

Banstead Remembers

Sapper Reginald Moyse

Patient at Banstead Mental Hospital

*Royal Engineers
Served in France
Died, aged 37*



FRIDAY 28th APRIL

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

Reg Moyse, of Herne Hill, served with the Royal Engineers as a skilled tradesman on the Home Front and as a sapper in France. He came back from the war a changed man. Reg died of an infection he contracted while being treated as a patient in Banstead Mental Hospital.

Please come and remember the sacrifice made in the Great War.

*We will remember **each** one*

Sapper Reginald Moyse Patient at Banstead Asylum

Reginald Adolphus Moyse was born in Bray, Berkshire, in the summer of 1879. He was the son of Adolphus, a builder's clerk, and Amelia Moyse and was the youngest of at least eight children. The family lived at 6 Grenfell Road, Bray, and were Wesleyans.

Reg left the village after his father's death and went to live in Lambeth, London, where he took 2 unfurnished rooms on the first floor of 44 Denmark Road. He married a local girl, Edith Maud Downs, in the summer of 1905. They made their home at 129 Paulet Road, Camberwell, and later in Heron Road, Herne Hill, and had five sons, with the first of them, Reginald William, arriving within a year. Arthur Charles, followed in 1909, then Horace Alfred was born in 1910, Cyril Bernard in 1912 and Leonard James in January 1914.

Reg was a "very good" typesetter/compositor, meaning he made metal printing type and composed (arranged) the type for use in the printing press. Composing needed nimble fingers, the ability read to upside down and a good deal of skill to do quickly and accurately.

Reg (5ft 11in tall and 35 years old) enlisted in the Army on 11th December 1914, signing on for the duration of the war, and joined the Royal Engineers. The Engineers were responsible for printing the Army's literature and it was with them that his skills would be put to best use in the war effort. He was classed as "skilled" which meant that he received extra pay.

He worked at the Regimental Depot, at Chatham, Kent, until 22nd August 1915, when he was transferred to 9th Field Company, who were with 4th Division and the British Expeditionary Force in France. He joined his new unit on 17th September. The Field Companies of the Royal Engineers were responsible for planning, building and improving defences, supervising the construction and repair of trenches, building and maintaining bridges and, sometimes, blowing them up.

Reg was not a well man and was only with his unit for a fortnight before being admitted to No.10 General Hospital on 1st October. It was to be the first of many visits to hospital. When he returned to duty, it was with another field company, the 56th. He was not with them long before he was back in hospital in November, then again in January 1916. After just a week with yet another field company, he returned to hospital for a long stay. He had been concussed and buried by a shell, leaving him "weak and nervous". After his discharge, he joined 7th Entrenching Battalion but lasted just three weeks before being admitted to a Field Ambulance. He was admitted to 8th General Hospital on 28th June and was shipped home to England the following day, arriving on 1st July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

Reg was already suffering from a degenerative neurological condition, similar to dementia, and the stress of active service and the concussion had accelerated his decline, leaving him in a "facile, euphoric state". He was discharged as no longer fit for service and became an Army pensioner, receiving a pension of 20 shillings per week and an allowance for each child. By February 1917, he had been admitted to Banstead Mental Hospital, which used to stand on Banstead Downs, where the prisons are now.

In April 1917, Reg contracted erysipelas, known as "St Anthony's Fire", a bacterial skin infection. Penicillin had not yet been discovered and, on the 28th, he died. He was 37.

Reg was buried on 4th May in the hospital cemetery. Years later, the graveyard was cleared for use as farmland but a covenant protects Reg's war grave and his headstone still stands in the field to this day, his grave tended to down the years by the hospital, then by the prison governor and now by the farmer who owns the field.