

# George HONEY

Private 1291, 32nd Battalion, Australian Infantry

Died July 19th 1916, aged 29

Memorial at VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial, Fromelles, France

George Honey was born at Port Isaac in 1886 to William John and Thursa Honey. In 1891, William John (48) is recorded as a fisherman, living with Thursa (40) and their six children; John (15) a farm labourer, Mary G (13), Harry (10), James (8), George (5) and Gregory (5 months). In 1901, Henry (Harry), George and Gregory are still with their parents, with Henry noted as an able seaman in the Merchant service, and George is now also a fisherman. In 1911 George was the mate on the schooner Thomas Aylan at Pentewan Docks, with his father as master.

1912 saw great changes for George. In the autumn he married Ann Brown Bradshaw, sister of Richard Mitchell Bradshaw, and on December 20th 1912 they left London on the SS Gothic bound for Fremantle in Western Australia. On the passenger list, George gave his occupation as a farm labourer. Her brother Richard had gone there the previous year with their brother John and his family (in 1911 John was running a market gardening business in Port Gaverne). Her older sister Mary and two of her children also emigrated to Australia in September of the following year.



SS Gothic

George and Ann Honey on the SS Gothic passenger list

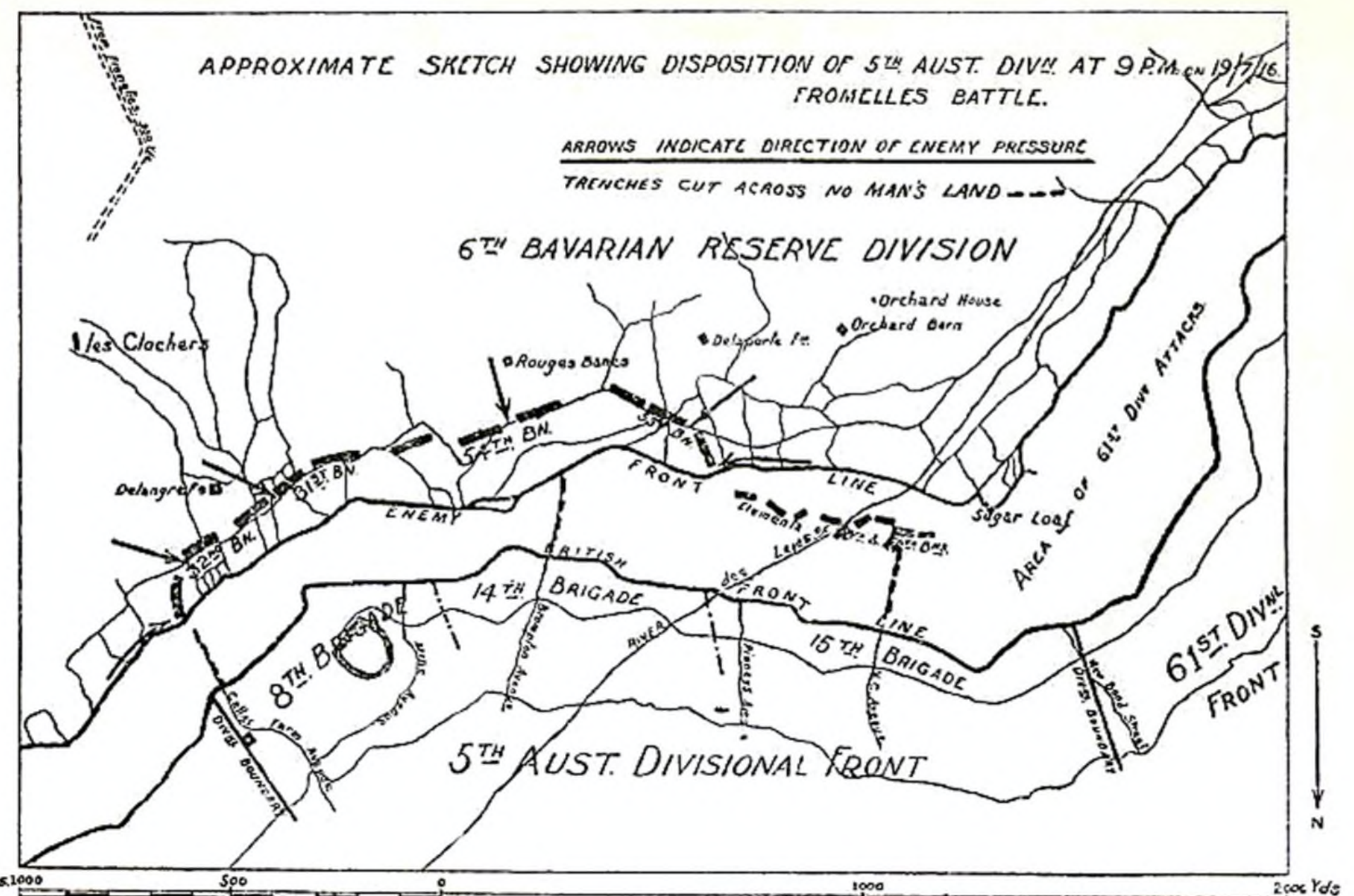


In Australia, George and Ann settled in with Ann's brother John and his family in Beechboro, West Guildford, now a suburb of Perth, Western Australia. In 1915 they had a son, James William Honey.

George Honey's Enlistment Papers

George joined the Australian Imperial Force on July 12th 1915, where he recorded his occupation as labourer. He was placed in D Company 32nd Battalion, which embarked on the SS Geelong in December 1915, arriving at Alexandria in Egypt on December 18th. In Egypt they mixed with the Australian forces just evacuated from Gallipoli, where he may have come across his nephew, William John Bradshaw. These mixed forces were formed into I and II ANZAC Corps in February 1916. The more experienced I ANZAC was shipped to France that month with most of the artillery and trained personnel. II ANZAC was left in Egypt to train. As a first 'test', they were ordered to undertake a 40 mile training march from their camp at Tel el Kebir to the Suez Canal. Their commanding officer Major-General J W McCay objected, but was overruled. He imposed strict discipline on the march, which took three days over soft sand and in extreme heat. The men suffered severely and the march was completed in disarray. No doubt glad to get out of the heat, 32nd Battalion left Egypt on June 17th 1916 on the SS Transylvania as part of the 5th Division, to arrive at Marseilles in France on June 23rd.

5th Division was the most inexperienced Australian division in France, but was chosen for the debut attack of the Australian Imperial Force in the Battle of Fromelles, just a week after arriving in the trenches. Their task was to attack the left flank of the German salient on higher ground, known as the Sugarloaf, with the British 61st Division attacking the right flank. There was considerable discussion amongst the general staff as to whether the operation was necessary, and Sir Douglas Haig did not want the attack to proceed unless local commanders were confident of success. Preparations for the attack were rushed, the troops were inexperienced, and the strength of the opposing German forces was seriously underestimated. It was to be a daylight attack on a narrow front, against defenders on high ground with their artillery on either side free to fire into the flanks of the attackers. With the benefits of hindsight, we can see that all the ingredients were in place for a debacle.



5th Australian Division Positions on July 19th 1916, with 32nd Battalion on the left (note south is at the top of this map)

After several postponements the attack began at 5.30pm on July 19th. The 61st Division entered no man's land through narrow 'sally-ports', some of which were already under fire from German machine guns and quickly became death traps. The entry into battle by the 5th Division fared slightly better as they went over the parapets on a wide front. The advance on the right was stopped after 300 yards by machine gun fire from the Sugarloaf and the survivors had to dig in. In the centre they managed to reach the German line and took prisoners. The 32nd battalion was on the extreme left and suffered heavy casualties as they attacked the German stronghold in the ruins of Delangre Farm. W H 'Jimmy' Downing, an Australian survivor from an adjacent battalion, described the horrendous scene 'the air was thick with bullets, swishing in a flat, criss-crossed lattice of death. Hundreds were mown down in the flicker of an eyelid, like great rows of teeth knocked from a comb. Men were cut in two by streams of bullets. It was all over in five minutes'. In the light of events, a further planned attack was called off at 8.20pm and all troops were ordered to withdraw. Those pinned down in no man's land withdrew under cover of darkness, and rescue parties tried to recover the wounded.

The battle is widely regarded as a disaster for the allies, and the number of casualties was appalling. The British 61st Battalion lost 1,547 men, but the 5th Australian Division fared much worse, losing 5,513 men, the greatest loss of Australian lives in 24 hours. The 32nd Battalion lost 718 men, representing 90% of strength, and it had to be completely rebuilt as a fighting unit. Amongst the casualties was Private George Honey, whose memorial is at the VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial at Fromelles, France.

There was a full investigation into this disaster, which may explain why there are so many documents still surviving relating to George's death, including these personal accounts from fellow soldiers who were sure they saw him fall.

George Honey's colleagues, Privates Williams, Cameron, Grievs and Fhen, saw him fall and wrote these notes. (Fleurbaix is the nearest village, about a mile north of the front line. Maylands is a district of Perth, a few miles from Beechboro, West Guildford.)

These eye witness accounts confirm George must have died near Delangre Farm.

Along with 160 Australian and 239 British casualties, his body was subsequently recovered by the Germans and buried. Their effects were returned through the Red Cross, together with the identity tags as confirmation of their death. The exact location of the German temporary grave may have been lost in the fog of war, but he could be amongst the 410 unknown Australian soldiers buried in the VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial at Fromelles, or in another local cemetery nearby. VC Corner was the nickname given to this part of the battlefield near the Sugarloaf, referring either to the bravery of the Australian troops, or that the place demanded exceptional bravery to be held. VC Avenue, where the cemetery was built, is marked on the above map, SSW of the Sugarloaf.

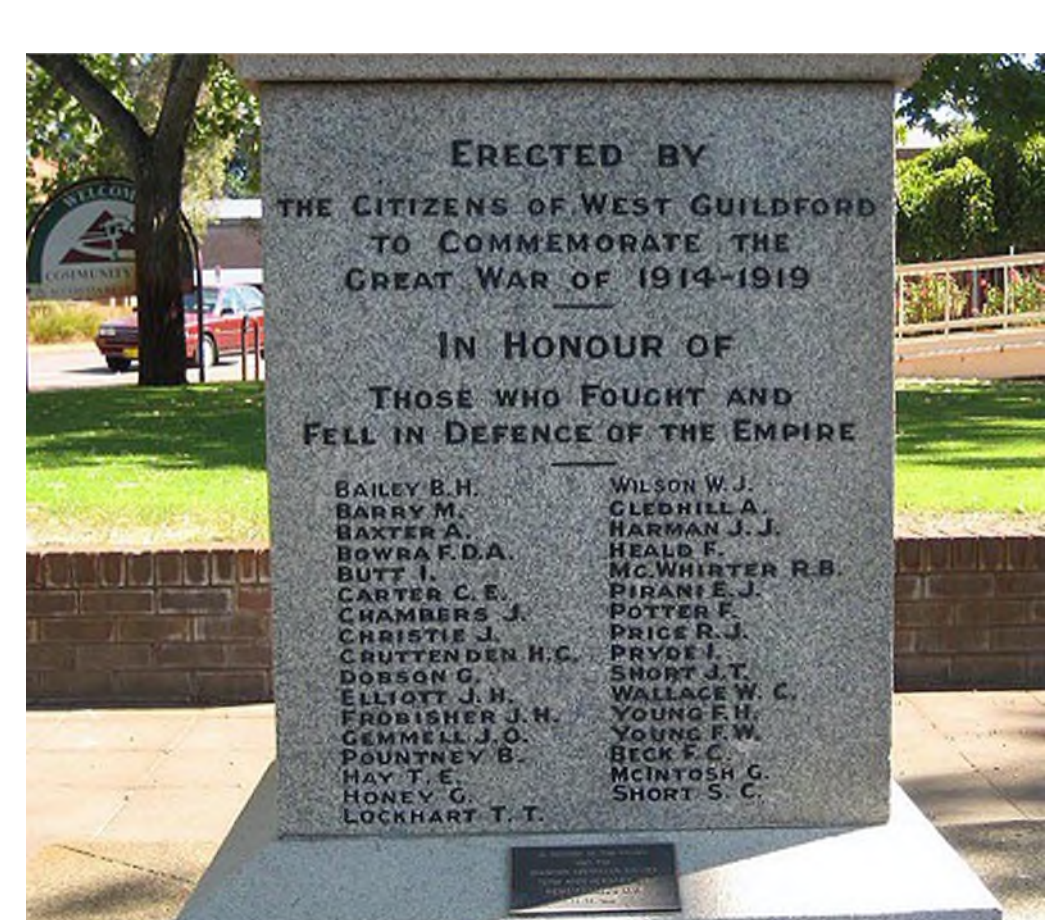
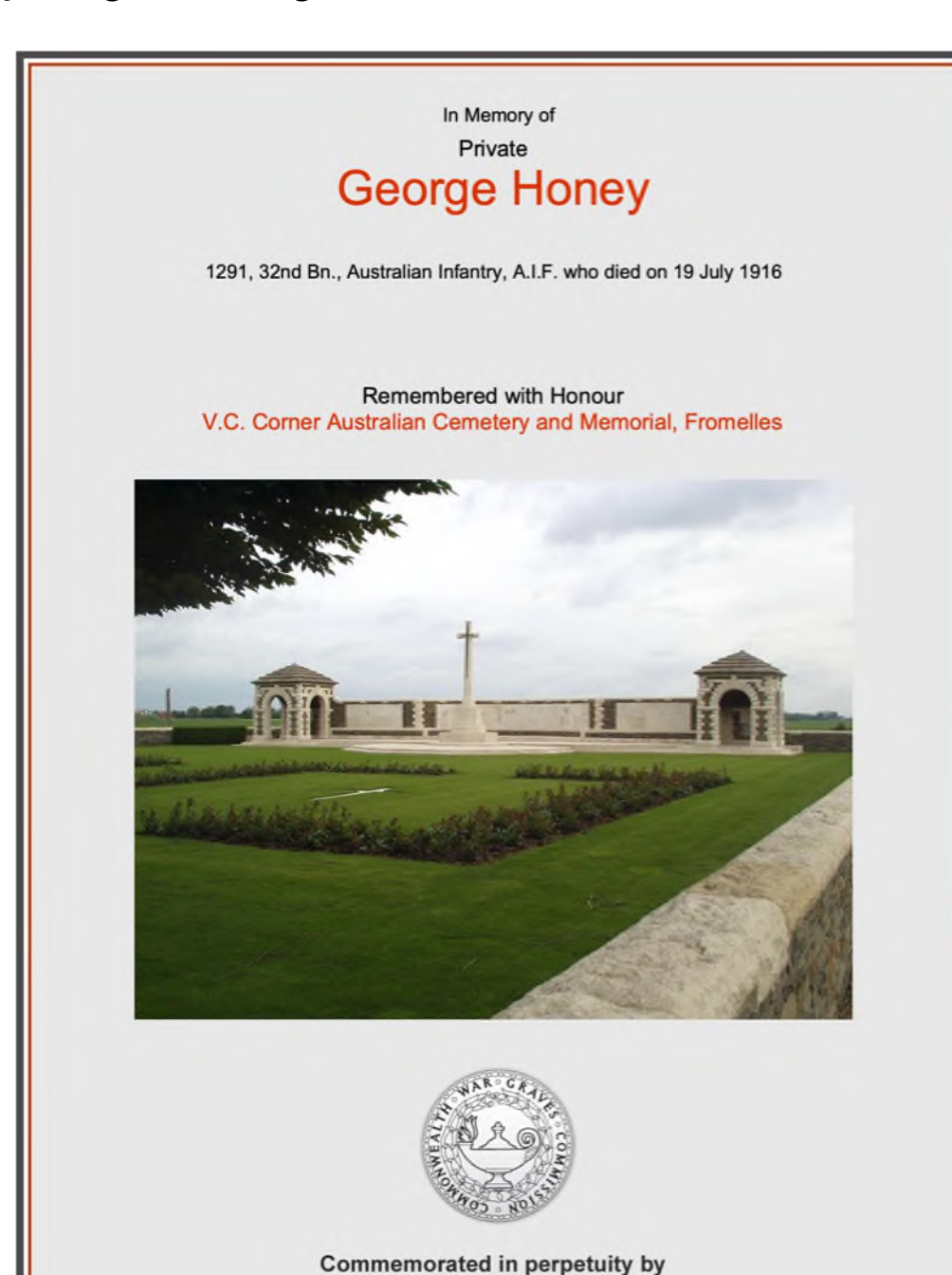
Ann Brown Honey had lost her husband but still had to raise their son, James William. She was living with her eldest brother John, whose son William John Bradshaw had also enlisted in 1915. In 1918, she heard that their brother Richard had also been killed. Her nephew William John did live through the war, despite several wounds and experiencing the horrors of Gallipoli.

German record card for the recovery of the body of George Honey, with a translation on the right

Some of the correspondence between the military and Ann still survives in the Australian archives. We know she needed confirmation of George's death for his insurance purposes, and asked for it on August 14th 1916, only to receive a stock letter advising they did not have confirmation but had noted her request for compliance at the earliest possible date. On November 9th her brother John wrote again on her behalf asking for these documents urgently, which were finally sent on November 22nd. The following April she had to ask the same army department for a second copy of his death certificate in order to settle up with a different army department about his deferred army pay. In July 1917 she asked for any of his effects to be sent to her. The identity disc recovered by the Germans was returned to Australia in 1917 and passed on to Ann, who gave her receipt.

Letters to the Australian Military

She had had some tough knocks in her life, but managed to raise their son to adulthood. James William Honey joined the Australian army and survived the Second World War, but died quite young at the age of 36 in 1951.



West Guildford's war memorial also records the name of George Honey

George had an older brother, Joe Honey (b1870), one of Port Gaverne's characters right up until he died in 1955. Honey Cellars in Port Gaverne is named after him. Although she never knew him, George is Joan Murray's uncle



Ann Brown Honey c1935 and the obituaries to Ann and George's son, James William Honey

As a footnote to this story of courage and sacrifice, in May 2008, following detailed research by a retired Australian schoolteacher, Lambis Englezos, the remains of 250 soldiers buried by the Germans were located in mass graves at Pheasant Wood (Bois Faisan) on the outskirts of Fromelles. 205 were Australian, 3 British and 42 were unknown. Using sophisticated forensic techniques, including DNA analysis for comparison with living descendants, 96 Australian bodies have been successfully identified. Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, the first new Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery for over 50 years, was built for their final interment. The inaugural reburial and ceremony took place at 11 am on January 30th 2010, attended by representatives from Australia, France, the UK and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The former Chief of Defence of the French Army, General Bruno Cuche, paid tribute to the sacrifice made by the young soldiers, concluding with these fine words -

**"When we give these soldiers a dignified grave we accomplish here one of the oldest gestures of mankind. It is a gesture of devotion. It is the gesture accomplished by every son for his father and by every nation for their heroes. Let them rest in peace in this land for which they shed their blood and which owes them everything, including freedom!"**

**May 2020 - Additional Footnote Regarding DNA Testing:** Joan Murray recalls Major David Wilson of the Unrecovered War Casualties Unit of the Australian Army visiting Port Isaac some years back in his quest for DNA to try and identify George.

On May 6th an email was received from Marg O'Leary, Vice-President of the Fromelles Association of Australia. She had seen the story of George Honey on our Port Isaac Heritage website and wished to advise us that last year the Fromelles Identification Board had used the DNA collected there to add George Honey to the list of identified casualties. She included a copy of the Fromelles Association newsletter for September 2019 which gave details of the annual ceremony of remembrance at the cemetery in France on July 19th 2109 in which the graves of George Honey, and six more of his comrades, were dedicated, together with this report from member Ann Watson who attended the ceremony.

"We were picked up with the identified soldiers' families at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Lille, at 12 noon and taken out to Fromelles to a light lunch in the Cobbers School cafeteria where we met the town's mayor Jean Gabriel Masson and the school principal. After, the mayor led us down the lane to the mass grave site and then onto the Museum where the families were given research done into their soldier by the genealogists present. Unfortunately the Batt family had contacted me saying they couldn't make the ceremony and fortunately for me Dave Wilson asked if I would act in their place, so I also collected any and everything I could for them.

We departed the Museum and by coach went out to Cobbers Statue and onto VC Corner. Our Australian Diplomat from Paris accompanied us driving in front of the coach with the Australian flag flying. One of the group fell on the VC Corner steps cracking her head... lots of blood... everyone with any first aid training gave assistance and the Ambassador sent her off to hospital in Lille in his car.

The Dedication Ceremony started at 6pm with Lieutenant Colonel Ben McLennan who did a superb job. His French sounded great to us however he said he made a few blues. After the dignitaries arrived and were seated (on the other side of the cenotaph from where the families were seated) there were the usual welcomes and acknowledgements followed by the wreath laying. I didn't fully understand what was asked of me by Carole who organised the wreath. Whereas others had their association's names on the sash I asked for "Lest we forget" and purchased a card and wrote what was suggested by Royce. However after assuring that all the wreaths were in order when the time came Lt. Col. Ben used his French accent to give the organisation and some old French bloke from the flag bearing party strode forward and took the wreath and laid it for us!! I chose not to make a fuss of any kind although our families' group looked a bit astonished because they knew the wreath was from our Association. The soldiers I identified just as ashenated too, sitting on the edge of my seat all ready to rise. Sorry about that but not under my control. The guards I identified were then named as one member from each family went forward and met a child from the village who carried 2 long stemmed red roses. The child I met was named Juliette and we walked together to Arthur George Batt's grave.

When everyone was in place, the family member unveiled the headstone. Juliette passed one of the roses to me and we placed them at the foot of the stone. After returning to our seats there was the Ode of Remembrance, Last Post, National Anthem, a final blessing and departure of flag bearers and Official Parties. There was a reception at Cobbers School, and we returned to Lille at 8.30pm.

That's the bare bones... lots of friendships made and stories told."

Ann Watson

It is heart-warming that so much international effort has taken place to ensure these brave men, including one of our Port Isaac boys, receive their fully marked final resting place.

**Sources**  
5th Division in II ANZAC: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5th\\_Division\\_\(Australia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5th_Division_(Australia))  
Battle of Fromelles: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Fromelles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Fromelles) and [http://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/44/page18\\_ekins/](http://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/44/page18_ekins/)  
VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VC\\_Corner\\_Australian\\_Cemetery\\_and\\_Memorial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VC_Corner_Australian_Cemetery_and_Memorial)  
Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fromelles\\_\(Pheasant\\_Wood\)\\_Military\\_Cemetery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fromelles_(Pheasant_Wood)_Military_Cemetery)

Port Isaac Heritage thank Joan Murray for her documents and pictures, and Sally McNicol in Honey Cellars for translation of the German record.



Ann Watson accompanied by Juliette with two red roses for the grave

1291 Private G. Honey  
32nd Bn. Australian Inf.  
19th July 1916 Age 30

"He Serves Beside His Comrades"

