

COMMUNITY



BRAVERY: A Commonwealth War Graves Commission stonemason adds the MM inscription to the gravestone of Pte William Bannister, inset

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Hero's medal is recognised

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A FIRST World War soldier's forgotten heroism has been marked on his gravestone almost 100 years after his death.

Private William Bannister's war grave at Hildersham churchyard has now been altered to show that he had been awarded the Military Medal (MM), which was missed in the original inscription.

A mason from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission had to cut a new piece of stone into the memorial so that MM could be added after Pte Bannister's name.

Pte Bannister died of his wounds in the Eastern General Hospital, Cambridge, in December 1917, and was buried in Hildersham churchyard.

He had been awarded the medal for bravery in the field, although the full details of his heroism are not known.

Andrew Westwood-Bate, churchwarden and treasurer at Holy Trinity Church, Hildersham, said Pte Bannister, who was born at Barnardiston, near Haverhill, had served in the 11th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, which was the Cambridge and Isle of Ely battalion, recruiting locally.

He said: "The Suffolk Regiment was badly affected in the Battle of the Somme and in battles in 1917 and 1918. "Willie survived the dev-



HONOUR: The new addition to Pte Bannister's grave

astation of the first day of the Somme on the July 1, 1916, for the Battalion, ending up back in the trenches in October 1917.

"In an attack on October 21-22, the battalion lost a good deal of men. Willie was severely injured after displaying exemplary bravery," Mr Westwood-Bate said.

"Back in Cambridge, he was treated at the 1st Eastern General Hospital, where the University Library is today.

"On December 4, 1917, he succumbed to his wounds and was laid to rest in Hildersham churchyard, as his father was a horse keep-

er in the village at the time." He said that in January 1918 the King announced in the gazette that Pte Bannister had been awarded the Military Medal. This was recorded on the war memorial in the church, but not on the gravestone.

Mr Westwood-Bate said: "It is the only war grave in the churchyard, and this year will be the 100th anniversary of his death."

He said the fact that Pte Bannister's gravestone was being corrected a century on was something to be welcomed.

"Fascinatingly, as there is not enough room to add the information, a new bit of stone has been inserted," he added.

He said that although the insert was paler than the rest of the stone, it would blend in over the years.

Mr Westwood-Bate said Pte Bannister, the son of Walter and Emily Bannister, was shown in the census of 1911 as working as a teenage farm labourer in Impington.

He joined A Company of the 11th Battalion in 1914, together with many of his friends.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which maintains war graves and also celebrates its centenary this year, said it did carry out alterations to gravestones from time to time when new information came in.

A spokesman for the Suffolk Regiment Museum in Bury St Edmunds said: "I am glad the MM is being added. I approve of that."

CRIME

Raiders threaten OAP with hammer

POLICE are hunting three masked raiders who threatened a man in his 80s with a hammer before ransacking his home.

Between 7.30pm and 8pm on Thursday, three men smashed through a window of a home in The Wyches, Little Thetford.

One man was armed with a hammer, which he used to threaten and demand money from the victim. The men then searched the property before stealing an unknown sum of cash.

Three men, of a similar description, struck at the home

of another pensioner in nearby Sutton around an hour later.

Cambridgeshire police are currently keeping an open mind about whether the two burglaries are linked.

A spokeswoman from Cambridgeshire police said: "One was armed with a hammer and demanded money from the male victim [in his 80s]. They conducted a search of the property before making off with some cash. The men are described as white, all wearing dark clothing, boots and a hat."

Around half an hour later at 8.30pm, three masked men

forced their way into a Sutton property owned by a woman in her 60s.

Posing as 'gas board' officials the commen came to the door and barged into the woman's bungalow in Mill Field. They forced her face down on to a bed while they ransacked her home and got away with her handbag and purse.

One man was reported to be wearing a high-vis jacket and dark clothing with his face concealed. The other two were wearing dark clothing and hats with their faces concealed.

Anyone with information is asked to call police on 101.

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