



Bernard Joseph Donovan was born into a family who came to truly understand the meaning of tragedy and loss. In 1891 the family were living in Exclusion Cottage, Brickfield Yard Isleworth. Father Richard was an agricultural labourer, born in Cork, Ireland. His wife Jane and his children were all born in Brentford. By 1891 they already had three children, Richard (Jr), Dorothy and Agnus. By 1901 the family had moved to a cottage in Taylor's Garden, London Road. Bernard was born in 1893, Jennie in 1896 and little Leonard in 1899. **Very surprisingly, Bernard was educated at Mount St Mary's College, Spinkhill in Derbyshire. This was a Catholic school which may well have offered scholarships to bright boys such as Bernard.** By 1911 father Richard is now a Market Garden Foreman, Richard (Jr) is a Police Constable in London, Agnus a student teacher and Bernard is a junior clerk with 'canal carriers' Fellows, Morton & Clayton Ltd situated at Grand Junction Wharf Brentford. An industrious family!

The family's first experience of family loss occurred in 1907 when 8 year old Leonard died. Jennie (who worked as an uncertified teacher at Grove Road Infant school) died in 1916 'after a long illness' - she was 20. Richard, the eldest son died a little later in 1917. He was 30. Bernard would die the following year.

There are no surviving army service records for Bernard other than his basic army details. **What does survive though is paperwork from his employers relating to an Application for Exemption from Military Service dated May 22nd 1917.** Their reason: *"We are a firm of canal carriers engaged in the Canal Transport of Munitions, Materials for Munitions and important war work generally"....."this man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he is habitually engaged"...."This employee has been medically rejected twice".* This application was rejected - **"it is no longer necessary in the national interest that this man should continue in civil employment"**. The Army won the case. Bernard was called up on 31st July 1917.

Bernard's regimental number was 353760 **I W & D RE** (Inland Waterways & Docks - Royal Engineers) formed in 1915 and often recruited from civilian watermen. At 17 Bernard was a Junior Clerk but by 25 **he was a Company Sergeant Major!** Bernard was clearly a strong character, a quick learner and probably had excellent people skills. He died on 15th February 1919 from influenza and pneumonia ...sadly whilst on 'demobilisation furlough' (the process of standing down from the armed forces). His grave is in Isleworth's Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery.



The Chapel at Mount St Mary's College.

It enshrines the names of 100 Old Boys called Mountaineers who died in the Great War

Courtesy Richard Clarke & Chris Preston derbyshirewarmemorials.wikispaces.com

