

Banstead Remembers

*Able Seaman George Bryan
of 22 Oatlands Road, Burgh Heath*

*Howe Battalion, Royal Naval Division
Died of his wounds, aged 21*



FRIDAY 25th NOVEMBER

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

35 men from Oatlands Road served all over the world during the war, including in France, Belgium, India, Iraq, Greece, Egypt, East Africa and at Gallipoli. 10 of them did not return. Please come and remember the sacrifice that was made by our local families.

*We will remember **each** one*

Able Seaman George Ernest Bryan of 22 Oatlands Road

George Ernest Bryan was born in Tadworth on 10th November 1895. He was the eldest son of George and Lottie Bryan, one of eight children, and was known as Ernest when he was young. The family came to Burgh Heath in 1900, living in a cottage on the Green, before moving to 11 (now numbered 22) Oatlands Road in 1906.

George attended the Burgh Heath Church of England School, opposite the planned site of St Mary's, and left school at the standard age of 14. He was apprenticed to an electrician but soon became a postman, probably working from Mr Roberts' stores and post office which stood where Travis Perkins' yard is now.

On 1st November 1915, George joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, perhaps with dreams of going to sea, and was posted to the 5th (Depot) Battalion of the Royal Naval Division, the Navy's fighting force on dry land. He trained at the Naval Centre at Crystal Palace and was drafted to the 2nd (Drake) Battalion at Blandford, Dorset, in May 1916. He specialised as a Lewis Gunner (a machine-gunner) and was transferred to the 6th (Howe) Battalion, joining them in France in August.

The Royal Naval Division were stationed in the mining district around Loos. It was quiet where they were, a long way north of the battle raging on the Somme. Their billets were often comfortable (some were even furnished with proper beds, a real luxury) and there was little in the way of fighting to be done. The good times wouldn't last long, however, as reinforcements were always needed in the south.

At the end of September, they moved down to the Somme battle zone. An attack was planned on the villages of Beaucourt and Beaumont-Hamel. October rain turned the battlefield into a sea of mud and the attack was delayed until 13th November. At 5:45am, on a cold, gloomy, misty morning, the Navy men went over the top. Their objective was Beaucourt, in the marshy valley of the River Ancre. They advanced behind a protective barrage, moving at a rate of 100 yards every 5 minutes, through three lines of German trenches and to the outskirts of the village itself. On the left, the men of George's brigade encountered stiff resistance from a strongpoint which had been untouched by the barrage and whose machine gun kept doing damage to the advancing troops even when the redoubt had been surrounded. Eventually, three tanks drove up into the strongpoint and the garrison of 800 men surrendered. The village was stormed by a ragtag mixture of men from several battalions and taken in the evening. Casualties were high. George was wounded, shot in the back and thigh.

George was evacuated to a hospital at Etaples, far from the front line. Within days he had fallen seriously ill. On 24th November, his condition deteriorated and, at 5:15am on the 25th, George passed away. He was 21 years old.