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A Valentine unloved for over 125 years, till now

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Another short and tragic life buried in an unmarked grave in Epsom's abandoned Horton Cemetery is brought to life by one of the volunteer team of researchers. The full story can be read on www.hortoncemetery.org

The story of **Valentine Ridley**: At just 6 years old, in 1897, we find Valentine and his sister Elizabeth in the Greenwich Union Poor School. Their father George is "in house", that is, living in the workhouse. There is no mention of Valentine's mother or his younger sisters. Later in October Elizabeth is released 'c/o Father'.

In May 1898 Valentine and all three of his sisters were admitted, along with their father, to the Greenwich Union Work House, their address is given as Snead Street, New Cross which is shown on Booth's Maps as "comfortable" two storey houses, with bay windows, usually shared by two families. Sadly, by August of that year Valentine was in the Brighton Road, School, Sutton. His father is now shown as 'out of house on leave'. In June of this year Valentine's youngest sister, Florence, was transferred to the Work House Infirmary where she died in October 1898, having lived a short sad life, so possibly George's 'leave' was due to this event.

Periods of leave were granted to look for work, deal with family problems or celebrations. Someone like Valentine's father George, became known as an "in and out" as they spent their lives in and out of the workhouse/infirmary.

The 1901 Census, taken on 31st March, shows all three children in the Banstead Road School, Sutton, but on 23rd Dec 1901 Valentine, Elizabeth and Mildred are discharged from the Brighton Rd School and returned to the Workhouse again. These two schools were run by the same authority and seem almost interchangeable.



23	Ridy	Ridley	Eliz[th]	Greenwich		Masters	6	1	3	1	To the Workhouse
"	"	"	"	Valentine	"		"	8	1	1	1	"	"
"	"	"	"	Mildred	"		"	7	1	3	1	"	"

on 18th November 1909 he is admitted to the Ewell Epileptic Colony where he lived for the next 7 years. According to the 1911 Census he developed Epilepsy when he was 16 years old, just one year prior to being admitted. With no family to care for him we can assume that the Greenwich Union was happy to pass his care to the Epileptic Colony in Ewell.

Valentine died on 21st February 1916 and was buried in the Horton Estate Cemetery on 25th February in plot number 2014a, he was just 23yrs old.

The 'Epsom Colony', part of the Epsom Cluster of five mental hospitals' had been opened in 1903 to care for "the Epileptic insane of the Metropolis". This new approach housed patients in a collection of villas, avoiding the stigma of living in a mental asylum. The treatment consisted of a specially regulated diet and doses of potassium bromide, the first effective treatment for controlling epilepsy. The patients were expected to contribute to their costs by working on the hospital farm or in the kitchens, laundry or bakery, all of which supported the Epsom cluster of hospitals.

Lesley Lee

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