

# *Banstead Remembers*

*Private Charles Couchman*

*Park Cottage, Park Road*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers  
Served in France and Belgium  
Killed in Action, aged 35*



## TUESDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER

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

Charles Couchman, a pedlar and father of five who had served as a drummer boy in the Boer War and was a reservist when war broke out in 1914, was killed at Nieuport, on the Belgian coast, in September 1917. Please come and remember the sacrifice our village made in the Great War.

*We will remember **each** one*

## *Private Charles Couchman Park Cottage, Park Road*

Charles Edward Couchman was born on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1882, at home at 52 Castle Street, St. Giles, London. He was the son of Charles, a foreman housekeeper and veteran of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, and Ellen Couchman (nee Seymour). Charles was one of at least five children. They had moved the short distance from Castle Street to Neal Street, Bloomsbury, by 1891, and the children attended school locally.

Ellen remarried after she was widowed. Her new husband was Frederick Davis, a night attendant at Banstead Asylum, and they were married at All Saints in March 1894. They made their home at Park Cottage, Park Road, which still stands today. Ellen's younger children, probably including Charles, lived with them at Park Cottage and she and Frederick went on to have two sons together.

Charles joined the Army as a drummer boy, aged 14, on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1896. He served with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa for 3 years during the Second Boer War and was mentioned in Despatches. After completing his 7 years with the Colours, Charles joined the permanent fulltime staff of 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, a reserve unit.

In 1904, he married Mary Anne Coyle in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, and they went on to have 5 children together. After Charles completed his 12 years of service and left the Army in 1908, he became a pedlar and they moved to County Tyrone.

Charles had enlisted as a reservist when he left the Army and he was still in the Army Reserve in August 1914 when war broke out. He spent the first half of the war on the Home Front, probably training recruits at the Inniskillings' depot. He eventually went to France to join 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, probably in Summer 1916 to make good their losses on the Somme. They chased the retreating Germans to the Hindenburg Line in early 1917, fought them at Arras in April and then went up to Belgium, where they were in reserve for the Battle of Messines in June. They then marched north, to the coast.

Barbed wire straggled through the sandy dunes where the trenches ran into the sea at the coastal resort of Nieuport. Also running into the sea at Nieuport was the River Yser. In 1914, the Belgians had opened the river's floodgates to create a barrier against the German advance and the flat land to the south was flooded to a width of 2,000-3,000 yards. The British and Belgians held both banks of the river at Nieuport. The plan of campaign for the Flanders offensive of 1917 called for a breakout from Ypres (the attempt would become the Third Battle of Ypres, usually just known as "Passchendaele") in conjunction with landings on the Belgian coast (Operation Hush) and an attack across the River Yser by Fourth Army. The Germans guessed the British plan and launched a spoiling attack at Nieuport on 11<sup>th</sup> July, while the Inniskillings were holding the line; they were fortunate to escape with few casualties.

In September, the Inniskillings held an important sector, which was the main defence of the bridges and locks around Nieuport and which contained the only practical jumping off point for Fourth Army's planned crossing of the Yser in support of Operation Hush. A German attack was expected at any day. On 25<sup>th</sup> September, Charles was killed in action while holding the line. He was 35. He is buried at Coxyde.

*Charles will be commemorated at All Saints at 11:50am on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> September.*