

FOREWORD

Captain John Devitt Stringfellow Pendlebury, Special Operations Executive

From Wikipedia:

John Pendlebury (12 October 1904 – 22 May 1941) was a [British archaeologist](#) who worked for [British intelligence](#) during [World War II](#). He was captured and executed by German troops during the [Battle of Crete](#).

Details of his early life and education in England and his extensive archaeological achievements in pre-war Crete, Greece and Egypt are covered in his potted Wikipedia biography (see his Archive folder included elsewhere in this dossier collection).

However, his situation is highly unusual within the general remit of this series of military Veteran's stories – i.e. he was a civilian volunteer specifically recruited for his extensive specialised knowledge of his adopted country. Consequently his life and works prior to moving on to his beloved Greece and Crete for a desperately short wartime experience and finally the ultimate sacrifice, will be recounted in these current files in his honour – to give the measure of the man, and to demonstrate his unique and extreme potential usefulness to the war effort on Crete.

Early life

John Pendlebury was born in London, the eldest son of Herbert S. Pendlebury, a London surgeon, and Lilian D. Devitt, a daughter of Thomas Devitt, part owner of [Devitt and Moore](#), a shipping company. At the age of about two, he lost an eye in an accident of unknown nature while in the care of a friend of his parents, who were away for a few days. On their return conflicting reports of the accident were given. The eye could not be successfully treated. He used a prosthetic glass eye, which, it has been said by people who knew him, was generally mistaken for a real one. Throughout his life he remained determined to out-perform persons with two eyes. As a child he was taken to see [Wallis Budge](#) at the [British Museum](#). During the conversation he apparently resolved to become an [Egyptian archaeologist](#). Budge told him to study [Classics](#) before making up his mind. His mother died when he was 17, leaving him a legacy from his grandfather that made him financially independent. His father remarried, but had no further children. Pendlebury got along well with his stepmother and her son, Robin. He remained the centre of his father's affections, whom he called "daddy" in letters.

He was educated at [Winchester](#) (1918-1923), before winning scholarships at [Pembroke College, Cambridge](#) where he was awarded a Second in Part I and a First in Part II of the [Classical Tripos](#), "with distinction in archaeology." Despite his disability, he also shone as a sportsman, with an [athletics blue](#) and competing internationally as a [high jumper](#).

During the Easter holidays of 1923 at Winchester, Pendlebury and a master from Winchester had travelled to Greece, Pendlebury for the first time; visiting the excavations at [Mycenae](#), they conversed with [Alan Wace](#), then Director of the [British School at Athens](#). Wace remembered him as a boy who wished "to see things for himself." The visit solidified his determination to become an [archaeologist](#).