

The Bright family was probably typical of many of our predecessors in the Culm Valley. They were not in trade or business but made their living as agricultural labourers who moved frequently to find work. Frederick Bright was one such itinerant farm worker. He was originally of Colyton, near Seaton, where he had been born in 1875. When he was 21, he married Charlotte Jarman at Honiton. She was from Holcombe, near Dawlish, where her father was a market gardener and her sister Mary was the village postmistress.

Frederick and Charlotte Bright had at least five homes in 15 years of marriage and more places were to follow in the years leading up to the start of the Great War. In 1911 they were living at Burrows Farm, a few miles south of Bolham Water in the parish of Clayhidon, with their children. The two eldest, Reginald and Hubert, were twins born on New Year's Day, 1897. By the time of the census these boys had already left home, having reached the school leaving age of 14. Reginald had found work as a gardener and was living with his aunt and grandfather at the Post Office in Holcombe, Dawlish. Three years later, he had become a farm boy and may have returned to live with his parents in Clayhidon. Hubert had gone in another direction. He did not work on the land but went into service for a widow called Thomasine Richards in Queen Street, Honiton.

The third son, Frederick Leonard, born in 1898, served in World War One and returned to the Culm Valley with pulmonary TB. He married May Salter and they had a daughter called Sylvia. Frederick was in and out of hospital and eventually died in an Exeter sanatorium on July 24th 1928.

May later married one of his younger brothers, Harry, who had been born in 1912. Harry, known as Big Daddy, and May lived in South View, Hemyock, until recent years.

Hubert John Bright

Hubert was Reginald's twin. Whatever similarities they may have had as children, they were to take different paths in life. Today we can barely comprehend that, a hundred years ago, boys became virtual men at the age of 14, the year they left school. There were no teenagers, just young adults. Few allowances were made for what we would term today adolescent behaviour. The reality of life was that the brothers' father was an agricultural labourer who moved from place to place. In a family of nine living in a four-roomed cottage, the boys were expected to leave home as soon as they left school and find work, any work. Hubert left home to live in nearby Honiton as servant to a widow, Mrs Richards, who ran a printing business. This would have been the first time that he had lived in a town of any sort. The experience may have tempted him to explore further afield. Trains then, as now, ran from Honiton to Waterloo. Evidence suggests that Hubert found a job as a manservant in London, where he may have stayed with a relative, Robert Bright. He next appears on the public record as having enlisted in the Army at Walworth, South London. He joined The Rifle Brigade and on January

11th crossed to France in a draft of individual reinforcements to join the 3rd Battalion, already serving at the Front. Despite its name, this was an infantry regiment of the line with four regular battalions and not, as its name suggests, a brigade in the normal sense of the word. The 3rd Rifle Brigade, then serving in Belgian Flanders, was part of the 17th Brigade. There are no records of Hubert between the time of his arrival in France in January 1915 and his death in April 1917.

He was, at the time of his death, serving with 17 Company, Machine Gun Corps (MGC). These companies had been brought into existence largely from hand-picked volunteers from within brigades. He was therefore still within 17 Brigade and from this, even without records, we can reliably deduce his original unit as being the 3rd Rifle Brigade. For the first year of the War, 17 Brigade was part of 6 Division in France. In September 1914 it had marched rapidly across France to the Aisne to reinforce the hard-pressed British Expeditionary Force. It had then moved north to Belgian Flanders and in October 1915 transferred with 3rd Rifle Brigade to 24th Division. In 1916 the 17 Brigade suffered in the German gas attack at Wulverghem and then joined the Somme offensive seeing action in the battles of Delville Wood and Guillemont.

We do not know whether Hubert served with 3rd Rifle Brigade or 17 MGC during these battles but both were part of 17 Brigade and he would have been at all of them with either unit. In April the following year, the Brigade was involved in seizing Vimy Ridge as part of the Battle of Arras. It was here that Hubert was killed. Casualty rates among the Machine Gun Corps were high. They were priority targets for German mortars, artillery and machine guns. Hubert's body was never identified on the field of battle. However, he is remembered on the memorial in the Arras British Military Cemetery. He is also remembered on Clayhidon's war memorial, his name besides his twin's, reunited.