

Banstead Remembers

Private Horace Mitchell

of 44 Oatlands Road

7th Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment

Killed at Trones Wood, France, aged 22

13th July 1916



WEDNESDAY 13th JULY

at All Saints Church, Banstead

11:50am: 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

Horace is one of nearly 20 Banstead and Burgh Heath men to be killed in the Battle of the Somme and was one of three brothers who lost their lives in the war. Please come and remember the sacrifice that our local community made 100 years ago in World War One.

*We will remember **each** one*

Private Horace Mitchell

44 Oatlands Road

Horace William Mitchell was born in New Shoreham, Sussex, on 13th December 1893. He was the second of eight children born to John and Susan Mitchell.

John was born in Banstead and worked as a labourer. The family moved around with his work, living in Mogador, Shoreham, Walton on the Hill, Epsom and Ewell. Horace attended the Church of England School in West Street, Ewell. John lied about his son's age so that he could finish his schooling earlier and so Horace left school aged 12 to work on a farm.

The family moved to Burgh Heath in 1908. They lived at number 22 (now 44) Oatlands Road, a semi-detached house on the south side of the road (the houses on the north side of the street are post-war). George's grandmother moved in too and there were 11 people crammed into a 3-bedroom house, typical of the overcrowding that was rife in the area at the time.

As a teenager, Horace became a groom for a "horsekeeper", possibly working at the stables which used to stand on The Green at Burgh Heath, which one of his brothers later went on to run.

Horace volunteered for service with the Army on 8th June 1915, joining his brother George's unit, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment. After a very short training period he was posted to the 7th (Service) Battalion and arrived in France on 14th August 1915.

They were stationed in the "*green and eye-pleasing*" country of Picardy, through which ran the Somme and the Ancre. Their first few months were relatively uneventful, the spells in the line were not too long, they were well supplied with food and had comfortable billets.

That all changed on 1st July 1916 when they went over the top on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. They were in the south of the British sector and their objective was the Montuban-Mametz road trench and the western end of the fortified village of Montauban. Their advance faltered in a hail of machine-gun fire but thanks to the determination of a junior officer in leading a grenade attack, they broke through the German lines and reached their objective. They suffered 532 casualties but the advance from the south had been a success, a contrast to the failure elsewhere.

A renewed attack from the south was scheduled for 14th July and Horace's Brigade were ordered to secure the attack's right flank by recapturing Trones Wood from the Germans. The 300 remaining men of the 7th Queen's, with support from other units, attacked at 7pm on the 13th. The preliminary artillery bombardment had little effect on the Germans in the wood and the 7th Queen's suffered immediate and heavy casualties as they left their trench. Most didn't even get within 100 yards of the wood. The survivors sheltered in shell holes and then crept back under cover of darkness.

Horace was initially reported as missing but was later confirmed as killed in action. He was 22 years old. He is buried in the Bernafay Wood British Cemetery at Montauban and is commemorated at All Saints (Banstead), St Mary's (Burgh Heath) and in the Burgh Heath War Memorial Hall.

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

Two of Horace's brothers were killed in the war and his youngest brother died from illness in 1917.