

ON 26 OCTOBER 2009 COPIES OF THE NOVEMBER EDITION OF 'AT THE STATE LIBRARY' WERE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC. THIS NEWSLETTER CONTAINED A SHORT ADVERTISEMENT FOR A FREE TALK BEING GIVEN BY MIKE O'BRIEN, A FORMER MEMBER OF THE AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY. TITLED **RECOVERING THE AUSTRALIAN WAR DEAD AT FROMELLES**, THE NOTICE REFERRED TO THE RETIRED MAJOR GENERAL AS HAVING "ARRANGED THE REBURIAL OF FIVE WORLD WAR I AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS FOUND IN BELGIUM IN 2007," AND, MORE RECENTLY IT WAS SAID, HE "OVERSAW THE EXHUMATION, IDENTIFICATION AND REBURIAL OF THE REMAINS OF SEVERAL HUNDRED AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS AT FROMELLES." THE FOLLOWING COMMUNICATION WAS PREPARED IN ORDER TO SEEK CLARIFICATION OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS BRIEF AND FROMELLES DISCUSSION GROUP WAS PLEASED TO RECEIVE A REPLY FROM HAMISH CURRY, LIBRARY & ONLINE LEARNING MANAGER, LEARNING SERVICES, STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA, WHO THANKED US FOR THE INTEREST EXPRESSED IN THE FORTHCOMING PRESENTATION. HE EXPECTED THIS KIND OF TOPIC TO GENERATE DIVERSE OPINIONS. IN DRAFTING A REPLY THOUGH THE GROUP REMINDED THE LEARNING & ONLINE MANAGER THAT IT WAS UNDERSTOOD THE FREE TALK WAS PART OF THE MAKING PUBLIC HISTORIES SERIES, HOWEVER, HAD NOT RECEIVED CLARIFICATION OF THE REBURIAL OF REMAINS.

**JESSICA CANNANE, LEARNING SERVICES—EVENTS, STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA:**

Dear Jessica,

**RECOVERING ALL AUSTRALIA'S WAR DEAD FROM THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES**

During a visit to the State Library of Victoria this morning I learned the facility was hosting a FREE public lecture or talk on 12 November 2009 titled '**Recovering the Australian war dead at Fromelles.**' As the Convenor/Administrator of Fromelles Discussion Group I would like to attend the talk being given by Major General Mike O'Brien (Rtd) and Professor Bruce Scates commencing at 5:30 p.m. on the date designated, but am unable to do so.

As a result I would appreciate being told whether the talk is being filmed or taped as I would like to obtain a transcript of the session, particularly since the November 2009 issue of **at the State Library** described the site manager as being primarily responsible for overseeing "*the exhumation, identification and reburial of the remains of several hundred Australian soldiers at Fromelles, France*" and, during the session, is expected to "*outline the origins, process and outcomes of the Fromelles exhumation.*"

As you probably know Fromelles Discussion Group was formed in late 2007 and began operating on the internet at the beginning of 2008 to encourage the Australian Government to recover, identify and individually memorialize the Great War Diggers found at Pheasant Wood. Lately we have also been lobbying the authorities to

aggregate the remains of the missing from this battle as there are more than a thousand unknowns from the attack currently buried in cemeteries around the old battlefield who are also awaiting identification, having been left out of the recent dig. Particularly important now that the British and Australian governments, in conjunction with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, are building a new Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery to contain the remains of the missing from this assault, as discussion papers on our website [FromellesDiscussionGroup.com](http://FromellesDiscussionGroup.com) show.

Although Scates in his capacity of Professor of History and Australian Studies and Director of the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University is good value because of his connection with the committee that reluctantly agreed to support the need to investigate claims of the existence of a mass grave at Fromelles, I would respectfully suggest the State Library provide the public a broader range of views on this particular subject than it is on this occasion. The Executive which manages the Library and its collections, services, programs and the staff, guests and visitors who attend the function on the 12th, should all be reminded of the controversy surrounding the limited dig. For example there has been an extraordinary amount of criticism directed at the way the Commonwealth Government has handled recovery and Australia's myopic political elite has continued to ignore the plea of this group, to have as many of the missing as possible accounted for during the current forensic program.

Should you wish further comment from Fromelles Discussion Group please feel free to either communicate via our website using the [info@FromellesDiscussionGroup.com](mailto:info@FromellesDiscussionGroup.com) function or my private Email address given at the top of this document. If possible I would be grateful to have one or two aspects of the synopsis published in **at the State Library** clarified.

Firstly, when did Major General O'Brien rebury several hundred Australian soldiers discovered at Pheasant Wood? From our understanding of the news material being disseminated in the media this task has been allotted to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which is meant to commemorate all officers and men from Great Britain and the Empire who so courageously laid down their lives during WWI. Indeed the latest information at our disposal suggests the actual excavation has only recently concluded and the remains that have been removed from the burial pits will be progressively reinterred in the new cemetery being constructed starting after 30 January 2010. Of course this information can be confirmed by looking at the Fromelles section of the Department of Defence website known as Don't forget me Cobber.

Regardless of the official position on Fromelles which will more likely than not be imparted during the afore-mentioned lecture, public institutions like the State Library of Victoria in my opinion, have a social, historical and cultural responsibility to air a range of views on such important subjects as Fromelles and our disenfranchised war dead. Therefore it is my belief that your organization should permit the voices of all the missing from this assault to be heard even though the four-month excavation on the mass grave has just officially wrapped up.

Members of the public should be made aware that questions have been raised about the dig and besides this, there is a possibility that mounting criticism will eventually lead to an inquiry into the project and the methods employed.

Kindest regards,  
Grant Triffett, Convenor/Administrator, Fromelles Discussion Group

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