

# *Banstead Remembers*

*Private John Strong*

*of Burgh Heath*

*City of London Rifles*

*Served in France*

*Killed in Action, aged 19*



**MONDAY 27<sup>th</sup> 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

John Strong was born in Burgh Heath, the son of a railwayman who was working on the Chipstead Valley Railway. He went to France aged 18 and was killed four months later, near Maricourt, in the Hundred Days advance to victory. Please come and remember the sacrifice our community made.

*We will remember **each** one*

## *Private John Strong of Burgh Heath*

John William Strong was born in Burgh Heath on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1899 and baptised at St Andrew's, Kingswood, on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

He was the son of John and Florence Strong (nee Coe). His father was an engine driver and worked on the building of the Chipstead Valley Railway and John was probably born in a railway workers' camp near Kingswood and Burgh Heath Station. In those days, Burgh Heath was considered to extend as far south as Waterhouse Lane, which we would nowadays think of as being Kingswood. The Strong family were nomadic, going wherever John senior's work took him, and they had left the area by the time the line to Tattenham Corner had been completed.

John was living in Barking, Essex, when he was conscripted in 1917. He was mobilized two months after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and trained with the 16<sup>th</sup> Training Reserve Battalion at Bedford for three months before completing his training with the Royal West Kent Regiment. He would have expected to remain on the Home Front until he turned 19 but the German offensive of March 1918 inflicted heavy casualties and men were needed so the age for overseas service was lowered to 18 years old, provided that the young soldier had received at least six months of training. So it was that John was sent to France in mid-April, three months earlier than scheduled.

He was posted to the King's Royal Rifle Corps but this was purely an administrative move as he was almost immediately attached to the 6<sup>th</sup> (City of London) Regiment (City of London Rifles). The Battalion had suffered 500 casualties in April and John joined them in the field in early May as part of a large draft of reinforcements.

John spent his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday in the trenches near Albert. The line here was 5 miles behind the old 1916 Somme front line, the British having been pushed back 40 miles in just a few days by the German offensive of four months earlier, losing the gains of 1917. There was much work to be done to fortify their new positions and new arrivals to train as American troops joined them to learn about life in the front line.

The Germans launched their final offensive in July. Although initially successful, it was stopped in its tracks after a few days and the Allies delivered a counterattack that forced the Germans back. By now the Allies had absorbed the lessons of the last two years and finally put together all of the ingredients for a war-winning offensive of their own, taking the first step to victory with the Battle of Amiens on 8<sup>th</sup> August, a surprise attack in which John's City of London Rifles fought on the left flank and sustained over 300 casualties. After a week's pause, a series of blows was then struck, one every few days at different points along the line, pummeling the Germans. On 27<sup>th</sup> August, John was killed while the British struck one of those blows, near Maricourt. He was buried overlooking the River Somme and later exhumed and reburied at Peronne Road Cemetery, Maricourt. He was 19 years old.