

Banstead Remembers

Private Jack Gatland

of 17 Diceland Road

*105th Labour Company
Served in France and Belgium
Killed in Action, aged 37*



FRIDAY 27th OCTOBER

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

Jack Gatland was a Banstead-born bricklayer who served in a labour battalion of the Royal Fusiliers and later with a labour company. He was killed near Ypres, probably by a shell as he worked to repair a shell-damaged road during the Second Battle of Passchendaele.

*We will remember **each** one*

Private Jack Gatland of 17 Diceland Road

John "Jack" William Gatland was born on 18th August 1880 at Banstead Place, Park Road. He was the son of John and Eliza and was one of 8 children. His family lived at Mint Cottages, by The Mint pub. Jack's father was a bricklayer and Jack grew up to be one too. The family moved to Devonshire Cottages, where Shrubland Court is today, on the corner of Garratts Lane and Shrubland Road, and then to Ash Cottages, in Diceland Road. Their house is now number 17.

Jack probably joined the Army in December 1915 under the Derby Scheme and was posted to the 33rd Royal Fusiliers, a labour battalion. The labour battalions were formed from men who were fit enough to work but not fit enough to fight, as well as skilled tradesmen, craftsmen and engineers. It's likely that he was chosen for a labour battalion as he didn't rate "A1" in his medical classification and because he was a bricklayer.

The 33rd Battalion left for France in April 1916. They worked near Loos and Arras, making and mending roads. They also worked on the light railways that were used to transport men and shells up to the front. A few men were lent to help on farms, where they were treated with every hospitality whilst others were sent up to work near the front line and endured constant shelling, which they got used to treating with "*the utmost indifference.*" When there was nothing else to be done, they carried ammunition up to the front line. Jack probably went out to join them in December 1916.

In May 1917, the Battalion was broken up when the Labour Corps was formed and Jack transferred to 105th Labour Company and soon found himself at Ypres, where the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) was fought through the summer and into the autumn.

Shellfire and wet weather destroyed the roads and tracks at Ypres and made the movement of men and guns extremely difficult, so that the guns were unable to properly support the advance and men would reach the front line already exhausted. The labour companies laid plank roads and corduroy roads (made with half-logs and used instead of planks/sleepers wherever better traction was needed) for the lorries and guns and duckboard tracks for the men, so that they could reach the front line without wading through knee-deep mud.

The roads were under constant shellfire in October and casualty rates amongst the labour battalions were as high as in the infantry. Jack was probably working on a road near Pilckem on 27th October when he was killed. He was 37. Jack is buried in Artillery Wood Cemetery.