

# *Banstead Remembers*

*Private George Edwards  
of 11 Asylum Cottages, Freedown Lane*

*9<sup>th</sup> East Surrey Regiment  
Died in Belgium, aged 20  
21st April 1916*



**THURSDAY 21<sup>st</sup> APRIL**

at All Saints Church, Banstead

7:30am: the churchyard flag will be raised to half-mast  
11:55am: a short service of remembrance will be held  
noon: a church bell will be tolled 100 times

All are welcome to attend to help commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George's death. Please come and remember the sacrifice that our local community made 100 years ago in World War One.

*We will remember **each** one*

# *Private George Edwards of 11 Asylum Cottages*

George Edwards was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1896 in Walton-on-the-Hill. His father, Arthur, was from a Walton family. Arthur worked as a groom and also served as a reservist with The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment). George's mother, Elizabeth (nee Burton), was a Sussex girl. Arthur and Elizabeth married in Walton-on-the-Hill in May 1895 and George came along ten months later, the first of six sons.

Arthur became an attendant at the London County Lunatic Asylum on Banstead Downs (where the prisons stand today) and the family moved to Kings Road, Belmont. Arthur was called up when the Boer War broke out in 1899. He served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen's, part of General Sir Redvers Buller's column that relieved the besieged town of Ladysmith, and George fought at Colenso and in several other engagements before being invalided home with an ulcer. The family moved to 2 Aylmer Cottages, Queens Road, before moving again, to 11 Asylum Cottages in Freedown Lane on Banstead Downs.

George was working as a gardener when war broke out in August 1914. He lied about his age, adding a year so that he was "19", old enough to fight overseas, when father and son joined the Army together at Sutton on 10<sup>th</sup> September, one of the busiest recruiting days of the war. They attested with the East Surrey Regiment and were assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion for training. George was then posted to a new battalion, the 10<sup>th</sup>, before being shipped out to join the 9<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion in October 1915 as part of a draft of 230 men, sorely needed replacements for the 9<sup>th</sup> who had suffered devastating casualties at Loos a week earlier.

Even though the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in France for a month, they had yet to spend time in the trenches, so George shared his first taste of trench life with the other men of the battalion. The weather was terrible and there was running water in the trenches; it was a constant battle to keep them in good repair. Communications trenches collapsed and that meant that rations and other supplies had to be carried overland, a dangerous business.

They were able to spend December refitting, training, resting and relaxing with sporting competitions, trips to the cinema and to lectures and concerts before returning to the front line in the New Year.

It was cold and the trenches were in a bad state but at least it was quiet – although "quiet" still meant being shelled, bombarded by trench mortars, daily rifle grenade barrages and exchanging tit-for-tat machinegun fire. There were new threats too: underground warfare was beginning to make its appearance and men from both sides were busy tunnelling and planting mines under No Man's Land and each other's trenches; gas cylinders were arriving in German trenches, now filled with a new, deadlier, gas: phosgene. It would not be long before the valves of those cylinders were opened.

George Edwards died on (or around) the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1916, a victim of attritional trench warfare. The exact circumstances of his death are a mystery as his name is not recorded amongst the dead or wounded in the Battalion's war diary. He was officially recorded as killed in action and he was most likely to have been the victim of a rifle grenade attack.

George is buried in Dranoutre Cemetery. He is commemorated on the Banstead War Memorial, the Garton Memorial in All Saints' churchyard and on the wooden panels inside the church. He was 20.

George was awarded the British War Medal, the Victory Medal and the 1914-15 Star.

Please do come and help to honour his memory at All Saints, Banstead, on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> April.