

# HERBERT JAMES MOSS



17th November 1915

1895-1915 Aged 20



**Gunner 780, 11th (Ilkley) Howitzer Battery, 4th West Riding Brigade Royal Field Artillery (Territorial Force).** Herbert Moss was born in Bradford in June 1895 and baptized in Manningham. He was the third of five children born to Thomas Moss and Elizabeth Amelia, nee Gamble. Thomas came from Shropshire, and was perhaps illegitimate as no father is named on his marriage record. By 1881, he was a schoolboy in Bradford, living with Henry Spencer, surgeon. Elizabeth had been taken to Bradford when she was only one, following the death of her father, a soldier originally from the city. Her mother was from Guernsey in the Channel Islands. Thomas and Elizabeth married in 1891. Thomas worked for a Bradford wool merchant in lower middle class occupations as a salesman and clerk. By 1911, he was a buyer of dress goods. He lived with his wife and five children, his mother-in-law and wife's aunt in one terraced house east of Bradford city centre. They had no servants.

Herbert spent a single year at the Bradford Grammar School, 1909-10, when he was fourteen. William Keeling, the great head master, was determined that clever boys of whatever class should have access to the School, and he established a 'modern side' to educate boys for the needs of Bradford. However, for reasons unknown Herbert did not stay at the School. By 1911 he was an 'office boy' for a 'Dress Merchant', likely the one his father worked for. When war began in 1914 he worked for Messrs W.T. Garnett & Co, merchants and shippers of Barkerend Road, close to the family home. He was known as Bert, and a local paper described him as *'a youth of a lively disposition, and very popular among his friends.'* His brother Thomas Angel Moss, four years his senior, held a similar occupation, as a wool merchant's clerk.

For young men of limited education and few prospects, the outbreak of war in August 1914 offered the opportunity for adventure. Thomas, Bert and a group of friends decided to enlist—

unusually, to do so they travelled to Otley to join the 4th West Riding Howitzer Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, a Territorial unit. Despite their lack of experience, they went to France with 49th West Riding Division, disembarking on 16th April 1915. The battery comprised four obsolete 5" howitzers— despite their slow rate of fire, this type of weapon was essential in the prevailing conditions of trench warfare. Their first action was in support of the attack at Aubers Ridge on 9th May. From July to December, the 49th Division held an extensive line north of Ypres. The only howitzers they had were the eight guns from Ilkley and Otley, and so they had no relief, unlike the infantry. Leave was restricted to one man per fortnight. Heavy rains in October turned the gun positions into a stream. The first frosts, combined with eternally sodden boots, started cases of trench foot. Bert fell sick and was sent to a base hospital at Boulogne, where he was granted home sick leave. He wrote that he would wire his parents on his arrival in London. On 17th November he was on the Hospital Ship 'Anglia', carrying 386 casualties, plus nursing staff and crew. Four miles off Dover they struck a mine laid by the German U-boat *UC-5* in a channel reserved for hospital ships. One hundred and sixty-nine casualties, medical staff and crew drowned despite heroic attempts to save them. Bert was unmarried. His name is remembered on the Holybrook Naval Memorial, at Southampton.





### Acknowledgements:

The 1911 census is the easiest starting point for constructing Herbert Moss's family, although much is obscure. His death is recorded in the Bradford Daily Telegraph and the Bradford Weekly Telegraph (26th November 1915). I am indebted to the Local Studies Library, Bradford, for their index and microfilm service.

Thomas Angel Moss was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the RFA in 1917 and survived the war. The family moved to Sussex in the 1920s. The story of the Ilkley howitzer battery is in A.E. Gee and A.E. Shaw, *A Record of D245 Battery 1914-1919*, Otley 1931. Bert Moss's loss is noted on p.51.

The photos of the sinking of the 'Anglia', below, are from <http://www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/HMHSAnglia.html>. The author of *Dover & Folkestone during the Great War* (Pen&Sword 2008) also contributed to <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=158380>.

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**TELEGRAPH, WEDNESDAY,**

**S RECORD.**

**ART IN THE WAR:**

**BRADFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL OLD BOY'S FATE.**

It is feared that at least one victim of the sinking of the hospital ship Anglia, which was sunk in the English Channel last week, is a Bradfordian. Mr. and Mrs. T. Moss, of West View, Roydstone Road, Bradford Moor, Bradford, have been informed by the military authorities that their second son, Gunner Herbert J. Moss, was on board, and missing and it is feared he has been drowned. Gunner Herbert J. Moss, who was in his 21st year, along with his elder brother, Gunner Thos. A. Moss, and some other Bradford friends, joined



the 4th West Riding Howitzer Brigade soon after war was declared, and they went to the front in April last. For some days Gunner Herbert Moss was sick in the hospital at Boulogne, from where he wrote last week to his parents saying he was on sick leave, and that he would wire on arrival in London. Nothing more was heard, and the sinking of the Anglia gave rise to suspicions which have proved only too well founded. He was a Bradford Grammar School boy, a youth of a lively disposition, and very popular among his friends. Before joining the army he was employed by Messrs. W. T. Garnett and Co., Barkerend Mills, Bradford.

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