

# Historical Happenings

*Special items in our  
newsletter:*



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## Piecing together the past: Fromelles

By Robert Hall  
BBC News

**Detective work by a British historian has unearthed information that could enable thousands to piece together their family histories.**

Historian Peter Barton, commissioned by the Australian government, has been given access to archives in the basement of the Red Cross headquarters in Geneva, allowed to examine records that have lain virtually untouched since 1918. The research followed the discovery of a WW1 mass grave at Fromelles in France. Estimates are that there could be 20 million sets of details.

They deal with the capture, death, or burial of servicemen from over 30 nations drawn into the conflict; personal effects, home addresses and grave sites cover page after page. Volunteers logged the information by hand to be sent to the home countries.

The records could potentially reveal the whereabouts of individuals whose remains were never found, or never identified. Grave after grave in the World War I cemeteries mark the last resting place of an unknown soldier. The Red Cross hope to have the archive online by 2014. With the help of today's technology the past will be unlocked.

Personal details have lain virtually untouched for decades, card indexes and registers compiled between 1914 and 1918; the Red Cross had acted as a go-between, logging, and passing on the whereabouts of prisoners, their condition or injuries at the time of capture, and the location of field burials. Shelves contain millions more personal stories. Barton went through pages of handwritten names - all men who had died on the first day of the Battle of the Somme - lives ended far from home. Thanks to the Red Cross, their stories may soon be told.

If you would like to contribute to this newsletter please contact Ros Coventry on 5581 2875 or [roscov@iprimus.com.au](mailto:roscov@iprimus.com.au).

### **Change to date of the visit to Chetwynd: now Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> April**

At our last meeting last we discussed changing the date from 29 March to 19 April. Orthodox Easter falls on that date and is therefore not possible for Ilija and Sloba.

The date is now the **last Sunday in April, 26<sup>th</sup>**. This is the final date so hope most of you have no clash on that day.



## Who Remembers the O. Gilpin Stores?

by local historian, Jim Kent

The next meeting of the Casterton Historical Society will be on **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April at 7pm at the Glenelg Inn.** All welcome.

**Casterton New Cemetery Mapping Project**

**Now held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays from 10am – 12 noon.**

Currently we are mapping and recording the Catholic Section headstone inscriptions.

Update on the VIC – the Society is waiting for a memorandum of understanding to be formed. Once this is done, a meeting will be called between all parties to discuss and agree with the document. Waiting patiently!!

It all started on the night of July 8<sup>th</sup> 1874 when a male child was born to William and Dinah Gilpin, farmers of Euroa, Victoria, and previously of County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

The parents selected land that at one time formed part of that famous property known as the Seven Creeks Run.

Born 8 July 1874 was their second son who became part of a family of 3 girls and 4 boys. His parents gave him the baptismal name of Oliver.

From the parents' dairy farm Oliver attended schools at Sheans' Creek and Castle Creed and at the age of 17 years began his first employment as a counter hand with the drapery firm of Miller and Co in Euroa.

After several years with Miller and Co Oliver moved to the Carlton branch of Ball and Welch in Melbourne. This firm was also involved in the retailing of drapery.

An ambitious person, Oliver at the age of 21 years opened at Korumburra his first of many stores, dating from 1895.

It was here at Korumburra he married the first of what were to be three marriages. He went on to open a further three stores at Leongatha, Foster and Jumburra and later a fourth at Rutherglen.

To coordinate stock and delivery to these stores Oliver and family moved first to the Melbourne

suburb of Richmond and later to Fitzroy where he had his warehouse and shop. This was then the humble beginning of a man who went on to establish a chain of 94 stores all over Victoria and southern NSW.

A feature of these stores was not only the magnitude of lines carried but Oliver Gilpin's decided preference for female managers and staff.

To quote just a few prices listed in the mid 1930s, a 2 pint or 1 litre kettle was 9 pence, a pillow slip 4 pence, men's shirts 1/9 (19 cents), ladies bloomers 10 1/2 pence.

To service the delivery to all his far flung stores Gilpin entered into a contract with John Thornycroft, a truck maker from England, for a fleet of the 6 wheeler lorries and 4 wheeler trailers, after having used some solid-tyred Internationals and Leylands to move his imports from wharf to warehouse and warehouse to rail.

Much to the annoyance and opposition from both NSW and Vic Railways, O Gilpin commenced delivering his goods to his shops with a fleet of these Thornycroft transports and this action saw him defend numerous court appearances.

I well remember these later 1920s and early 1930s trucks and their drivers. All the goods were carted in huge square cane wicker baskets.

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[www.ballaratgenealogy.org/  
casterton/historicalsociety](http://www.ballaratgenealogy.org/casterton/historicalsociety)

How the drivers man-handled these huge baskets I don't know. They always camped under the cypress trees on the common on the Noss Road where the fire track is now. I got to know them when I would be rounding up our milking cows back in the early thirties. One remark a driver named Ted Hall said to me stuck in my mind about these old trucks. Ted said they were "flat out to pull their shadow along".

A fellow truck restorer, Tom Esmore, has a restored Gardiner engine O.Gilpin Thornycroft of which I am very jealous. The early ones ran a Dorman-Ricardo diesel engine, not the best of motors.

On the local scene the Casterton O Gilpin store was directly opposite our town hall and in my youth was under the management of Alma Gill. I don't remember if she was Mrs or Miss Gill. She was not Boy Gill's wife, she was originally Alma Coxon and I think she was Mrs Herbert Gill. He worked in the hardware of Stookes Store.

Of the dozens of girls who worked there was Jack McCallum's sister, Joan, the only one I can remember and that she rode a pony to work. In 1944 Foy and son bought the 94 O Gilpin stores including the Casterton one. In 1951 G J Coles and Co bought all the Foy and Gibson stores and the Casterton store closed, to re-open again as Elder-Smith Stock and Station agents.

Elders build their new premises and the old O Gilpin store where I used to buy my saintly little brother small presents for 6 pence or 1 shilling is now being used as a storage premises. Oliver Gilpin died in 1942, a remarkable Australian if ever was one. He ranks in my book with the lies of Reginald Myles Ansett as a man of vision, before his time.

"Thanks Jim for contributing to our newsletter"; *President Jan*

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