

“I Once Was Lost but Now am Found”

Some ten years ago I had a letter published in the Daily Telegraph in my then capacity as President of the Institution of Engineering Designers. A few days later I received a letter from a John Harvey in Australia, a member of the Institution. After addressing some technical issues, he asked after the Matthews family and some pieces of machinery at their mill. He had been evacuated to Chadlington during the war, went to school in Chipping Norton, and had fond memories of this area, particularly the Matthews family and the mill. He and his wife, Beverley, have visited us twice since he wrote, the last occasion being to attend the memorial service of an ancestor of Beverley's at Fromelles. Peter Hills

A Terrible Loss of Life

Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery is a First World War cemetery built by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission near Fromelles in northern France, close to the Belgian border. Constructed between 2009 and 2010, it was the first new Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery for more than 50 years. It contains the graves of 250 British and Australian soldiers who died on 19th July 1916 in the Battle of Fromelles, which was intended to divert the enemy from the Battle of the Somme. It was the first occasion that the Australian Imperial Force saw action on the Western Front. After a night and a day of fighting, 1,500 British and 5,533 Australian soldiers were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The Australian national war memorial describes the battle as “the worst 24 hours in Australia's entire history.”

Detective Work

You may have seen details on TV of a project to identify bodies found in a mass grave near Fromelles. It involved taking DNA samples from individual bodies and

then matching them to living descendants of the fallen, a massive piece of forensic detective work. I knew nothing about it until I was contacted by a researcher for the Fromelles Project. John and I had been overseas when the project was publicised on ANZAC Day, 25th April. After confirming that I had sons, Richard and Michael, I was told I would be contacted by the Department of Defence at a later stage. I confirmed I had two photos of James Hugh Ross, my mother's elder



Corporal James Ross

brother. On one was a caption: “I don't always look like this, sometimes better!” After his death, the Germans had returned a gold fob watch to my grandparents via the Red Cross. Inside it was engraved “To James Ross from MAB - a sweetheart.” My son, Michael, now owns the watch.

Was It Just As Hot In 1916?

As time evolved, my DNA was requested and sent to the Netherlands for analysis and my relationship with Corporal James Hugh Ross was confirmed. I was asked to write an inscription for the headstone and chose “I once was lost but now am found. Not forgotten.” I decided to attend any service that might be held for an Uncle of whom I knew little, except for his death in

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WW1, and I was naturally very proud of him.

In June this year we travelled to Europe and arrived in Paris a few days before the service. Early on 19th July we travelled by train to Lille where, at the station, we were directed to coaches that drove us 20 kilometres to the small village of Fromelles. We then had to walk along a narrow road for approximately one kilometre to where the service was to be held. The temperature was well over 30°C and very humid and I wondered if this was the case in 1916 for those soldiers in their full woollen uniforms .

“Don’t forget me Cobber”

Because our departure from Australia had been six weeks earlier, we did not have any of the necessary paperwork. However, the Army were aware of this and we were directed to the church, where the names of John and Beverley Harvey were clearly listed and we were given tickets for the ceremony and the reception.

It was a very sensitively presented memorial to those who died so tragically. There was a welcome personal touch to the ceremony with reminiscences of

members of the families of the soldiers that brought reality to events of so long ago. It was the last resting place of 250 soldiers, whose remains were found on the other side of a copse of trees. The reception, attended by Prince Charles and our Governor General, Quentin Bryce, was in the grounds of the local school which, I understand, was re-built by money raised in Australia. There is a huge plaque on the school wall saying, “Don’t forget me Cobber” and it is known as the *Ecole publique des Cobbers*.

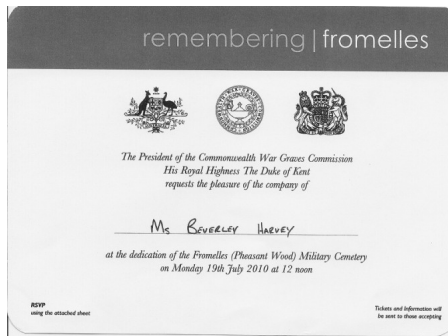
A Most Memorable Day

After the reception, we walked back to the cemetery where the Governor General made a short speech and then invited relatives to visit the graves. We quickly found James's grave and quietly stood for a while before taking photographs. We then walked back through the village and took the coach back to Lille and later returned by train to Paris.

It was a most memorable day, which only took

place because of the steadfast research of the Australian amateur historian and head of the Friends of the 15th Brigade, Lambis Englezos, whose research led to the Army’s decision to investigate Fromelles.

Beverley Harvey



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Vanessa Newman
Practice Manager