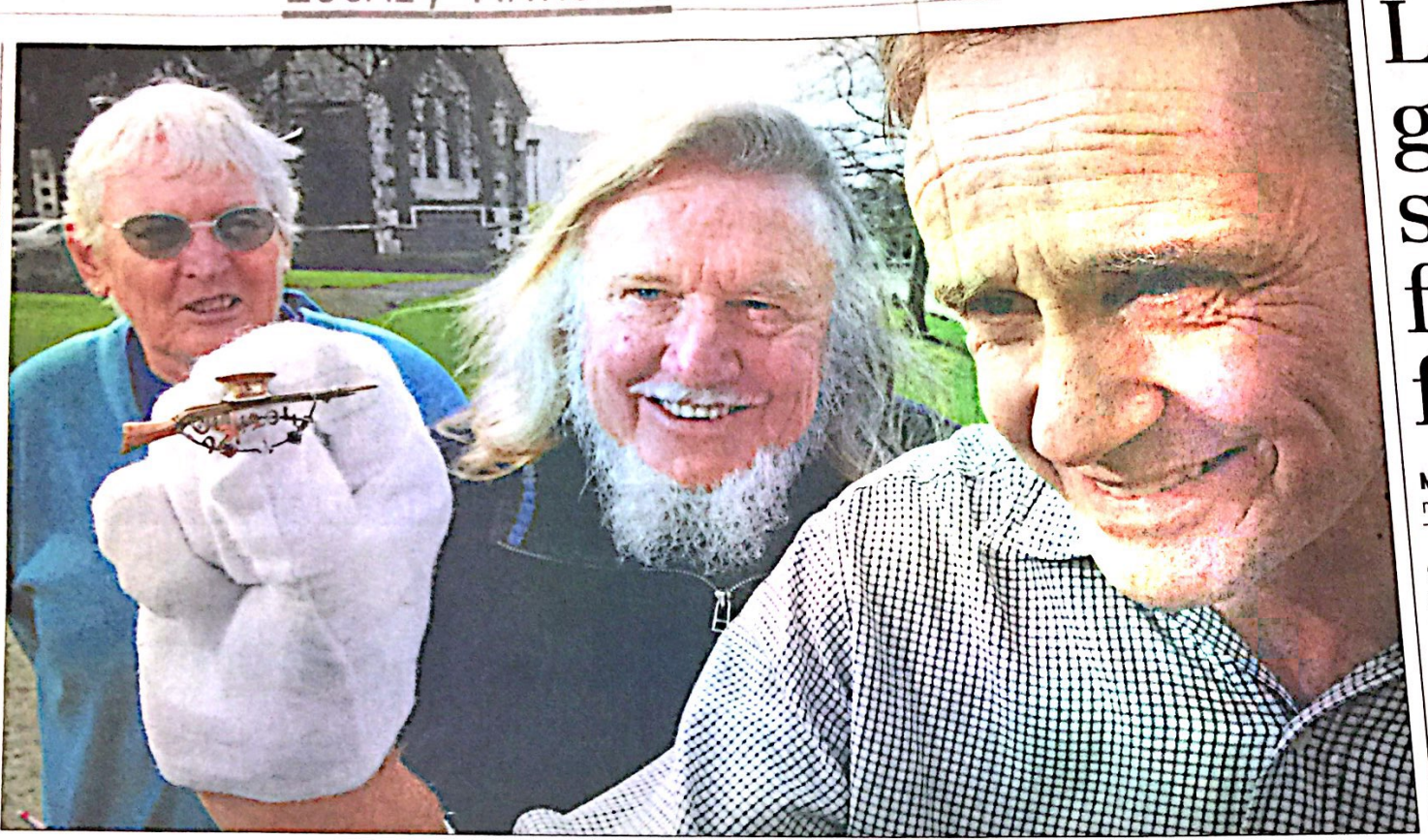


LOCAL / NATIONAL



Up close and personal: Gaye and David Strachan are pleased that a "sweetheart medal" given on behalf of his uncle James Taku Strachan has returned to Timaru nearly a century later after it was bought by South Canterbury Museum director Phillip Howe, front.

Photo: JOHN BISSET/FAIRFAX NZ

Military memento finally home

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A military heirloom has returned to Timaru nearly a century after it was first presented.

The "sweetheart medal" was likely created by a local jeweller for the friends of family of James Taku Strachan, of Timaru, who was killed in the battle of Messines, 1917. However, his nephews, David and Greg, were unaware such a heirloom existed

until a few weeks ago.

"A friend of mine who is interested in military memorabilia spotted an auction for it on Trade Me," David said.

"I was taken aback. I knew my uncle was killed in the war, but if something like this existed, then I thought my father would have known about it."

The Australian-based seller described the nine carat gold piece as one of the most complete and well kept of its kind in existence. It features an

engraving of the soldier's service number and ranking.

"I've got no idea how this Australian guy got a hold of it, other than he bought it off a New Zealand dealer," David said.

"It's all very surprising."

David, who lives in Ashburton, informed the South Canterbury Museum of its existence.

"I thought they would be interested in such an item, considering its Timaru connection," he said.

South Canterbury Museum

director Philip Howe managed to purchase the item for about \$495.

"It's quite a find, and the only one of these we have in our collection," he said.

"The seller seemed pretty happy that it would make its way back to Timaru."

Mr Howe was not sure when it would go on display at the museum. "The centennial of World War I comes up in 2014. I'm sure it would make an interesting little addition to any exhibition we will hold then," he said.

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