

Percy James Woolgar 'Uncle Percy'

Percy James Woolgar was born on the 3rd of July 1891 at 7 Chalford Road, Dulwich Surrey,ⁱ the second son and third child of Philip James and Clara Woolgar née Dawson.ⁱⁱ He was baptised at Emmanuel Church, Dulwich on the 27th of September 1891.ⁱⁱⁱ On the 4th of January 1893, his younger sister, my grandmother, Ivy Gertrude, arrived to complete the family; their father was working as a milkman.^{iv}



Sadly, on the 6th of May 1894, Percy's eldest brother, Philip Thomas Cecil Woolgar, died at home of croup and asthenia, which is defined as weakness and a lack of energy.^v He was buried on the 11th of May at Norwood Cemetery, Surrey.^{vi}

Percy James Woolgar
c.1892

Percy was entered into Salter's Hill School on the 24th of August 1896.^{vii} He lived all his life at 7 Chalford Road;^{viii} in 1901, he was living there with his parents and siblings. His father had changed his occupation by this time and had become a gardener.^{ix}



Percy James Woolgar outside
7 Chalford Road c.1902

Percy loved music and sang in several choirs, notably that for nearby All Saints' Church. He belonged to the Royal Philharmonic Choir and was also a deputy for the choirs at St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and St. Alban's Cathedral, travelling to these venues by bus.^x



Percy James Woolgar as a chorister c. 1906

Despite wanting to be an organ builder,^{xi} in March 1905, when he was not yet fourteen years old, Percy began working for the London Agency of the thread manufacturers J & P Coats^{xii} The 1911 census confirms that Percy was a clerk for a cotton thread manufacturer.^{xiii} According to his niece, Gwendoline



Percy James Woolgar in uniform 1918
1st of April
7 inches tall.
sooner. There

Catherine Braund née Smith, he worked for Pawson and Leaf of St. Paul's churchyard. It may however have been later in his career that he worked for this company.^{xiv}

The Military Service Act, of January 1916, compelled all men between the ages of eighteen and forty one to sign up. On the 28th of February 1917 Percy James, who had been working as a commercial clerk, enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps as a rigger, transferring to the newly created Royal Air Force on the 1918. He was described as being 5 foot It is not known why he was not called up is no record of him having been in the

army before he entered the Royal Flying Corps. Might it have been his fitness that delayed his call-up?

On the 22nd of May 1919 he was discharged as no longer being fit and was awarded the Silver War Badge.^{xv}

His poor eyesight and a defect of his foot preventing more active involvement. He spent much of the war in Scotland where he met a young lady called Jean, whom he planned to marry. Despite his sister Ivy still living at home, his mother vetoed the idea of moving to Scotland and Percy single.^{xvi}

In the 1921 census, Percy was living and younger sister, still working as a clerk in the thread trade. On this was listed as working for the Central thread manufacturers of 13 Square, Barbican, London; presumably the London branch of what was a Scottish company. The amalgamation of several companies, including J & P Coats, had created the largest thread manufacturers in the world.^{xvii} The J & P Coats Archive records confirm that Percy worked for them for more than twenty years, still being an employee at the end of 1925.^{xviii} It is not clear if he continued working for the company beyond this date. Alternatively, was it at



her only son
Percy James Woolgar
remained
c.1920s. Possibly taken from
a group work photograph

with mother
commercial
occasion, he
Agency Ltd.,
Bridgewater



**Percy James Woolgar and a
friend with his car 1938**

this point that he joined Pawsons, or was Pawsons part of the Central Agency conglomerate?

According to his niece, in 1933, Percy left the office and became a commercial traveller for the same firm. He began making his rounds in south-east London and north-east Surrey by bus, taking his wares in a massive suitcase. In 1936, was told that he had to learn to drive and he acquired an Austin 7. He used to take his niece, Gwendoline with him on his rounds on Saturdays. Gwen also remembers helping Percy with various do-it-yourself tasks, passing him nails whilst he mended a fence.^{xix} Percy was a good amateur carpenter and made dolls' houses for his niece Gwendoline and great-niece Janet.

Percy was a dog lover. His Old English sheep-dog, was named Mef, short for Mephistopheles, after the character in Faust. Percy was understudying Howard Williams for the role when the dog was acquired. Mef was followed by golden retriever, Dep (Deputy), who died of a fit when the coalman's horse, Harry, reared up at the window. Percy also looked after a Red Setter, Flash, for a friend.



Percy used to holiday at Church Town Farm in Bridgerule, Devon. The farm was owned by the Johns family but the bed and breakfast side of the business was run by Gladys Bowden and her husband.

**Percy James
Woolgar on holiday
1936**

According to the 1939 Register, Percy was living with his mother at 7 Chalford Road and was a 'commercial traveller - textile'.^{xx}



known each
Percy James Woolgar
Croxted Road
well have
nursing home

in later life

in Tupwood Lane is remembered by his great-niece, who used to visit and be rewarded with 2/- or even 2/6, enough to buy a new book! Percy's legless room-mate made an impression; his name may have been Bill.^{xxiii} Percy died on the 8th of March 1965 at Alexandra House Nursing Home, Tupwood Lane, Caterham Surrey.^{xxiv}

In old age, Percy used to spend Christmas with his niece Gwen. Percy didn't like turkey so, when the turkey was served, he was told it was chicken and he ate it quite happily.^{xxi}

Percy retired in the July of 1961, at the age of seventy. A few months later he had a stroke whilst on his daily evening walk. He spent the rest of his life in nursing homes being visited by his family and friends Reg Hurson and Don Kaye. Although Percy was five years Reg's senior, they had almost certainly other from childhood, as Reg grew up in and his father was a dairyman,^{xxii} so may worked with Philip James. Percy's time at the

ⁱ Short Birth certificate for Percy James Woolgar in family possession.

ⁱⁱ 1911 census for 7 Chalford Road, Norwood, Surrey RG14 2134 folio 190.

ⁱⁱⁱ Baptism register for Emmanuel Church, Dulwich, Surrey via www.ancestry.co.uk originals at London Metropolitan Archives.

^{iv} Short birth certificate in family possession. Full birth certificate of Ivy Gertrude Woolgar 1893, from the General Register Office (pdf).

^v Death certificate of Philip Cecil Thomas Woolgar 1894, from the General Registrar.

^{vi} Invoice for funeral in family possession.

^{vii} Admissions' Registers for Salter's Hill School, Lambeth, Surrey LCC/EO/DIV08/SAL image via www.ancestry.com, originals at London Metropolitan Archives.

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- viii Oral evidence from Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith. The will of Percy James Woolgar 1965, in family possession.
- ix 1901 census for 7 Chalford Road, Norwood, Surrey RG13 438 folio 36.
- x Oral evidence from Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith.
- xi Oral evidence from Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith.
- xii J & P Coats Archive Home Department Agencies Staff Wages 1913-1929 GB 248 UGD 199/1/21/11.
- xiii 1911 census for 7 Chalford Road, Norwood, Surrey RG14 2134 folio 190.
- xiv Oral evidence from Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith.
- xv Air Force Service records for Percy James Woolgar AIR79/577 63245.
- xvi Oral evidence from Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith.
- xvii 1921 census for 7 Chalford Road, Dulwich Surrey RG15 2179 0607 sn303.
- xviii J & P Coats Archive Salary Book 7 1916-1926 GB 248 UGD 199/1/21/4.
- xix Oral evidence from Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith.
- xx 1939 Register for 7 Chalford Road, Dulwich, Surrey RG101/0371C/002/11 Letter # Code: ANQU.
- xxi Oral evidence from Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith.
- xxii 1911 census for 49, South Croxted Road, Dulwich, Surrey RG14 2134 folio 24.
- xxiii Oral evidence from Janet Mary Few née Braund.
- xxiv The will of Percy James Woolgar 1965, in family possession.