Banstead Remembers

C.S.M. Willie Layzell
of Banstead Asylum

6th Bedfordshire Regiment
Served in France and Belgium
Died, aged 42

SUNDAY 14th JANUARY

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

Willie was an attendant at Banstead Asylum. He was an old soldier who re-enlisted when war broke out and went to France with the Bedfordshire Regiment. He was wounded on the Somme and invalided home. He died soon after being medically discharged from the Army. Please come and remember the sacrifice that our local community made in the Great War.

We will remember each one

Company Sergeant Major Willie Layzell of Banstead Asylum

Willie George Layzell was born in Lambeth in early 1875. He was the son of Thomas, a slater, and Abigail Layzell (nee Tricker). Willie had several brothers and sisters and the family lived at 2 Joiner Street, Southwark, near London Bridge Station. His parents were from Suffolk and they moved the family back there when Willie was about 10 years old, living in the village of Little Cornard.

Willie was apprenticed as a baker in Sudbury and lived with the master baker and his family at their shop. When his master died, Willie joined the Army, enlisting in the Suffolk Regiment. He served in India for nearly five years before going to fight in the Second Boer War, in South Africa. He was captured early in the fighting and was a prisoner of war for nine months before being released and rejoining his regiment.

After Willie returned to Britain in 1903, he got a job with London County Council, working as an attendant at the asylum on Banstead Downs. He lived in the on-site accommodation blocks for single male attendants until he married Edith Bailey, of Lodge Road, Sutton, in Sutton on 31st March 1907.

They made their home at 2 Lenham Gardens, Sutton, and had a son, John, in 1908. They moved to 3 Argyle Terrace, Collingwood Road, where another son, Thomas, was born in 1911. Their next move was to 1 Belmont Road, in Belmont, in 1913-14. Their new house was much closer to Willie's work and several attendants lived in the road with their families. They were still living there when war broke out.

The Council encouraged their employees to join the Armed Forces, keeping their jobs open and continuing to pay their salaries. Willie joined the Army for a second time on 9th September 1914. As he had previous military experience and had been a corporal, he was immediately appointed corporal instructor and then made up to lance sergeant the following day. He helped to train the enthusiastic volunteers that flooded into the Army in the autumn of 1914 and went with them when the 6th Bedfordshires left for France in July 1915.

The Bedfordshires spent most of their time just north of what became the Somme battlefield. When the Somme offensive came in July 1916, the Bedfords were soon sent south to fight. Shot in the neck during an attack in August, Willie was invalided home. While convalescing, he developed a bad cough and started to lose weight. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis, believed by the doctors to be hereditary and aggravated by exposure, gas poisoning and fatigue during his time at the Front.

Willie was treated in Fulham Military Hospital. He transferred to the Royal Defence Corps (WWI's Home Guard) but by then was already too ill to serve. Discharged from the Army in September 1917, Willie died four months later, aged 42. He is buried in the churchyard at St Dunstan's, Cheam.