Private John May

John May was the son of Walter and Mary Anne May who lived in Stonewall Park, Penshurst, Kent, where Walter was a gamekeeper. He had three brothers, at least one of whom , Charles, was a domestic gardener, and one sister.

He enlisted at Tunbridge Wells in the 1st Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, part of the regular army. In 1918 this battalion fought for most of the year, starting in the First Battle of the Somme , and by 20th September were approaching St Quentin. He was killed in action on 20th September 1918, aged 23, most likely around a network of German trenches known as the “Quadrilateral” near Holnon Wood just short of St Quentin. He is buried at Vis-en-Artois Memorial.

In “A Short History of the 6th Division” Thomas Marden describes the scene:

“At the highest point about the centre of the Divisional area of attack was a network of trenches known later as the Quadrilateral--a name of bad omen to the 6th Division--and which, like its namesake on the Somme, could be reinforced under cover from the back slopes of the hill. An examination of the battlefield after the 24th September also revealed several narrow sunken roads filled with wire. The position was one of great natural strength, and in addition the whole of the right was dominated by heights in the area to be attacked by the French. Lastly, adequate time could not be given to Brigades for reconnaissance owing to the imperative necessity of pushing on to guard the flank of Corps farther north. Troops had not seen the ground they had to attack over, and rain and smoke obscured the few landmarks

existing on 18th September.”