



DISCOVERING THE MOBBS' OWN

A PROJECT TO FIND THE STORIES OF THE MEN AND THEIR FAMILIES OF
'D' COMPANY 7TH BATTALION, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE REGIMENT



OUR
HISTORY
THEIR
FUTURE



heritage
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LOTTERY FUNDED

This booklet describes the story of the Mobbs' Own project which is the first project delivered by the Heritage team and a group of volunteers at the Northampton Saints Foundation.

More importantly, it tells the stories of some of the men of the Mobbs' Own and their families

March 2020



THE MOBBS' OWN PROJECT – WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE

The objective of this project is to find out the stories of the Mobbs' Own and their families.

The Mobbs' Own project is funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Over twenty volunteers have been involved in researching and sharing the stories of the Mobbs' Own.

The Northampton Saints Foundation was established in 2018, with three areas of focus – Education to support schools with a variety of programmes, Social Inclusion to support young people who have some of the most significant challenges in the town and county and Heritage, to gather and protect the history of Northampton Saints Rugby Club.

This project is the first of many which will research the history of the club and its place in the town.

THE MOBBS' OWN – WHO WERE THEY?

The Mobbs' Own were a company of men, recruited by Edgar Mobbs in early September 1914. They were recruited into 'D' Company 7th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment.

Initially, 450 men volunteered and of those, we now believe nearly 280 went to France. We are still finding new names.

Traditionally, it's been thought this was a company mostly made up of sportsmen. We now know that there were many sportsmen but many other trades and professions were present too.

They also, came from all over the country – one man was from Oldham whilst a group of friends joined from Gloucester. But mostly, they came from the towns and villages from Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Many didn't spend long with the Mobbs Own – some were promoted into other regiments; some were transferred because of their skills and some never made it to France because their health wasn't good enough.



**SERGEANT ALBERT EDWIN LUCK 15644
MM AND BAR | SAINT #514**

The volunteers have nicknamed Albert the 'Forgotten Saint' – no-one at the Saints had made the connection between Saint #514 on the list of players and Sgt AE Luck in the Mobbs' Own. We were looking for his marriage announcement in the newspaper and we found something entirely different – the match report from his last game for the Saints

Born in 1895 in Semilong, Albert was the youngest of three children. The family all worked in the boot and shoe industry and lived in Dallington and St James before Albert signed up.

He was just 19 when he went to war. He was wounded in 1916 but went on to win the Military Medal twice in 1917 when he was also promoted to Sergeant. He was one of just 5,796 men who won the honour twice – for ‘gallantry and devotion to duty under fire’.

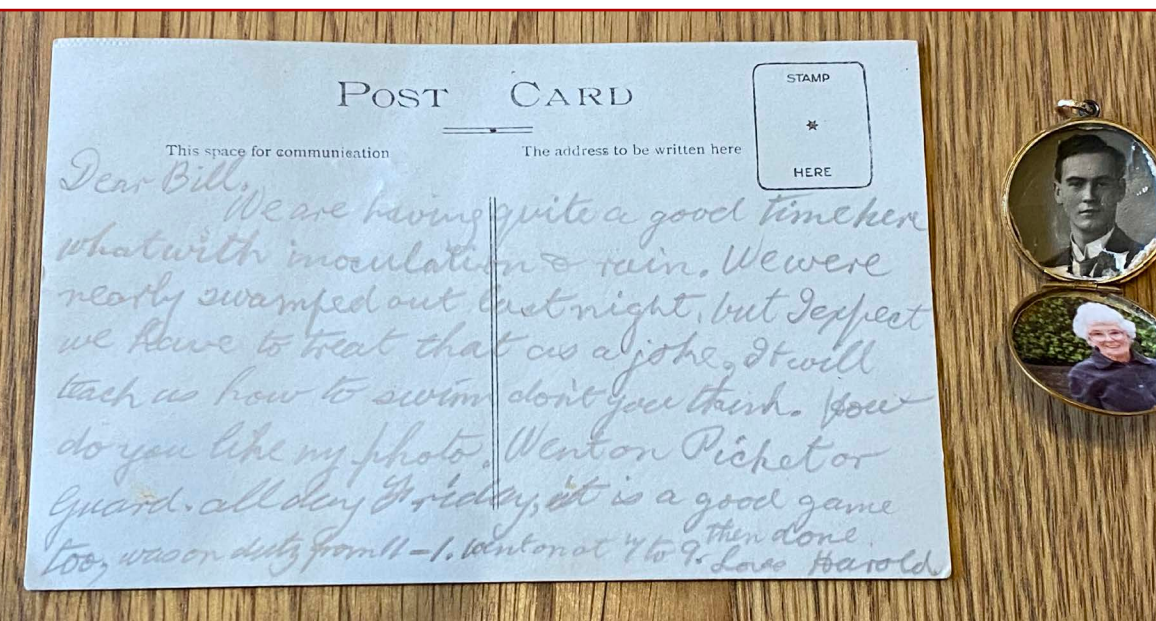


On his return he played some 253 times for Saints from 1919 until his retirement in 1928. He played in the pack, mainly at lock with the occasional game at skirmisher (flanker) when carrying an injury.

Such was his popularity at the club that when he married in 1926, the committee asked for donations for a present to be made to the secretary. His name is now on the 200 club roll of honour and in pride of place by the No 4 peg in the changing room.

PRIVATE FRANK HAROLD AXFORD 15766

VICTORY MEDAL, BRITISH WAR MEDAL, STAR



Known in the family as Harold, his father was a Shoe Laster who moved the family from London to Northampton around the turn of the century. A tall, slender figure, the youngest of 5 children, Harold signed up at the age of 19, having previously worked at George Mance Smith in Mercer's Row.



Harold married Ethel Vaughan, a shoe machinist, in early 1916, apparently after her father demanded Harold be given leave to marry his daughter, as she was pregnant. Sadly, Harold never met his daughter Madge. Wounded in action, with a gunshot wound to the chest on 13th July 1916, Harold rejoined his battalion, only to be killed in action a month later at Guillemont. He is commemorated on the Thiepval memorial.

Ethel had to write repeatedly to have Harold's personal effects returned to her, and only received them on 25th February 1917 – sadly, there is no mention of the gold ring and silver chain she sought.

We have met two of Harold's relatives – his grand-daughter, Carol and his great-nephew, Simon. Carol showed us Harold's medals, his cigarette case and her mother's locket which has a photo of Harold and Madge in it. And a post-card which shows Harold had a wry sense of humour.

LANCE CORPORAL FRANK ORMROD 15617 BRITISH WAR MEDAL, VICTORY MEDAL, 1914-15 STAR AND SILVER STAR

Frank Ormrod was not a local boy. His family home was Oldham, Lancashire. One of his older brothers, William, was a teacher at Northampton School (now NSB) and they enrolled together when he was visiting in 1914. William was quickly commissioned and served with the Lancashire Fusilliers, going on to be awarded the Military Cross, leaving his younger brother presumably among a group of complete strangers.

Frank was reported as missing after the first day of the battle of Loos (Sept 25th, 1915). By November that had changed, with his death being reported. One can only imagine the turmoil his parents went through, when in January 1916 he was reported as a POW. Apparently, he had been wounded in Loos, hit in the head by a shell which left him paralysed in one leg.



The Red Cross brokered an arrangement to transfer prisoners who were unlikely to be fit enough to re-join any fighting, to a neutral location for the duration of the war. Frank was one such person and was transferred to Murren, Switzerland.

He returned to England in 1917 and attended the first reunion dinner of Mobbs' Own in September 1919, proposing a toast to the health of Major Farrer. Frank married in Saddleworth in 1924, had a son in 1928 and lived until 1978, when he died in Blackpool



MAJOR DENIS HERBERT FARRER COMMISSIONED OFFICER | BRITISH WAR MEDAL, VICTORY MEDAL AND 1914-15 STAR

Born in Bigbury, Devon, Denis was the only son of Maria and Frederick, the rector of Bigbury. In 1907 he married Joan Freeman-Mitford, sister to David, the father of the infamous Mitford girls. Denis had previously spent some time with Joan's brother on a tea planting station in Ceylon where he served with the Ceylon Planters Rifle Corps.

Joining the Mobbs' Own as a Sergeant, he was soon promoted and became a leading figure in D company, hosting journalists in Mobbs' absence at Shoreham, during pre-deployment training. Although injured in 1915 with a GSW to his left shoulder, which healed, his military career continued back home until 1919, due to medical issues which limited the movement of his right arm. He left from the position of Major and Assistant Provost Marshal.

Denis and his family lived in Brayfield House, near Newport Pagnell which he inherited along with the role of lord of the manor. Denis was active in community affairs all his life notably as a Magistrate, a County Councillor, British Legion Branch President, and Chairman of the Board of Managers, Bedford Modern School.

He also established the annual Mobbs reunion dinners. In 1919 over 100 men attended the first where Farrer raised a toast to Mobbs, and the fallen who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Campaign		1914-15 Star		(A) Where decoration was earned.		(B) Present situation.	
Name	Grade	Rank	Reg. No.	Unit	Where earned	Present situation	Remarks
(A) FARRER	SERGEANT	1914-15	47	11th Bn. 1st Div.	11/1/17 to 11/4/18	11/4/18 to 11/4/18	11/4/18 to 11/4/18
(B) D. H.							
Address: 8 Ambrose Street, Oxford, Brayfield House, Newport Pagnell, 25-3-20							



The connection with the Mitford family was a close one with Denis's three daughters being at school with their cousins and frequent visitors to each other's houses during the holidays.

Pamela Mitford was the same age as Barbara Farrer and was one of her bridesmaids when she married.

Anne and Joan Farrer were contemporaries of Jessica and Unity Mitford. They were even given names in Boudledidge, the language the Mitford girls created. It was reputed that it was to Anne Farrer that Jessica first expressed her concerns about the 'have-nots' in society.

Jessica went on to be a communist eloping with her boyfriend to the Spanish Civil War. Unity was at the other extreme – satirised at the time as 'the Hitler lover'. She shot herself in the head days after Britain declared war on Germany in 1939 – she failed to kill herself but died later of pneumococcal meningitis.

HON CAPTAIN LEONARD SKEMPTON 15577 SILVER BADGE

Leonard was the second son born to Samuel, a Building Society clerk and Elizabeth, in Holly Road, Northampton. Both Leonard and his brother Alex played for Northampton Saints, #342 and #364 respectively. Alex made his debut in 1908 and won just 7 caps. Leonard moved from Moseley to make his debut in 1907 and went on to win 62 caps. A forward, he was also a contemporary of Edgar Mobbs in the East Midlands team of 1907.

Signing up with Mobb's Own, Leonard was commissioned in May 1915 as a second lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion of the South Staffordshire regiment, transferring quickly to the 8th. In June 1916 he was diagnosed with a heart problem. After several medical boards he was transferred to the Oxford Volunteer regiment in 1917. He was confirmed unfit for service in November 1918, when he was awarded the rank of Honorary Captain.

His brother Alex died in 1926 as a result of his war service, though the authorities never recognised this. He never went on to see the success of his son, named after him. Sir Alec Westley Skempton became a renowned professor of soil mechanics and civil engineering at Imperial College, a leading figurehead in his field for over 50 years

Leonard worked for Royal Insurance as a resident manager, moving from Oxford to Nottingham, with his wife Gladys.



NORTHAMPTON
RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB 1908-9

PAFFESSELL	A. KNIGHT	L. SKEMPTON	H. BURKE	T. BIRCH	E. WHITE	A. STOKER	R. WILLIAMS
L. MASH	F. COLES	J. N. BEASLEY	E. R. MOBBS (Capt)	A. CHALMERS	C. LEIGH	E. COOK	
T. H. PRESTON					R. HARRISON		