

Banstead Remembers

Leading Seaman Harry Gurney of 26 Diceland Road

*HMS Birmingham
Royal Navy
Died, aged 33*



MONDAY 19th 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

Harry joined the Navy at 14 and served aboard a number of different ships in peacetime. He fought in the Aegean Sea as the British and French tried to force a passage through the Dardanelles narrows in 1915, when his ship was sunk. He died at home from Tuberculosis caught while in the Navy.

*We will remember **each** one*

Harry Gurney *26 Diceland Road*

Harry Gurney was born in Chipstead in Spring 1885 and was baptised at St Margaret's on 7th June. He was the son of Henry and Mary Ann Gurney (nee Laine).

His father was a carpenter and chimney sweep from St John's Wood, London, and his mother was a housemaid from Chipstead. The Gurney and Laine families both lived in Banstead and were next-door neighbours in Pound Cottages, Pound Road.

Henry and Mary Ann married and moved to Chipstead, where Harry (the second of eight children) was born, and then came back to Banstead in 1886 to live in Devonshire Cottages, which used to stand on the corner of Garratts Lane and Shrublands Road. They later returned to the road in which they had met, Pound Road, living at 7 Firtree Cottages, before moving to 26 Diceland Road between 1911-1914.

Harry (5ft tall, light brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion) worked as a gardener's boy for a few months after leaving school and then joined the Navy, aged 14½ but pretending to be 15, during the Boer War. After completing his training and turning "18", he signed up for 12 years and was still serving when war broke out.

He had joined HMS *Irresistible* shortly before war broke out and served aboard her in Home Waters in the autumn and winter of 1914, probably escorting troopships across the Channel. *Irresistible* was sent south, to the Mediterranean and Aegean in February 1915, and she took part in two of the attempts by Anglo-French naval forces to fight their way through the narrow entrance to the Dardanelles Straits and attack the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople (Istanbul). Capturing Constantinople and the Bosphorous would probably knock the Ottomans out of the war (or at least seriously hamper their war effort) and open a sea route to the Black Sea to support our Russian ally. The narrows were guarded by Turkish forts, which the ships bombarded, but their main defence was minefields. They could not be cleared and *Irresistible* struck a mine during one of the attempts and sunk soon afterwards. Most of the crew, including Harry, managed to abandon ship.

He served in the Aegean Sea during the unrest in Greece, when a pro-Allied faction rebelled against the neutral (and pro-Central Powers) government, before returning to Britain in 1917. His last posting was to HMS *Birmingham*, which he served aboard for only three weeks in the summer of 1917 before being discharged suffering from Pulmonary Tuberculosis.

Harry married Annie James in the Epsom Registration District at about the time he left the Navy and they made their home at 16 Elm Grove, Benhilton, Sutton. Sadly, Harry died from TB on 19th November 1918. He was 33.

Harry is buried at All Saints, Benhilton, Sutton. He has only just been recognised as a war casualty and he is now commemorated in the CWGC's UK Book of Remembrance.