



November, 2015

## Special points of interest:

- AGM 2015
- The work of UWCSA
- Finding living descendants
- Fromelles 2016
- Paul Cobb's Presentation
- Involvement with other like minded groups

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Hello again to all our members, friends, and those who share our interest in the Battle of Fromelles and those who we are trying to identify.

Since our last Newsletter, we have been hoping to receive concrete information about the events planned for Fromelles in 2016. While we don't have final details, we can provide some insight. See more info below.

## **AGM HELD ON 25 JULY, 2015 AT EX-SERVICES CLUB, CESSNOCK**

We held our AGM in Cessnock this year, and the venue was an excellent choice. Thanks for scouting the area Royce. We had an attendance of 35 people on the day.

Various reports were presented by Royce Atkinson (President), Bill Irvine (Treasurer), and Geoffrey Benn (Secretary). We had the pleasure of being the audience for Martin Hood, a well-regarded researcher and friend to us all on the topic of "Finding the Living", being the methods used to locate descendants of those who were killed in battle. The objective is to find modern day DNA donors for unidentified soldiers.

In talking of our own role in identifying soldiers who have been recovered from Pheasant Wood, Royce pointed out that:

- 1299 soldiers were ultimately "missing" after THE BATTLE
- 250 were found and re-buried in Fromelles.
- 190 of those 250 were listed on the German Death lists from information passed over from the German Army to the Red Cross.
- 60 other unknown soldiers were also buried.
- There has been a massive expression of interest to date by persons who are not aware whether or not a deceased ancestor will be identified.

*For those lost so far from home.*

- 144 have been positively identified to date.
- Royce suggested we should publish the details of people we have found as potential donors for identification.
- He then gave a presentation on various soldiers on our list of identified donors, with some background stories.
- Royce also spoke on the human toll of research – the ‘burnout’ of researchers.
- Travelling to Fromelles in 2016? Royce spoke on what people have been doing up to date.

### **PRESENTATION BY – BRIAN MANNS, MANAGER UWCSA**

We also had the pleasure of receiving a presentation from Brian Manns, on the Role and Activity of Unrecovered War Casualties Section – Army (UWCS).

Brian commenced his presentation by offering us this insight: “The assistance that the Fromelles Association gives to UWCS-A is invaluable. You don’t just talk about Fromelles, you do something!”

It is fair to say that the information given by our group has contributed a significant amount to the research activities undertaken in attempting to identify recovered or unidentified soldier remains. Hence 144 of the 250 soldiers remains have been identified since 2009.

Brian then proceeded to provide the audience with a "snapshot" of current outcomes and new initiatives at UWCSA.

There were no identification announcements this year.

The identification project was initially jointly British/Australian funded from 2009 - 2014 Then a decision was made for the project to continue under Australian Army management "whilst suitable donors are coming forward". Your members continue to identify relative of soldiers, and once identified, have been seeking their support by providing DNA samples. The “identifications” of potential DNA donors and relations are being received at UWCSA and we will be contacting them this year for DNA sampling.

Brian observed that Army will improve their communications with all donors from now onwards. People will be contacted more quickly to advise of the outcomes of the DNA matching process, no matter whether their DNA has been matched or not.

If anyone wishes to make enquiries with Army as to the progress of their sample donation and the identification process, they are welcome to phone UWCSA on 1800-019-090.

Anyone wishing to email UWC can do so using the address of [army.uwc@defence.gov.au](mailto:army.uwc@defence.gov.au) as well.

The website where information on the identification process can be found is [www.army.gov.au](http://www.army.gov.au), and follow the tab under “Our Work” to ‘UWC’.

A postscript: We have since been contacted by one of the descendants of the family of Henry Gardner, to advise that she had received a letter from the Army UWCSA with regards to the DNA testing. A testing kit had been received, and the sample sent to the Forensics lab based in the south of England. We hope to be informed of the results as soon as they are provided to the family.

### **PRESENTATION BY – MARTIN HOOD**

Martin provided a PowerPoint presentation of great interest to all. Martin pointed out the relative ease of finding the dead, but particularly focussed on the problems associated with locating the living. Privacy Legislation, incomplete data, expenses associated with certificates and the general community reluctance to answer unsolicited phone call from unknown numbers were all canvassed in depth.

Trove, Phone, electoral registers and other traditional sources of information were discussed together with the more "new age" information mediums such as Facebook, twitter and even the results of the city to surf competitors (for NSW searches).

### **GENERAL BUSINESS.**

One matter arose in General Business.

A motion was moved by Geoffrey Benn and seconded by Rene Herbert that:

Our Association calls on the Australian Government to formally record that those who served at Fromelles, France and were killed or wounded on the evening of 19 & 20 July, 1916, were in fact killed or wounded in a Battle during World War 1.

Having been so involved that “Fromelles” must be inscribed on war memorials honouring the service of soldiers who served in World War 1.

The motion was carried unanimously.

You can also  
check out our  
Facebook  
page under:  
Fromelles  
Association of  
Australia.  
Click on  
Recent Posts.

## **FROMELLES 19 JULY 2016 – WHAT IS HAPPENING?**

Returning to the ongoing question.

We continue to receive ‘snippets’ from different sources. One such source came via Cheryl Cash who posted on the Facebook page of Fromelles 2016 Commemoration:-

*I am not with the DVA. We emailed them today to find out what was happening and this is the info we got.*

*There will be a commemorative service open to the public conducted at the Fromelles Military (Pheasant Wood) Cemetery at 1:00pm on Tuesday 19 July 2016. The town of Fromelles will also be conducting a range of activities yet to be confirmed throughout the day. The French Authorities are still finalising their traffic management arrangements but it is likely that tour operators will be able to drop and pick up their clients in the centre of Fromelles and those self-driving will be directed to a park and ride location where they will be shuttled into Fromelles.*

*Due the overall capacity of the site there will be a process to manage attendance implemented and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs will make an announcement on the details of the service and how attendance will be managed in November 2015. At the same time all of the information will become available on the DVA website.*

We have this week received advice from Vicki Munday, **Director - Western Front Commemorations, Commemorations and War Graves Division**, that they “are aware of some recent information available on the internet but not sure how accurate it is. Vicki went on to advise that DVA recently held tour operator briefings in Australia and in Europe, to alert those companies who had clients who had booked and paid for travel (to attend Centenary services in France in 2016) about preliminary arrangements regarding attendance at the services. While information was provided in an effort to assist with their forward business planning and prepare them to provide finalised information to their clients, it appears some operators have chosen to advertise preliminary information [on their websites] which has not yet been announced by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and therefore not confirmed.

In an effort to manage attendance at small cemetery and memorial sites, a registration process for Australian citizens and permanent residents to receive an attendance pass will shortly be announced

by the Minister for Veteran' Affairs, we are hoping around the first week in December, noting this is not a confirmed date.

As new information becomes available, it will be immediately be placed on the DVA websites [www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au) and [www.anzaccentenary.gov.au](http://www.anzaccentenary.gov.au)

With regard to the families involved in the rededications for 2016, our defence colleagues will be liaising directly with the families, and are meeting with us on Wednesday to discuss detailed arrangements. We will be able to provide further information at that time."

We are therefore waiting to be advised as to registering our interest in attending, so we will be provided an opportunity to register our planned attendance before the registration site is made public.

—oo00oo—

Many members of our association are also members of other groups with an interest in World War 1. You would not be surprised therefore that the management committee also liaise with, are invited to, and attend, other meetings, thus ensuring that we are part of the wider fabric of World War 1 history. Some accounts of activities with those other groups are set out following.

### **AUSTRALIAN WORLD WAR ONE DESCENDANTS ASSOCIATION**

#### **"AWWOD"**

Being part of this group permits families of deceased soldiers to march on Anzac Day. It was my very great pleasure to do so in honour of my great uncle, William Polding Ryan who was killed at Fromelles on 19 July, 1916. The crowds at the side of the street gave out a tremendous feeling of pride to those who participated. I had the further honour of marching alongside one of my work colleagues whose great ancestor served at Villers-Bretoneux.

Geoffrey Benn

#### **AWWOD AGM HELD ON 8 JULY, 2015.**

At their AGM on 8 July, we were advised about that association's attempts to look at various charities worthy of their help. They have discovered a project in Pozierres France, to erect a memorial park and also rebuilt the original Windmill for the 2016 centenary. The site chosen for the memorial park has been described by Charles Bean as "a site more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth". The windmill was destroyed during the battle in 1916 and will be rebuilt by the French Government, but they have given Australia land around it on which the memorial park will be built.

Geoffrey Benn

**Why not  
Submit Your  
Family's story  
for inclusion in  
future  
Newsletters?**

It will also be protected from any further development in the future. The Pozierres Remembrance Assn Inc. is selling bricks for \$50.00 each to raise money for the memorial park, as the Australian government at this stage are not providing much assistance. AWWOD is considering donating \$3000.00 to the memorial to be used as a garden with a plaque bearing its name.

Pozierres is of course, one of the sites which will be the scene of remembrance events in 2016. For more information about AWWOD, go to their website at [www.AWWOD.org.au](http://www.AWWOD.org.au).

### **FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THE FIRST AIF**

or FFFAIF for short, hold a remembrance ceremony at the War Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney each year on 19 July. It was my honour and pleasure to attend this event ahead of our own AGM which was held the following weekend at Cessnock.

Rene Herbert laid a wreath in honour of the missing.



### **FACEBOOK PAGE.**

We will place information on the Facebook page progressively, and we welcome your own contributions to the page itself.

We will also upload a Membership Application form to our Facebook page so you can get your “friends” to download and complete one.

*For those lost so far from home.*



**PAUL COBB — PRESENTATION GIVEN TO THE "FROMELLES ASSOCIATION, AND THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATIONS ON 28 JUNE, 2015.**

It started innocently enough. An email in 2014 from Paul Cobb, the author of *Fromelles 1916* advising us of his delight in reading our Newsletter, and advising he was coming to Australia in the coming year. This was followed with a responding email asking if he was giving any talks while he was coming out to Australia. Events moved from there, and we ultimately ended up at the Bowlers Club in York Street, Sydney, at a talk which went for about 90 captivating minutes on the Battle of Fromelles, given by Paul Cobb himself. Paul's research on Fromelles goes back to 1989. His research took him to the Imperial War Museum, the National Archives in the UK, and the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. He interviewed veterans in Australia and elsewhere, and scoured a wide range of primary sources culminating in the publication of his book in 2007.

[From Paul Simadas for his branch report in the upcoming Bulletin for the Western Front Association:]

*The Australian branch was pleased to hold a special mid-year meeting to welcome Paul Cobb to deliver a lecture on the 1916 battle of Fromelles fought by the 61st British and 5th Australian Divisions in July 1916. A stalwart of the WFA, this was Paul's second address to the branch, his last being in the late 90's as I recall!*

*Paul was able to deliver an authoritative and entertaining lecture on the battle and it's many personalities. He gave a balanced account on this controversial battle to a packed audience at our new venue, 99 York St in central Sydney. As part of our endeavours to widen knowledge and involvement in the WFA "Down-under", the branch hosted members of three other like-minded organisations: The Fromelles Association of Australia (which jointly hosted the lecture, thanks to Geoffrey Benn of that group), the NSW Military History Society, and the Friends and Families of the First AIF. Several members belong to one or other of these groups.*

*Fromelles, or the Battle of Fleurbaix to attribute it's official nomenclature, has only recently entered the popular imagination of the Australian conscience. During the 1920s and '30s, the important battles of the Somme at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm dominated the historiography and commemoration of the events of 1916. Now, along with the Anzac landing, and the 1918 battle of Le Hamel, these are three of the main "touch-points" of remembrance to many Australians.*

*The VC Corner Australian Cemetery Memorial is in the area of the Fromelles engagement. It is the only all Australian cemetery on the western front and uniquely contains no headstones. As none of the remains of the 410 Fromelles dead collected around it in 1918-19 could be identified, they were interred in two areas, each marked by a huge flat white cross. Around a thousand Australian fallen with no known grave are also commemorated here. This cemetery, along with the new Pheasant Wood CWGC, are two of the most iconic sites of remembrance for the AIF, and with the AIF Divisional memorials at Pozieres and elsewhere, and the "Windmill" site will be important sites of pilgrimage and complementation in 2016. Each deserves an equal place in the remembrance of that terrible year of conflict.*

We thank Paul Simadas for taking the time and devoting his energy to co-ordinating and making this an informative and involving afternoon's attendance for all. It is still quite surreal to believe that a few emails resulted in the gathering in central Sydney, with a highly respected historian and author on holiday from England, a presently serving Lt. Col. In the Army, an audience comprising a Major General, a Major, members of the FFFAIF, members of the Western Front Association, and members of the Fromelles Association. And then being asked to give the vote of thanks just capped it off. We can all truly look to the future with a better understanding of the past as a result of this day alone.

### **THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION**

If you would like to make contact with the Western Front Association, you may email them at: [wfaaustraliabranch@gmail.com](mailto:wfaaustraliabranch@gmail.com).

### **WE WILL SOON HAVE A LOGO.**

After a number of suggestions came in from sources in Australia and overseas in answer to a post on our Facebook page, we are closer than ever to having a tangible indicator to the world at large of who we are and what are our core ingredients. Stay tuned.



**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM UPDATED.**

A revised membership application form will be attached to all newsletters, with a request for information about the soldier of interest for the intending member.

If you haven't joined our Association already, we would love to welcome you to the group! Fill in your own details in the application attached and send it to us with your payment.

Membership will run from July to June in the following year.

**AND OTHER STUFF**

A little poem on the Fromelles chat site passed on by Marg O'Leary:

One more charge and then be  
dumb,  
When the forts of Folly fall,  
May the victors when they  
come  
Find my body near the wall.



**DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT**  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING IN 2016.**

Given that many members and families will be in Fromelles in July 2016, our AGM will be convened at a venue in the area of Fromelles, most likely in Lille, France, in July, 2016.

Further details will be advised when they are able to be confirmed.

The Fromelles Association of Australia has incorporated in order:

- To champion the Sacrifice of the Soldiers who served at Fromelles, and their families.
- To promote, encourage, and document research designed to identify the missing soldiers of the Battle of Fromelles.
- To forge strong relationships with organisations and people interested in the Battle of Fromelles, especially families of soldiers, the Australian Army, and the citizens of Fromelles.

**The Fromelles Association of Australia**

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