

John Sunderland (1884 – 1947)

John Sunderland and his six siblings were born in Little Lever, in Lancashire.

Associated with the army from an early age, John served 15 months in Malta, with The Royal Lancashire Regiment. On returning home he was then transferred to the Army Reserve.

John Sunderland married and at that time worked as a conductor. His first two children were born in Lancashire and his two sons in Farnhill. Before returning to active service in France, he was on the committee of Farnhill Institute and was also a member of the local St John's Ambulance.



After his discharge from the army in 1918, he joined his family, who had left Farnhill and moved back to Little Lever. Widowed in 1923 he married for a second time and died in Morecambe in 1947.

Pre-war life

John Sunderland was born on 13th September 1884. He was the second child (eldest son) of Michael, who was a worker at a bleach works, and Alice Jane (nee Boardman).

Both his parents were from the village of Little Lever, near Bolton, which was where John and his six siblings were born.

- Bertha, b. 1881
- Arthur William, b. 1886
- Tom Martin, b. 1888, d. 1893
- Mary, b. 1891
- Albert, b. 1894
- James Stewart, b. 1895

Bolton was a coal mining area and by the time of the 1901 census, taken when he was 16, John was employed as a coal miner. However it seems likely that soon after this John joined his father in the bleach works for a short while before, on 13th August 1901, he enlisted in the Royal Lancaster Regiment in Manchester. On his enlistment form he added two years to his age, claiming to be 18 years and 11 months old although he was not quite 17.

After a period of training, John was posted to Malta for 15 months, returning home in March 1903; and in August 1904 was transferred to the Army Reserve.

On 22nd April 1905 John Sunderland, at this time employed as a "Conductor", married Mary Ann Jackson at St. Paul's Church, Scotforth in Lancaster. The wedding was witnessed by Mary Ann's older sister, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's fiancé George William Stuart Muchall.

After the marriage children came quickly to the couple – and their places of birth indicate a move by the family from Lancaster to Farnhill.

- Alice Jane; b. 20/1/1906, Lancaster
- Elizabeth; b. 12/9/1908, Little Lever
- George Arthur; b. 27/8/1910, Farnhill; bapt. St. Andrew's, Kildwick, 20/9/1910
- Tom Michael; b. 23/3/1912, Farnhill; bapt. St. Andrew's, Kildwick, 21/4/1912

It seems that the period around the time of the move was a difficult one for the family. It is unclear where John was living when the 1911 census was taken; but Mary Ann, Elizabeth and George Arthur were living with the Jackson family, in Golgotha Road, Lancaster; while the elder daughter, Alice Jane, was living with John's parents in Little Lever.

It is possible that John, although not recorded on the census, was living somewhere in the Farnhill area. The baptismal records of his two sons has John Sunderland employed as a postman, and this is confirmed by Post Office records which note him working out of the Keighley office in 1911.

The 1912 electoral roll for Farnhill, taken in late 1911, records him living at 8 Bright Street, which would be home until the start of the war.

Almost immediately on arrival in the village John must have joined the newly opened Kildwick and Farnhill Institute. At the first annual general meeting he was elected onto the committee and also singled out for arranging ambulance (first aid) classes.

The Institute.

The first annual meeting of the Kildwick and Farnhill Institute was held in the Billiard Room on Friday night. Mr. W. A. Brigg, one of the founders of the Institute, presided.

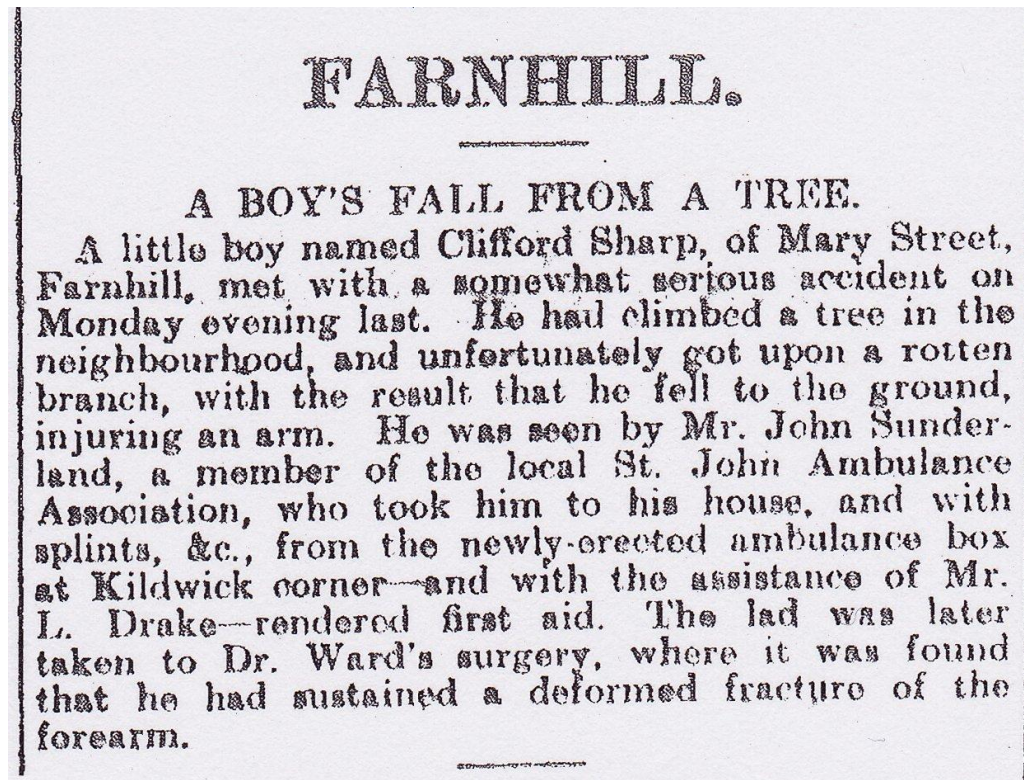
The Chairman said he was pleased with the year's working. It showed the popularity of the Institute. The club was what it was intended to be at first—a meeting house where all the members could come in their spare time. He expressed satisfaction with the various societies connected with the Institute, mentioning the ambulance classes both for males and females, arranged by Mr. J. Sunderland, and the dancing class under Mr. A. Heaton.

The following officers were elected :— President Mr. W. A. Brigg ; vice-presidents, Mr. J. Spencer and Mr. J. E. Sugden ; committee, Messrs. C. Hill, Binns Hartley, S. Tillotson, J. Appleby, John Green, J. B. Smith, J. Sunderland, Wm. Feather, Herbert Kitson, M. Dawson, W. Green, H. Birtwhistle, Hy. Slater, and J. E. Sudgen.

Extracts from a news report on the Kildwick & Farnhill Institute's first Annual Meeting,
from the Craven Herald, 18/10/1912
By kind permission of Craven Herald

Subsequent news reports that appeared in all the local papers up until the start of the war, indicate that a thriving branch of the St. John's Ambulance brigade was established in the village.

At the end of May 1914 the local Association raised funds for a First Aid box to be erected at Kildwick corner (Keighley News, 30/5/1914) and it was not long before John Sunderland had occasion to use it.



From the Keighley News 13/6/1914
By kind permission of Keighley News

Note: The boy in question was eight-year old Joseph Clifford Sharpe. His father, Ephraim Sharpe, was subsequently one of the Farnhill WW1 Volunteers.

WW1 service

John Sunderland returned full-time to the Royal Lancaster Regiment, for a four-year term, on 18th February 1913 and was promoted to Lance Corporal on 13th August.

War broke out on 4th August 1914 and the Royal Lancaster Regiment was mobilized the following day, at Lancaster; they left Southampton for Boulogne on the 22nd. On 1st November 1914, John was posted to France and joined the 1st battalion.

Throughout October 1914 the battalion had been involved in the Battle of Armentières in Northern France. This was part of an attempt by both German and Allied forces to outflank each other along the whole length of the front in what was called the "Race to the Sea". It was the start of trench warfare on the Western Front.

The Royal Lancaster Regiment had been in action in a stretch of the front from the town of Armentières, on the Belgian border, to Touquet, about three miles to the north-west, in Belgium; but by the time John Sunderland arrived in France, the battle was largely over and a series of trenches had been built.

This reduction of activity on the front was reflected in the Regimental War diary of the 1st battalion Royal Lancaster Regiment, summarised below:

- 1st to 5th November – In trenches, at Armentières
- 6th November – Relieved and went into billets, at Chapelle Armentières [south of the town]
- 7th November – Sent to the Le Bizet/Touquet area [north of the town] to support the Rifle Brigade, who had been defending the road against German attack from trenches just 30 to 50 yards away since mid-October.
- 8th to 11th November – In action at Touquet.
- 12th November – Relieved by [Manchester ?] Fusiliers.
- 13th to 25th November – No diary entry. (Presumably the battalion was in billets after being relieved.)

At some point in this quiet period, John Sunderland was wounded (most likely during the action at Le Bizet). He was returned home on 26th November 1914 (see below), where he stayed until 5th July 1915.

MILITARY HISTORY SHEET.					
1. Service at Home and Abroad (including former service of re-enlisted men, when allowed to reckon towards)					
COUNTRY	FROM	TO	YEARS	DAYS	
Home	13. 8. 01	18. 11. 01	—	116	to
Italy	19. 11. 01	18. 3. 03	1	120	not
France	19. 3. 03	31. 10. 14	11	227	the
France	1. 11. 14	25. 11. 14	—	25	sta
France	26. 11. 14	5. 7. 15	—	222	En
France	6. 7. 15	11. 7. 15	—	6	ter
Home	12. 7. 15	26. 4. 18	2	289	Se
				16	259
2. Whether educated at (Applies only to Boys)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Duke of York's Royal Military School <input type="checkbox"/> Royal Hibernian Military School <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial School under Home Office					

Part of John Sunderland's WW1 service records, showing his short periods in France
Used under licence from the National Archive

By early December 1914, John Sunderland was well enough to address a meeting in Farnhill along with five other men who had been invalided home. The meeting was reported widely in the local press and extracts from the report in the Keighley News (5/12/1914) are included below.

Wounded Soldiers Visit Farnhill

Thrilling Stories

A hurried visit was made to the village of Farnhill on Tuesday evening last by Sergeant John Sunderland (of Farnhill), of the 1st Battalion King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment. He was accompanied by five other men from the same regiment, all of whom had been invalided home on account of wounds received during the terrible fighting now in progress in Belgium ...

The men stated that they were stationed at Le Touquet, about three kilometres from Armentières, one of the most important points held by the English at the present time, seeing that the Kaiser's army has done its best to break through there to Calais ... they had held and maintained that barrier for a month.

It had been said that men in the trenches had been relieved every third day, but they knew of cases where men had not been out of the trenches for fourteen days. There was only a distance of fifty yards between the German and English trenches, and the Germans used to shout across to them, "What about the Hotel Cecil and the Hotel Metropolitan." One of the men also stated that he had heard them singing the popular music-hall ditty, "Hold your hand out, you naughty boy." It was customary for both the Germans and the British to put bully-beef tins on the parapets of the trenches for one another to shoot at, hits and misses being signalled in customary fashion [with flags]; and, since snow had fallen, snowball matches had been indulged in by the combatants ...

Amongst the English a great number of casualties were caused by German snipers, who were certainly excellent marksmen. One of their practices was to select a tree ... bore a hole in it and insert the rifle through the aperture ... Anyone who came within range of the rifle would then be practically certain to be put out of action. The snipers also used tripods and stands on which they rested their guns ...

With regard to the atrocities committed by the Germans, the men said it would make an Englishman's hair stand on end to listen to the stories ... Wherever they went the Germans caused frightful destruction ... when on a looting expedition, rather than leave anything that they could not carry away, they would smash or deface it.

Reference was also made to the difficulty the Germans experienced in burying their dead, many of which were to be seen hanging on the barbed wire of the trenches – for all the world like clothes on a clothes line. Some of them had been in the act of getting over the barbed wire when death had overtaken them with terrific swiftness. Many of the Germans seemed only too glad to surrender.

Notes: The Hotel Cecil and Hotel Metropole were two London hotels requisitioned by the Government at the start of the war. The Germans were making it clear to the British that they knew the latest news from London.

The incidents of fraternization between the Germans and the British mentioned by John Sunderland pre-date by more than a month the famous Christmas Day football match in no-man's land, which is often reported as being a unique and spontaneous occurrence. Clearly it wasn't.

John Sunderland was returned to his battalion, in France, on 6th July 1915; but this period of active service was even shorter than his previous one.

By this time the battalion had moved north, into Belgium, and were located at the village of Wieltje, about 3 miles north-east of Ypres. The Regimental diary for the period is summarised below, and reveals typical trench warfare activity:

- 1st to 5th July – In support trenches.
- 6th July – ... made an attack at 6am and captured some German trenches. German counter-attacks failed. Lancashire Fusiliers put in during the evening to hold trenches taken.
- 7th July – Line held by Lancashire Fusiliers was heavily shelled and attacked by Germans. All attacks were beaten off. Battalion relieved by [units of] 49th Division.
- 8th July – Whole division is being relieved by 49th Division and is going to rest near Proven [about 10 miles south-west of Dunkirk].
- 9th to 20th July – In camp at Proven.

John Sunderland returned to England on 11th July, arriving on the 12th (see earlier). It was the last time he would serve abroad.

It has not been possible to find out why John Sunderland's second period of active service was so short. Perhaps he was found to be unwell on arrival or possibly he was wounded again during the actions that took place on the 6th and 7th of July.

In a letter he sent to Kildwick and Farnhill Institute, which was read into the minutes of their meeting on 18th November, he asked to be allowed to resign from the committee – suggesting that, although he was back in the country, he would not be able to continue to serve as a committee member.

At some time after February 1916, John was transferred from the Royal Lancaster Regiment to the 3rd Garrison battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. This was a domestic unit based in Wrexham, in North Wales.

His service record contains a single entry, a stamp labelled "Royal Hospital Chelsea" and dated 11/11/1916 (see earlier), that suggests he was in hospital at this time. It may have been as a result of this that he was transferred to the Army Reserve later in the month and awarded a pension of 16s 6d per week for six months. He was also awarded a Silver War Badge (no. 153541) which he received in March 1917.

Campaign :— **1914** (A) Where decoration was earned. (B) Present situation.

Name	Corps	* Rank	Reg. No.	Roll on which included (if any)
(A) SLINDERLAND	R. Lancer	CPL	6856	VICTORY J/2/102 B/16 4993
(B) JOHN	R. M. O. S.	Sgt	38305	BRITISH H/12/3 129

Action taken

Trans

Poland 41421 for 1.V. 38454/2.9.31

Correct rank as per Auth. x - 2 B.

Sub dir 5/474

QUALIFYING DATE. **2. 11. 14**

(6 34 46) W234—HP5590 500,000 4/19 HWV(P240) K608 [OVER.]

John Sunderland's WW1 Medal Card – showing him eligible for a 1914 Star,
British War Medal and a Victory Medal
Used under licence from the National Archive

Note: Silver War Badges (SWB), sometimes known as the "Discharge Badge", the "Wound Badge" or "Services Rendered Badge", were first issued in September 1916. They were awarded to men who were unable to continue in the services due to illness or wounds sustained. They were intended to be worn with civilian clothing and so counteract the practice of "white-feathering" men who had wounds that rendered them unfit for war service, but which were not obvious from their outward appearance.

He was finally discharged from the army on 26th April 1918.

When the war was over, John was awarded a 1914 Mons Star (despatched on 27/2/1919), a British War Medal, and a Victory Medal (both despatched 24/8/1922).

Post-war life

By the time the war ended, the Sunderland family had moved out of the village; John did not appear on the 1918 electoral roll, compiled late in 1917.

It seems likely that the family moved back to Little Lever, where most of John's family were still living. Certainly that was where Mary Ann and the couple's children were living at the time of the 1921 census. Possibly this was an easier place for John to visit whilst on leave from his regiment, based in Wrexham, rather than travelling all the way across country to Farnhill? (No 1921 census entry for John Sunderland has been found.)

John's wife, Mary Ann, died in Little Lever in early June 1923 and was buried on the 4th. Just five days later, he married for a second time. His wife was a divorcee, Elizabeth Lynch, nee Cunliffe.

539491

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY OF MARRIAGE.
Pursuant to the Marriage Acts, 1811 to 1934.

Registration District **Manchester**

Marriage Solemnized at **The Register Office** in the **district of Chorlton** in the **County of Manchester**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
Ninth June 1923	John Sunderland	38 years	Widower	Manager of Film Co.	38, Hartington Street Moss Side	Michael Sunderland	Bleacher
	Elizabeth Lynch formerly Cunliffe (Spinster)	40 years	The divorced wife of William Louis Lionel Lynch		38, Hartington Street Moss Side	Jonathon Cunliffe (deceased)	Soap Maker

Wedded in the **Register Office** according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the **Church of England** by Licence before by me,

Marriage solemnized between us, **John Sunderland** and **Elizabeth Lynch** in the Presence of us, **Harry Cunliffe** and **Matilda Wood**

C.H. Ramsbottom Registrar
David S. Bloomfield, Supt. Registrar

Frederick Osner Deputy Superintendent Registrar for the District of **MANCHESTER** do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the Entry No. **190** in the Register Book of Marriages No. **309** for the said district.

WITNESS MY HAND this **23rd** day of **September**, **1939**.

Superintendent Registrar

NOTE.—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or (2) uses it as true, knowing it to be falsified, is liable to Prosecution.

Marriage certificate – John and his second wife, Elizabeth
Used under licence from the National Archive

The wedding took place at Chorlton Register Office, and the couple were recorded as living at 38 Hartington Street, Moss Side, Manchester.

The 1939 Register, taken when ration cards were being prepared at the start of WW2, recorded John Sunderland, his wife, and Elizabeth his daughter from his first marriage, living at 2 Halden Road, Morecambe. It would be John's home for the rest of his life.

1	Sunderland, John	M	12 th Sept 1914	M	unmarried advertisement
2	Sunderland, Elizabeth	F	24 June 1923	M	unpaid domestic duties
3	Sunderland, Elizabeth	F	12 th Sept 1923	M	multiple stores supervisor

768516 Halden Rd 2/2/39
HALL & POHSE NO 122 Sackville
no substance allowed

1939 Register entry for 2 Halden Road, Morecambe
Used under licence from the National Archive

The text in red, to the right of the main entry, suggests that John may have been a WW2 Special Constable.

John Sunderland died, in Morecambe, on 28th January 1947; aged 62. He was buried in the churchyard at Little Lever.

Postscript

Elizabeth, John's second wife, died in Morecambe on 16th January 1957. She was aged 74.

A number of John Sunderland's siblings and at least one of his children married and had children. There are living descendants in various parts of the country, and possibly also in New Zealand.

John Sunderland – a life in summary

Born: 13/9/1884, Little Lever (Lancashire)
Baptised: 2/11/1884, Little Lever (Lancashire)
Died: 28/1/1947; buried at Little Lever **Aged:** 62
Home address: 2 Halden Rd, Morecambe

Parents

Father: Michael; bapt. 24/11/1855, Little Lever (Lancashire);
d. 23/5/1933, Little Lever (Lancashire)
Mother: Alice Jane (nee Boardman);
b. 1860, Little Lever (Lancashire); bapt. 24/6/1860; d. 14/3/1931, Little Lever (Lancashire)
Married: 12/8/1880, Little Lever (Lancashire)

Siblings

Bertha; b. 1881, Little Lever (Lancashire); bapt. 9/10/1881; m. Thomas Ashton, 13/2/1904
Arthur William; b. 1886, Little Lever (Lancashire); bapt. 14/11/1886
Tom Martin; b. 1888; bapt. 28/4/1888, Little Lever (Lancashire); d. 1893, Little Lever
Mary; b. 1891, Little Lever (Lancashire); bapt. 4/4/1891;
m. Robert Edward Mills, 9/4/1917, Little Lever (Lancashire); d. 26/2/1960, Little Lever
Albert; b. 1893, Little Lever (Lancashire); bapt. 4/11/1893;
m. Elizabeth Collinge Hatchman, 10/4/1920, Little Lever; d. 11/2/1961, Little Lever
James Stewart; b. 21/12/1895, Little Lever (Lancashire); m. Beatrice Stafford, 5/6/1920, Little Lever;
d. 1970, New Zealand

WW1 service

Service period: 2/11/1914 to 22/11/1916 (to reserves – Class P); discharged 26/4/1918
Regt.: 1st Battalion, King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment (no. 6856)
3rd Garrison Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers (no. 38305)
Medals: 1914 Mons Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Silver War Badge
Home address: 8 Bright Street, Farnhill

Relationship to other volunteers

None known.

Marriage

Wife: (1) Mary Ann Jackson; b. 11/8/1883, Lancaster; d. June 1923, Little Lever, Lancashire
(2) Elizabeth Lynch (nee Cunliffe); d. 16/1/1957, Morecambe; aged 74
Date: (1) 22/4/1905; at St. Paul's Church, Scotforth, Lancaster
(2) 9/6/1923; at Chorlton Register Office

Children

Alice Jane, b. 20/1/1906, Lancaster

Elizabeth, b. 12/9/1908, Little Lever; m. Fred M. Beetham, 1959, Lancaster (Registration district);
d. 1966, Lancaster (Registration district)

George Arthur, b. 27/8/1910, Farnhill; m. Rose H. Smith, 1938, Lancaster (Registration district);
d. 23/5/1992, Itchen, Southampton

Tom Michael, b. 23/3/1912, Farnhill; d. 1986, Knowsley (Registration district)

