

# *Banstead Remembers*

*Private George Butler*

*of 7 Firtree Cottages, Pound Road*

*18<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers  
Served in France and Belgium  
Killed in Action, aged 34*



## **SUNDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> OCTOBER**

at All Saints Church, Banstead

10:50am: a short service of remembrance will be held

11:00am: 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

George Butler was a platelayer who was born in Lincolnshire but grew up in Diceland Road and later lived in Pound Road. He served with the Royal Engineers and then in the infantry, with the Lancashire Fusiliers. He was killed at Houthulst Forest prior to the Second Battle of Passchendaele.

*We will remember **each** one*

## *Private George Butler of 7 Firtree Cottages, Pound Road*

George was born in Holland Fen, Lincolnshire, in early 1883. He was the son of Marshall and Sophia Butler (nee Day). The family came to Banstead when he was a toddler and lived at a cottage (now no.7) in Diceland Road.

George worked as a carter, a bricklayer and then as a labourer and platelayer for the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway. He married Sarah Anne Parsons, a domestic servant from Devon, in the summer of 1905 and they made their home at 7 Firtree Cottages (since demolished), in Pound Road, one of ten cottages that used to stand between Stirling Close and the post-Second World War number 29. They had three children, Aubrey, Clarence and Lena. Sadly, Aubrey died whilst still a baby.

George enlisted as a sapper in the Royal Engineers in May 1916 and was soon in France. It is not known where he was for several months but on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1917, a draft of 213 other ranks from the Army Service Corps and Royal Engineers joined 18<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers, at Doingt, France. They prepared a training ground at a quiet village a few miles from Arras and rehearsed the attack before leaving for Belgium in mid-October.

The Third Battle Of Ypres (usually simply known as “Passchendaele” after its final phase), which had been planned as a 2-day advance from just outside low-lying Ypres to the village of Passchendaele on the ridge above, was into its 78<sup>th</sup> day when the Lancashire Fusiliers arrived at Boesinghe on 16<sup>th</sup> October. After an unpromising start in awful weather in August, the British had hit upon the secret of success and through a series of short steps, had nearly reached Passchendaele itself. Then the weather had turned for the worse once more and the advance bogged down. Despite the rain and worsening battlefield conditions, there was to be one more try on the village itself.

The Lancashire Fusiliers bivouacked between the Broombeek and Steenbeek streams on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> October and were shelled throughout the night. The 21<sup>st</sup> was spent in preparation for the attack. Their brigade was in the north of the battlefield and was to advance northwards into the Houthulst Forest in order to secure the left flank before the renewal of the Passchendaele attack a few days later.

Zero Hour was 5:35am on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. George’s battalion were in the centre of their brigade, whose advance was to expand out into a fan shape. A gap was always present between them and the battalion on the right, and unfortunately machine-gun nests in the gap were not dealt with by either battalion, driving a wedge between them and causing heavy casualties. The ground had been drying out but rain began to fall once more, making progress difficult. They fought from shell-hole to shell-hole, advancing into machine-gun and rifle fire from the Wood with little protection provided by a “ragged” barrage. The left company reached their objective but the right company got caught up in fighting amongst the thick and entangled fallen boughs in the Wood. They dug in where they could, in water-filled shell-holes and made sandbag parapets ready to hold off counterattacks, which were not long in coming. George was killed. He was 34. He is commemorated on the Banstead War Memorial and on the vast memorial to the missing in Tyne Cot Cemetery.