

Returned From The Front: Researching a Repatriated Battlefield Cross.



This grave marker turned up at the RMP museum around September 2017 as part of Nick Stone's survey of repatriated grave markers from the First World War. A cross from a unknown burial from the 1/24th London Regiment. For details of the survey project see: <https://thereturned.co.uk/>

As the creator of Geoff's Search Engine (GSE), I was asked to try to help determine the cemetery from where this marker was taken. We'd had some success tracing the original location of a few crosses, it depends on how common the GRU reference is. I intended to write up the search method used back then, so here it is some years later!

Using GSE it is possible to find burials from a particular cemetery, plot and row, if they are of the common form: plot.row.grave. For example VIII. A. 9 which is common in cemeteries with several plots. This is obviously not practical with the number of cemeteries in France and Belgium to find a particular cross location. I had attempted to search for this cross back then, but it was not conclusive and my data was not up to date. Now the data is updated, I decided to try again. The first problem is the Graves Registration Unit (GRU) tag is not clear, is it 7 C 17 or 7 G 17 ? I'm leaning towards the latter.

Having an updated set of data from CWGC and using an off-line search of the data using a short query program, which needs to do two things. First produce a list of all cemeteries which have a plot 7 and a row G, then find all cemeteries which have a known burial in grave 17 and remove these from the list. This takes about 2 minutes of computer time, but very much longer to write the code!. The CWGC database accessible to the public only consists of identified burials, so to find the grave for this cross it is required to locate a known burial in the same plot and row. (I'm sure CWGC have unknown burial plots in their database but there is no public access to these). Once you have found a known burial for each cemetery in the list, it is simply a case of tediously, manually examining the grave registration unit documents on the CWGC search feature to check every plot 7 and row G from our putative cemetery list.

HABARCQ COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION
WANCOURT BRITISH CEMETERY
WARLOY-BAILLON COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION
LES BARAQUES MILITARY CEMETERY, SANGATTE
WARLINCOURT HALTE BRITISH CEMETERY, SAULTY
OOSTTAVERNE WOOD CEMETERY
VLAMERTINGHE NEW MILITARY CEMETERY
STRAND MILITARY CEMETERY
ST. PIERRE CEMETERY, AMIENS
GOUZEAUCOURT NEW BRITISH CEMETERY
TINCOURT NEW BRITISH CEMETERY
A.I.F. BURIAL GROUND, FLERS
ORCHARD DUMP CEMETERY, ARLEUX-EN-GOHELLE
MARFAUX BRITISH CEMETERY
QUEANT ROAD CEMETERY, BUISSY
FLESQUIERES HILL BRITISH CEMETERY
MONT HUON MILITARY CEMETERY, LE TREPORT
CONNAUGHT CEMETERY, THIEPVAL
LONSDALE CEMETERY, AUTHUILLE
OVILLERS MILITARY CEMETERY
DANTZIG ALLEY BRITISH CEMETERY, MAMETZ
DELVILLE WOOD CEMETERY, LONGUEVAL

The first few possible locations in the cemetery list with a plot 7 and a row G.

GSE can be used to search the plot (7 entered as VII) and row (G) for each cemetery from the above list. For TINCOURT NBC:

Regiment/Corps:	United Kingdom		
Secondary Regt:	Not selected		
Secondary unit text:			
Cemetery/memorial:	TINCOURT NEW BRITISH CEMETERY		
Plot:	VII	Row:	G

This search produces a list of casualties in row G of plot 7:

Page 1 of 1

001	DANCE	W	21000	5TH BN.	30/07/1916	ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT	VII. G. 16.
002	FRENCH	E	12327	19TH BN.	09/07/1916	MANCHESTER REGIMENT	VII. G. 6.
003	KENNEDY	J	15655	10TH BN.	01/07/1916	ROYAL INNISKILLING FUSILIERS	VII. G. 19.
004	MITCHELL	H	22689	23RD BN.	25/07/1916	MANCHESTER REGIMENT	VII. G. 14.
005	TRUSTY	T	L/16225	""D"" COY. 26TH BN."	26/09/1916	ROYAL FUSILIERS	VII. G. 2.

We look for a nearby casualty, there is one in VII. G. 16 and select this CWGC record to examine the original GRU documents. We note there is an unknown British Soldier in grave 17, but of an unknown regiment so it is probably not our grave marker which is for a soldier of the 1/24th London Regiment.

Row G produced a cemetery list of about 30 possible cemeteries and similar for row C. So the only option is to 'soldier on' and manually check each cemetery in our list. Had the GRU tags been less usual, for example the first one identified was 58 E 47 (plot 58, row E, grave 47), which only appears in one cemetery – Tyne Cot Cemetery, it would be an easy task, see:

<http://thereturned.co.uk/crosses/cuddington/>



Links to the grave registration documents on each CWGC casualty page.

No. 5 Area, I.W.G.C.
Serial No. 90.
20/1/25.

Army Form W. 3372.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.
REPORT No. 4.

SCHEDULE No. 1236. ^{142c}

COMMUNE:- TINCOURT BOUCLY.

PLACE OF BURIAL TINCOURT NEW BRITISH CEMETERY.

Map Reference 62c. J.23. b.4.7.

The following are buried here:—

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave No.
		Plot 7; Row "G" ^{G 27/1996}				
5/D.G.		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.	✓	-	E.	12. ✓
Manchesters. REGT		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.	✓	-	E.	13. ✓
23/Manchesters.	22689	MITCHELL.	Pte. H.	25/7/16.	E. 574/5739	14. ✓
Kings.		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.	✓	-	E.	15. ✓
5/R. Berks. att'd w/ Manc. R.	21000	DANCE	Pte. W.	30-7-16	E. 574/5737	16. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.	✓	-	E.	17. ✓
Manchesters. REGT		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.	✓	-	E.	18. ✓
R.H.A. F.A.	15657	KENNEDY.	Pte. J	1-7-16	E. 574/5737	19. ✓
		ROW "G" ^{G 27/1996}				
145/H.B. R.G.A.	109511	BROWN	Gnr. F.A.H.	18/9/18.	E.	8. ✓
315/Bde. R.F.A.	695873	DYSON	Gnr. N.R.	20/9/18.	E.	9. ✓
-do.-	262921	CLARK	Gnr. N.	20/9/18.	E.	10. ✓
-do.-	50364	SOUTHAN	Sgt. W.	20/9/18.	E.	11. ✓
12/R. Scots. REGT	4022	SUTHERLAND	Pte. J.	23-3-18	E. 574/5737	12. ✓
R.A.M.C.		RYLEY	Major. C.	4/5/17.	E.	13. ✓
S. African Sig. Co.	9781	FOGARTY	Spr. T.	10/4/17.	E.	14. ✓
Co. 21/Middx. Regt.	15758	FLOWER	L/Cpl. T.C.	10/4/17.	E.	15. ✓

Grave registration document for plot VII. Row G. at Tincourt New British Cemetery with an Unknown British Soldier in grave 17

If a row only holds unknown burials then it is impossible to identify the grave since there are no known burials on which to pull up the GRU documents and this may be a possibility.

It may also occur that a row covers more than one page in the GRU document, if the row is long or if there are several rows per page and the page we want has no identified burials, so cannot be called up from the CWGC search result page. There is a possibility in such a case to look at the URL of one of the pages and adjust the URL page number to get to the adjacent page. In the example below, grave 17 is on the previous page:

Commune; - MIRAUMONT.
PLACE OF BURIAL
ADANAC M.C.

Map Reference 57d.R.18.a.3.4.

The following are buried here:— *Johnston*

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave
		Plot. 7. ROW "G"				
S.FUS.		UNKNOWN	SOLDIER		ALL	18. ✓
C.E.F.		"	"		CROSSES	19. ✓

Hovering the mouse pointer over the link to the document reveals the URL of the GRU document:

<https://archive.cloud.cwgc.org/archive/doc/doc1962986.JPG>

If we change the URL to the one before:

<https://archive.cloud.cwgc.org/archive/doc/doc1962985.JPG>

We find grave 17 on the previous page, which is on a page of unknowns, so not normally accessible to us. An unknown British soldier, but no regiment recorded, so not likely to be our man from 1/24th Londons.

-do-

"	"	"	"	18. ✓
"	"	BRITISH SOLDIER	"	19. ✓
"	"	"	"	14. ✓
"	"	"	"	15. ✓
"	"	"	"	16. ✓
"	"	"	"	17. ✓

ENTERED 10/6/11
CHECKED 938.
7.71

(6 31 5) W3160—P2723 100,000 9/19 HWV P1024) Forms/W33723

All cemetery searches from both lists were inconclusive, but there is one possible grave. In Warlencourt British Cemetery there is a unknown British soldier of the 1/23rd London Regiment. In VII. G. 17. Could this be our man? – there were errors, some corrected, in the GRU documents. These burials were all exhumed, so were presumably originally identified by shoulder titles, so unlikely to be any confusion between 23 and 24, but humans make errors sometimes.

There is also the possibility that the grave marker was from a cemetery with a row populated with all unknowns, which we can't find with the available information.

P.L. 27/9/20

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.

Army Form W. 3372.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

3rd A.S No. W/ *40724*

Commune: **WARLENCOURT.** REPORT No. **60.** SCHEDULE No. *113e*

PLACE OF BURIAL **WARLENCOURT B.C.**

Map Reference **57c.M11.d.15.90.**

4 NOV 1920

The following are buried here:— *Exhumation*

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave
PLOT 7. ROW "G" Cont'd.						
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.			ALL	14. ✓
3/17 LONDONS.	<i>6821</i>	FISHER. ✓	PTE. H.	1-10-16.	<i>41-2/23/2081</i> CROSSES	15. ✓
20/ "	5181	HEATH. ✓	" S.	1-10-16.	<i>41/23/2081</i> ERECTED.	16. ✓
23/ "		UNKNOWN SOLDIER.				17. ✓
20/ LONDONS	<i>688789</i> LATE 7532	RICHMAN. ✓	PTE. R.	1-10-16	<i>RU/22.726</i>	18. ✓
17/ "	<i>573044</i> <i>(late)</i> 6083	LODDER. DOLMER. ✓	TFN. J.	1-10-16	<i>RU/19672</i>	19. ✓
23/ "		UNKNOWN	SGT.			20. ✓
23/ "	3490	BESWICK. ✓	PTE. E.			21. ✓
10/ W. YORKS.	<i>54723</i>	HOUGHTON. ✓	2/LT. G.	<i>9/22/106</i>	<i>X 4/2049</i>	22. ✓
LINCOLNS	<i>42038</i>	RAMMER. STAMMER. ✓	PTE. S.	<i>26-8-18.</i>	<i>RU 34323.</i>	23. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.				24. ✓
1/5 D.L.I.	4110	SMITH. ✓	PTE. J.	26.1.17	<i>24/2049 (H.S.)</i>	24. ✓
		UNKNOWN SOLDIER.				25. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.				26. ✓
		-do-	-do-			27. ✓
		-do-	-do-			28. ✓
1/5 N. FUSILIERS.	<i>2</i> 7496. ✓	BUCHANAN. ✓	L/SGT. A	<i>14</i> 15/11/16	<i>RU/39107</i>	28. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.				29. ✓

(G 31 5) W3150-P2723 100,000 9/19 HWV(P1024) Forms W3372/3

Cards made for Houghton, Rammer & Stammer (to replace) 18.2.21

ENTERED
SLIPS CHECKED
6 17/20
6/15/20
Card made 5M17H 16.11.21

Plot 7 Row G Warlencourt British Cemetery

Cross to Unknown British Soldier, 13. H. 14



Cross of Unknown British Soldier with GRU label 13. H. 14 at St Paul's, Hooton, Wirral.
(Photo credit Margaret Draycott, Beverley Goodwin)

This cross has a less common plot and row 13. H. There are only nine cemeteries with this reference, and the original grave is easily found at Serre Road Cemetery No 2, Plot 13, Row H, Grave 14:

Cemetery with plot 13, row H

VLAMERTINGHE NEW MILITARY CEMETERY
VOORMEZEELE ENCLOSURE NO.3
HOOGE CRATER CEMETERY
OVILLERS MILITARY CEMETERY
DELVILLE WOOD CEMETERY, LONGUEVAL
LOOS BRITISH CEMETERY
CATERPILLAR VALLEY CEMETERY, LONGUEVAL
SERRE ROAD CEMETERY NO.2
GUILLEMONT ROAD CEMETERY, GUILLEMONT

Grave 14

Known burial
Unknown Northumberland Fusilier
Known burial
Row length 10
Row length 10
Known burial
Row length 10
Unidentified British Soldier
Row length 10

Rows of length 10 and 13 seem to be common and cemeteries with these often appear in the list of cemeteries to search and can only be rejected by manual examination where the wanted grave number is higher.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

Comprehensive Report.

REPORT No. 93. SCHEDULE No. 133c.

Communes: - Beaumont-Hamel & Hebuterne.

PLACE OF BURIAL Serre Road Cemetery, No. 2.

Map Reference 57d. K.35. a.l.0.

All Concentrations.

Plot 13, Row H.

The following are buried here:—

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave No.
		Unknown Australian Soldier.		-	E.	1. ✓
2/Welsh Regt.	33763.	Nicholas.	Pte J.P.	26.7.16	E. Eff/21092	2. ✓
		Unknown Australian Soldier.		-	E. Eff/21093	3. ✓
5/Bn. A.I.F.	1819.	Tulloch.	Pte. E.B.	25.7.16	E. Eff/21094	4. ✓
		Unknown British Soldier.		-	E.	5. ✓
Durham L.I.		Unknown British Soldier.		-	E.	6. ✓
		Unknown British Soldier.		-	E.	7. ✓
W.Yorks.		Unknown British Soldier.		-	E.	8. ✓
		Unknown Australian Soldier.		-	E.	9. ✓
5/Bn. A.I.F.	3328	LYNALL	Pte F.E.P.	25.7.16	E. Eff/21096	10. ✓
5/Bn. A.I.F.		Unknown Australian Soldier.		-	E.	11. ✓
		Unknown British Soldier.		-	E. Eff/21097	12. ✓
W.Yorks.		Unknown British Soldier.		-	E.	13. ✓
		Unknown British Soldier.		-	E.	14. ✓
9th Black Watch.	11385.	Laird.	Pte G.	8.9.16	E. Eff/21098	15. ✓
45th Bn A.I.F.	2708	Young	Pte J.	7.8.16	E. Eff/21099	16. ✓
		Unknown Australian Soldier.		-	E.	17. ✓
		Unknown Australian Soldier.		-	E. Eff/21099	17. ✓

50311 W3423/4914 10m(2) 2/22 J.P. 301 Gp. 121 Forms/W3372/4

ENTERED. 31.10.27
SLIPS CHECKED. AC. 31.10.27

Plot 13, Row H Serre Road Cemetery No. 2

This cross was surveyed by Margaret Draycott and Beverley Goodwin. For details of this cross see:

<https://thereturned.co.uk/crosses/hooton/>

Cross to Unknown British Soldier, 13. B. 11.



Cross of Unknown British Soldier with GRU label 13. B.11. at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral
(Photo credit Margaret Draycott, Beverley Goodwin)

A search for this grave reference found 8 locations where the row length was 10 or less and five unknown soldiers. Four of these had an identified regiment, only one was wholly unidentified at St. Mary's A.D.S. Cemetery, Haisnes in plot XIII. B. 11.

CLEMENT HOUSE CEMETERY
ST. MARY'S A.D.S. HAINNES
POELCAPELLE BRITISH CEMETERY
A.I.F. BURIAL GROUND, FLEURS
PERTH CEMETERY, (CHINA WALL)

U.B.S. Seaforths
U.B.S.
U.S.B. South Wales Borderer
U.S.B. Machine Gun Corps
Unknown Canadian Soldier

This cross was surveyed by Margaret Draycott and Beverley Goodwin. For details of this cross see:

<https://thereturned.co.uk/crosses/liverpool-anglican-cathedral/>

M.M. 2-11-20
COMPREHENSIVE REPORT. Army Form W. 3372.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

No. 1. District. REPORT No. 18 SCHEDULE No. 98c.
HAINES

PLACE OF BURIAL ST. MARYS A.D.S. BRITISH CEMETERY.

Map Reference 44a.G.17.b.5.G. Major
D.A.D.G.R. & E. "A"

The following are buried here:— PLOT 13. ROW "A". *102*

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave
Som, L.I.	UNKNOWN	BRITISH	SOLDIER.			18 ✓
"	"	"	"			19 ✓
"	"	"	"			20 ✓

ROW "B".						
D/62 R.F.A.	86930	CROOKE.	GNR. R.A.	7-10-15	R/39676	1 ✓
	UNKNOWN	BRITISH	SOLDIER.			2 ✓
"	"	"	"			3 ✓
"	"	"	"			4 ✓
"	"	"	"			5 ✓
"	"	"	"			6 ✓
"	"	"	"			7 ✓
"	"	"	"			8 ✓
"	"	"	"			9 ✓
"	"	"	"			10 ✓
"	"	"	"			11 ✓
"	"	"	"			12 ✓
1/s. Wales Bdrs.	18230	<i>INCE.</i>	<i>INCE.</i>	24-2-16	64/5/6/5392.	13 ✓

D. G. R. & E.
12 JAN 1921

INCE.
INCE.
D. 15 1/2 A.

SLIPS CHECKED *20.44*

Plot 13, Row B of St. Mary's A.D.S.

Other identified locations

Cardiff Castle.

Wooden cross with GRU tags 47-B-2, Welsh Regiment.
Found in Tyne Cot Cemetery

<http://thereturned.co.uk/crosses/cardiff-cardiff-castle-wales/>

St. Andrews, Chedworth, Gloucestershire.

Wooden cross with GRU tags 55-D-9, Unknown British Soldier
Found in Tyne Cot Cemetery

<http://thereturned.co.uk/crosses/chedworth-st-andrews-gloucestershire/>

St. Hilda's Church, Halifax, West Yorkshire.

Wooden cross with GRU tags 55-K-11, Unknown British Soldier.
This is a mystery as I can't find a plot 55 with a row K anywhere. It may be a row of unidentified soldiers.

<http://thereturned.co.uk/crosses/halifax-st-hildas-church-west-yorkshire/>

There are a few more unresearched on The Returned survey, with significantly more probable sites:

3-B-13 St. Matthews Church, Bromborough, Wirral.
3-B-14 Christ Church, Barnton, Northwich, Cheshire.
(the above two may have been neighbours?)
2-G-4 Parkgate and Neston URC, Parkgate, Cheshire.
3-A-3 St. Peter and St. Paul, Ormskirk, Lancashire.
And the mysterious:
0-L-7 Lady Haig's Poppy Factory, Edinburgh.

Some of these could probably be identified, if there is good reason for the effort!

The updated GSE can be found at:

www.hut-six.co.uk/cgi-bin/searchWW1.php

© Geoff Sullivan. November 2023.

Summary of Locations of Unknown returned crosses

GRU Number	GRU Details	Found on Search	Possible locations	Close match	Grave in Tyne Cot
13-H-14	UBS	Serre Rd. No.2			No row
13-B-11	UBS	St. Mary's A.D.S.			Known burial
3-B-13	UBS		200		UBS
3-B-14	UBS		200		UBS
2-G-4	UBS		81		No plot
3-A-3	UBS		131		No document found
7-C-17 or 7-G-17	1/24 London	Possible?	38	1/23 London, Warlencourt B. C.	Known or not UBS Regiment
47-B-2	Welsh	Tyne Cot Cemetery			
55-D-9	UBS	Tyne Cot Cemetery			
55-K-11	UBS	Plot/Row not found			
58-E-47	UBS	Tyne Cot Cemetery			
O-L-7	UBS				

Summary of locations. There was a theory that all crosses could have been from Tyne Cot Cemetery – clearly this is not the case.

Notes.

3-B-13 and 3-B-14 are UBS in Tyne Cot Cemetery but other locations not searched.

Possible other matches with high number of locations.

3-A-3 no GRU documents found for Tyne Cot, could be all unknowns in row A.

55-K-11 does not exist in Tyne Cot Cemetery.

2-G-4 does not exist in Tyne Cot Cemetery.

O-L-7 is possibly a field burial reference which used letters, rather than a cemetery plot/row reference.

Appendix A: Part of the search code, viewed from 23 feet.

```
filein = fopen("returned.csv","r+t"); //input file
fileout = fopen("out.txt","w+t"); //output file

for(k = 0; k++) {

    memset(buf, 0, sizeof(buf));
    memset(buf2, 0, sizeof(buf2));
    if(fgets(buf, sizeof(buf)-1, filein) == NULL) //read record
        break;

    strcpy(buf2, buf);
    rfield = 0;
    memset(field, 0, sizeof(field));
    for(q = buf; p = strtok(q, "\n") != NULL; q = NULL) {
        field[rfield++] = unpad(p);
        if(rfield == 7)
            break;
    }

    strcpy(str, field[5]);

    if(strcmp(str, "VII. S. ", 0) != 0) //plot row exists?
        continue;

    findit = 0;
    for(i = 0; i <= n; i++) {
        if(strcmp(&finds[i][0], field[4]) == 0) {
            findit = 1;
            break;
        }
    }

    if(findit == 0) {
        strcpy(&finds[n][0], field[4]);
        n++;
    }

    ++found;
}

for(i = 0; i <= n; i++) {
    fprintf(fileout, "%s\n", &finds[i][0]);
}

fclose(filein);
fclose(fileout);

printf("found: %d cons: %d\n", found, n);

fileout = fopen("Plot?-RowC-17.txt","w+t"); //write output file
filepass = fopen("out.txt","r+t"); //read first pass file

for(j = 0; j++) {

    memset(cemetery, 0, sizeof(cemetery));
    if(fgets(cemetery, sizeof(cemetery)-1, filepass) == NULL) //read cemetery
        break;

    for(i = 0; cemetery[i]; i++)
```

WOODEN CROSSES FROM WAR GRAVES.

GIFT TO RELATIVES.

The Imperial War Graves Commission announce that when the temporary wooden crosses that mark the graves of officers and men abroad are replaced by permanent memorials, it will not be possible to preserve beyond a certain time those that are not required by the relatives.

Next-of-kin who wish these wooden crosses to be sent to them are therefore requested to apply to the Secretary, Imperial War Graves Commission, Winchester House, St. James's-square, S.W.1, before September 1, stating the address to which the cross is to be sent and giving the usual particulars regarding the soldier on whose grave it is erected. It will be a convenience if the name of the cemetery is also given.

The wooden cross will be sent in due course, though not for some time, and the secretary should be kept informed of any change of address.
