



David Storey, Lewis Whiting, Geoff Storey, Nathalia and Johan Vandewalle, Terry Linz, councillors Brian Moore and Gerry Cartmel, and Glenn Sweet during Mr Vandewalle's visit to the region.

Zonnebeke Diggers archaeologist visits

THE man who excavated the remains of the World War 1 Diggers known as the Zonnebeke Five visited Bridgetown on Friday.

"My trip is like a pilgrim's tour to walk in their footsteps," said Johan Vandewalle, an amateur archaeologist who said his interest in the war began as a child when he collected shrapnel and other artefacts from the old battlefields surrounding his home in Belgium.

His Australian pilgrimage had already taken him to Queensland, where he met the family of John Hunter, and Melbourne, where he met George Calder's relatives. He came to Bridgetown via Subiaco,

where another of the five Diggers, George Storey, grew up.

Mr Vandewalle was called in when workers building a gas pipeline discovered the five bodies beneath a road in 2006. A carpenter by trade, he said the dugouts the soldiers built to survive trench warfare, some as many as 13m deep, had always interested him and he had been excavating them since 1992.

"I was fascinated by (the stories of) an old neighbour who survived the war. He brought a kind of magic to me," he said.

Pie Storey's nephews, Bridgetown man Geoff Storey and his Perth-based brother David,

were both at the Bridgetown RSL rooms in Campbell Street on Friday.

With them were councillors Brian Moore and Gerry Cartmel, and RSL president Lewis Whiting, welfare officer Terry Linz and secretary Glenn Sweet.

Mr Sweet presented Mr Vandewalle with a clock and thermometer set in jarrah as a memento of his visit, while Geoff and David Storey received from Mr Vandewalle a sketch of their uncle drawn by a Belgian artist.

The Storey brothers first met Mr Vandewalle in September, when they travelled to Butte Cemetery for a rededication ceremony

at which a new headstone was unveiled bearing their uncle's name and details.

His remains were finally identified using a new DNA technique early last year, however, two of the five resting near him remain unknown.

Mr Vandewalle is hopeful that his visit may have unearthed a clue to the identity of one of the unknown men — he received a call with new information after stories about his trip were published in the eastern States.

Mr Vandewalle aims to build a bronze sculpture near the site where the bodies were discovered as a tribute to the men.

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- Shed
- Fencing
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