

WILLIAM THOMAS GREGORY MOSS



5th July 1917

1898-1917 Aged 18

Second Lieutenant, 38th Training Squadron, Royal Flying Corps.

Gregory Moss was the eldest child of Thomas Moss, from Darlington, and Matilda Jane Gregory born in South Wales. Thomas served in the Army in the Durham Light Infantry, then became a teacher, before he went to college to train for the ministry. Matilda was also a teacher, and in 1891 they lived on the same road in Normanby near Middlesbrough. They married in 1897, shortly before Thomas took up a position in Somerset at Shepton Mallet. Their son was born there on 17th September 1898, and was followed in 1900 by a sister, Annie. At some point Gregory adopted his mother's maiden name as his favoured forename. He attended the Clifford Collegiate School until his father became pastor of the Baptist Church at Idle. He started at Bradford Grammar School in September 1910, in Form Second Classical. At the end of his first year he won the reading prize and came sixteenth out of thirty. For four years he was on the Classical side of the School, although with moderate results, and was probably intended for university. He was an active pupil, playing cricket, rugby and tennis, as well as rowing and fishing. He was also an active worker in the Idle Baptist Sunday School.

The outbreak of war changed everything. In September 1914, when he passed sixteen, Gregory moved into Fifth Modern middle, and he was one of the first members of the newly-constituted School O.T.C. Days after his seventeenth birthday in September 1915 he volunteered in London. As he was still too young to see active service Gregory was put into the 2nd Battalion Artists' Rifles O.T.C. as Private 4576. In August 1916 he applied for an officer's commission in the Royal Flying Corps. He listed among his 'Special Qualifications for the R.F.C.': the 'Use of hand tools. Knowledge of electrical engineering. Motor cycling and running repairs. Knowledge of photography, developed and printed own photos. Sailed small yacht at sea. Military mapping course.' In addition he stated that he had 'Fair French and slight German.' Indeed, in his last year at school he had come second in French but did not study German. He was accepted for 1st Officer Cadet Battalion at Denham (Bucks.), and was then sent to Oxford for service with the



R.F.C. He was commissioned on 27th January 1917 and sent to 38th Training Squadron at Rendcomb in Gloucestershire where he qualified as a pilot. By this time Gregory Moss must have been desperate to get into action, yet despite the high attrition rate among pilots at the front, he was too young for active service, being still eighteen.

At 7.58 a.m. on Thursday 5th July 1917, Second Lieutenant Moss went up alone in an R.E. 8. This two-seater reconnaissance aircraft, nicknamed the 'Harry Tate' after a music-hall star, was not easy to fly—one pilot described it as 'more like flying a steam roller than an aeroplane'. The inquest into Moss's death was told that though 'young he was quite a strong, capable man' who liked the machine and was familiar with it. A witness saw it turn nose upwards, stall and plunge to the ground from a height of about 300 feet. It was said death would have been almost instantaneous. A verdict of accidental death was recorded. His obituary stated 'he was highly respected by all who knew him' and 'one of the most promising of airmen.' The newspaper accounts announced that Gregory Moss was to be buried in Bradford; however his grave is actually in Toxteth Park Cemetery, Liverpool. The reason why is a mystery. He was remembered on the war memorials of his father's church and the village of Idle. The Reverend Thomas Moss was himself serving in France with the Y.M.C.A. as a chaplain when his son died. He later moved to Bridlington.



Acknowledgements:

Gregory Moss's photo is from the School Memorial Book, with thanks to the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. For his school years, see the B.G.S. Annual Reports for 1911-1915. His military career comes from his Officer Personal Record from The National Archives, WO 339-71573. The inquest was reported in the *Gloucester Journal* 14-7-1917 (<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0000532%2f19170714%2f051>). The obituary is from the *Shipley Express & Times* 13-7-17 (<<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0001711%2f19170713%2f049>>). For the R.E.8 see <<http://thevintageaviator.co.nz/projects/re8-reproduction/history>> accessed 27-6-2017. There is a Medal Index Card for Mr. Thomas Moss, Y.M.C.A., who went to France 6-5-1917.

Moss is on two memorials in Idle, the parish war memorial at Holy Trinity Church and the village memorial, as W.T.G Moss, and on the Idle Baptist Church memorial as W.T. Gregory Moss (Duncan Lodge's catalogue of Bradford War Memorials).

Researched and composed by Nick Hooper (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com) in June 2017.