

# *Banstead Remembers*

*Private Arthur Curtis  
of The Coffee House, High Street*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers  
Served in Belgium and France  
Killed in action, aged 28*



## MONDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> APRIL

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

The Battle of Arras is often forgotten, overshadowed by the fighting that took place before it on the Somme and afterwards at Passchendaele. Eight men from Banstead and Burgh Heath were killed in the battle. Arthur was one of three local men to lose their lives on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 1917.

*We will remember **each** one*

## *Private Arthur Curtis of The Coffee House, High Street*

The Battle of Arras was fought to divert German reserves north so that the French could try and break through on a wide front along the River Aisne, far to the south. The battle began on Easter Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917, and that day saw the largest gains made from a standing start in the war so far. The Canadians captured Vimy Ridge and the British Third Army smashed through the first two lines of German defences east of Arras. After two further days of fighting, the British advanced into the village of Monchy-le-Preux, on top of a ridge of high ground that ran between the Scarpe and Cojeul rivers. There the advance halted, having claimed the lives of four Banstead men.

The French attack on the Aisne began on 16<sup>th</sup> April. It was a failure, the Germans knew they were coming and were ready for them. The British pressed on with their offensive and as dawn was breaking at 4:45am on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, they renewed their attack on a 9-mile front which centred on Monchy-le-Preux. The attack broke down when the flanks were shredded by machine-gun fire. Two Burgh Heath men fell that day.

That night, **Arthur Curtis**, a Dorset-born cowman who worked at Longcroft (now Longcroft Clinic) and lived at the Coffee House in the High Street, and his 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers took over trenches to the right (south) of Monchy. They continued the attack at 4pm the next day,

Advancing towards a copse on a spur that led down to the River Cojeul, they came under heavy machine-gun fire and took cover in shell holes. One company then charged through the wood whilst two more flanked it and took up positions in pits on its northeast edge. Here they were sniped at and came under heavy shelling and machine-gun fire. Patrols were sent out to the left and right to try and make contact with other attacking units. The patrol that went right never returned and the one that went left could find no sign of other British troops. With their numbers rapidly dwindling, no support on either flank and the Germans working their way around the edges of the Fusiliers' position, they were ordered to fall back to their old line at 6:50pm. Arthur was among the dead. He was 28 years old.