

## Spr. P.B.Miller – Royal Engineers

The log book for Westcott Village School contains the following entry:

*‘12 July 1918 – Received information this afternoon that the Caretaker of the school, Mr Percy Miller, was killed in action on the 30<sup>th</sup> June or 1<sup>st</sup> July last.’*

The records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission show that Sapper P.A.Miller (Service No. 165087) of 70<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers was killed in action on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1918. There is no record of a Sapper P.B.Miller being killed on that date.

Percy Miller was born in Wotton in 1881, the son of Harry and Ann Miller. At the time of the 1901 census he was living with his mother and siblings in St John’s Road, Westcott. Marriage records then show that Percy Arthur Miller married Emily Smithers at our church on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1908 and the 1911 census shows that Percy and Emily were then living in North Street, Westcott. It therefore seems certain that the name on our memorial should be ‘Spr P.A.Miller’ rather than ‘Spr P.B.Miller’.

The 1911 census shows that Percy Miller was a bricklayer and it appears he later became the school caretaker. The school log book records that he left to join the Army on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1916 and that his duties would be carried on by Mrs Miller ‘pending definite arrangements by the Managers.’ There is no evidence in the log book to show that this was achieved before the end of the war.

With bricklaying skills, Percy would have been in demand for the Royal Engineers and after enlisting at Dorking, he joined 70<sup>th</sup> Field Company Royal Engineers in the 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern Division). Every Division had a Royal Engineer field company to provide engineering and construction support and it had the full range of trades to do this. Typically a field company would have 20 bricklayers, 40 carpenters, 12 masons, 8 plumbers plus surveyors, draughtsmen, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, engine drivers and other allied trades. Its men could also be used in the infantry role if needed.

After its formation in late August 1914 the 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division had carried out preliminary training in various garrisons in south-east England before leaving for France. The training was completed by February 1915 and the Division landed in Boulogne on 29<sup>th</sup> May. After first concentrating near St. Omer it served with distinction on the Western Front for the rest

**of the war, taking part notably in the battles of Loos, the Somme, Pozieres, the Arras offensive of 1917 and the final advances of 1918.**

**It was in June 1918 that the Division was positioned in the line in readiness for an attack on Bouzincourt in France. The Division was ordered to make the attack on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1918 and Percy Miller was killed in that action on 30<sup>th</sup> June-1<sup>st</sup> July, possibly during the opening stages of the attack. He is buried in Senlis Communal Cemetery Extension which is situated 5 km north-west of Albert.**