

Private Harold MOSS

1st/4th Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers



Harold was the eldest son of Samuel and Sarah Ellen Moss and he was born in Morley in early 1889. His parents were also Morley born and bred as were all their other children. By 1911 Harold had four brothers and one sister but four other children had died earlier. The family was living in Fountain Street in a 4-roomed terraced house at the time.

In 1912, Harold married Lavinia Bennett of Howden Clough at St Andrew's Church, Bruntcliffe and they had one son, Sydney, who was born in 1913. Harold worked for the Morley Co-op as a grocer's assistant. The Co-op was a large and important organisation in Morley at that time. It had been founded on a principle of profit sharing and this attracted a lot of people from the left of the political spectrum. Harold was one of these, active in Trade Union affairs and a member of the radical Independent Labour Party.

By mid-1916, the Army's need for men to fight in the increasingly attritional war meant that even able-bodied married men were called up to join the forces. In August 1916 Harold was summoned before the Morley Tribunal because he had said he did not wish to join the forces. He said he was acting as a conscientious objector based on his political views that the war was wrong. He put his case in detail, saying he believed in the brotherhood of man and he felt that disputes between nations should be settled in a court of law not on a battlefield.

We know from The Morley Observer report that Harold received backing from two Morley councillors, Percy Marshall and Ben Simpson who were associated with the Labour Party. He was prepared to do farm work or other work of national importance but would have nothing to do directly with the military. However, the Tribunal, by majority, took a hard line and his appeal was refused.

He appealed to another Tribunal in Dewsbury but they also were dismissive of his views and told him he must sign up within 14 days. We do not know the exact details but think it is likely that when he was informed what his alternatives were - and conscientious objectors were treated very harshly by the authorities - he decided to join up. He enlisted with the Northumberland Fusiliers at Pontefract a few days later in early September 1916.

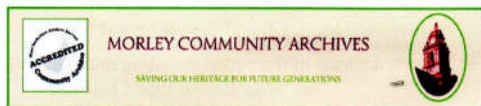
Once more the story is unclear but we know that he was in the army for only a short time of a few weeks before he became ill and was transferred from the Strensall camp of the Northumberland Fusiliers to Fulford Military Hospital in the York area. Both his death certificate and the Morley Observer tell us that he had developed a severe throat infection. This turned into rheumatic fever after which he died from heart failure. (We do know that others of his siblings had died young and, in an age which had no anti-biotics, other soldiers suffered a very similar fate so I believe that further speculation at this moment is pointless.)

Harold's body was returned to Morley and he was buried in Morley Cemetery. There is a full report of the funeral which was carried out by the Rev. Baggot of St Andrew's in the presence of family, friends and colleagues despite his views which were definitely in a minority in the Morley of that time.

His wife and child went to live in Batley and he is remembered on the War Memorial there besides those created by the Borough of Morley and the Morley Co-op. I think a lot of people realised that Harold tried to do his best for his fellow humans and I trust he will rest in peace.

Researcher:

Dr Clive McManus of Morley Community Archives.



Wreath Ceremony at Morley Cemetery – October 3rd 2016

