

Alexander Shanley (1892 -1964)

Alexander Shanley was my grandfather. Although the family were originally from Ireland, he was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1892.

He was serving an apprenticeship with an engineering company in Aberdeen, but was also in the Territorial Army.

When war was declared in August 1914, the 'Territorials' were of course mobilised immediately. Alexander, serving as a 'sapper' with the Royal Engineers attached to the 51st Highland Division, was sent to France in the early spring of 1915, and fought at the battle of Festubert, in May of that year.

During the battle, he was wounded, as a result of carrying out actions for which he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) on May 16th 1915.

He was sent home to recover from his wounds, after which he returned to active service, and was then sent back to France.

'En route', he was billeted with William and Selina Thornton, then living at Hannington Rd in Pokesdown. It was there he met their eldest daughter, Florence, and the two became 'an item', as we say these days!

He ended the war as a sergeant, and returned home and married Florence Thornton on Boxing Day 1919.

The politicians of the time following the Armistice had promised a 'Land fit for Heroes' as part of the post war period.

As usual with politicians, they lied. Times were extremely hard for many folk.

Alexander had completed his engineering apprenticeship, but could not find work in his chosen engineering trade, as a miller.

After a short time living in Wells, Somerset, Alexander, his wife and new baby daughter Mary, returned to Bournemouth, to be closer to his wife's family.

In 1924, Alexander found a job as the 'boilerman' for the Castle Laundry in Castle Rd, Winton, a position he continued to hold until he retired in 1957.

The family was lucky enough to move into a new home in Elmes Road, built as part of the major expansion which Moordown saw during the 1920s.

He lived there for the rest of his life. He died in 1964.

As with so many men of that generation, Alexander never, ever talked of his experiences during the Great War. Only after his death did we discover the documents and letters surrounding the award of his DCM.

As a result of the efforts of many historians over the years, we now have some idea of what the brave men who served during the Great War must have endured.

I say '*some*' idea -- we can never really hope understand exactly what some of them had endured.

Most of them never talked of it, knowing full well we could not possibly comprehend.....