

Banstead Remembers

Corporal Gordon Anderson

of 11 Lyme Regis Road

1/4th Cameron Highlanders

*Killed at the Battle of Festubert, aged 39
17th May 1915*



TUESDAY 17th MAY

at All Saints Church, Banstead

- 7:30am: the churchyard flag will be raised to half-mast
- 11:45am: a piper will play in the Orchard
- 11:55am: a short service of remembrance will be held
- noon: a church bell will be tolled 101 times

At least 25 men from Lyme Regis Road served overseas during the war; 8 never returned. Please come and remember the sacrifice that our local community made in World War One.

We will remember each one

Corporal Gordon Anderson of Lulworth, 11 Lyme Regis Road

George Gordon Anderson, known as Gordon, was born at the Old Brompton barracks on 4th May 1876. He was the eldest child of Company Sergeant Major John and Jessie (nee Ellis) Anderson.

John was a Royal Engineer and the family moved to what would later be called the Victoria & Albert Museum when Gordon was about 4 years old. The museum was administered by the Civil Service's Science & Art Department but was run by a lieutenant-colonel of the Royal Engineers and it housed a detachment of sappers who acted as warders, clerks, handymen, printers and auxiliary firefighters. Sadly, John soon died and Jessie had to find work, probably leaving her family behind in London with her mother while she did so. Happily, she also found a new husband and remarried, to a widower, and their two families moved in together, living in Fetter Lane in the City of London.

19-year-old Gordon became a messenger in the Science & Art Department in 1895, probably working in the Science Museum. He also joined the 13th Middlesex (Queen's Westminster) Rifle Volunteers, one of the part-time units that were forerunners of the Territorial Army. London's volunteer units offered a rich social and sporting life and were ideal for networking for City men; they seem to have been rather like gentlemen's clubs with guns and uniforms.

War broke out in South Africa in 1899 and did not start well for Britain. With the news of successive defeats, the City of London Imperial Volunteers, the "Lord Mayor's Own", were formed by Royal Warrant. Picked marksmen were chosen from across London's rifle volunteers and they were handsomely equipped by their City backers. The men, Gordon amongst them, received the Freedom of the City and marched through cheering crowds and off on the long sea voyage to South Africa.

Gordon joined No.1 Company, C.I.V. Mounted Infantry (horseriding skills for many men were negligible, some learned to ride on a wooden horse whilst on the voyage) and served with Field-Marshal Lord Roberts' column that relieved the siege of Kimberley, won a famous victory at Paardeberg and marched all the way to Pretoria. The C.I.V. returned home in October 1900 to a hero's welcome, gifts of pork pies and oranges and a medal presentation by the King himself.

Gordon resumed his career as a civil servant, working for the Department of Education. He married Ethel Vale-Lane in 1905 in Clapham. Ethel's parents, Jasper and Ellen, moved to The Ferns (now 60), Ferndale Road, Banstead, and Gordon and Ethel moved to Wallington at about the same time.

The Vale-Lanes had moved around the corner to Lulworth (now number 11), Lyme Regis Road by the time that war was declared in 1914. At the time, only the (modern) numbers 11-23A, known as Lulworth Cottages, had been built on the northern side and 2-16, a house on the site of 20/22 and 24-38 stood on the southern side of the road. Gordon joined the 1/4th Cameron Highlanders in September 1914 and began training with them at Bedford; Ethel moved in with her parents.

Gordon arrived in France in February 1915 and fought at Neuve Chapelle in March. They were in action again, at Festubert, in May. With bayonets fixed, they charged across 800 yards of No Man's Land criss-crossed with deep and wide ditches and swept with shell and rifle fire. They captured the trench that was their objective but the attack either side of them broke down. They were isolated and under grenade bombardment and had to retreat. A survivor recalls that they were "shot down like rabbits" as they recrossed No Man's Land and another man said it was a "glimpse of Hell and butchery." They lost nearly 250 men, Gordon was one of the fallen. He was 39 years old.

Gordon was awarded the British War Medal, the Victory Medal and the 1914-15 Star. He is commemorated on the Le Touret memorial, on the Wallington war memorial and on the wooden panels in the Lady Chapel at All Saints, Banstead.

Ethel and her parents lived in Lyme Regis Road for the rest of their lives. Gordon's date of death has only recently been determined so he is being commemorated on the 101st anniversary of his death.