# WILLIAM DEVONPORT BERRY, Trooper 4454, 1st Life Guards (Machine Gun Corps)

William was the third generation of the Berry family with this name. His grandfather was born in Devonport (hence the name?) in about 1834; in 1881 he was living at Road Farm with his wife Margaret and children Elizabeth, James, William Devonport junior aged 14, and Alice; William senior was a well-known cattle dealer.

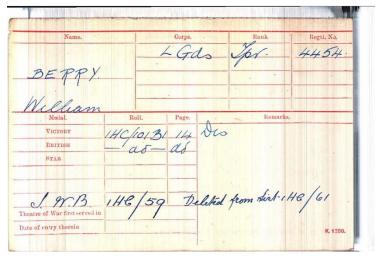
In May 1897 William junior married Mary Pike in Whitestaunton; he was a dealer and the landlord of the Rising Sun Inn. William Devonport the youngest was born on September 19 1898. He was the only child, and by 1911 the family were back in Buckland. Young William was 12, and still at school.



His name is on Buckland St Mary School's Roll of Honour, written up at the back of the School's Log Book; he's in the Life Guards, and his father is again noted as a dealer, and living at Newtown. William was at the school for about 18 months, leaving in November 1906.

We are fortunate in that the Guards' records were stored separately from the general Army Service Records, and are now kept, undamaged, at the National Archives, so that we have a full record of William's service.

He attested on September 16 1916 shortly before his  $18^{th}$  birthday. Why the Lifeguards? A glance at his Attestation papers gives us the probable explanation: he was  $6'1\frac{3}{4}$ ", weighed 15 stone with a 33/35 chest measurement and 20/20 vision. The Medical Officer wrote "Fit - nice clean boy" on his medical! He was placed in the Army Reserve; his service was reckoned from May 5 1917. Interestingly, his mother Mary is noted as Next of Kin on his papers, although his



father was still alive.

On May 5 1918 he was transferred to the No 1(1<sup>st</sup> Life Guards) Machine Gun Battalion, which had been formed in March that year. He arrived in Boulogne on June 28<sup>th</sup>, and joined the Machine Gun Depot at its base at Camiers, Pas de Calais on June 29<sup>th</sup>. Camiers was adjacent to the huge base camp at Etaples. Further mention of this transfer is dated August 23; he joined the Battalion in the field on

December 6 1918 – by which time of course the Armistice had been signed.



## Silver War Badge

He was transferred back to England on March 4 1919 as "no longer physically fit for War Service", and in August appeared before an Invaliding Board at Bath War Hospital. His disability is given as D.A.H. – Disordered Action of the Heart; it seems that this would now be

categorised as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. One is left to wonder what can have happened to this fit young man, who served only at the tail end of the war in France, to leave him in this state. He was awarded a Silver War Badge and a pension. The last instalment of his pension was assessed on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1921, with a final payment of 7/6 for 35 weeks, based on a "6-14% Degree of Disablement", down from an earlier assessment of 20%.

William was married at Christchurch in 1923 to Gertrude Florence Day; they had 3 children. They farmed near Bridgwater; in the 1939 Register they were at Crossways Farm and later at Boomer Farm. William died in 1960 aged 61. His son Eric and daughter Margot Spearing were his executors.

# **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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# A PATRIARCHAL POLITICIAN Walked to Poll at 91 Talk with Buckland St. Mary Veteran HEALTH ON THE HILLS A CHALLENGE AT CHARD (County Gazette Special)

Not the least remarkable of many interesting incidents reported on polling day comes from Buckland St. Mary, a secluded village on the Blackdown Hills, about five miles from Chard, and included in the Yeovil Division, where Col. Aubrey Herbert easily retained his seat.

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It transpired not long before the poll closed that Mr. William Devonport Berry, a veteran of 91, had refused a lift from his home nearly a mile away, preferring to walk to and from the polling station in the village.

#### READS WITHOUT GLASSES

To describe Mr. Berry, or "Devonport", as he is more familiarly known, as hale and hearty and in the pink of condition is no exabgeration, for he is upright, walks without a stick, reads without the aid of glasses, and still on occasions transacts his own business. Indeed, there is nothing he likes better than a deal, for all his life he has attended markets in the West Country, buying and selling live stock, principally calves, pigs, and horses.

When seen this week by a "County Gazette" reporter Mr. Berry, who lives at Road Farm - "an old house for an old man", as he put it - was engaged in his orchard gathering apples, of which he has had a goodly crop. He seemed amused that his walk to the polling booth should cause surprise, declaring, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, and an exhibition of shadow boxing, that he felt fit enough to walk to London, and had no doubt about his ability to get there on foot if given the time. Very readily granting an interview, and leading the way into his house - "I came here when I was married, 68 years ago", he remarked - Mr. Berry recalled his younger days. "I was born at Devonport," he said, "and that's why I was christened 'Devonport'; but my parents settled in Buckland when I was about 18 months old, I have lived in the parish ever since, and I shall be 92 on the 14th February next".

#### "NOT A BAD SCHOLAR"

Mr. Berry's wife died about 15 years ago; a widowed daughter now acts as his housekeeper. He has had a family of three boys and three girls, the sons following their father's occupation of fatming and dealing in cattle. Very proud is the old fellow of his youngest daughter, who has, he told his visitor, been a schoolmistress at Netheravon, Wilts, for over 30 years. "I was not a bad scholar myself," he went on. "As a young man I taught at Buckland Church Sunday-school, and I'll show you the prize they gave me". He exhibited with pride a heavily bound volume of the Bible, bearing the inscription, "Reward for William Devonport Berry, July 24th, 1849 - 'Search the Scriptures. John v. 39' ". In further conversation Mr. Berry, who has a rich sense of humour and no little knowledge of the world, told of his experiences at the various auctions he was wont to visit. Many years ago he regularly attended Exeter market, until, as he put it, the city became "too thickly populated". He then transferred his custom to Basingstoke, picking up batches of calves on the way, and doing "a regular trade".

### "A MAN OF GIRTH"

Sherborne retains his affection as the town where, 40 years ago, he won a prize at a fete given by Lord Digby in the grounds of Sherborne Castle. "There was," he said, "a competition for men of girth. I had no intention of entering, but my son persuaded me to do so, and my chest measurement was found to be  $48^{\frac{3}{2}}$  inches. I always have been a man of strong constitution, and don't remember having a headache or suffering from indigestion. That I put down to hard work and plenty of fresh air." Dr. Munden, of Ilminster, says that people never die on these hills. Of course, that's a bit of a 'stretcher'; but it is a fact that people up here live to be a good old age".

## NON-SMOKER ALL HIS LIFE

Mr. Berry has been a non-smoker all his life. He has never smoked a pipe, cigar, or cigarette, but does not object to others enjoying the fragrant weed. He is not a teetotaler, and has no liking for Pussyfoot, though strongly of opinion that much of the drink sold nowadays is inferior in quality, and often in the case of spirits injurious. "This has been a good year for apples," he remarked, "and I have made a tidy few hogsheads of cider. That, at any rate, is pure liquor. Noah knew a thing or two when he came out of the ark and cultivated a vineyard, though it is true he got drunk on his own grapes. That has always amused me, and it shows that people got drunk even in those days. I have only been drunk twice in my life, though, mind you, I have always been a man who could carry his liquor".

#### £50 WAGER GOES BEGGING

Referring to the visits which he still pays to local markets, Mr. Berry told an amusing story, the accuracy of which he vouched for. "A fortnight ago," he said, "I was in a certain hostelry in Chard having a chat with a few friends. There was some talk about my fitness, and I threw out a wager that I would outbox, wrestle, run, or jump any man for £50. When those in the room had stopped laughing, I explained that, as the lawyers would say, there was a codicil to the statement, contained in the stipulation that the man I was to meet must be my age to the minute and weight to the ounce. No one took up the challenge".

## ENJOYS THE "GAZETTE" SERIAL

Mr. Berry, in wishing his interviewer "Good-day", mentioned that he had taken the "County Gazette" for over 50 years, deriving much enjoyment each week from the news and reading the serial story. The story just concluded - "Three Men Who Came Back" - he considered a rare good yarn, and said that judging by the title of the new serial - "The Mystery of Room 75" - it would provide the right kind of reading for the winter evenings. Our readers will join us in the hope that Mr. Berry may retain his health and spirits, and enjoy his simple pleasures for many more years.

(Somerset County Gazette, 1922)