

# *Banstead Remembers*

*Corporal Roberts Majuba Caselton  
of 30 Diceland Road*

*8<sup>th</sup> The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)  
Died in France, aged 16  
17<sup>th</sup> April 1916*



**SUNDAY 17<sup>th</sup> APRIL**

at All Saints Church, Banstead

7:30am: the churchyard flag will be raised to half-mast  
11:55am: a short service of remembrance will be held  
noon: a church bell will be tolled 100 times

All are welcome to attend to help commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roberts' death. Please come and remember the sacrifice that our local community made 100 years ago in World War One.

*We will remember **each** one*

# *Corporal Roberts Majuba Caselton of 30 Diceland Road*

Roberts Majuba Caselton was born on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1900 at 30 Diceland Road. His father, Walston, was an attendant at the asylum on Banstead Downs in peacetime but in 1900 he was away with the Norfolk Regiment, fighting the Boers in South Africa. Roberts' mother, Louisa, was left at home to bring up their young family.

The Boer War had been going badly until late February but now the nation was celebrating the relief of the besieged town of Kimberley and a major victory at Paardeberg. Walston was with Field-Marshal Lord Frederick Roberts at Paardeberg and so the family named the new baby "Roberts" in honour of the British Commander-in-Chief and "Majuba" as the victory had come on Majuba Day, the anniversary of an infamous British defeat now avenged by the capture of 4,000 Boers at Paardeberg.

Roberts was the fourth of six sons born to Walston and Louisa. When war came in 1914, his father and his three elder brothers joined up. Roberts was not to be left out. Aged 14, he claimed to be "19 years and 355 days" and attested under his brother William's name with The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment) in February 1915.

Roberts joined the 8<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of The Queen's, part of 72<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, which was made up of four battalions from Surrey and Kent. Their training was poor, equipment was in short supply and rifles were not available until July.

In the summer of 1915, the men of Kitchener's New Army poured into France in preparation for the "Big Push" at Loos and the 8<sup>th</sup> Queen's arrived in France on 1<sup>st</sup> September. There was little for the men to do as they waited in camp for three weeks. Discipline suffered and Roberts spent three days in shackles for an unknown offence.

They finally marched onto the battlefield on 26<sup>th</sup> September, the second day of the Battle of Loos, and straight into a killing zone. They came under heavy machinegun fire from in front and from both sides, point-blank German artillery fire and were even shelled by British artillery. When they finally reached the undamaged German wire, they could not cut their way through. The German soldiers stood and shot "as rapidly as they could pull their triggers." The Surrey and Kent battalions of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Brigade suffered over 2,000 casualties that day. The Germans called the battleground "The Field of Corpses." The 8<sup>th</sup> Queen's had been gutted, they had lost half of their men within the space of just a few hours.

Roberts, just 15 years old, was promoted to corporal in the aftermath of the battle. The 8<sup>th</sup> Queen's took their first spell in the trenches in October and spent much of the autumn and early winter battling the weather more than the Germans. Constant work was required to stop the rain washing away their parapets and flooding their trenches. They rested and refitted in December, returning to the trenches in the New Year.

With so many men crowded together in insanitary conditions, disease was a constant menace and Roberts fell victim to one of the most common ailments: scabies, a skin mite infestation that causes severe itching. Most sufferers went on to develop complications as the scratched, broken skin was easily infected and Roberts was no exception. He soon suffered from sores and blisters brought on by impetigo and was sent to a specialist hospital for treatment. His health was failing; he developed pneumonia and was transferred to an isolation hospital where, a fortnight later, he contracted meningitis.

Roberts died on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1916. He was 16 years and 2 months old, the youngest man from Banstead to die in the war.

Roberts' real identity came to light after the war and he is buried under his own name in Etaples Military Cemetery, France. His headstone inscription reads "Who passed from a world at war to a paradise of peace."

He is commemorated on the family monument in All Saints' churchyard, on the Banstead War Memorial, on the Garton War Memorial in All Saints' churchyard and on the wooden panels in All Saints' Lady Chapel.

Roberts was awarded the British War Medal, Victory Medal and the 1914-15 Star.

Please come and honour his memory on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April.