

Banstead Remembers

Private Charles Grason

of Reads Rest Cottages, Canons Lane, Burgh Heath

*19th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force
Died at Tel el Kebir, Egypt, aged 27
21st May 1916*



SATURDAY 21st MAY

at All Saints Church, Banstead

11:55am: a short service of remembrance will be held

Noon: a church bell will be tolled 100 times

The churchyard flag will be raised to half mast at 7:30am and lowered at 5:30pm

At least 13 men from the cottages and farms along Canons Lane served overseas during the war; 2 never returned. Please come and remember the sacrifice that our local community made 100 years ago in World War One.

*We will remember **each** one*

Private Charles Grason of Reads Rest Cottages, Canons Lane

Charles Grason was born in Burgh Heath on 24th July 1889. His father was Thomas Grason, a carman from Lincolnshire, and his mother was Sarah, a dairywoman from Edenbridge, Kent. They lived in a cottage at Burgh Heath and Thomas worked at North Tadworth Farm. They had 4 children: Charles ("Charley"), Harry, Amy and Mabel.

Charley, a Methodist, attended the Wesleyan School on the Green, enrolling in 1898. He left school in 1903, aged 13, to go to work, probably at Tadworth Court Farm, where Thomas had become farm foreman. The family lived at the farm and in Tadworth for the first decade of the 1900s.

In 1911, Thomas, Sarah and Charley were back in Burgh Heath, living at Reads Rest Cottages in Canons Lane and were nursing two children to help ends meet. It was a difficult time for the dairy industry and so Charley was working as a coachman at one of the local big houses rather than working with his father at Canons Farm. He was about to take a step into the unknown.

On 17th February 1912, Charley sailed for a new life in Australia, aboard the *Marathon*, giving his occupation as "dairy farmer". Also on board was his future wife, Lizzie Burdett, a housemaid from Peckham. They disembarked at Sydney. Charley must have sent back good reports as his parents soon followed his lead and, in 1913, Thomas emigrated to New Zealand, with Sarah and the other children following in 1914.

Charley settled in Red Range, in the dairy farming heartland of the highlands of New South Wales, and worked as a labourer. He joined the Manchester Independent Unity of Oddfellows, and was elected Noble Grand (chairman) of Red Range Lodge in June 1915. He attested with the Australian Imperial Force on 1st November 1915. His medical records show that he was a short man, just 5ft 2in tall, and weighed 9 stone 4lbs, with a fair complexion, blue eyes and light brown hair. He had scars on his left arm and on the left side of his forehead and he smoked a pipe.

After completing his training, he joined the 10th draft of reinforcements for the 19th Battalion in January 1916. Shortly before leaving Australia, Charley married Lizzie at the Salvation Army Congress Hall in Sydney. Charley carried a lock of Lizzie's hair with him when he sailed from Sydney aboard *HMAT Orsova* on 11th March 1916. He was bound for Egypt.

The 19th Battalion had fought at Gallipoli and were refitting and training at a vast new camp, at Tel el Kebir, about 70 miles from Cairo. The camp was "devoid of beauty", row upon row of white bell tents and huts made from rushes, by a canal and railway in the middle of the desert. The reinforcements would have reached camp in April and the new men were posted to a training battalion before joining their units.

Charley fell ill and on 15th May he was admitted to No.2 Stationary Hospital. By the 20th he was dangerously ill with septicaemia (blood poisoning) and he died the following day. He was 27.

Charley was buried at Tel el Kebir on the 22nd of May. His headstone inscription, chosen by Lizzie, reads: "No one he loved was by his side to hear his last faint sigh."

He was awarded the British War Medal and Lizzie, his bride of just 2 months, was sent a commemorative plaque, scroll and a photograph of his grave. He has several memorials in New South Wales and is commemorated on the Australian National Roll of Honour. His name will be projected onto the walls of the Hall of Memory for 30 seconds on 19 occasions during Australia's WW1 centenary commemorations.

News of Charley's death may never have reached Burgh Heath and so he is not yet commemorated in St Mary's or in the Burgh Heath War Memorial Hall.