

'Remember Me to All'

**The archaeological recovery and identification
of soldiers who fought and died in the
Battle of Fromelles, 1916**

‘Remember Me to All’

The archaeological recovery and identification of soldiers who fought and died in the Battle of Fromelles, 1916

by Louise Loe, Caroline Barker, Kate Brady,
Margaret Cox and Helen Webb

with contributions by

*Alison Anderson, Matt Bradley, Carl Champness, Ambika Flavel, Wayne Hoban,
Peter Jones, Dai Lewis, Tim Loveless, Paul Murray, Dan Poore, Lucian Pricop,
Ian Scott, Mark Viner, James Walker, Roland Wessling and Richard Wright*

Illustration and design by

*Kate Brady, Julia Collins, Gary Jones, Tim Loveless, Georgina Slater
and Magdalena Wachnik*

**This volume contains images of human skeletal remains,
some of which have been altered in order to present potentially
sensitive information in a respectful manner**

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Figure 1.7 (a) Private Stanley Charles Perrett (2015), 7th Battalion, AIF. Australian War Memorial Image P07769.001;
(b) Lance Corporal Cecil Clark Dell (266125) 2nd / 1st Bucks Battalion, Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry.

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Front cover

Foreground – LEFT: Men of the 53rd Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force a few minutes before launching the attack in the Battle of Fromelles (Australian War Memorial image H16396). CENTRE: excavation of the graves in progress (© Oxford Archaeology). RIGHT: Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery (© Commonwealth War Graves Commission). Background – the sun rising over Pheasant Wood (photo by Paul Backhouse © Oxford Archaeology). Top – 3rd pattern rising sun badge used 1909–49.

Back cover

Selection of artefacts recovered from the graves – rosary, return train ticket, 'Australia' shoulder title, and hand-stitched heart-shaped leather pouch

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Dear Mum,

*Just a line to let you know I am not dead yet. I am going back to the trenches in the morning. I have been at the base for 3 weeks. I have heard no word of Pat. I wrote to the enquiry office in England about him but I haven't got a reply yet. I hope he is alright. There are only two alive in the section I was in, 15 men & that's Pat & I. I have been in the same tent as them ever since we went into camp. There are still nearly 300 of the battalion missing & missing means killed as they can't be brought in. However I don't suppose we will have it as bad again & don't be troubled about me as you may be sure I won't expose myself unless I have to & I am not troubled about Fritz or his shells The weather is getting pretty rotten here now, raining every day & getting cold. It will be lovely shortly. Are you milking many cows this spring or is it nearly all sheep. I haven't had a letter for months & I don't suppose I will see one for several more. **Remember me to all** & don't trouble about me. Hoping everybody is well.*

Your aff son,

Frank

14th October 1916

Extract from a letter from Frank O'Meara to his mother whilst serving on the Western Front. The letter was written three months after fighting in (and surviving) the Battle of Fromelles. Frank's brother, Private Patrick Julian O'Meara, of the 59th Battalion, also fought in the battle but did not survive. His body has not yet been identified.

Contents

List of Figures	xiii
List of Tables	xix
Summary.....	xxi
Foreword.....	xxix
Acknowledgements	xxx
 Chapter One: Description of the Project	
SUMMARY.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
PROJECT BACKGROUND.....	1
LOCATION AND SITE CHARACTER.....	4
HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.....	6
THE DISCOVERY OF THE GRAVES.....	7
ESTIMATED NUMBER OF BURIALS AND MISSING.....	8
SOURCE MATERIAL.....	8
SOLDIERS' ATTRIBUTES: BIOLOGICAL PROFILE OF THE MISSING.....	9
SOLDIERS' ATTRIBUTES: MILITARY ISSUE UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT.....	10
British Expeditionary Force (BEF).....	10
Australian Imperial Force (AIF).....	13
Equipment (both armies).....	14
Battle orders.....	14
WEAPONRY, INJURIES AND THE INFANTRY SOLDIER.....	16
 Chapter Two: Methodology	
SUMMARY.....	19
TEAM STRUCTURE AND COMPOUND LAYOUT.....	19
CHAIN OF CUSTODY, CONTINUITY AND QUALITY CONTROL.....	20
DNA specific procedures.....	23
Field procedures.....	24
Mortuary procedures.....	25
Data storage and data security.....	25
Documentation.....	26
Database.....	26
EXCAVATION AND RECORDING.....	26
Water removal.....	26
Waste removal.....	27
Stratigraphic hand excavation.....	30
Survey.....	33
TEMPORARY MORTUARY SPECIFIC METHODOLOGIES.....	35
Mortuary set-up and management.....	35
Forensic pathology.....	36
Forensic radiography.....	36

Processing – non-osseous tissues and cleaning	39
Forensic anthropology	39
<i>Aims and objectives</i>	39
<i>Methodology</i>	39
<i>Inventory</i>	41
<i>Commingled human remains</i>	42
<i>Completeness, condition and taphonomic change</i>	43
<i>Reconstruction of human skeletal remains</i>	44
<i>Assessment of biological profiles</i>	44
<i>Assessment of individuating characteristics</i>	46
Packaging human remains	53
Data analysis	53
Quality assurance	53
ARTEFACTS	53
Aims and objectives	54
Methodology	54
Excavation	54
Radiography and processing	55
Recording and interpretation	55
Packaging and short-term conservation	58
Additional treatments	59
SHORT-TERM STORAGE	59
PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD	59
Basic workflow	59
Equipment	59
The field	59
The mortuary	60
Working shots	62
Communications and archiving	62
HEALTH AND SAFETY	62
General	62
Specific hazards	62
Hand excavations	63
Post traumatic stress disorder	63
Staff welfare	63
Unexploded ordnance (UXO)	63
MONITORING	64
THE MEDIA, PUBLIC AND OFFICIALS	64
THE ARCHIVE	64
Chapter Three: Results Part One – Archaeological Description of the Graves	
SUMMARY	65
INTRODUCTION	65
GUARD SONDAGES	65
TOPSOIL, PLOUGHSOIL AND SUBSOILS	65
Topsoil	65
Ploughsoil	67
Subsoils	67

Contents

BACKFILLS OF GRAVES ONE TO SIX.....	67
Upper backfills	68
Lower backfills	68
BACKFILLS OF GRAVES SEVEN AND EIGHT	68
CHALK AND LIME INCLUSIONS	68
BODY LAYERS ONE AND TWO	71
Grave One, layer one	72
Grave One, layer two	74
Grave Two, layer one	74
Grave Two, layer two	77
Grave Three, layer one.....	77
Grave Three, layer two.....	77
Grave Four, layer one	79
Grave Four, layer two.....	81
Grave Five, layer one	81
Grave Five, layer two	83
Grave Six.....	84
ASSOCIATED EVIDENCE AND METHOD OF BURIAL.....	84
DIMENSIONS OF GRAVES AND GUARD SONDAGES	85
Lengths, widths and depths of graves	86
Depths of burial layers	86
Dimensions of GUARD sondages.....	86
INTERPRETATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS.....	87
Chapter Four: Results Part Two – Anthropology	
SUMMARY.....	91
ACTUAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS	91
COMMINGLED REMAINS RE-ASSOCIATION EXERCISE	91
COMPLETENESS, CONDITION AND TAPHONOMIC CHANGES.....	93
Completeness.....	93
Condition	93
<i>Erosion</i>	95
<i>Fragmentation</i>	95
Taphonomic changes	97
<i>Root activity and fungal activity</i>	97
<i>Bone texture</i>	97
<i>Plastic deformation</i>	97
<i>Adherent remnants of fabric or textile</i>	97
<i>Metal staining</i>	97
<i>Deposits of lime</i>	98
Statistical analysis of preservation and taphonomic changes by grave	99
ASSESSMENT OF BIOLOGICAL PROFILES	101
Ancestry.....	101
Estimation of biological sex	102
Estimation of biological age at death	102
Stature	105
ASSESSMENT OF INDIVIDUATING CHARACTERISTICS	106
Skeletal constitution and handedness	106
Facial attributes and 360 degree video of the skull	106

The dentitions	106
<i>Preservation</i>	106
<i>Dental and oral health (pathology)</i>	107
<i>Dental work</i>	110
<i>Type of dental work and age</i>	116
<i>Comparison of frequency of dental work and the different graves</i>	116
Ante-mortem pathology and trauma	117
<i>Introduction</i>	117
<i>The assemblage</i>	117
<i>Infection</i>	117
<i>Metabolic disorders</i>	121
<i>Congenital and developmental conditions</i>	122
<i>Joint disease</i>	123
<i>Circulatory disorders</i>	125
<i>Neoplastic disease</i>	125
<i>Ante-mortem trauma</i>	126
<i>Miscellaneous conditions</i>	129
<i>Possible slipped femoral capital epiphysis (Developmental Dysplasia)</i>	129
<i>Os acromiale</i>	130
<i>Other pathological changes/abnormalities</i>	130
Peri-mortem trauma	130
<i>Introduction</i>	130
<i>Overall findings</i>	131
<i>Statistical comparison of peri-mortem trauma between graves</i>	140
DISCUSSION	141
<i>Completeness, condition and taphonomic changes</i>	141
<i>Demographic profile and individuating characteristics</i>	142
<i>The dentitions</i>	145
<i>Ante-mortem pathology and trauma</i>	147
<i>Peri-mortem trauma</i>	148

Chapter Five: Results Part Three – The Artefacts

SUMMARY	153
INTRODUCTION	154
PRESERVATION	154
LOCATIONS	156
DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ARTEFACTS	156
Identifying artefacts	156
<i>Significance score two</i>	156
<i>Significance score three</i>	159
<i>Significance score four</i>	163
<i>Significance score five</i>	166
Frequency and distribution of identifying artefacts	168
Non-identifying artefacts	169
<i>Ammunition</i>	169
<i>Clothing/uniform fabric</i>	170
<i>Hooks, and hooks and eyes</i>	170
<i>Miscellaneous buttons and badges</i>	170
<i>Braces</i>	171

Contents

<i>Undergarments</i>	172
<i>Webbing equipment and associated items</i>	172
<i>Gas masks</i>	172
<i>Bayonets/bayonet scabbards</i>	174
<i>Oil bottle for service rifle</i>	174
<i>Field dressing kit</i>	174
<i>Personal kit</i>	175
<i>Phrase book</i>	175
<i>Trench art</i>	176
<i>Charms/talismans</i>	176
<i>Writing paraphernalia</i>	178
<i>Personal items</i>	179
<i>Smoking paraphernalia</i>	180
DISCUSSION	180
Some caveats	181
Interpretation of the artefacts	182
<i>Trouser buttons</i>	182
<i>Jacket buckles and buttons</i>	182
<i>Insignia</i>	183
<i>Uniform fabric and leather trouser patches</i>	183
<i>Boots</i>	184
<i>Helmets</i>	184
<i>Webbing and associated equipment</i>	184
<i>First aid kits</i>	184
<i>Army issue personal kits</i>	185
<i>Items possibly associated with officers</i>	185
<i>Personal items and religious items</i>	185
<i>Identity discs</i>	186
Summary and conclusions	187
Chapter Six: Discussion on the Archaeology, Anthropology and Artefacts as Evidence for Identifying the Missing Soldiers	
SUMMARY	189
INTRODUCTION	189
RELIABILITY AND POTENTIAL OF THE EVIDENCE FOR IDENTIFICATION	189
The collective identity of the buried soldiers as a match with the collective identity of the Missing.....	190
The circumstances of the burial.....	190
Anthropological evidence.....	192
Artefactual evidence.....	194
Methodology.....	195
Realising the potential of the anthropological and artefactual evidence for identification.....	196
CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER WORK	196
Chapter Seven: Identification of the Soldiers Buried at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles	
SUMMARY	197
INTRODUCTION	197
THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS	199
ID categories	199

Initial assessment	202
DNA Group I.....	202
DNA Group II	202
Sampling bias	202
Security and confidentiality	203
Notifications.....	203
THE DATASETS	203
DNA and ID.....	206
Tracing families.....	207
DNA haplogroups.....	208
Anthropology in identification	208
Identification assisted by the program OPTIMISE.....	209
CONCLUSIONS AND OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS.....	210
APPENDIX ONE: Standard Operating Procedures for DNA Sampling on Site	213
APPENDIX TWO: Statistical Methods Employed to Analyse the Data from the Anthropological Analysis	219
APPENDIX THREE: Anthropology Contingency Tables and Chi-square Results.....	225
Bibliography	241
Index.	251

List of Figures

Chapter One

Fig. 1.1	Map showing location of the 1916 unmarked mass graves.	2
Fig. 1.2	Location of graves, Pheasant Wood, with new cemetery under construction in the foreground	5
Fig. 1.3	1918 aerial photograph showing three open features.	5
Fig. 1.4	The ceremony held on 5th May 2009 to mark the commencement of the recovery operation	6
Fig. 1.5	The ceremony held at Fromelles in 2010.	11
Fig. 1.6	The battlefield	12
Fig. 1.7	Australian (a) and British (b) military issue uniforms	13
Fig. 1.8	Australian jacket belt and attached buckle.	14
Fig. 1.9	'Australia' shoulder title	14
Fig. 1.10	Rising sun badge.	14
Fig. 1.11	Fittings from pattern 1908 webbing equipment.	15
Fig. 1.12	PH hood gas mask fragments	15

Chapter Two

Fig. 2.1	Compound layout and grave locations.	20
Fig. 2.2	The temporary mortuary (reception entrance on very left of image)	20
Fig. 2.3	Diagram of compound layout showing workflow and DNA zones	21
Fig. 2.4	Perimeter fence around excavation with viewing window for the public (arrowed).	21
Fig. 2.5	Graves three, four, five and six under cover of marquee; graves seven and eight in foreground, excavated and backfilled.	21
Fig. 2.6	Signing a body over at the graveside to the mortuary manager	21
Fig. 2.7	DNA sampling methodology	22-3
Fig. 2.8	PPE worn in the 'full DNA protection' zone	24
Fig. 2.9	SoCO (left) and grave supervisor at the graveside managing the site evidence log.	24
Fig. 2.10	Water management: a 'French drain' (main image) and pumps with sumps (inset) were among the strategies employed	27
Fig. 2.11	Machine excavation under the close supervision (from left to right) of the EOD engineer, the project's senior forensic adviser, and senior archaeologist.	27
Fig. 2.12	Machine excavation of Grave Four	28
Fig. 2.13	Metal detecting for artefacts (left) and checking for unexploded ordnance (right).	28
Fig. 2.14	Graves three (bottom) and four (top) pedestalled and ready for excavation; grave four covered with a non-permeable membrane to protect the remains overnight	29
Fig. 2.15	Fingertip searching the soil.	30
Fig. 2.16	Selection of working views showing excavation in progress	31
Fig. 2.17	The work undertaken on each body was recorded on wipe boards at the sides of each grave	32
Fig. 2.18	Completing paper records.	32
Fig. 2.19	Photographic recording within the graves	32
Fig. 2.20	Surveying of the graves.	34
Fig. 2.21	Once all skeletons had been recovered, each grave was excavated by hand and machine to confirm that there were no more present.	34
Fig. 2.22	Holding bay for bodies and artefacts in the temporary mortuary reception; bodies and artefacts were stored here by grave number to await radiography and then processing.	34
Fig. 2.23	The radiography suite	35
Fig. 2.24	Soil samples being radiographed.	36
Fig. 2.25	Radiography of a soil sample showing how objects could be found. Inset: a) the eye of a hook, b) rising sun badge, c) 'Australia' shoulder title	37
Fig. 2.26	Soldier's boot straight after recovery from Grave One and on a radiograph (inset), which showed that the foot bones were still present inside; this information was helpful when processing the boot	37

Fig. 2.27	General working views of processing	38
Fig. 2.28	Anthropology laboratory (note the overhead cameras)	40
Fig. 2.29	Working view of anthropological analysis	40
Fig. 2.30	Body regions scored for presence and absence	41
Fig. 2.31	Example of survey plans being used to help resolve commingling	42
Fig. 2.32	Anatomical landmarks employed in the assessment of craniofacial asymmetry	48
Fig. 2.33	Anatomical landmarks employed in the assessment of facial profile	48
Fig. 2.34	Set up employed to capture 360° videos of skulls	49
Fig. 2.35	Artefacts (Commonwealth buttons, leather brace ends, indelible pencils, and Australian jacket belt buckle) <i>in situ</i>	54
Fig. 2.36	A pipe being recovered	54
Fig. 2.37	Corroded brass lighter (left) and radiograph of the lighter (right); the radiograph shows that it bore no useful features or marks for identification	55
Fig. 2.38	Artefacts laid out with labelled finds bags for checking, identification, recording and research	56
Fig. 2.39	Fromelles museum	56
Fig. 2.40	Australian jacket belt buckle being recovered	57
Fig. 2.41	Part of shoulder number denoting battalion	57
Fig. 2.42	Photography set-up in the finds laboratory	58
Fig. 2.43	Skeletons in short term storage	58
Fig. 2.44	Artefacts in short term storage	59
Fig. 2.45	Overhead camera shots of a plastic reference skeleton illustrating coloured arrow system (blue = presence and location of fusing epiphyses; orange = ante-mortem pathology and trauma; red = peri-mortem trauma)	61

Chapter Three

Fig. 3.1	Three-dimensional image of the graves summarising the number of soldiers recovered from each	66
Fig. 3.2	Representative section showing the deposits encountered during the excavation of the graves	67
Fig. 3.3	Survey plan of Grave Seven	68
Fig. 3.4	Grave Seven during excavation (looking east)	69
Fig. 3.5	Survey plan of Grave Eight	69
Fig. 3.6	Grave Eight during excavation (looking west)	69
Fig. 3.7	Chalk lumps	70
Fig. 3.8	Fly puparia at instar (resting) stage within chalk	70
Fig. 3.9	Surveyed relationship between the right arm (2932BP) and the rest of the body (2919B) to which it belonged	70
Fig. 3.10	Arm position (2511B): both arms extended superiorly	71
Fig. 3.11	Arm position (1682B): neither arm extended superiorly	71
Fig. 3.12	Arm position (0184B): one arm extended superiorly	71
Fig. 3.13	Foot position (2538B): feet close together	71
Fig. 3.14	Foot position (0192B): feet moderately close together	71
Fig. 3.15	Foot position (0993B): feet wide apart	72
Fig. 3.16	Body posture (1360B): prone	72
Fig. 3.17	Body posture (3095B): supine	72
Fig. 3.18	Body posture (1357B): lying on left side	72
Fig. 3.19	Body posture (2397B): lying on right side	72
Fig. 3.20	Survey plans of Grave One, layers one and two	73
Fig. 3.21	Grave One during excavation, looking west (the white strips are labels marking evidence numbers and refer to bodies and artefacts)	74
Fig. 3.22	Grave Two during excavation, looking east	74
Fig. 3.23	Survey plans of Grave Two, layers one and two	75
Fig. 3.24	Eastern end of Grave Two, layer one	76
Fig. 3.25	Grave Two, layer one (0636B, 0732B, 0975B, 1223B)	76
Fig. 3.26	Grave Two, layer two (note the 'head-to-toe' organisation of burial)	77
Fig. 3.27	Survey plans of Grave Three, layers one and two	78
Fig. 3.28	Grave Three during excavation, looking west	79
Fig. 3.29	Grave Three, layer two (western end)	79
Fig. 3.30	Grave Three, layer two, bodies 2768B, 2792B, 2793B and 2794B orientated the same way, all prone, with their feet close to one another	79

List of Figures

Fig. 3.31	Survey plans of Grave Four, layers one and two.	80
Fig. 3.32	Grave Four during excavation, looking west.	81
Fig. 3.33	Survey plans of Grave Five, layers one and two.	82
Fig. 3.34	Grave Five during excavation, looking east.	83
Fig. 3.35	Grave Five, layer one (note the varied body orientations, not the typical N-S alignment)	83
Fig. 3.36	Grave Five, layer two (eastern end), showing dense concentration of burials.	83
Fig. 3.37	Grave Five, layer two, body 3147B (note unusual body position, 'rolled into a ball')	84
Fig. 3.38	Survey plan of Grave Six.	84
Fig. 3.39	Grave Six during excavation, looking east (top) and west (bottom)	85

Chapter Four

Fig. 4.1	Re-associating 2932BP with 2919B: (top) 2919B <i>in situ</i> with missing right arm; (bottom) laid out in the mortuary with missing right arm (left) and laid out in the mortuary with right arm re-associated (right).	92
Fig. 4.2	Frequency of non-osseous tissue types, graves one to five	93
Fig. 4.3	Number of complete, part and absent body regions (n=250)	94
Fig. 4.4	Erosion (arrowed) involving the cancellous bone of the proximal tibiae of 1223B	95
Fig. 4.5	Frequency of fragmentation for different body regions	96
Fig. 4.6	Frequency of diffuse and focal lime deposits, graves one to five	98
Fig. 4.7	Lime deposits (white patches) on a bone surfaces (1825B)	98
Fig. 4.8	Concretions of lime holding the bones of a hand together (1832B)	98
Fig. 4.9	Tissue disruption and fracture margins preserved by lime concretion (2108B)	98
Fig. 4.10	Distribution of green bone presence/absence	100
Fig. 4.11	Frequency of age groups in the total assemblage (n=250)	102
Fig. 4.12	Frequency of individuals by age categories, graves one to six (n=250).	102
Fig. 4.13	Age: osteological data and AIF records compared	103
Fig. 4.14	Distribution of younger and older individuals in graves one to five (n=247)	103
Fig. 4.15	Distribution of older/younger individuals	104
Fig. 4.16	Stature: comparison of osteological data and AIF records.	105
Fig. 4.17	Anterior view of facial attributes with midline deviations (0674B)	106
Fig. 4.18	LEH on upper (arrowed) and lower teeth (2044B)	107
Fig. 4.19	Example of gross caries (arrowed).	108
Fig. 4.20	Progressive ante-mortem tooth loss in the mandible (2719B)	108
Fig. 4.21	Marked protrusion of the upper anterior teeth (3095B)	110
Fig. 4.22	Open bite and distinctive gold denture and onlay work (2341B)	110
Fig. 4.23	Attrition patterns (arrowed) associated with habitual pipe smoking (1390B)	110
Fig. 4.24	The frequency of different types of dental work seen at Pheasant Wood (n=137).	110
Fig. 4.25	Gold crowns (arrowed GC), root canal work (arrowed RCW) and restorations (arrowed R) (2159B)	111
Fig. 4.26	Crude amalgam fillings (arrowed) (0288B).	111
Fig. 4.27	Sophisticated gold onlay work on upper anterior teeth (1834B).	111
Fig. 4.28	Amalgam (arrowed AF), gold (arrowed GF) and white restorations (arrowed WF) and gold crowns (arrowed GC) (2159B)	112
Fig. 4.29	Vulcanised rubber hard palate denture with gutta percha (arrowed) (3095B)	112
Fig. 4.30	Vulcanised rubber hard palate denture showing rugae on palatal contact surface (metal clasps for attachment to natural teeth also visible) (3095B).	113
Fig. 4.31	Palatal relief (arrowed) (0269B).	113
Fig. 4.32	Occlusal surface of denture with metal pins holding anterior tooth in place (arrowed); posterior prosthetic teeth are embedded in the vulcanised rubber	113
Fig. 4.33	Gold denture showing owner's rugae pattern (0666B).	113
Fig. 4.34	Evidence of sculpting of the occlusal surface of a gold crown (1973B)	115
Fig. 4.35	Frequency of crown types seen in upper and lower dental arcades	115
Fig. 4.36	Example of a root canal work; metal posts fixed in the root cavity of two maxillary teeth (3168B).	115
Fig. 4.37	White and gold upper bridge work (2117B).	116
Fig. 4.38	Percentage frequency of the different pathological conditions observed in the assemblage (n=250).	117
Fig. 4.39	Radiograph showing cloaca (arrow number 1) and involucrum (arrow number 2).	120
Fig. 4.40	Vertebral bodies with lytic lesions (arrowed) (0764B)	121
Fig. 4.41	Radiological appearance of vertebral bodies (lytic lesions are arrowed) (0764B)	121

Fig. 4.42	a) Radiograph showing fibrous cortical defect on left distal femur (1834B); b) macroscopic appearance of left distal femur with a marked absence of pathological change (1834B).....	126
Fig. 4.43	Myositis ossificans traumatica (white arrow); the red arrow points to peri-mortem trauma (1212B).....	126
Fig. 4.44	Radiograph (a) and macroscopic appearance (b) of healed fracture of the left femur shaft (1683B); right unfractured femur is shown on the radiograph along with miscellaneous bone fragments from the same body.....	128
Fig. 4.45	Radiograph showing right and left lower limb bones (1667B); the right tibia has an area of increased density (arrowed).....	128
Fig. 4.46	Left femur with mushroom-shaped head (1875B).....	130
Fig. 4.47	True prevalence rates of peri-mortem injuries observed.....	131
Fig. 4.48	Detail of blast trauma lesions sustained to the cranial vault and thorax of 0821B, showing complete shear fractures to the petrous bone and glenoid of the scapula.....	133
Fig. 4.49	3089B: Bilateral partial limb amputation observed as mass comminution of right and left tibiae and fibulae, and right femur and foot bones; a) laboratory, b) <i>in situ</i> , c) radiographic image, d) radiographic image.....	134
Fig. 4.50	a) Single penetrating shrapnel wound on the left second metacarpal (dorsal aspect); b) very degraded ferrous fragment embedded in 2108B's fourth metatarsal; c) 0647B, cranium with shrapnel ball and ferrous metal object embedded in bone (detail shown in (d)).....	136
Fig. 4.51	a) Jaw of 2928B: a contorted lead bullet was recovered from the area of tooth loss; b) radiograph of 3091B showing a bullet embedded in the cranial vault; c) circular defect on the right maxilla of 3091B; d) butterfly fracture involving the distal right radius, without involvement of other bones (1872B).....	137
Fig. 4.52	a and b) Shrapnel ball injury to the left femur of 2811. The arrow shows the path that the shrapnel ball had taken through the bone; c) surveyed <i>in situ</i> position of 2131 (represented as a stick figure) and some of the associated shrapnel balls (arrowed and numbered 2133A, 2139A and 2141A; the other red dots refer to other artefacts that were found with the soldier); d) a fracture consistent with being peri-mortem in origin was observed on the left proximal third of the femur. The physical artefacts and the peri-mortem trauma on the left femur are consistent with blast type trauma (Ambika Flavel, pers. comm.).....	138
Fig. 4.53	a) 'Through and through' shrapnel ball injury observed on the skull of 2810B; b) linear incision involving the ninth rib of 2930B.....	139

Chapter Five

Fig. 5.1	0266B with Australian jacket belt buckle in area of navel.....	153
Fig. 5.2	0495B with Australian jacket belt buckle in area of shoulder.....	153
Fig. 5.3	Gold patina on a button.....	154
Fig. 5.4	Varying corrosion on belt buckles.....	154
Fig. 5.5	'INF' badge.....	154
Fig. 5.6	Plain aluminium buttons.....	155
Fig. 5.7	Woollen sock.....	155
Fig. 5.8	Crucifix.....	156
Fig. 5.9	Rosary.....	157
Fig. 5.10	Religious medallion.....	157
Fig. 5.11	Gold cross and pouch.....	157
Fig. 5.12	Prayer book.....	158
Fig. 5.13	Lacing eyelets from the ankle of breeches.....	158
Fig. 5.14	Leather patches from mounted style breeches.....	158
Fig. 5.15	British general service button (left); Royal Scots button (middle); back of an Australian service button (right), found with one body.....	159
Fig. 5.16	MGS (Machine Gun Squadron) shoulder title.....	159
Fig. 5.17	Australian jacket belt buckles.....	159
Fig. 5.18	Bodies associated with AJBBs.....	160
Fig. 5.19	'Australia' shoulder title.....	159
Fig. 5.20	Rising sun badge.....	161
Fig. 5.21	Australian service button.....	161
Fig. 5.22	Australian 'no borders' service buttons.....	161
Fig. 5.23	'Commonwealth' trouser buttons.....	161
Fig. 5.24	Cellulose/vegetable ivory button.....	162

List of Figures

Fig. 5.25	Trouser button from 'Hordern & Sons, Sydney'	162
Fig. 5.26	Train ticket	162
Fig. 5.27	Boomerang 'sweetheart' badge	163
Fig. 5.28	Shoulder number	163
Fig. 5.29	Colour patch	163
Fig. 5.30	Royal Engineers' badge	163
Fig. 5.31	British pattern boot (1005A)	164
Fig. 5.32	Boot (3374A) with the inscription: 'R. WHITE/MELB'	164
Fig. 5.33	British Pattern boot (3081A)	165
Fig. 5.34	Officer's compass	165
Fig. 5.35	ID disc (3332A, found with 3272B)	166
Fig. 5.36	ID disc (2393A, found with 2119B)	167
Fig. 5.37	3272B with ID disc in area of neck	167
Fig. 5.38	3214B with ID disc in area of pelvis	167
Fig. 5.39	Briar pipe engraved with initials	168
Fig. 5.40	Matchbox case engraved with name	168
Fig. 5.41	Inscribed gold ring	168
Fig. 5.42	Textile from an Australian jacket	170
Fig. 5.43	Flaming grenade collar badge	171
Fig. 5.44	Flaming grenade collar badges on a New Zealand army uniform at the Imperial War Museum stores	171
Fig. 5.45	Braces ends	171
Fig. 5.46	Stamped braces fragment	171
Fig. 5.47	Braces end with a re-used British general service button	171
Fig. 5.48	Fittings from pattern 1908 webbing equipment	172
Fig. 5.49	Bodies associated with webbing equipment	173
Fig. 5.50	Gas mask fragments	173
Fig. 5.51	Bayonet scabbard	174
Fig. 5.52	Rifle oil canister	174
Fig. 5.53	Iodine ampoule from a field dressing kit	174
Fig. 5.54	Safety pins from a field dressing kit	174
Fig. 5.55	Toothbrush from a personal kit	175
Fig. 5.56	Pocket knife from a personal kit	175
Fig. 5.57	'Black Cat' phrase book from Fromelles museum	175
Fig. 5.58	Trench art ring	176
Fig. 5.59	Trench art ring	176
Fig. 5.60	Knotted leather trench art bracelet	176
Fig. 5.61	Monkey charm	176
Fig. 5.62	Swastika charm	177
Fig. 5.63	Cross and wreath charm	177
Fig. 5.64	Indelible pencils	177
Fig. 5.65	Graphite pencil	177
Fig. 5.66	'Empire' fountain pen	177
Fig. 5.67	'Onoto' fountain pen fragments	178
Fig. 5.68	Purse and Ottoman Turkish coins	178
Fig. 5.69	'Estaires' souvenir badge	179
Fig. 5.70	Sleeve holder	179
Fig. 5.71	Braces fitting	179
Fig. 5.72	Hand stitched leather heart	180
Fig. 5.73	Cigarette holder and case	180
Fig. 5.74	Matches	180
Fig. 5.75	Pipe	180
Fig. 5.76	Head of trenching tool	184
Fig. 5.77	Officer's Sam Browne belt at Fromelles museum	185

Chapter Six

Fig. 6.1	A contemporary grave, similar to the Pheasant Wood mass graves, described as being near Vimy, but said to be Fromelles, 1916	191
----------	---	-----

Chapter Seven

Fig. 7.1	Overview of the ID process used for the Fromelles Project from 2010 to 2014	204
Fig. 7.2	Denture showing negative impression of the wearer's name	206

Fig. 7.3 Pattern of inheritance of the Y-STR and Mitochondrial DNA showing potential paternal and maternal donors. Those on the direct male line are shown as blue boxes, while those on the maternal line are shown as pink boxes 210

Fig. 7.4 A visual representation of the program OPTIMISE 211

Appendix 2

Fig. A2.1 Summary results of chi-square tests 222

Fig. A2.2 Correspondence analysis scattergram 223

List of Tables

Chapter Two

Table 2.1	Completeness scores employed	43
Table 2.2	Age categories employed	45
Table 2.3	Stature categories	46
Table 2.4:	Assessment of the shape of the lower jaw	47
Table 2.5	Trauma classifications according to causal force	51
Table 2.6	Summary of the mechanisms and effects of blast trauma	52

Chapter Three

Table 3.1	Arm positions, Grave One, layer one	74
Table 3.2	Feet positions, Grave One, layer one	74
Table 3.3	Arm positions, Grave One, layer two	74
Table 3.4	Feet positions, Grave One, layer two	74
Table 3.5	Arm positions, Grave Two, layer one	76
Table 3.6	Feet positions, Grave Two, layer one	76
Table 3.7	Arm positions, Grave Two, layer two	77
Table 3.8	Feet positions, Grave Two, layer two	77
Table 3.9	Arm positions, Grave Three, layer one	77
Table 3.10	Feet positions, Grave Three, layer one	77
Table 3.11	Arm positions, Grave Three, layer two	79
Table 3.12	Feet positions, Grave Three, layer two	79
Table 3.13	Arm positions, Grave Four, layer one	81
Table 3.14	Feet positions, Grave Four, layer one	81
Table 3.15	Arm positions, Grave Four, layer two	81
Table 3.16	Feet positions, Grave Four, layer two	81
Table 3.17	Arm positions, Grave Five, layer one	83
Table 3.18	Feet positions, Grave Five, layer one	83
Table 3.19	Arm positions, Grave Five, layer two	84
Table 3.20	Feet positions, Grave Five, layer two	84
Table 3.21	Grave dimensions; lengths and widths taken at the top of grave cuts	85
Table 3.22	Burial layers; depth and thickness	86
Table 3.23	Dimensions of GUARD sondages	87

Chapter Four

Table 4.1	Body parts by grave	91
Table 4.2	Completeness and condition of the skeletal remains (n=250)	93
Table 4.3	Completeness and condition of skeletons by grave (graves one to three)	94
Table 4.4	Completeness and condition of skeletons by grave (graves four to six)	95
Table 4.5	Frequency of fragmentation by body region	96
Table 4.6	Chi-squared analysis of preservation and taphonomic changes, graves one to five	99
Table 4.7	Chi-squared analysis of preservation and taphonomic changes: graves near edge of wood (two, three and six); graves away from edge of wood (one, four and five)	101
Table 4.8	Frequency of under- and over-age individuals	103
Table 4.9	Frequency of younger and older individuals in graves one to five (three young adults from Grave Six not included)	103
Table 4.10	The status of all teeth (number of possible teeth=8000)	106
Table 4.11	Prevalence of dental disease	107
Table 4.12	Individuals with hypodontia	109
Table 4.13	Prevalence of dental treatments	110
Table 4.14	Frequency of crown and material type in the anterior and posterior dentition	112
Table 4.15	Frequency of restorations and type of material in the anterior and posterior dentition	112
Table 4.16	Frequency of restorations and type of material type in the anterior and posterior dentition	114

Table 4.17	Age at death and prevalence of ante-mortem pathology and trauma	118
Table 4.18	True prevalence rate (TPR) of ante-mortem pathology and trauma	118
Table 4.19	Individuals with periostitis	120
Table 4.20	Anatomical distribution of peri-mortem trauma by body region, graves one to five	132
Table 4.21	Pheasant Wood frequency of peri-mortem trauma by causal force	132
Table 4.22	Pheasant Wood true prevalence of peri-mortem trauma by causal force and body region	132
Table 4.23	Frequency of peri-mortem injuries in collapsed categories (chi-squared analysis) and percentage frequencies of combat injuries	140
Table 4.24	Results of chi-squared analysis comparing the frequency of combat injuries in different body regions in graves one to five	141

Chapter Five

Table 5.1	Summary of boots found with individuals	166
Table 5.2	Number of identifying artefacts (ID score 2 or more) by grave and by artefact	169

Chapter Seven

Table 7.1	ID categories	199
Table 7.2	Values for each type of biological and artefactual data reflecting the accuracy of the methodologies available and the confidence level associated with its context	201

Appendix One: Standard operating procedures for DNA sampling on site

Table A1.1	Sample forms and required information for each form	215
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Appendix Two: Statistical methods employed to analyse the data from the anthropological analysis

Table A2.1	Observed frequencies of adherent fabric in the graves	220
Table A2.2	Expected (theoretical) frequencies, assuming that there is literally no relation between adherent fabric and grave numbers	220
Table A2.3	The adjusted residuals for adherent fabric and graves, showing which graves contribute to the statistically significant result	221
Table A2.4	The counts of properties within the graves	221
Table A2.5	The correspondence analysis scores for the data shown in Table A2.4	223

Appendix Three: Anthropology Contingency Tables and Chi-square Results

Tables A3.1 – A3.79	225
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Summary

Almost 100 years ago, 250 soldiers were buried behind enemy lines in unmarked mass graves on the outskirts of the village of Fromelles, Northern France. They were among several thousand Australian and British soldiers who were killed in the Battle of Fromelles on the 19th and 20th July 1916, many of whom have no marked grave. This volume describes Oxford Archaeology's contribution to a joint Australian and British government mission to recover the soldiers and re-bury them with full military honours in a new Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Fromelles. Bringing together an international team of forensic and investigative professionals, Oxford Archaeology, under the management of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, excavated and scientifically examined the mortal remains of the soldiers and associated items buried with them. With the full support and cooperation of the soldiers' families, this evidence was, and continues to be, employed alongside DNA and historical sources in an attempt to identify the soldiers by name for their commemoration on headstones. This volume is a technical synthesis of Oxford Archaeology's work on this landmark project involving the largest recovery and identification operation of First World War soldiers ever carried out using modern science. It also includes detail of the identification process undertaken by appropriately experienced government advisors.

The operation commenced in May 2009. Reverend Ray Jones of St George's Memorial Church in Ypres led a service and Defence Minister Quentin Davies formally initiated the project. With just six months to complete the work, and under intense media scrutiny, innovative techniques were devised to meet the unique requirements of the project. A special site compound was designed to integrate the different elements – excavation, recovery and analysis – of the project, computer software was developed to help interpret commingled remains, and a forensic 'chain of custody' approach meant that human remains and associated artefacts had to be signed for whenever they were moved. In these respects the project broke new ground and has arguably become the 'gold standard' for projects of this nature in the future.

The graves, eight in total, were excavated over a period of four months. The responsibility of recovering, analysing and interpreting them was keenly felt among the team, prompting periods of deep reflection on the battle and warfare in general, and fostering a strong determination to do justice to the evidence and ultimately to the individuals themselves.

Precisely how many soldiers would be found was unknown; preliminary investigations suggested 400, while over 1650 soldiers were listed as missing. Soil was meticulously removed, first by a small mechanical digger and then using specialist hand tools, to expose individuals (all practically skeletonised) and artefacts. Teeth and bones were sampled for DNA and all evidence was comprehensively recorded before being lifted and transported to the temporary mortuary. All the graves were highly complex deposits, prone to water infiltration and requiring the exposure of as many individuals as possible before they could be recorded and lifted in a timely and accurate manner, while maintaining the dignity of the deceased at all times. This, in addition to robust water management systems, sampling strategies, and two- and three-dimensional recording by photography, survey and written record, meant that it was possible to recover discrete individuals and make secure associations between the individuals and artefacts. This was of fundamental importance to the identification process and is presented through fully illustrated descriptions in this volume.

Five graves were found to contain between 44 and 52 individuals each, buried in two layers with the majority lying across the width of the graves. One grave contained just three individuals lying one on top of the other, and two graves contained no individuals at all. Other findings, while not directly relevant to identification of the individuals, provided important contextual information on the process of burial in 1916. Chalk lumps and lime, found in all the occupied graves, attest to attempts to sanitise them before they were backfilled, while groundsheets and cable appear to have been used to assist with the interments. In addition, fly pupae suggest that the bodies had been buried, or the graves had been backfilled, between five and ten days after the battle had taken place.

Anthropological and artefactual analyses ran in parallel to the excavation inside a temporary mortuary adjacent to the site. Each individual was examined one at a time at a workstation, which was equipped with overhead cameras used to take photographs of each skeleton from the same fixed point throughout the duration of the project. Images were downloaded onto computers, which also contained, for each individual, associated survey and finds data, the bespoke project database and digital radiographs. This real-time archaeological recording and analysis was invaluable, helping the team manage the constant flow of information and ensuring that the works were completed on time.

Despite the wealth of documents, including letters, diaries and photographs that relate to the Battle of Fromelles, the artefacts and skeletons tell perhaps the most personal stories about what happened on the 19th/20th July 1916. All the skeletons were in good or excellent condition, allowing a high level of biological and personal identification information to be obtained. As expected, the skeletons exhibited extensive wounding from the battlefield (blast, projectile and sharp-force lesions), testimony to the bravery of the men who fought at Fromelles. Horrific in nature, this could be important identification evidence when considered alongside eye-witness accounts held by the British Red Cross, and is enormously helpful to forensic pathologists today, who work to achieve justice for victims of armed conflict.

Many soldiers were in their teens, the youngest approximately 14 years old, but there were also older individuals aged up to at least 50 years. They had an average height of 1.72 metres, which is above the height restrictions in place for enlistment in 1916. The majority were Caucasoid, but at least one was of mixed European and Aboriginal ancestry. Despite considerable breakage of bones, it was possible to make detailed records of the facial attributes of a good number of individuals. Antemortem pathology and trauma were consistent with a group of individuals who had died prematurely in their prime. There was a low rate of joint disease and other conditions that are normally associated with old age. Congenital abnormalities were frequent and the dental work was varied and extensive. Healed fractures, activity related bony changes, dental fillings and chronic disease were also recorded, and these could make an important contribution to identification where they were supported by enlistment documentation.

When the burials took place in 1916, identity discs and personal effects were collected and sent back to the Red Cross and military intelligence. As such, it was expected that a limited range of artefacts would be found. However, approximately 5900 artefacts were recovered and analysed for identification information with the assistance of radiography. Consisting primarily of items the soldiers happened to be carrying with them at their time of death, they included both military and personal effects. The majority were the remains of uniforms, such as insignia, buttons and belt buckles, the last item playing an important part in identifying the army for which individuals served. There were seven items that bore a name and were associated with individuals, although the association was not always strong. Perhaps some of the most poignant artefacts to be found were an unused return train ticket from Freemantle to Perth, which had been tucked inside a gas mask, and a lock of hair, contained within a leather heart.

All the recovered evidence was collated into confidential case reports, one for each soldier, for the identification commission, which convened

annually over five years, beginning in 2010. A data analysis team, which comprised subject matter experts, including a representative from OA, collated this information with historical records and DNA results from living families and the deceased. This was a fundamental part of the identification process and employed a methodology devised specifically for this project – the first attempt at historic identifications on a large scale.

To date, a total of 144 Australian soldiers have been identified by name. Of the remaining 106 soldiers, 75 are considered to have served for the Australian Army, two for the British Army and 29 remain 'known unto God'. Work to identify these soldiers by name will continue under the auspices of each country.

All the soldiers have now been re-buried with full military honours in individual graves at Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, the first CWGC cemetery to be built in 50 years. The first and last burials to take place were marked by ceremonies held in January 2010 and on 19th July 2010. At the latter ceremony, held on the 94th anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles, a dedication service was held and the last soldier, presently unidentified, was reburied. The ceremony was attended by HRH the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce, then Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, HRH the Duke of Kent, President of the CWGC, families of the Missing and the buried soldiers, residents of Fromelles, members of the French, Australian and British governments and armed forces, and members of the various organisations who have worked on the project.

For Oxford Archaeology, which has investigated thousands of archaeological burials, including mass graves, it has been a great privilege to work on the Fromelles project. At all times the soldiers' mortal remains were treated with the utmost dignity and respect, with high regard shown for the sensitivities involved in a project of this nature. The information in this volume has been provided in this spirit and in recognition of the Fromelles Management Board's conditions for information release (as far as a reasonable person would interpret them). An operation such as this clearly has a very important contribution to make to future, similar, projects and multiple disciplines in general. Every attempt has been made to realise this as far as possible here, although some information (for example, images and specialist catalogues) has, by necessity, been omitted or altered.

Ever since the recovery operation began, and given the sensitivities involved, limited information has been revealed up till now about how this project, aiming to recover and identify some of the Missing of Fromelles, was undertaken, what was found and how the information was employed to identify individuals. This volume is the comprehensive account of that work. Ultimately, however, this is a story of the soldiers, their bravery and sacrifice. Individuals remembered.

Résumé

Il y a presque cent ans, durant la Grande Guerre, 250 soldats ont été enterrés dans des fosses communes à l'arrière des lignes ennemies à côté du village de Fromelles, dans le nord de la France. Ils faisaient partie des milliers de soldats australiens et britanniques qui ont péri durant la bataille de Fromelles les 19 et 20 juillet 1916, et dont beaucoup n'ont pas eu de sépulture identifiée. Cet ouvrage décrit le travail réalisé par Oxford Archaeology dans le cadre d'une mission gouvernementale conjointe australienne et britannique visant à rechercher ces soldats et à les réenterrer avec les honneurs militaires dans un nouveau cimetière militaire du Commonwealth à Fromelles. Réunissant une équipe internationale de chercheurs et de spécialistes de la médecine légale, Oxford Archaeology, sous la direction de la Commonwealth War Graves Commission, a exhumé et étudié scientifiquement les dépouilles de ces soldats ainsi que les objets qui les accompagnaient. Avec le soutien et la coopération des familles des disparus, le résultat de ces recherches, avec l'ADN et les archives historiques, a été et continue d'être exploité dans le but d'identifier ces individus et de pouvoir apposer leur nom sur leur sépulture. Cet ouvrage est une synthèse technique des recherches menées par Oxford Archaeology au sein de ce projet majeur constituant la plus importante opération d'exhumation et d'identification de soldats de la Première Guerre mondiale jamais réalisée utilisant les outils de la science moderne. Il inclut également un descriptif des procédés d'identification mis en œuvre par les conseillers gouvernementaux spécialistes.

L'opération a commencé en mai 2009. À cette occasion, le révérent Ray Jones de la Saint Georges Memorial Church d'Ypres a célébré un service, et le ministre de la Défense Quentin Davies a ouvert officiellement le projet. Avec un délai d'à peine six mois pour effectuer ce travail, et dans un contexte de haute surveillance médiatique, des techniques innovantes ont été conçues afin de satisfaire aux exigences particulières de ce projet. Un camp de base a été installé sur le site, intégrant les différentes étapes de l'opération – la fouille, l'exhumation et les analyses ; un programme informatique a été développé afin d'aider à l'interprétation globale des vestiges ; enfin, une « chaîne de traçabilité » médico-légale a été mise en place, entraînant la consignation de chaque déplacement des restes humains et des objets qui leur étaient associés. À ces égards, ce projet innovant servira probablement de référence pour les futures entreprises de ce type.

Les tombes communes, huit au total, ont été fouillées sur une période de quatre mois. La responsabilité impliquée par ces travaux de recherche, d'analyse et d'interprétation a été vivement ressentie au sein de l'équipe, suscitant des périodes de profonde réflexion sur la bataille de Fromelles et la guerre en général, et favorisant une détermination à rendre justice à ces vestiges et finalement aux individus eux-mêmes.

Le nombre exact de soldats susceptibles d'être découverts était inconnu ; des recherches préliminaires suggéraient 400 individus, tandis que plus de 1650 soldats étaient portés disparus. Dans un premier temps, la terre des tombes a été retirée de façon méticuleuse avec une mini-pelle mécanique ; ensuite, les individus (tous pratiquement à l'état de squelette) et les artefacts ont été mis au jour manuellement à l'aide d'outils spécifiques. Les dents et les os ont été échantillonnés pour des analyses ADN. Les vestiges ont été intégralement enregistrés avant leur prélèvement et leur transfert à la morgue temporaire. Toutes les tombes consistaient en des dépôts très complexes, sujets aux infiltrations d'eau et exigeant la mise au jour d'un maximum d'individus avant de pouvoir les enregistrer et les exhumer de façon opportune et précise, tout en maintenant la dignité du défunt à tout moment. Grâce à une gestion des infiltrations d'eau efficace, grâce également aux stratégies d'échantillonnage ainsi qu'aux enregistrements en deux et trois dimensions par la photographie, le relevé dessin et l'écrit, il a été possible de différencier les individus et de réaliser des associations fiables entre ceux-ci et les artefacts. Cette étape a joué un rôle fondamental dans le processus d'identification des soldats et est présentée avec nombre de descriptions illustrées dans cet ouvrage.

Cinq tombes contenaient entre 44 et 52 individus chacune, enterrés sur deux niveaux. La plupart des corps s'étendaient dans la largeur des fosses. Une tombe contenait seulement trois individus inhumés l'un au-dessus de l'autre, et deux fosses ne renfermaient aucun corps. Certaines découvertes, même si elles ne sont pas directement utiles pour l'identification des individus, ont livré d'importantes informations contextuelles sur les procédés d'inhumation en 1916. Des morceaux de craie et de chaux, retrouvés dans toutes les tombes occupées, montrent que l'on a voulu désinfecter celles-ci avant de les remblayer, tandis que des tapis et des câbles semblent avoir été utilisés pour les mises en terre. En outre, la présence de pupes de mouches suggère que les corps ont été enterrés, ou les

tombes remblayées, entre cinq et dix jours après la bataille.

Les analyses anthropologiques et du mobilier ont été menées en parallèle des fouilles au sein d'une morgue temporaire installée sur le site. Chaque corps a fait l'objet d'un examen individuel sur un poste de travail équipé d'appareils photo zénithaux, ceux-ci permettant de prendre des photographies de chaque squelette depuis le même point fixe tout au long de la durée du projet. Les images étaient directement téléchargées sur des ordinateurs, où le dossier de chaque individu comprenait également les relevés et les données de fouilles, la base de données du site et les radiographies numériques. Ces enregistrements et analyses archéologiques en temps réel ont été très précieux et ont permis à l'équipe de gérer le flot d'informations constant et de respecter les délais.

En dépit de la richesse des documents historiques se rapportant à la bataille de Fromelles, incluant des lettres, des journaux intimes et des photographies, les artefacts et les squelettes sont peut-être ceux qui racontent le mieux ce qui s'est passé les 19 et 20 juillet 1916. Tous les squelettes étaient en bon ou excellent état, favorisant l'identification biologique et individuelle du défunt. Comme prévu, les corps montraient d'importantes blessures reçues sur le champ de bataille (lésions dues à des explosions, à des projectiles et à des objets tranchants), témoignages de la bravoure de ces hommes qui ont combattu à Fromelles. Horribles par nature, ces blessures peuvent cependant constituer des outils d'identification d'une grande importance lorsqu'on les met en parallèle avec les récits de témoins oculaires recueillis par la Croix Rouge britannique, de même qu'elles sont extrêmement utiles aux médecins légistes d'aujourd'hui qui travaillent à rendre justice aux victimes de conflits armés.

Beaucoup de ces soldats étaient encore adolescents – le plus jeune d'entre eux était âgé de 14 ans –, mais il y avait également des individus plus âgés atteignant au moins 50 ans. Ces hommes mesuraient en moyenne 1,72 mètre, ce qui est supérieur au minimum requis en 1916 pour l'engagement militaire. La majorité d'entre eux étaient de type caucasien, mais au moins un était d'ascendance mixte européenne et aborigène. Malgré le nombre considérable de fractures, il a été possible d'effectuer des relevés détaillés des attributs faciaux d'un bon nombre d'individus. Les pathologies et traumatismes *ante mortem* étaient cohérents avec ceux d'un groupe d'individus ayant péri prématurément dans la fleur de l'âge. Un faible taux de maladies articulaires et d'autres pathologies normalement associées à la vieillesse a été constaté. Les anomalies congénitales étaient fréquentes, et les travaux dentaires étaient variés et importants. Des fractures ressoudées, des altérations osseuses, des plombages dentaires et des maladies chroniques ont également été enregistrés ; ces éléments ont parfois été déterminants dans

l'identification quand ils ont pu être confrontés à des descriptions réalisées au moment de l'engagement du soldat.

Lors des inhumations en 1916, les plaques d'identité et les effets personnels des soldats ont été récupérés et envoyés à la Croix Rouge et aux services de renseignement militaires. Ainsi, on pensait que peu d'objets allaient être retrouvés. Toutefois, environ 5 900 artefacts ont été découverts et ont pu être analysés par radiographie à des fins d'identification. Il s'agit principalement des objets que les soldats portaient avec eux au moment de leur mort, et ils incluent à la fois des effets personnels et militaires. L'essentiel se composait de restes d'uniformes tels que des insignes, des boutons et des boucles de ceinture, ces dernières jouant un rôle important dans l'identification de l'armée dans laquelle servaient les soldats. Sept objets portaient un nom et étaient associés à des individus, bien que ce lien n'ait pas toujours été établi de façon certaine. Un billet de train retour non utilisé de Freemantle à Perth qui avait été glissé dans un masque à gaz ainsi qu'une mèche de cheveux enfermée dans un cœur en cuir sont peut-être les objets les plus poignants qui ont été découverts.

Tous les indices recueillis ont été archivés dans des dossiers confidentiels, un pour chaque soldat, à l'intention de la commission d'identification, qui se réunit tous les ans depuis 2010 pour une durée de cinq ans. Une équipe d'analyse des données, comprenant des experts en la matière et incluant un représentant d'Oxford Archaeology, a été chargée de collationner ces informations avec les archives historiques et les résultats des analyses ADN effectuées sur les défunts et les membres des familles encore en vie. Étape fondamentale du processus d'identification, ce travail a mis en œuvre une méthodologie conçue spécialement pour ce projet – la première entreprise d'identifications historiques à grande échelle.

À ce jour, 144 soldats australiens ont été identifiés par un nom. Sur les 106 autres soldats, 75 sont considérés comme ayant servi l'armée australienne, 2 l'armée britannique, et 29 demeurent « connus de Dieu seul ». Les travaux pour identifier ces soldats continueront sous les auspices de chaque pays.

Tous les soldats ont été réinhumés avec les honneurs militaires dans des sépultures individuelles au cimetière militaire du Bois du Faisan de Fromelles (Pheasant Wood), le premier cimetière militaire du Commonwealth à être construit en cinquante ans. La première et la dernière inhumation ont été marquées par des commémorations en janvier 2010 et le 19 juillet 2010. Au cours de cette dernière, le jour du 94^e anniversaire de la bataille de Fromelles, une cérémonie de consécration a précédé l'enterrement du dernier soldat, à ce jour non identifié, en présence de Son Altesse Royale le prince de Galles et de la duchesse de Cornwall, de l'Honorable Dame Quentin Bryce, alors gouverneur général du Commonwealth d'Australie, de Son Altesse Royale le duc de Kent, président du CWGC,

des familles des soldats disparus et enterrés, des habitants de Fromelles, de membres des gouvernements et des forces armées français, australiens et britanniques, et de membres de diverses organisations ayant travaillé sur le projet.

Pour Oxford Archaeology, qui a depuis sa création étudié des milliers de sépultures dont des fosses communes, travailler sur le projet Fromelles a été un très grand privilège. Tout au long de ces recherches, les dépouilles des soldats ont été traitées dans le plus grand respect de leur dignité et avec une grande considération pour les sensibilités impliquées. Les informations contenues dans cet ouvrage ont été délivrées dans cet esprit et selon les conditions établies par le Fromelles Management Board (telles qu'une personne raisonnable les interpréterait). Une telle opération aura certainement un

impact important sur les projets futurs similaires ou plus généralement dans de multiples disciplines. Tous les efforts possibles ont été faits dans ce sens, bien que certaines informations (par exemple, des images et des inventaires de spécialistes) aient été, par nécessité, omises ou modifiées.

Depuis les débuts de l'opération, et compte tenu des sensibilités de chacun, peu d'informations ont été révélées sur la façon dont ce projet, visant à retrouver et à identifier les disparus de Fromelles, a été entrepris, sur ce qui a été découvert et comment les informations récoltées ont été utilisées pour identifier les individus. Cet ouvrage est le compte-rendu complet de ce travail. En définitive, cependant, c'est d'une histoire de ces soldats dont il s'agit, de leur bravoure et de leur sacrifice. En leur mémoire.

Zusammenfassung

Vor fast 100 Jahren wurden am Ortsrand des nordfranzösischen Dorfes Fromelles 250 Soldaten hinter der feindlichen Linie in anonymen Massengräbern begraben. Wie einige Tausend weitere australische und britische Männer hatten sie am 19. und 20. Juli 1916 in der Schlacht von Fromelles ihr Leben verloren. Viele von ihnen haben kein gekennzeichnetes Grab. Der vorliegende Bericht schildert den von Oxford Archaeology zu einer gemeinsamen Initiative der australischen und britischen Regierung geleisteten Beitrag. Ziel dieser Initiative war es gewesen, die Toten zu bergen und in einem neuen Kriegsgräberfriedhof des Commonwealth in Fromelles mit militärischen Ehren zu bestatten. Unter der Leitung der Commonwealth-Kriegsgräber-Kommission (Commonwealth War Graves Commission, CWGC) beauftragte Oxford Archaeology ein internationales Team aus forensischen Experten und Sachverständigen mit der Ausgrabung und wissenschaftlichen Untersuchung der sterblichen Überreste der Soldaten sowie der beiliegenden Objekte. Mit dem Einverständnis und der Unterstützung der heute noch lebenden Angehörigen werden diese Funde neben DNA-Analysen und historischen Quellen bis heute dazu verwendet, die Soldaten namentlich zu identifizieren, um ihrer auf Grabsteinen persönlich gedenken zu können. Das vorliegende Werk ist eine fachliche Zusammenführung der von Oxford Archaeology ausgeführten Arbeiten an diesem bahnbrechenden Projekt: der bis dato größten, mittels moderner wissenschaftlicher Methoden erfolgten Bergung und Identifizierung im Ersten Weltkrieg gefallener Soldaten. Ferner enthält sie Einzelheiten zu dem von erfahrenen Regierungsberatern abgewickelten Identifizierungsverfahren.

Die Ermittlungen begannen im Mai 2009; zu diesem Anlass hielt Hochwürden Ray Jones von der Gedächtniskirche St. Georg in Ypres einen Gottesdienst und das Projekt wurde vom damaligen britischen Verteidigungsminister Quentin Davies offiziell initiiert. Für die Grabungsarbeiten waren lediglich 6 Monate anberaunt und unter dem wachsamen Auge der Medien konzipierte man innovative Vorgehensweisen, um den einmaligen Anforderungen des Vorhabens zu genügen. Zur Integration der einzelnen Forschungskomponenten – Ausgrabung, Exhumierung und Analyse – wurde vor Ort eine Projektzentrale errichtet; um die miteinander vermischten Knochenteile besser interpretieren zu können, entwickelten Experten eine spezielle Computer-Software. Ferner bedeutete der für die Forensik verwendete Ansatz der lückenlosen Rückverfolgbarkeit, dass die menschlichen

Überreste sowie die zugehörigen Funde jedes Mal abgezeichnet werden mussten, wenn sie an einen anderen Ort transferiert wurden. In dieser Hinsicht beschritt das Projekt technisches Neuland, was für Unternehmungen dieser Art künftig wohl der ‚Goldstandard‘ sein wird.

Über einen Zeitraum von vier Monaten wurden insgesamt acht Gräber freigelegt. Welche Verantwortung die Bergung, Auswertung und Interpretation mit sich brachte, war im Team deutlich zu spüren und führte zu Phasen tiefgründiger Reflexionen zum Kampfesgeschehen selbst sowie zum Thema Kriegsführung im Allgemeinen. Dies nährte ein starkes Bestreben, den bedeutsamen Fund und letztendlich die Verstorbenen selbst gebührend zu würdigen.

Wie viele tote Soldaten man genau finden würde, war nicht bekannt; Voruntersuchungen gingen von etwa 400 aus, während über 1.650 als vermisst galten. Das Erdreich wurde sorgfältig abgetragen, zunächst mit einem mechanischen Kleinbagger und anschließend unter Einsatz spezieller Handwerkzeuge, um die einzelnen Leichen (praktisch alle skelettiert) sowie die Grabbeilagen freizulegen. An Zähnen und Knochen wurden Proben für DNA-Tests entnommen. Ferner wurden alle Fundstücke ausführlich dokumentiert, bevor sie ausgehoben und in eine vorübergehende Leichenhalle verlegt wurden. Sämtliche Gräber enthielten Ablagerungen stark unterschiedlicher Beschaffenheit und waren durch einsickerndes Wasser gefährdet. Aus diesem Grund mussten möglichst viele Einzelskelette freigelegt werden, bevor sie zeitig und minuziös dokumentiert und geborgen werden konnten, wobei die Würde der Toten stets gewahrt wurde. Diese Vorgehensweise, kombiniert mit soliden Wassermanagementsystemen und Probenahme-strategien, zwei- plus dreidimensionaler Erfassung durch Fotografie, Vermessung und schriftliche Aufzeichnungen, ermöglichte die Bergung individueller Skelette und die eindeutige Zuweisung der gefundenen Objekte. Für den Identifizierungsprozess spielten diese Faktoren eine entscheidende Rolle, wie im vorliegenden Werk durchgehend mit bebilderten Beschreibungen veranschaulicht wird.

Fünf Gräber enthielten jeweils zwischen 44 und 52 verschiedene Skelette, die in zwei Schichten begraben waren, die Mehrheit davon entlang der Breite der Gräber. In einem Grab fand man lediglich drei Personen, die aufeinander lagen; zwei Gräber enthielten keine Gebeine. Andere Fundstücke, wenn auch nicht direkt relevant für die Identifizierung

Einzelner, lieferten wichtige Kontextinformationen zur Art und Weise der im Jahr 1916 erfolgten Bestattung. In allen drei belegten Gräbern fanden sich Kreidebrocken und Kalk – ein Hinweis für den Versuch, die Leichname zu desinfizieren, bevor die ausgehobenen Gruben wieder zugeschüttet wurden. Für die Beisetzung selbst scheinen Bodenplanen und Kabel benutzt worden zu sein; Fliegenpuppen indessen lassen darauf schließen, dass die Verstorbenen fünf bis zehn Tage nach dem Gefecht beigesetzt bzw. die Gräber nach diesem Zeitraum verfüllt wurden.

Parallel zur Ausgrabung erfolgten in einer zeitweiligen Leichenhalle neben der Fundstätte anthropologische Untersuchungen und eine Analyse der Artefakte. An einer Workstation wurden alle Skelette separat untersucht und während des Grabungsverlaufs mit Overhead-Kameras aus demselben Blickwinkel fotografiert. Die Bilder wurden anschließend auf Computer heruntergeladen; dort waren für jedes Skelett auch die Vermessungsdaten sowie Informationen zu den beigefundenen Gegenständen, die speziell konzipierte Projektdatenbank und digitale Röntgenaufnahmen gespeichert. Die archäologische Aufzeichnung und Auswertung in Echtzeit erwies sich als unentbehrlich: Sie half dem Team bei der Bewältigung des kontinuierlichen Informationsflusses und ermöglichte den fristgemäßen Abschluss der Arbeiten.

Ungeachtet der Fülle der zur Schlacht von Fromelles in Bezug stehenden Dokumente, darunter Briefe, Tagebücher und Fotografien, erzählen die Fundstücke und Gebeine wohl die persönlichsten Geschichten darüber, was am 19. und 20. Juli 1916 wirklich geschah. Da sich alle Skelette in einem guten bis ausgezeichneten Zustand befanden, ließen sich umfassende biologische und persönliche Identifizierungsdaten gewinnen. Wie erwartet, zeigten die Knochen zahlreiche Anzeichen für Verwundungen an der Front (durch Explosionen, Geschosse und punktuelle Einwirkung verursachte Läsionen) und bezeugen die Tapferkeit jener Männer, die in Fromelles gekämpft haben. Zusammen mit Augenzeugenberichten aus dem Archiv des Britischen Roten Kreuzes liefern Hinweise dieser Art, so schmerzlich sie auch sein mögen, wichtige Anhaltspunkte für die Identifizierung und helfen den Gerichtsmedizinern sehr bei ihrer Aufgabe, Gerechtigkeit für die Opfer des bewaffneten Konflikts zu erzielen.

Viele der Soldaten waren noch Jugendliche, der jüngste ungefähr 14 Jahre alt. Unter ihnen befanden sich allerdings auch ältere Männer im Alter von mindestens 50 Jahren. Sie waren durchschnittlich 1,72 Meter groß und lagen damit über der für das Jahr 1916 festgelegten Mindestgröße für die Einberufung. Die meisten waren europäischer Herkunft, allerdings stammte mindestens einer von ihnen neben seinen europäischen Vorfahren auch von australischen Ureinwohnern ab. Obwohl viele Knochen zerbrochen waren, konnten detaillierte

Aussagen über die Gesichtsmerkmale einer stattlichen Zahl einzelner Soldaten gemacht werden. Pathologische Merkmale ante mortem und Traumata entsprachen denen frühzeitig in den besten Lebensjahren verstorbener Personen. Der Anteil an Gelenkerkrankungen und anderer, gewöhnlich mit steigendem Alter assoziierter Krankheitsbilder war gering; angeborene Fehlbildungen wurden häufig verzeichnet, und die Zähne zeigten umfangreiche Behandlungen der unterschiedlichsten Art. Verheilte Frakturen, verschleißbedingte Veränderungen im Knochenaufbau, Zahnfüllungen und chronische Erkrankungen wurden ebenfalls nachgewiesen und waren maßgeblich für die Identifizierung in Fällen, in denen Einberufungsbescheide vorlagen.

Da Erkennungsmarken und persönliche Effekten vor der Grablegung im Jahr 1916 eingesammelt und anschließend an das Rote Kreuz sowie an militärische Nachrichtendienstabteilungen gesendet wurden, ging man davon aus, eine begrenzte Anzahl von Artefakten zu finden. Tatsächlich wurden insgesamt rund 5.900 Gegenstände geborgen und mit Hilfe von Röntgenaufnahmen zu Identifizierungszwecken analysiert. Der Fund bestand hauptsächlich aus Objekten, welche die Soldaten zum Todeszeitpunkt bei sich trugen und umfasste sowohl militärische Artikel als auch persönliche Dinge, der Großteil davon Uniformfragmente wie Rangabzeichen, Knöpfe und Gürtelschnallen – letztere spielten für die Bestimmung der Einheit, in der die einzelnen Soldaten dienten, eine wichtige Rolle. Sieben Objekte waren mit einem Namen versehen und konnten mit einzelnen Soldaten in Verbindung gebracht werden, allerdings war die Assoziierung nicht immer eindeutig. Zu den vielleicht ergreifendsten Fundstücken zählen eine unbenutzte Rückfahrkarte von Freemantle nach Perth, die in der Auskleidung einer Gasmasken steckte, und eine Haarlocke im Inneren eines Lederherzchens.

Alle freigelegten Gegenstände wurden in vertraulichen, für jeden Soldaten separat erstellten Fallberichten erfasst und der Identifizierungskommission vorgelegt, die ab 2010 über einen Zeitraum von 5 Jahren einmal jährlich tagte. Ein Datenanalyseteam bestehend aus Fachbereichsexperten, darunter ein Vertreter von Oxford Archaeology, gliederte diese Informationen mit historischen Aufzeichnungen sowie den Erbgutprofilen lebender Nachkommen und der verstorbenen Soldaten ab. Dies war ein wesentliches Element des Identifikationsprozesses und verwendete eine eigens für dieses Projekt entworfene Methodik – der erstmalige Versuch einer historischen Identifikation in einem so großen Umfang.

Bislang konnten insgesamt 144 australische Soldaten namentlich identifiziert werden. Von den übrigen 106 Soldaten dienten 75 vermutlich im Australischen Heer, zwei für die Landstreitkräfte des Vereinigten Königreiches, und 29 ‚kennt nur Gott‘. Unter Federführung der jeweiligen Länder laufen die Bemühungen weiter, auch diese Männer namentlich zu identifizieren.

Die sterblichen Überreste aller Soldaten wurden auf dem ersten, nach einer 50-jährigen Pause von der CWGC angelegten Soldatenfriedhof in Einzelgräbern in Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) mit militärischen Ehren bestattet. Sowohl die erste als auch die letzte Beisetzung im Januar 2010 und am 19. Juli 2010 wurden durch offizielle Gedenkfeiern begleitet. Bei der letzten Zeremonie, die am 94. Jahrestag der Schlacht von Fromelles stattfand, wurde der Friedhof offiziell eingeweiht und der letzte bis dato nicht näher identifizierte letzte Soldat erneut beerdigt. Unter den Anwesenden waren Charles, Prinz von Wales, mit seiner Gattin, der Herzogin von Cornwall, sowie Dame Quentin Bryce, zum damaligen Zeitpunkt Generalgouverneurin Australiens, der Herzog von Kent (Präsident der CWGC), die Hinterbliebenen der vermissten und bestatteten Soldaten, Einwohner von Fromelles, Repräsentanten der französischen, australischen und britischen Regierungen und Armeen sowie Vertreter verschiedener, an dem Projekt beteiligter Organisationen.

Oxford Archaeology, ein Unternehmen, das Tausende archäologischer Grabstätten, inklusive Massengräber, untersucht hat, betrachtete die Tätigkeit in Fromelles als eine große Ehre. Die sterblichen Überreste der Soldaten wurden pietätvoll und mit größtem Respekt behandelt, und man zollte den besonderen Empfindlichkeiten,

die ein Projekt dieser Art birgt, große Achtung. Auch die im vorliegenden Werk enthaltenen Daten erheben diesen Anspruch und honorieren (bei angemessener, vernünftiger Betrachtung) die vom Verwaltungsrat Fromelles für die Veröffentlichung von Informationen gemachten Auflagen. Ein Unterfangen wie dieses hat künftig zu ähnlichen Projekten, aber auch zu anderen Fachdisziplinen generell einen wichtigen Beitrag zu leisten. An dieser Stelle wurden alle erdenklichen Anstrengungen unternommen, um diesem Streben gerecht zu werden; nichts desto weniger wurden einige Informationen (zum Beispiel Bilder und Fachkataloge) notwendigerweise ausgelassen bzw. geändert.

Um einen würdevollen Umgang mit den Verstorbenen und ihren Angehörigen zu gewährleisten, wurden nach Beginn der Grabung nur begrenzt Informationen darüber preisgegeben, wie dieses Projekt, in dessen Mittelpunkt die Bergung und Identifikation der Vermissten von Fromelles stand, vonstatten ging, was gefunden wurde und wie einzelne Soldaten mit Hilfe dieser Daten identifiziert wurden. Der vorliegende Forschungsbericht trägt den ausgeführten Arbeiten umfassend Rechnung. Schlussendlich jedoch erzählt er die Geschichte der Soldaten, ihrer Tapferkeit und der von ihnen erbrachten Opfer. Wir werden ihrer gedenken.

Foreword

The opening of a new Commonwealth war cemetery at Fromelles on 19 July 2010 was the ceremonial culmination of a number of years of dedicated work to locate, recover, inter and where possible, identify Australian and British soldiers who died and remained unaccounted for from the Battle of Fromelles.

On the basis of compelling evidence collated by a number of devoted historians, the Australian Army began the task of confirming the presence of human remains at a suspected mass burial site adjacent to Pheasant Wood. In 2008 the non-invasive investigation confirmed the presence of human remains at the site. Later that same year, the Australian and British Governments combined to establish the joint project team to recover, inter and, where possible, identify the soldiers from Pheasant Wood.

Team members from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the British Ministry of Defence and the Australian Army relied heavily on a range of expert individuals and organisations to perform the diverse functions necessary to fulfil the project aims. Consequently, the joint project team expanded to include anthropologists, micro-biologists, genealogists, historical researchers and archaeologists. The members of the project team, many of whom kindly volunteered their time, were united in the cause to give the soldiers' remains a suitable final resting place.

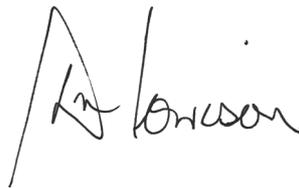
I am very proud of the joint team's achievements. The team discovered and identified the remains of many brave men, who were otherwise destined to remain unidentified. The team also reunited families, rewrote history, and reminded us all that the deeds of our soldiers ought never be forgotten.

One of the very many contributors to the success of the Fromelles Project was the archaeological recovery team from Oxford Archaeology, a dedicated and professional team charged with the emotionally sapping task of recovering the 250 soldiers. The pages of this book will explain how they went about this painstaking task.

With thousands of family members of the lost soldiers registered with the project and a plan to utilise DNA to identify the remains, the recovery team recognised that its task was something more than just an archaeological dig. Indeed, many of the team met with family members of the deceased as tour groups and individuals came to Fromelles to witness history unfolding. The team's strong connection with the project and the families of the deceased is evident each year as many of the members of the recovery team return to Fromelles on the anniversary of the battle to commemorate and to remember.

Ultimately, it was the commitment and professionalism of everyone at Oxford Archaeology that led to the recovery of 250 soldiers and almost 6,000 individual artefacts. The meticulous manner with which Oxford Archaeology recovered these remains and artefacts resulted in the identification of the majority of the soldiers by nationality, and many of those by name. It was a monumental achievement by any measure.

On behalf of all involved in the Fromelles Project, I thank Oxford Archaeology for the significant part that it played in the recovery, identification and honouring of the missing soldiers from the Battle of Fromelles. The Australian Army will be forever grateful.



*Lieutenant General David Morrison, AO
Chief of Army, the Australian Army*



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On-site grave excavation and site logistics were managed by Paul Murray. Survey work was led initially by Anna Komar, followed by Laura Gadsby with Victoria Wilkinson. Excavation and recovery was supervised by Ambika Flavel, Brian Dean and Roland Wessling and undertaken by Andrew Brown, Adrian Burrow, Mark Gibson, Artur Fedorowicz, John Griffiths, Jasmine Hall, Sophie Nias-Cooper, Mattius Philwret, Laura Piper, Juliette Michel and Alistair Zochowski. Chain of custody was managed by Jan Williams, Scene of Crime Officer (SoCO) seconded to the project by Gwent and Glamorgan Police. Special thanks is extended to Dr Michel Signoli for making time in his busy schedule to join the excavation team and for recommending and putting us in contact with finds and conservation experts. We are also grateful to GUARD Archaeology, in particular Dr Iain Banks and Dr Tony Pollard, for making their survey data available during excavation set-up.

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'Remember Me to All'



Members of the project team (2009)



Members of the field and temporary mortuary project team (2009)