

Percy Hamlen, died 9 March 1915, aged 16

Percy Hamlen was the youngest casualty of World War I to be recorded on All Saints' memorial. He was born in East Finchley in 1898, at 12 Lincoln Road; the family moved to this house 1893 and 1896, and presumably this was where the connection with All Saints' Church was forged. The family appeared to be doing well at this time; Mr Hamlen was a commercial traveller in wines, and he and his wife had two sons and three daughters and a live-in domestic servant. Sadly their youngest child, Irene, died later that year before reaching her first birthday.

The next record is the 1911 census. The family had moved to 21 Clifton Road, and it looks as though life was not so good. Mr Hamlen was still working, but his wife Ada was a patient in the new Middlesex County Asylum at Napsbury in Hertfordshire and she died there in 1917. The family no longer had any domestic help, and the elder surviving daughter – 20 year old Constance – was not in employment, so perhaps she looked after the household in her mother's absence. Her 18 year old brother Robert was a stockbrokers' clerk and 15 year old Gertrude was a mantle maker, while Percy was 12 and still at school.

Soon after the war started Percy joined the 28th Battalion of the London Regiment, known as the Artists' Rifles. The battalion recruited from the public schools and applicants needed a reference to join. In August 1914 the battalion's HQ was in Duke's Road near Euston Station – the building is now The Place, a centre for contemporary dance – and young Percy enlisted there as a Private. In October 1914 the battalion was sent to France to Bailleul near St Omer, and became an officer training corps.

Percy may not even have reached France – if he did, he was soon sent back to England because of his poor health. He suffered from mesenteric tuberculosis, a serious illness which particularly affected children and young adults. Unfortunately, this became acute and he developed an intestinal obstruction, and on 9 March 1915 he died in Finchley Cottage Hospital (now Finchley Memorial Hospital) close by the family home in Clifton Road. He was buried in St Pancras cemetery, where his grave is marked with an official Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone, and his name is recorded on the Artists' Rifles Roll of Honour.



Mr Hamlen died in 1924, and the three remaining siblings stayed in the Clifton Road house for some years before moving together to Barnet and then Hayle in Cornwall. Percy's life was brief, his end painful, and there is little left to mark his existence. But we at All Saints' will remember him.