

*Banstead Remembers*  
*Private Aubrey Balchin*  
*of 7 Court Road*

*8<sup>th</sup> London Regiment (Post Office Rifles)*  
*Served in France*  
*Killed in Action, aged 19*



**SUNDAY 14<sup>th</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

Aubrey was an accounts clerk for the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway who became a Territorial soldier when he turned 18 in 1917. He was killed in fighting near Lens as his battalion tried to secure a bridgehead over a canal during the Hundred Days advance to victory.

*We will remember **each** one*

## *The Hundred Days: Day 68* *Aubrey Balchin, of 7 Court Road*

Aubrey Alfred William Balchin was born at home in Pound Road on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1899. He was the son of Aubrey and Alice Balchin (nee Blunt).

The Balchins had been living in Banstead since at least the 1860s, in Court Road Cottages, and were a well-known local family. His mother's family, the Blunts, had come to Banstead from Goudhurst, in Kent, in the 1890s to build the new houses up by the Brighton Road and Aubrey senior, a carpenter, had probably worked with Alice's father and brothers. Alice and Aubrey senior moved in together in Battersea and were married in Wandsworth, then returned to Banstead make their home in Pound Road and went on to have at least six children, one of whom died young.

The Balchins moved to Homeland, a new house in Court Road, now number 7, in 1909-10, living with Aubrey's aunt, Clara, who was headmistress of the Infants School. When Clara left to take charge of Smitham School, Aubrey went with her.

Both Aubrey and his father played cricket for Banstead and, at 14, Aubrey was one of the youngest players in the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI's final peacetime game, which was played against Redhill 'A' on the day that the Germans invaded Belgium. He was too young to join up at the start of the war and became a clerk in the accounting office of the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway, earning 16 shillings a week.

Aubrey joined a Territorial battalion of the London Regiment when he turned 18 in the autumn of 1917 and was sent to France in the spring of 1918 in the aftermath of the German offensive, when the age at which men could serve overseas was lowered from 19 to 18½. He served with the 8<sup>th</sup> London Regiment (Post Office Rifles).

On 8<sup>th</sup> August, Day 1 of the Hundred Days offensive, the Allies took the first step to victory with the Battle of Amiens, in which the Post Office Rifles fought. The Allies then began a series of attacks, one every few days, constantly shifting the point of focus, probing for a weak spot. They forced the Germans back through the old Somme battlefield and all five British armies were advancing by early September, pursuing the Germans back to the strong fortifications of the Hindenburg Line. On 26<sup>th</sup> September, a general offensive began, which then spread between the Meuse and the Channel coast over the next few days. The Hindenburg Line was breached north of St Quentin and the Germans began to fall back once more but had not yet given up.

On 14<sup>th</sup> October, Day 68 of the Hundred Days, Aubrey's battalion was sent to secure a bridgehead over a canal east of the industrial town of Lens. They advanced through heavy machinegun fire to reach their objective but the units either side of them could not keep up and the Post Office Rifles soon became surrounded and had to withdraw. Aubrey was killed in the fighting that day. He was 19 years old. In a double tragedy for the family, Aubrey's maternal uncle, Percy Blunt, died of malaria while on active service in Beirut three days later.