

Frank Brown 1885-1918

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Frank Brown was born in Pembury 20th July 1885. He was the youngest of 8 children born to Irad Arthur Brown and Miriam Brown (nee Mewett). Miriam died in November 1885 of typhoid fever, leaving Irad with 4 children under 10, and Frank just 4 months old. Not surprisingly he very quickly found a housekeeper and married her in 1889.



Irad with his 5 sons in c1898. Frank Brown is far right, aged c13

The family had moved to High Brooms by 1891, where Irad and his sons were all builders, bricklayers or brickmakers. They lived variously in High Brooms Rd, Nursery Rd and Silverdale Rd. Frank was placed as a bricklaying apprentice with John Jarvis & Co. He was among the men who built the Opera House in Tunbridge Wells and is shown in this picture of them. (2nd row from front. 5th from left).



John Jarvis builders at the Opera House. c1901

The family story is that whilst working on the dome inside the building, he fell off the scaffolding and fell into a pile of sand on the floor. Amazingly he was not badly injured but was sacked on the spot by the foreman for "being careless" !

He married Florence Victoria Camfield at St John's Church 16th May 1909. They had 4 children. Grace Emily (b.1909), Doris Violet (b.1912), Frank William (b.1916) and Ronald (died at 10 days old)



Photo of Frank Brown with daughter Grace Emily c1910

He was working for T Bates and Sons, builders in Tunbridge Wells when he was called up in 1916.

World War 1. Frank was called up in May 1916 in Tunbridge Wells and was assigned to the 9th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment. (G12432). He was posted to France in September 1916. In December 1916 he suffered a facial injury and spent a month in hospital. In March 1917 he escaped with a graze when a shell landed nearby. On April 11th 1917 he was not so lucky when another shell exploded in their trench. He was buried and suffered back injuries. He spent at least another month at base hospital in France. Obviously his health was failing as by October 1917 he is back in the UK at a military hospital in Oxford suffering from trench fever. From there he was transferred to Tickford Abbey Military Hospital in Newport Pagnall. We have a letter from the nursing sister there firstly warning Florence that "he is daily losing strength, but is comfortable and has everything he needs" and then this last letter from his doctor:

Dear Mrs Brown . I cannot tell how much I feel for you. We had learnt to be so fond of your husband that we can sympathise very fully. I know something of what your loss must be.

He bore his illness which I feel sure he knew must be the end of his life, with the courage of a true gentleman which he was in every sense. It must be harder to die lonely of an illness in hospital than in the field of battle. But he never showed the slightest sign of discontent or fear. I do hope the dear children will some day understand what a splendid father they had. May God grant you strength to bear the loss and loneliness. We can sympathise but can help you so little

The Tunbridge Wells Advertiser (5th July 1918) carried a report of his funeral :

Military Funeral As briefly stated in our last issue, the funeral of Pte Frank Brown, of the Royal Sussex Regiment, who died at the Newport Pagnell Hospital, Bucks, and whose wife resides at 44 (46) Nursery Rd, took place on Thursday with full military honours. The first part of the service was

held at St Matthew's Church, the Rev P Orme, assisted by the Military Chaplain Capt Rev Aylmer Stark, conducting the service at the Church and at the graveside at Southborough Cemetary. The coffin was covered with the Union Jack, and was borne on a gun-carriage with an escort and firing party of the Royal Sussex Regiment. The Last Post was sounded and three volleys fired over the grave. There were a number of choice floral tributes as follows: from his wife and children: Father, Sarah and Emily; Mr & Mrs T Brown; Mr & Mrs W Brown; Mr & Mrs Usherwood; Mr & Mrs A Towner; Mr & Mrs A J Brown; Mr & Mrs A E Brown; Mr & Mrs J Smith; Mrs Camfield; Mr & Mrs W Hallands; Mr & Mrs W Knight; Mr & Mrs Austen and daughter; Mr & Mrs Eastwood; Mrs Boakes and family; Mrs M Young; Mrs Fermer; Mrs Tester; Mr & Mrs Jeffery, Ron and Don; Beatrice; Comrade; School Children; the Commandant and Quartermaster of the Newport Hospital; Staff at Hospital; High Brooms Club and Institute.

Pte Brown, who was 33 yrs of age, joined up in May 1916, and went to France in September. He has been wounded in the face and back, buried in a dug-out, and came to England last October suffering from trench fever.

He was an old and much respected member of the High Brooms Club and Institute, having served on the committee for a number of years and was an old St Augustine's School Boy.

He is remembered on the following memorials:

1. Tunbridge Wells Town Memorial. Below the Town Hall. (F.Brown)
2. Southborough War Memorial. Southborough Common (Royal Sussex: F Brown)
3. High Brooms Club and Institute. (Roll of Honour 1914-18. F. Brown)
4. St Matthew's Church Memorial. (F.Brown)
5. Chichester Cathedral. St George's Chapel. Royal Sussex Regiment Memorial. (9th Battalion. 12432 F. Brown)

His wife Florence placed "In Memoriam" pieces in the Kent & Sussex Courier for many years after his death. This is from 1920.

"Friends may think that we've forgotten him, when at times they see us smile;
But they little know the sorrow that hides beneath that smile" From his ever loving Wife and Children.

WW1 Memorial Plaque. (the so-called "Widow's Penny") for Frank Brown. "He died for Freedom and Honour" inscribed on the rim. Issued by the Government in 1919 to the next-of-kin of all those who lost their lives in WW1. A scroll from the King accompanied each medal.



Frank Brown was buried at Southborough Cemetary on Southborough Common on 24th June 1918. His second son Ronald Brown was born on December 21st 1918, but died 10 days later and was buried with his father on 4th Jan 1919. When Florence died in 1968, she was also buried here. Because this is a military grave, with the headstone provided by the Commonwealth Graves Commission (who still look after it), the family were not able to add any headstone inscriptions for these later 2 burials.

