King</u> his mark <u>Sarah Ann King</u>		

Marriage Record of William Charles Tidnam's Parents

Come 1881 and the new family were living in Stratton St Mary, or Long Stratton as we now know it. William Snr and Hannah had two children, Charles W. and Benjamin. Sadly, Charles William (not William Charles – he came along later) died in late 1884, aged only 7 but Benjamin reappeared in Redenhall in the 1891 census. At this stage William Snr. was a groom and butcher, on the surface an odd combination but of course the butcher would have delivered his wares by a horse drawn vehicle. William's younger brother, George, was also boarding in William and Hannah's household. Judging by the ages of the subsequent children who were all born in Redenhall, I think we can assume the family upped sticks and moved to what would turn out to be William Snr.'s job for life, pretty soon after this census.

William Snr.'s first wife, Hannah, died in the last quarter of 1887 aged 33 leaving her husband with 4 children to care for including young William (Charles) Jnr. whose arrival (also in the last quarter

of 1887) may well have caused the death of his mother. William Snr could not really hang about, he had a very young baby and three other children to cope with, whilst still having to hold down a job. It is cheaper to marry than to employ a housekeeper and child minder, so it is not surprising that in 1888 he married an Emma Barber (born in Scole). She was the daughter of a Miller who was living up at Jay's Green in 1871, in 1881 the very heavily pregnant Emma was keeping out of mischief at her much older (by 18 years) brother's home in Rockland All Saints.

In 1891, the family were registered on Church Rd, Redenhall and William Tidnam Snr was then an Auctioneer's groom. I think we can, with a very high degree of certainty assume this auctioneer to be George Durrant snr of the nearby Grange, not only was Durrant holding regular and highly successful Auctions but he also had land holdings of 550 acres of farmland on which he employed 18 men and 5 boys. William Tidnam Snr would have been quite a catch, subsequent history proves he was a steady fellow and he had a steady, enjoyable job working for a man who was almost universally liked and admired. Unmarried Emma brought her own daughter, Florence, to the marriage, she would have been 7 at the time of the wedding, and by 1901 they had added six more children of their joint parentage including twin boys, plus another one of their children who had died. Emma and William Snr.s first son together was Percy Robert, age 7 in the 1901 census, half the age of the next brother up, William Jnr. In brief, if one includes the stepsister, the half siblings, and the two children who died (one from each marriage) there were 13 children in all, eleven of whom would have grown up together.

I suspect William Snr had thoroughly enjoyed being Durrant's Groom, good steady work whilst the actual auctions and market days were as much a social meeting of farming and country men as they were purely business transactions. However, George Durrant Snr died in 1900, when he was living on Mendham Lane, the home of the Tidnam's in the 1901 census. I suspect the old boy had recently retired to the White House where his widow appeared in the 1901 census and the Tidnam's followed William Snr.'s employer into town, relocating just down the road from their new house. When they appeared on Mendham Lane in 1901, even 11-month-old Winifred had been born in Redenhall prior to the move into town. In the 1911 census, Tidnam was still a Groom,

domestic, so I feel reasonably confident that he carried on working for the Durrant family even if only for George's widow and his also widowed daughter.

This assumption is confirmed when the 1911 census states William Snr to be a Groom/Gardener to an 'Independent Lady'. And who can blame Jane Durrant for wanting to carry on employing the man who had been her husband's groom for almost 20 years before that husband died. Indeed, by the 1911 census, she, or her husband would have employed William Snr for almost 30 years, over half of Tidnam's life.

Whilst William Snr carried on with his quiet respectable life, various of his children flew the nest into occupations typical of children of their background during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Rear Elevation of Kensington Road Police station<sup>1</sup>*



<sup>1</sup> London Picture Archive Cat No SC\_PHL\_02\_0183\_73\_41

Starting with the oldest of the children surviving from the first marriage and working my way down through the family: In 1901 Benjamin was an unmarried Police Constable living in the Unmarried



Constables Quarters in Kensington along with another 38 Constables. With a sergeant sharing the Quarters and an Inspector and Sub Inspector in the two adjacent houses I am sure the Constables were all on their best behaviour. 10 years on and Benjamin, still a P.C. had married a slightly older lass from Harpenden and was living with her and their two children in a two-room flat in the Campbell Buildings Lambeth.

*The Campbell Buildings before they were demolished in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>*

The girls proved trickier to trace but I suspect they were probably sent off to service. I eventually tracked down Florence, using her stepfather's surname and working as a housemaid for a widowed lady and her sister in Kensington. Perhaps she occasionally met up with her stepbrother.

Louisa, I lost but in the 1901 census Eliza was working as a housemaid for a prosperous grocer in Croydon and it was from there, she married in 1905 to Ernest Slater, a painter. Remaining in Croydon, by 1911 and after 6 years of marriage they had one daughter and with three rooms to live in must have been less cramped than her older brother's family.

We then get to William Charles Jnr who was to die at sea at the battle of Jutland. Many young Harleston men had, over the years, taken the uniform to find opportunity and broaden their horizons. The Army recruiting officer was a feature of most market towns; as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century wore on, joining the police like Benjamin had done was an increasingly popular option. A few, like William Jnr, joined the Navy. In 1901 he was still living in the family's new home on Mendham Lane, working as an errand boy. Once he was sixteen, in 1903, he joined the Navy. In 1911 we find him at the 'Union Jack Club', 23 years old he was an able-bodied seaman amongst another 248 other ranks and N.C.O.s staying there that night. Looking after them were a married superintendent and his wife, the Matron, a Clerk, 2 waiters, 2 porters, a storeman, a handyman, a cook and 13 'bed attendants' – each I assume with 20 beds to make, clean and keep clear. With the exception of the matron, this was an all-male environment. The Union Jack Clubs were a very recent innovation, indeed the official website states that

The Union Jack Club was founded by Miss Ethel McCaul, a nurse who served in the South African War at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. While officers had their clubs, servicemen below commissioned rank had nowhere reputable to stay with their families in the nation's capital. Miss McCaul was determined that they should have the opportunity to do this and see London and all its sights.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://boroughphotos.org/lambeth/campbell-buildings-waterloo-2/>



Miss McCaul's tireless fundraising efforts began in 1903 with concerts, entertainment and events throughout the country. She felt that a new club would benefit the Armed Forces and their ability to protect the Empire.

The Prince of Wales laid the foundation stone in July 1904 and as King Edward VII officially opened the Club in 1907 with Queen Alexandra at his side.

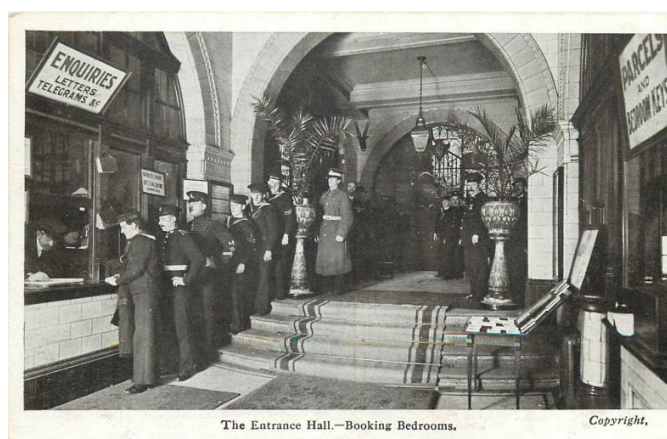
The original Edwardian building which was completed towards the end of 1904 had extensive public rooms and 208 bedrooms. Over the years there was a great demand for the services provided and the need for expansion became urgent. Waterloo remained the area of choice and the addition of a families' block in Exton Street helped solve the problem of the Club's popularity. The subsequent acquisition of a separate annexe in Holmes Terrace meant that by 1939 the Club could offer 1018 beds and had become a major part of the Waterloo community, as it is today.<sup>3</sup>

The club William Jnr was staying at was the first of its kind.<sup>4</sup> Sited, as it was, on Waterloo Road, the Union Jack Club would have been very close to where William's brother, P.C. Benjamin Tidnam and his family were living in 1911

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Edward VII at the opening of the new Club Building in 1907, the Club Entrance Hall and the building before it was destroyed during WW2



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ujclub.co.uk/about-us/history/#:~:text=Founder,families%20in%20the%20nation's%20capital.>

<sup>4</sup> There is an image of this original building from 1902 but it costs £11.99. <https://www.alamy.com/the-union-jack-club-an-armed-forces-club-in-central-london-this-is-the-early-premises-in-waterloo-road-date-1902-image341385676.html>

The organisation still exists and continues to offer its facilities to serving members of the British military forces.

William Jnr died at Scapa Flow, but not in the heat of battle. Instead, one of the two magazines on the ship exploded, probably due to the heat from an unnoticed fire in the stokehold (coal store). These fires were quite common, in fact one theory is that such a fire contributed to the sinking of the Titanic due to the heat generated weakening the structure sufficiently for it to collapse when it hit the iceberg



*H.M.S Vanguard 9<sup>th</sup> July 1917.*

*The wreck lies in 14m of water and is a registered War Grave*

Of his H.M.S. Vanguard's complement of over 800 men, only two survived; the loss still rates as one of the worst disasters for the British Navy. His wife, Kathleen May nee Roberts, now his widow, received his medals in 1919; the couple had only been married 7 months when William Jnr died.

As well as the memorial at Harleston, he is one of 18654 names on the Chatham Naval Memorial in Kent. Kathleen did go on to remarry, to a John Newman in Lambeth in 1923.

William Jnr's younger (half) siblings, Ellen, Alice, Percy, twins Fred (Samuel), Herbert (Sydney) and young Winifred Ivy M Tidnam also needed tracing.

Ellen was looking after her father's household in 1911 following the death of her mother Emma, William Snr's second wife, the previous year. There was an Ivy Annie E Tidman who died in 1908 somewhere between one and 5 months old. Who this child belongs to is not clear, but I suspect it to be the child of Robert and Alice Tidnam from Tasburgh, this Robert being one of William Snr's nephews'.

'Our' Alice, under her full and rather splendid name of Alice Isabelle E Tidnam. had married Frank Flaxman, a Ship Painter on the Isle of Wight; they were living in Cowes with their 4-month-old daughter in 1911 and since the marriage was less than a year old I think we can assume it was Vera's imminent arrival that precipitated them tying the knot. I would also suspect that Alice, like her older sisters had been working in service when she met her beau thus explaining why she was so far from home.

Percy Robert, also commemorated on the Harleston memorial, had also entered domestic service and in 1911 was a footman at a rather grand establishment with 9 live in servants. As a footman one could assume, he was reasonably tall and well presented, particularly in the more formal households. At 2 Hyde Park Square we are talking a rather nice house and a far cry from his other sibling's domestic arrangements at the time even if he was cramped into basic servants' quarters. Percy enlisted in 1914, before conscription and became Pte Percy Robert Tidnam 16925 of the Norfolk Regt. Percy seems to have quietly put his head down and got on with things although he did spend one day in the sick bay with an undefined fever in March 1916. Percy was reported wounded and missing on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1917 when he was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Norfolk – originally a volunteer unit. This was later updated to Killed in Action, assumed to be on the same day. I suspect after the heat of battle had died down, one of Percy's comrades reported seeing him injured but it was only after a period of time when his body still had not been located that it was concluded he had been killed in action. Percy is commemorated on the Arras Memorial, one of almost 35,000 soldiers with no known grave.

Fred, Sidney Herbert and Winifred were all still at home in 1911, the twin lads being a house boy for the local doctor and an apprentice boot maker respectively and Winifred, aged 10, was still at school. Fred, having moved to Lewisham, lived to the grand age of 89, Herbert I could not find, Winifred may have married in Staines in 1926 but, short of purchasing a copy of the certificate I cannot say for certain this was her.

## HARLESTON

### FUNERAL

The funeral took place at St. Mary's Church, on Saturday of Mr. William Tidnam, of the Close, who died on Wednesday week, aged 82 years. Mr Tidnam had resided for over 53 years at Harleston.

The service was conducted by the Rector (the Rev. B. M. Pickering) and the family mourners were Mr. Ben Tidnam, son; Mr. and Mrs. F. Spinlove, Mr. and Mrs. A. Mills, Mrs. Slater, Mr. F. Tidnam, Mr. and Mrs. Mrs. Slater, Mr. F. Tidnam, Mr. and Mrs. W. Whiting, Mr. and Mrs. George Tidnam and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. William Gower, Miss G. Flaxmer and Mrs. Payne.

Others present included Mr. V. Riches, Mr. J. Swann, Mrs. E. Calver, Mrs. J. Rudd, Mrs. J. Dove, Mr. and Mrs. William Pegg, Mr. W. Whiting.

So:-, two of the five Tidnam boys died in the first World War, it seems particularly poignant that one was the final child of a first marriage whose birth probably led to the death of his mother, the second was the first son of the second marriage of his father. Neither of the men lived long enough to have children of their own although William Jnr had been married for a few months before he died.

William Tidman Snr was living on Broad St when he received his son's back pay and War Gratuity payment but ended his days on the Common, dying at the very respectable age of 82.