



Private 40584, 3rd Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment formerly 8th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment). Died 18 January 1919. Aged 20. Son of Harry and Alice Gladstone, of 131, High St., Collier's Wood, Merton, London. Enlisted 1914. Born at Tooting, London. W. Buried in MITCHAM (CHURCH ROAD) BURIAL GROUND. Grave 203.

One of the names on the Mitcham WW1 war memorial behind the old town hall, is J W Gladstone, my great uncle, who died aged 20 in January 1919, two months after the war had ended. I must have walked past that memorial hundreds of times on my way to and from the Star School, but it wasn't until I had moved away from Mitcham, after 26 years living there, that I was taken aside by my uncle and told, in confidence, about Jack Gladstone's story. Why? Because Jack didn't die under a hail of bullets in France, he died under the wheels of a train in Morden and, in those unenlightened days, suicide was considered a sin. So the family didn't talk about it.

Jack joined up in 1914, just two months into the war. He had only just turned 16, so must have lied about his age, as the minimum age for enlisting was 18. He was quickly shipped off to the front in France where he was severely wounded in 1915. He then spent a couple of years in the Labour Corp until 1917, when he was declared fit to fight again and was sent back to the front, where he was "*slightly gassed*" and wounded for a second time, requiring six months in hospital to recover.

Shortly after the war ended in November 1918, he was sent home on 28 days demob leave and his father arranged for him to take a job as a tram conductor. But, as with many men, Jack was mentally scarred by his wartime experiences. These days we would call it post traumatic stress disorder. At the coroner's inquest, Jack's father, Harry Gladstone, said that the night before Jack killed himself,

he had *"heard him shout out. He asked if there was anything the matter, and Jack replied that he had had the nightmare and could not sleep"*.

Before the Suicide Act 1961, it was a crime to commit suicide - if you failed you could go to prison, if you succeeded you would have to be buried in un-consecrated ground. However, that final indignity was avoided as the coroner declared that Jack had been *"temporarily insane"* when he jumped in front of the train. That meant that as Jack was still a serving soldier when he died, albeit on demob leave, he was buried as a war hero in Mitcham Parish Churchyard, where his gravestone is still looked after by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Father Harry, who died 15 years later, is buried next to him.