

Battlefield Cross - James Walker Gittings

Lance Corporal James Walker Gittings (Service No. 2594), 1st Battalion Hertfordshire Regiment, died on 19 July 1916 (aged 28). The 2011 Census records that pre-war James was a gardener at Tyntesfield House. James, an unmarried man, is likely to have served in the army prior to the outbreak of war as he went to France with the British Expeditionary Force in September 1914. The circumstances of his death can be discerned from the War Diary:



A party of three Officers and sixty Other Ranks raided the enemy trenches at 10:40pm. The part of the trench that had been evacuated by the Germans. The party was in the enemy trenches for ten minutes as arranged but was bombed from the support line. No prisoners were taken. Our casualties on the evening were three Officers wounded, three Other Ranks killed, one Other Rank missing, twelve Other Ranks wounded.

Gittings is buried with two of his companions at Le Touret Military Cemetery, Richebourg-L'avoue. The cross which originally marked his grave is a simple wooden crucifix with the standard Graves Registration Unit information attached on metal strips - the date of death, the Imperial War Graves Commission plot reference, service number, name, rank and unit.

It is likely that James's parents, Charles and Emma Gittings (who lived in Priory Cottage in the grounds of Abbots Leigh Priory) sought the return of the marker. Indeed, the chosen inscription on Gittings' headstone at Le Touret reads 'Dearly Loved Son of Mr and Mrs Gittings, Abbots Leigh, Bristol'.

Charles and Emma died in 1936 and 1931 respectively and James is commemorated on his parents' grave in the churchyard as well as on the village War Memorial which is outside, just beyond the doorway to the church.