

The British and Australian Governments have today announced plans to re-bury the World War One dead found at a mass grave in Fromelles, France, last month.

The soldiers from the two countries, believed to number up to 400, will be re-buried in individual graves in a new cemetery that will be built on the site of, or as close as possible to, the mass grave by Pheasants Wood on the edge of Fromelles. The exhumation and re-interment will be carried out under the auspices of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. A timescale for the work to recover the remains will be announced later this year.

"It is right and proper that those brave men who lost their lives at Fromelles are buried with the honour and dignity befitting their ultimate sacrifice. The new cemetery will be a lasting tribute to their bravery and a place of pilgrimage for families who lost a relative in the battle. It will ensure the memory of their actions lives on for future generations," said Derek Twigg MP, Veterans Minister.

The mass war grave was discovered by an amateur historian in Australia and confirmed by a team of archaeologists from Glasgow University on behalf of the Australian Government with support from the British Ministry of Defence and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The limited excavation carried out earlier this year in May and June confirmed the presence of large numbers of human remains of both British and Australian soldiers. The site was covered over at the end of the two-week exploratory dig pending a decision on the way ahead.

The battle of Fromelles took place over 19 and 20 July 1916. The 5th Australian Division suffered 5,533 casualties and the 61st British Division suffered 1,547 casualties during the 24 hour battle. The 61st (South Midlands) Division was made up of Home Service based in Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.