

# Eccleshall's Lost Heroes: The Mossop Family

## Introduction

To commemorate the centenary of *The Great War*, a group of volunteers, with the full support of *The Eccleshall Historical Society*, set out to trace the family and military history of the 46 names on the Eccleshall War Memorial.

The second part of this project revealed the names of 17 men born in Eccleshall, all of whom appeared on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, but for whatever reason do not appear on the Eccleshall or other *local* memorials.

These stories have now been collected and it is our aim to ensure that they are also remembered alongside those already on the Eccleshall memorial.

Two of those names were brothers, the *Mossops*.

Further research revealed an amazing family history - the subject of this document.

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Maurice Mossop was born in 1803 and his wife Mary in 1811 in Co. Mayo, Ireland. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, no Irish catholic could vote, purchase land, live in or within 5 miles of a municipality, obtain an education, or enter a profession. In 1801, the Act of Union meant that the Dublin Parliament, which was exclusively Protestant, was disbanded and Irish M.P.'s sat in the Westminster Parliament; although Catholic Emancipation in early 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed some Catholics the right to vote. However, the landowners were exclusively protestant. Many of these were absentee landlords, who appointed middlemen to run their estates and collect rents, most of which were remitted to England. Whilst the estates produced beef, dairy products and grain, these were exported to England and the peasants who worked the land were forced onto smaller and smaller plots. The only crop they could grow to support their families was potatoes. A government commission reported in 1845 'their only food was potato, their only beverage water, cabins were seldom a protection against the weather, bed and blankets a rare luxury, their only property a pig and a manure heap'.

In the 1841 Census in England, Maurice Mossop is recorded as being a farm labourer on Badenhall Farm, Eccleshall. However, his children were all born in Ireland, and Edward was born after this date. It would appear that Maurice was supporting his family as an itinerant labourer in England during spring and summer, returning to Ireland when work was scarce.

Then, in 1846, potato blight reached Europe from America. In hot, humid conditions, the blight could devastate crops. Whilst it damaged crops throughout Europe, it was fatal to the Irish peasantry. The Great Famine struck Ireland in 1846-1851. During this period, roughly 1 million Irish died and 1 million emigrated. The population reduced by 20%. Whilst they were starving in Ireland, the larger estates were still exporting wheat and grain to England. Appeals to the British Government for help were ignored.

Many Irish emigrated, either to the USA or to the West Coast ports, especially Glasgow and Liverpool. This continued for many years. For example, 60 years later, many of the Titanic passengers were Irish. As it happens, Co. Mayo was one of the most impoverished and devastated parts of Ireland. However, Maurice and Mary, with their three sons Thomas (b. 1838), Maurice (b.1841) and Edward (b.1846), got out of Ireland with little money or food, and three children, one of them probably a babe in arms. It is difficult to imagine the hazards they must have faced.

However, the 1851 Census shows that the five of them were living in Castle Street, Eccleshall, along with 5 lodgers, all from Co. Mayo. Maurice and the lodgers are described as agricultural labourers. The three sons are described as scholars, which meant that they were getting an education, which as Catholics, was denied to them in Ireland. Clearly the family had moved to Eccleshall as Maurice knew the area and the possibility of employment.

In 1861, Maurice was a *Registered Boarding House Keeper*, [now living in](#) the High Street, Edward aged 14, was a grocer's assistant. The elder sons had left home and there were three

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boarders. Maurice, the middle son emigrated to the USA, where he became a successful builder. He has descendants in the USA today.

Many thanks to Wendy Baskerville for providing the following information from the Church Lodge deeds (now owned by the Baskerville family).

In 1854 and 1859, George and Sarah Jervis and Samuel Thomas bought the 'messuages, gardens and premises' (*messuage* is a legal term for a dwelling with its adjacent buildings and lands). In 1872, the houses were described as '3 freehold tenement or dwelling houses adjacent each other'. Maurice Mossop is on a list of occupants of one of these properties and also 'another small dwelling house situated behind one of the front and dwelling houses'. The properties were subsequently sold to Frederick Greatrex, solicitor and son of Christopher Greatrex, General Practitioner of Eccleshall'. All these properties were pulled down and in 1876 Frederick Greatrex 'caused to be erected two brick and tile dwellings, to be known as Church Lodge and Church Lodge Cottage.

In 1869, Edward married Ellen Hall in Burton-on-Trent and shortly afterwards moved to the USA. There they had three daughters, Mary Teresa, Sarah and Ellen, all born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, but, possibly due to the illness of Edward's father Maurice, the family returned to Eccleshall. Their next child, Morris was born in Eccleshall in 1878, and they then had a further six sons: Edward Percy (b.1883), George (b.1885), William Augustine (b.1886), Vincent (b.1887), Bernard Alfred (b.1888) and Thomas Francis (b.1889) In 1881, the family were living in Castle Street, Edward's occupation being given as *bricklayer*.

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Meanwhile, Edward's brother Thomas had married in Lancashire a lady who already had a son. They in turn had five children, Mary (b. Southport 1865), though the other four children, Mamie (b.1870), Olive (b.1872), Edward (b. 1876), and Vincent (b.1878) were born in Eccleshall. Thomas's father, Maurice died in 1879, and his wife had also died, Mary his mother was living on the High Street with Thomas, and his 5 children.

In 1891, Edward's family were now living in the High Street, but the business got into difficulties, and Edward was later declared bankrupt.

The 1901 census records that the family were living at 34 Highfield Road, Smethwick. Edward, father and son were both described as bricklayers and soon set up a business as steeplejacks. The business was successful, and lasted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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William is recorded as a sailor, (steward) living with his married sister Sarah (Brown) and her family in Cardiff. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1905 he joined the Militia, in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, (No. 9856) His age was given as 18yrs 11months. He was described as a labourer, living in Birmingham, a single man, with his father Edward as next of kin. His medical described him as 5ft 3ins tall, 117lbs, and chest 34ins with a 3inch expansion.



In 1910, William married Emily Andrews, and they had four children, Louisa E (b. 1911), William A (1912), Hilda M, (1914), and Mamie (1915). The marriage and births were registered in Kings Norton.

William joined the Regular Army and served as a Private (73146) in the Notts & Derby Regiment (Sherwood Foresters), arriving on the Western Front in December 1915. He died of wounds received at the Battle of Passchendaele on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1917 and is buried at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery. At the end of the war, he was posthumously awarded the 1915 Star, British Service, and Victory Medals.

We have been in contact with Duncan Honeybourne, the great –grandson of William. He told us that the photo above is the only known one of William to survive. He carried it with him with a dedication to his daughter on the back and it was returned, bloodstained to her. When she died, aged 98, the photo passed to Duncan. She recalled her father's visits home, particularly his last at Xmas 1916.

Duncan Honeybourne has a career as solo pianist, chamber musician, educator and artistic director. He has appeared at many major concert halls and leading festivals and has been a frequent broadcaster at home and abroad.

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On 6<sup>th</sup> Oct 1906, Bernard, the third son, also volunteered for the Militia. He was living at Highfield Road, and was an apprentice silversmith. He gave his age as 18yrs 7mths and his religion as catholic. He was 5ft 3ins tall, and 109lbs. He joined the South Staffordshire regiment.

It does not appear that Bernard ever married.



He volunteered for the Regular Army in 1914 and served with 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment, part of Kitchener's Armies, reaching the rank of Corporal. He is recorded as landing in France on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1915 which corresponds to the battalion's deployment. They were part of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade in 1<sup>st</sup> Division. The first major offensive of the British Army was the Battle of Loos. On 8<sup>th</sup> October 1915, the German Army launched an offensive and on 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October, the British were preparing a counter offensive.

Bernard Mossop was lost in action on 11<sup>th</sup> October and is commemorated on the Loos Memorial. On 13<sup>th</sup> October, the 10<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters were in action on the Hullack Road. On the same day, the North and South Staffordshires sustained heavy casualties attacking the Hohenzollern Redoubt, a German strongpoint. He was posthumously awarded the 1915 Star, British Service, and Victory Medals.

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The third brother to serve was Vincent. He married Lily Hands in 1909 and they had four children Agnes Ellen (1909), Maime (1913), George E (1915) and Olive (1917). All births were registered in Kings Norton. Throughout this time his address was 48 Beechfield Road, Smethwick. In 1915 he enlisted as a Private (096717) in the ASC (later the RASC), his date of birth being registered as 'about 1887'. He was a fitter by trade. The plan was to train him as a motor transport driver. His pay was 1s 2d per day but if he qualified as a driver, this would rise to 2s 4d. He went to France on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1916. He returned to England on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1917. His record described him as 'sobriety good, reliable and fairly intelligent, good lorry driver'. There is some evidence he either volunteered for or was attached to the newly-formed RAF. He must have remained as a Reservist as there is a record in 1921 where he was compulsorily re-enlisted for a 90 day period. It would appear he was working as a motor mechanic. He was awarded the British Service, and Victory Medals.

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George was the eldest brother to serve. In 1901 he was working as a clerk in a brewery in Smethwick. However he enlisted in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, his number (9100) suggesting he joined in 1902-3. Regular soldiers normally served for 7 years and then joined the Reserve for a further 5. In 1911 he was working as a steeplejack in the family business. In 1910, George married Lucy Morris, a milliner, registered in Kings Norton. They had two children, George A (b. 1911), usually called Jack and Molly (1920). As a Reservist, he was transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps as a stretcher bearer.



George served with 14<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance of the RAMC. He arrived in France on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1914, and was thus part of the very first deployment of the BEF. 14<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance were attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Division which were involved in many major battles:



George Mossop - bottom row (centre)

**1914:** Retreat from Mons, Le Cateau, Marne, Aisne, Messine, 1<sup>st</sup> Ypres.

(It is worth noting that by the end of 1914, two-thirds of the initial deployment of the BEF were killed, wounded or missing)

**1915:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres

**1916:** Somme,

**1917:** Arras, Passchendaele

**1918:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Somme, Hindenberg Line, Advance in Picardy.



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George rose to the rank of Corporal /Acting Sergeant. For Privates and NCO's, there were three medals for gallantry. Level 1, Victoria Cross; Level 2, Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM); Level 3, Military Medal. George was awarded the Military Medal.



The London Gazette, Issue 29805, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 1916, p29805 records the award of the MM to George. Individual citations were not given for Level 3 awards, but it states that 'His Majesty the King is graciously pleased to award the Military Medal for acts of bravery which were insufficient to merit the DCM'. A similar announcement in Issue 29854, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1916, p12059, recorded the award of a Bar to his MM. Whilst the details of the medals are not known, these awards coincided with the Battle of the Somme where 5<sup>th</sup> Division were involved.

The London Gazette 16<sup>th</sup> Jan 1919, p839 records the citation for the award of the DCM 'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty near Cambrai on 18<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 1918. In charge of bearers, he went up time after time by day and night to the R.A.P.s (*Regimental Aid Posts*) through heavy shellfire'. It is said that the recommendation was for the award of the VC but his Commanding Officer was killed soon after the event. In addition to his three gallantry awards, he received the 1914 Star (with clasp), British Service and Victory Medals.

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From his grandson Rod Mossop, we have received several accounts of George.

*'George drove his horse-drawn ambulance through France. His passions in civvy street were canaries, dogs and horses. As he passed empty houses, any abandoned canaries were collected. During a lull in the fighting at Mons all he could hear was the sound of canaries singing. Some soldiers thought it was the sound of angels, but George disabused them!'*

*'During the four years he was gassed twice, buried alive (saved by his pals) and had shrapnel removed from his back on the field'. At one stage he was attached to the Scots Greys who were wiped out. My grandmother Lucy was about to cash his insurance but he turned up. (his nickname was Lucky Mossie). His diary sadly is short, it starts mid channel en route to Mons and ends on Christmas Eve. I think he had a sticky time at Messine Ridge.'*

*'When on leave from being gassed, Lucy said his eyes looked like liver. She was walking down the High Street with him in civvys and some lady put a white feather on his back. George found it amusing. The lady didn't as Lucy was a force of nature!'*

*'For the DCM, after a major onslaught, when the RAMC had too many injured to cope he enlisted the help of German prisoners to carry back the wounded. I shall refrain from saying his way of persuading them, but suffice to say when someone carries home a boundary stone for his rockery, would you argue with them*

*'George was very reluctant to wear his medals, even on Remembrance Day. At one, Lucy hid the medals in her handbag. He had to be dragged to the church after the war and stated the roof would fall in if he did. She produced them outside the church and went in making him put them on. As he walked down the aisle, a piece of plaster fell on his head.'*

*Rod also provided copies of two letters from the War Office. The first informed her George had been gassed, but remained at his post. The second informed her that he was wounded (no further details) and they did not at that stage know which hospital he was in.*

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George died in 1937, aged 53. Rod has copies of letters to Lucy from the War Office, confirming that he was entitled to the clasp to his 1914 Star. (This was for soldiers who had actually been in action against the enemy). Lucy lived into old age and Rod got information about the grandfather he never knew from her.



This photograph is of George's wife, Lucy with a man in uniform. Written on the back in Lucy's handwriting is:

*'1<sup>st</sup> August 1918. To my darling George,  
from your loving wife and brother'.*

After some deliberation, we can confirm that he is Lucy's brother, Leonard Morris.

Leonard also had a distinguished war career. He served with 6<sup>th</sup> Bte Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and was thus a volunteer in Kitchener's Armies. He arrived in France on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1915, the first deployment of the battalion. He was already a Corporal and was subsequently promoted to Sergeant and was then commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. He survived the war.



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Whilst researching the family history of the four Mossop brothers, George, William, Bernard, and Vincent, sons of Edward Mossop, we became aware of a Captain Vincent Mossop who served with distinction in WW1. Edward's older brother Thomas, also had a son called Vincent. Are the two characters one and the same person?

Vincent, youngest son of Thomas was born in 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 1877, the birth being registered in Stone. A search of freeBMD shows that in the period 1865 – 1890, no other person named Vincent Mossop was born in England except for his cousin above. In 1891, his father had died and his elder siblings had moved on. 13 year old Vincent was an Institutional Scholar, in the Holy Trinity Boys Orphanage in Mayfield, Rye in Sussex. We are conditioned to think of Victorian orphanages as cruel, evil places, but this was most certainly not true of this establishment, thanks to the generosity of one lady. Louisa Catherine Caton was born in Maryland, USA, in about 1792. She married twice, the second time to the Duke of Leeds. On his death, she became the Dowager Duchess of Leeds. In 1864 she founded the orphanage in Mayfield. The building was magnificent, designed by the architect E. W Pugin (whose son designed the Houses of Parliament) with large gardens and open space. The school started taking fee –paying students (non-orphans) and became Mayfield College. It is now defunct, but the buildings have been converted into luxury apartments. The Dowager Duchess also established a girls' school, as well as schools in her native America.

The education was by the Xaverian Brothers and whilst it had a strong Roman Catholic ethos, it admitted boys of all ethnicities and religions. In 1891, there were about 100 pupils, aged from 8 to 16. Discipline was harsh, with birching a regular feature. However, Vincent probably received a better education than he would have received in a village school in Eccleshall.

In 1901, Vincent was living in Burslem working as a pottery modeller, but in 1911, he had moved to Bradford, West Yorkshire, where he was working as a clerk in a wool office. Ironically, he was a boarder in the home of Augusta Bryning, a German lady described as a headmistress and two visiting German wool travellers. At the time, Bradford was rapidly becoming the centre of the world's woollen industry, and many German families had moved to Bradford, running mills and trading offices. Part of Bradford is still called Little Germany. (When war broke out there were several anti-German Riots).

The Medal Roll, shows that Vincent Mossop (No 2369) first served in the West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales Own). He arrived in France on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1915, the date when the 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Battalions arrived. These were Territorial Battalions, so Vincent was a member of the Territorial Force who volunteered to serve abroad and it is worth noting that the 1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> was raised in Bradford! This clearly established that Thomas's son Vincent was indeed 'Captain Vincent'

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 1915 at Etaples, he was wounded by shrapnel on 10<sup>th</sup> July he was in King George Hospital in England, until 12<sup>th</sup> August. On 9<sup>th</sup> Oct. he was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant with the rank of Temporary Captain in 12<sup>th</sup> Bte Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. Before he

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could be promoted he had to give references to his moral character (by the Catholic Bishop of Leeds) and as to his educational attainments (Headmaster of St Bedes, the Catholic Grammar School of Bradford). 12<sup>th</sup> Bte was a Service (Miners, Pioneers) Battalion raised on 5<sup>th</sup> Sept 1914 by the West Yorkshire Coalminers Association. The Pioneers were involved in preparing the ground for the front line soldiers by building roads, railway tracks etc. whilst many miners were used to tunnel under the enemy trench lines. The Battalion had moved to France in May 1915, and then moved to Egypt on 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 1915.

Vincent was already an old man by army standards and it would appear that his transfer was because of his administrative and organisational skills. Forces War Records shows that he was at various times Temporary Captain or Temporary Major. It states that he was an 'Officer serving with Militia, Territorial Army, Supplementary Reserve, Overseas Forces, or holding temporary commission, who had service in any of the several theatres of war.'

Vincent presumably went to Egypt with the battalion which was involved in the defence of the Suez Canal. However, on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1916, they were ordered back to France where they remained for the rest of the war. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 it is recorded that he received a gunshot wound to the side of his face. . Between 1<sup>st</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917, the battalion was attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, building light railways.

On 13<sup>th</sup> April 1918, he received a wound to his leg at Vieux Berquin. He was in Western General Hospital and then on leave, returning to his unit on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1918

The London Gazette of 13 Sept 1918 records the award of the MC to Vincent. 'His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve the following award to the undermentioned in recognition of his gallantry and devotion to duty whilst commanding the company he was ordered to hold a cross-roads at all costs. He beat off 4 successive attacks when the enemy brought up trench mortars and blew him out of position. He collected the remnants of his company and organised successive positions, keeping the line intact. He was eventually wounded whilst rescuing one of his men who had been wounded.' It is assumed that this wound is the one received in April. The Germans had made an Armistice with the Bolsheviks and were able to release troops from the Eastern Front. Their Spring Offensive was their final attempt to break through between the British and French. He was also once *Mentioned in Dispatches*.

On St Valentine's Day 1925, Vincent Mossop, 47, General Clothing Manager, resident in Hampstead, married Maria Anna Lea Menzen, 26, at St Roberts RC Church, Harrogate. His father was described as Thomas Mossop deceased, builder, Her father was a barrister. The witnesses included Maurice and Mary Mossop, his brother and sister. They did not have any children.

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## **Epilogue**

From the above, it can be seen that six men in the same family, 4 brothers, 1 cousin and 1 brother-in-law served in the Great War. Collectively, there were two deaths in action, 4 gallantry medals, two raised from the ranks to become commissioned officers, and two promotions to NCO's. In addition, we should not forget the heroines of the story, Lucy, Lily and Emily who had to suffer all the horrors of the war whilst their loved ones were serving at the front.