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## FROM DROUGHT TO BUSHFIRES, TO DONATIONS FROM SCHOOLCHILDREN

Much of Australia has been drought affected for more than the last five, six, or more years depending on the area proclaimed as drought affected.

Then we suffered through the worst bushfire season on record. Whole communities were incinerated, as people were forced to flee their homes. The town of Mallacoota was evacuated by boat to escape the flames. The fires burned in every State of Australia, and it would be likely that every person in Australia knows someone, or is someone, who was affected by the fires.

As scenes of the flames and satellite images of the smoke made their way around the world, our friends in France kept in contact with us. In the town of Fromelles, in Villers-Bretonneux, in Lille, and in towns in Belgium, local families, citizens, parents and school children raised funds to pass on to charities in Australia, if only to help in what ways they could.

The children of the Ecole des Cobbers Primary School in Fromelles caught our attention with their own gesture of aid: sewing pouches for koalas, wombats, and small animals which may have suffered in the fires. Channel 7 Television brought us a report of the children, some with their parents, and others from the school, making the pouches 'for Australia'.

When time came for the pouches to be sent to Australia, the destination for the pouches was made. The villages of Fromelles chose:-

- Clifton Park Primary School in Victoria in honour of Pte William Reid Fitton of 59 Bn, from Heyfield, Gippsland, killed in action during the Battle of Fromelles and buried in Aubers Ridge British Cemetery; and
- Wombat Care Bundanoon in honour of Lt. Alfred Leslie Rush DCM, who was born at Bundanoon and fought at Fromelles, but was Killed in Action at Villers Bretonneux on 25 April, 1918 when the Anzacs recaptured Villers Bretonneux and stopped the German advance on Amiens.

Such acts are a much appreciated statement of the strong fondness and affection our French friends have for, and share with Australia, and will not be forgotten. Merci!

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## TO A VIRUS PANDEMIC THAT STOPPED THE JOINT IDENTIFICATIONS BOARD

The world has been dealing with the effects of a virus – COVID-19 - which originated in China at the end of 2019, and spread across Europe, to Australia, to North America, to South America, and back again. It has caused the deaths of many, and continues to seep into all parts of the world. Governments have called for us to be self-isolating, to use sanitiser regularly, and to limit our interactions with others. Travel arrangements have been quashed, and the mass movement of populations has been affected in ways we might never have thought possible in this modern world.

One such change has been the cancellation of the Joint Identifications Board which was to be held in London in early March, 2020.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the 2020 Fromelles Project Joint Identifications Board has been postponed.

We are yet to be advised if the Board will be re-scheduled to another definite date, or postponed indefinitely for 2020.

We can only advise at this time, that if the Board is unable to meet for 2020, it is likely that there will be no new soldier identifications, and no new headstone dedication ceremony at Fromelles in July, 2020.

We will provide an update as soon as we become aware of developments.

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### **A MEMORIAL TO THE 5<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION IN HYDE PARK, SYDNEY?**

As you may be aware, FFFAIF is currently undertaking a feasibility study for the erection of a memorial to the men of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division in Hyde Park in the vicinity of the Anzac Memorial. The proposed 5<sup>th</sup> Division Memorial would be a replica of the statue of A/Sgt William Polding Ryan made by Gillies and Marc, for the Wollondilly Anglican College Anzac Memorial Shelter, and unveiled by Geoff Benn at Wollondilly Anglican College on 18 June 2018. If FFFAIF can get City of Sydney approval in 2020, then we should be able to have the 5<sup>th</sup> Division Memorial dedicated for the 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles in July 2021.

*An Outline of the Case for a 5th Division Memorial in Hyde Park* was circulated to members and friends in February, 2020. It gave some historical perspectives of Fromelles Day in Sydney, 19 July as well as some background analysis of City of Sydney documents and an outline of the concept of the proposed 5th Division Memorial and its ongoing significance. The *Outline* has been provided to the staff of the City of Sydney seeking their guidance as to the process to be followed in making a full submission and then seeking approval. If you can't locate your copy of the email which attached the Outline of the Case, and wish to obtain a copy again, please send an email to Geofrey Benn at: [gvb456@gmail.com](mailto:gvb456@gmail.com) to request one.

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### **WHERE SOLDIERS LIE – THE QUEST TO FIND AUSTRALIA'S MISSING WAR DEAD**

This is the title of a recent book by Ian McPhedran. Ian was News Ltd (particularly The Australian) Defence correspondent for many years till 2016 when he started writing full time. He has 7 other books.

In this book he quotes events up to the middle of 2019. In the book, McPhedran refers to an interview with DNA Expert Dr. Peter Jones, at Cambridge in May, 2018.

“Speaking over coffee in a Cambridge cafe in May 2018, Dr Jones said that when he first spoke to Defence officials about using DNA to identify the remains at Fromelles, they had no idea of the red tape involved before DNA can be taken: there are ethical and privacy issues, and the Human Tissue Act. Under that Act, institutions have to register their ability to do work of this nature and stringent rules govern what can and cannot be done with human genetic material.”

Further on - “While he doubts the entire 250 fallen soldiers will get a name on a headstone (he thinks 200 would be ok), he said methods were improving all the time.

Peter Jones has been in contact with us to expand on the interview with Ian McPhedran at the beginning of March. In the email to us he wrote that while he had not seen the book himself, he talked with Ian McPhedran:-

“... in the Café of the Fitzwilliam museum, it's a little more refined than your usual Café. Legislation surrounding the use of Human Tissue is pretty stringent in the UK. It is covered by the Coroners Act and the Human Tissue Act and Fromelles came under

both in 2010.

The MOD were not expert in this area, however with the help of the Human Tissue Authority we managed to find a legal workaround to enable the project to take place, but it was touch and go for a while.

Methods have improved dramatically since the project started. The whole Fromelles team continues to explore novel approaches and emerging technologies to maximise the chance of identification. The approach taken in recent years has looked to pair the traditional approach with newer methods. We are all hopeful that innovation will support more identifications.

The estimate I gave at the beginning of the project of not being able to identify all 250 was based on some assumptions, namely the commonality of genotypes and the fact that some families die out so the direct lineage will be lost. My main concern was the loss of lineage, but thanks to your good work that is becoming less of a concern. I still do not think we will identify everyone, but we continue to strive to identify as many as possible may have to revise my estimate up from 200. Keep up the good work, it truly makes a difference.

Best regards, Peter [Jones]"

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On 12 April, 2020, we posted a question on Facebook:-

**WHO IS YOUR RELATIVE AT FROMELLES?  
Are you a relative of a soldier who served at Fromelles?  
If so, post and let us know who it is.**

The Response we received was not what we expected. It was overwhelming. So much so that we published the following post on our Facebook page on 14 April, 2020:-

**THANK YOU ALL WHO RESPONDED TO OUR QUESTION:  
WHO WAS YOUR RELATIVE AT FROMELLES?  
CAN WE PUBLISH YOUR INFORMATION?**

Hello Everyone and thanks so very much for replying to our message regarding your relative who fought at Fromelles. What we thought might be a trickle of responses has turned into an avalanche of very valuable information.

You may or may not be aware, that we are developing a new improved website, and every soldier who fought at Fromelles (1916) will have space for a bio, and some photographs.

We also wish to include the impacts on families "then and now" of this battle, for assuredly there have been impacts on every family - even those who have only recently discovered they had a relative who fought.

What I ask of each and everyone who has replied to our previous post is this: Please, each of you has a very emotive connection and a story, no matter how extensive nor how brief - would you share it with us, so that we can publish it? Now please don't worry if you have difficulty in writing - we have people who can assist or even write a complete story based on your words.

There are no costs associated with this - we simply wish to make a living memorial, and preserve irreplaceable pictures, mementos, verbal and written histories, for generations to follow.

Please do contact me via e mail, and I will explain in more detail:-

[royceatkinson@hotmail.com](mailto:royceatkinson@hotmail.com)

"Because We Care"

Royce Atkinson

*For those lost so far from home.*

## STORIES OF OUR SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO BE UPLOADED TO OUR NEW WEBSITE.

The posts on Facebook have given us contacts for details of our soldiers that we did not have before. We did have and are continuing to develop, information on the soldiers who served at Fromelles, not just those who were killed in action. As they are finessed into a story and a source of information, we will upload them to our new website which is currently under construction. Details will be posted as soon as we can go 'public'.

An example of one such story follows. May we have your assistance to see that there are many, many more.

### Pte Wilfrid KILBURN

#### The Soldier's Details

**Name:** Wilfrid KILBURN

**Regimental number:** 2697

**Rank:** Private

**Units:** 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion and 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion

**War service:** Egypt, Western Front

**Prior military service:** 18 months (approx.) Liverpool Regiment (UK),

Regimental no. 7786

**Enlistment:** 24<sup>th</sup> June 1915 at Blackboy Hill, Western Australia – aged 36

**Embarkation:** 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1915 from Fremantle on board HMAT A38 *Ulysses*

**Next of Kin:** Wife – Mary Jane Kilburn, 30 Cecil St, Victoria Park, Western Australia

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**Date & Place of Birth:** 13<sup>th</sup> September 1878 at Dewsbury, Yorkshire

**Parents:** Maria (nee Dunford) & Wilman Kilburn (both deceased)

**Marital status:** Married, with 2 daughters

and 3 sons

**Siblings:** 1 brother

**Occupation:** Baker

**Physical Description:** Eyes grey, hair brown, medium complexion

**Religion:** Church of England

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**Fate:** Killed in Action 19 July 1916, Fromelles



*For those lost so far from home.*

**Place of Burial:** Unknown

**Positively identified:** No

*Before the Great War*

Yorkshire-born Wilfrid Kilburn was a baker by trade, son of Wilman and Maria Kilburn and younger brother to George. In 1897 at 19, Wilfrid married Mary Jane James and had a daughter, Edith. He later volunteered to serve in the Liverpool Regiment during the 2nd Boer War 1899-1902 and survived. After his return to Dewsbury from South Africa, he decided to take his wife and daughter to live a better life in Australia. They settled in Western Australia and went on to have four more children, three sons and another daughter.



*Kilburn family circa 1911: Wilfrid, Arthur, Edith, William, Mary Jane and Clifford. The youngest daughter, Lilian, was not born until 1913.  
[Source: Simone Kilburn]*

*Experience of The Great War*

When WW1 broke out, Wilfrid volunteered as a veteran in the Australian army. He was shipped off to France to serve in the 53<sup>rd</sup> battalion, leaving his wife and children, the youngest being only 2 years old, in the timber town of Mornington Mills, Western Australia. He was 37 years old.

His brother, George Arthur Kilburn, a blacksmith, also volunteered from England leaving his wife and five children in Dewsbury. He was 38 years old. He fought at the Somme and was gassed but survived and lived to see his great grandchildren born.

The brothers were very close - they even got married in the same week in the same town. George Arthur had not seen his brother since he left for Australia and when he arrived in France, he watched the Australian soldiers march past; he was looking out for Wilfrid, but he didn't see him.

Little detail is known of Wilfrid's part in the battle of Fromelles and it is likely that he died during the first assault. His body was never found. Family members like to think

*For those lost so far from home.*



that he is one of the many unidentified soldiers buried in the mass graves in the V.C. Corner Cemetery at Fromelles, but it is possible he fell somewhere around that area and was lost in the mud.

*The family at home:*

Wilfrid's wife, Mary Jane, received the usual letter to tell her that he was missing and later, in September 1917, that he had been killed in action on 19 July 1916. She wrote to the army several times to find out more and to ask if she could receive his belongings. Nothing of his was ever received. Mary Jane never remarried and, having moved to Perth, brought up her family alone.

Simone Kilburn, great granddaughter of Wilfrid's brother, George, knew Wilfrid's story and, hearing about the excavation of the mass grave at Fromelles, she was hopeful that Wilfrid might be found at last. After much research, Simone tracked down potential DNA donors – including, amazingly, someone she had known for years but was unaware of any family connection. The donors were most willing but sadly their DNA donations failed to match any body from the mass grave. Wilfrid is still missing.

Disappointed and saddened, Simone reflected on all the other relatives seeking closure and decided to volunteer her time and research expertise to help identify those still unnamed souls from the mass grave. She explained:

“I feel very passionate about it; every male in my family fought in WW1 or WW2 and I know how emotional it was for them. All those brave men have a right to a proper burial and a name on their grave. We have the opportunity here to achieve that and I feel that it is the least we can do for their sacrifice.”

Simone had the chance to visit the war grave at Fromelles in 2015 and laid a white rose on the memorial in memory of Wilfrid. She commented that it was an incredibly emotional experience being there on behalf of all the family and to see all the names on the plaques and all the graves. There were quite a few tears shed that day joining the tears of many other visitors and families over the years.

As Dwight D. Eisenhower said. “There is no glory in battle worth the blood it costs.”

Such a waste of life.

Links to official records (which used Wilfred rather than family's preferred Wilfrid):

[UNSW: The AIF Project - 2697 KILBURN, Wilfred](#)

[NAA: B2455. KILBURN, Wilfred - First AIF Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920](#)

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Wilfrid is commemorated on V.C. Corner (Panel No 8), Australian Cemetery Memorial, Fromelles, France; and

Panel number 57, on the Roll of Honour, at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

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## **ANNUAL CONFERENCE CANCELLED. NEW DATE TO BE FIXED.**

We have previously advised that you should: **SAVE THE DAY:** For the FROMELLES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2020

We are monitoring the Corona Virus warnings. At this time, and with much reluctance - and due to the health and financial impacts of the Coronavirus virus - our Annual Conference is cancelled, and will be rescheduled to a date to be fixed.

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## **ANZAC DAY COMMEMORATION SERVICES CANCELLED**

(from the Department of Veterans Affairs :-)

Due to the global outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus), the Australian Government has cancelled overseas Anzac Day ceremonies for 2020 on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, near Villers-Bretonneux in France, including the Australian service at the 'Digger' Memorial, Bullecourt, Hellfire Pass in Thailand, Sandakan in Malaysia and Isurava in Papua New Guinea.

Australians are encouraged to privately commemorate Anzac Day, in-line with the latest health advice, and to watch the service at the Australian War Memorial. While the Service is not open to public attendance, the Service will be nationally broadcast, to enable the public to watch from their own homes. There will also be a range of other commemorative activities that will be broadcast throughout the day. The Department is working with state and territory governments as they finalise their Anzac Day plans and will update this page when these details are confirmed.

## **DRIVEWAY COMMEMORATIONS**

You may instead wish to take up the suggestion of standing at the end of your driveway at 6.00am. All states and territories' RSL branches have cancelled public Anzac Day services.



Instead, they are asking Australians to unite in recognising all armed services personnel by standing on their driveways at 6:00am for a combined dawn service.

"As a result of restrictions to this year's formal Anzac Day commemorations, the RSL encourages people to light up the dawn and remember and pay respects from home," an RSL South Australia spokesman said."

"This can take several forms including from the end of your driveway or within your home, with a candle or the light on your phone."

Will you be at the end of your driveway?

*For those lost so far from home.*

RSL SA said the qualities of the Anzac spirit — courage, endurance, humour, ingenuity, and mateship — were particularly applicable for Australians amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Anzac spirit, which is really just the Australian spirit, helps people in times of crisis," the spokesman said.

"When you're experiencing hardship or foul weather, just think about the men and women at war, and serving right now, in discomfort.

"It puts things into perspective — we'll get by. We'll get through this."

Australian jazz musician James Morrison called on brass musicians to play the Last Post at 6:00am in their driveways on Anzac Day "in the name of mateship".

In a Facebook video that has been viewed more than 450,000 times, Morrison said while coronavirus restrictions meant Australians could not gather for usual Anzac Day services, "we can still stand united in spirit".

He said the feeling will be powerful, across the country, "when people hear that song on that morning and know that we're celebrating Anzac Day as we always do — to remember our Anzacs who fought in all wars".

Morrison's posts has garnered a huge amount of support, including from the country's RSLs, with people pledging to join the campaign.

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### **PTE HERBERT SAMPSON THARME AND MARG O'LEARY.**

This is a studio portrait of Australian Prisoner of War (POW) 3188 Private (Pte) Herbert Sampson Tharme, 55th Battalion, from Leichhardt, NSW.

Pte Tharme enlisted on 12 August 1915 and embarked for overseas on 20 December 1915 aboard HMAT Suevic.

He was captured at Fleurbaix, France on 20 July 1916 and held as a POW initially at Dulmen and then at Schneidemuhl.

He was repatriated to London in December 1918.

He was married in England on 4 September 1919 and arrived back in Australia on 10 December 1920.

The picture is one of a series of over 400 photographs sent by Australian POWs in German camps to Miss M. E. Chomley, Secretary, Prisoners Department, Australian-British Red Cross Society, London. Original album housed in AWM Research Centre at RCo0864, Album image number 123.

What is incredible about this picture is that when it was found, our esteemed Researcher, Marg O'Leary discovered that contrary to her previous understanding of her family, she herself has a relative who fought at Fromelles.

Marg was organising a story about Henry Westerway 4921 in the 55<sup>th</sup> battalion, emailing with his grandson Warren Smith. Westerway has been featured in a previous Newsletter.

Marg writes: Henry was a POW from 20 July 1916 Fromelles, so I was searching for



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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any pics to add to the story, when up popped a picture of a prisoner Herbert Sampson Tharme and I immediately knew he was my cousin from Staffordshire, England. We had no idea he had come to Australia, and joined the AIF .

I told Warren - who immediately sent me the copy of a list of the POWs and there was Henry Westerway and Herbert Tharme on the same page.

We were both stunned by this coincidence.

The 55 boys went to a POW camp in Germany, near the border with the Netherlands. In the pic he is wearing his prisoners' uniform.

How amazing is that? Now I will be writing a story about Herbert!"

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### THEIR MOTHERS ARE PRAYING

Just a face in a crowd and they all look the same,  
no distinguishing marks or great claims to fame,  
not seen individually just as a mob  
but each has a story – each Jack, Bill and Bob.

They're keeping a secret and never will tell  
if there's something missing – their own secret hell.

The line in the sand had been drawn – it was so  
and the power of words – made them rise –made them go.

Running for the finish with bayonets drawn,  
they're still running today - through all nations war torn,  
though the uniforms differ – and the places do too -  
war's utter futility still touches you.

So when the wind blows – souging through the trees  
then perhaps it's their voices you hear on the breeze,  
for wherever they've fought - 'cross the world they do roam,  
their Mothers are praying – bring them safely home.

Maureen Clifford © 11/10

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FROMELLES ASSOCIATION  
OF AUSTRALIA

*For those lost so far from home*