

Banstead Remembers

*Private Leonard Bowler
of 24 Oatlands Road*

*8th Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment
and 9th East Surrey Regiment
Killed in Action, aged 20*



WEDNESDAY 17th AUGUST

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

Leonard was one of 10 men from Oatlands Road to be lost in the war and is one of nearly 20 local men who died in the Battle of the Somme. Please come and remember the sacrifice that was made in World War One.

*We will remember **each** one*

Private Leonard Bowler of 24 Oatlands Road

Leonard was born on 12th June 1896, the fifth of seven children born to Thomas and Alice Bowler. He was baptised at All Saints', Banstead, on 30th August of that year.

The Bowlers lived at 24 Oatlands Road (originally numbered 12), on the south side of the street (the houses on the north side are post-war), and Thomas worked as a carter for Percy Russell, Burgh Heath's corn merchant.

The children attended the Wesleyan School on the Green, joining at a young age. Leonard left school in 1910, two days before his 14th birthday. He would have been taught gardening and woodwork in addition to the usual Three Rs and he found work as a gardener's assistant.

The peak of voluntary enlistment came early on in the war, in August and September 1914, and the number of volunteers fell dramatically after that. The Derby Scheme was introduced in 1915 in order to increase the number of recruits. Men who were eligible for service had to visit a recruiting office and declare whether it was their intention to volunteer or not. If they did volunteer then they had the choice to join immediately or defer their service until it was deemed absolutely necessary. They were given a day's pay and an armband to wear showing they had pledged to serve and they were promised that they would only be mobilised if their whole age group was called up. Leonard attested under the Derby Scheme in December 1915 and was posted to the Army Reserve.

The younger Derby Scheme men were called up almost immediately. Leonard's age group were notified just a few days after he attested and they were mobilised on 20th January 1916. Leonard joined 10th (Reserve) Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment at Shoreham, Sussex, and was posted to the 9th East Surreys when his training ended.

The gas attack of 30th April, which claimed the life of George Mitchell (40 Oatlands Road), meant that the 8th (Service) Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment were short of men. Leonard joined them near Dranoutre on 2nd June 1916.

Leonard either transferred back to the 9th East Surreys (his service records have not survived so we can't be sure) and was killed in a disastrous attack on a strong point on the edge of Arrow Head Copse, near Guillemont, on the 16th August or he remained with the 8th Queen's and was killed on the 17th in the same trenches that the East Surreys had gone "over the top" from the day before. He was 20 years old.

Leonard is commemorated on memorial panels in St Mary's and the War Memorial Hall and at All Saints' Banstead.