

A souvenir of the commemoration
of the death of Rupert Brooke
on 23 April 2020

A collaboration between

Lauderdale *House*

&



Gallipoli Music
Memorial 2015

Singer / Reader: Alison Guill

Music: Stephen Hose

Historian: Peter Hart

Tribute to Robert Gibbings: Ghislaine Peart

The evening was devised by Nick Peacey

This souvenir includes:

- Full texts of all readings
- Transcripts of the question and answer session
- References to all books, poems, Imperial War Museum (IWM) interviews and music mentioned on the evening, with links where available
- Full texts

I saw a man this morning by Patrick Shaw-Stewart

'Tribute' to Major-General Cameron Shute by A.P. Herbert

Commemoration of the death of Rupert Brooke 23rd April 2020

Programme

The Highgate School Roll of Honour

A tribute to the ex-pupils of Highgate School who died at Gallipoli

Music: Kenneth Leighton *Sonatina*
John Ireland *The Holy Boy*

Two songs by William Denis Browne

Arabia & *To Gratiana Dancing and Singing*

Poems and writings by Rupert Brooke

In Praise of Cremation

Letters from America Rupert Brooke's description of the city of Ottawa

Safety, the second of the 'War Sonnets'

Fragment, written on the troopship *Grantully Castle* en route to Gallipoli

The remarkable Robert Gibbings

A tribute to the artist by Ghislaine Peart

Music: Lennox Berkeley *Preludes* 4 & 6

Rupert Brooke and the glitterati

A talk by Peter Hart

Epilogue: *A Little Love and Good Company*

An extract from the autobiography of Rupert Brooke's friend Cathleen Nesbitt



Rupert Brooke

The readings

Poetry and Prose by Rupert Brooke

In Praise of Cremation (extract)

probably written at Rugby School about 1904

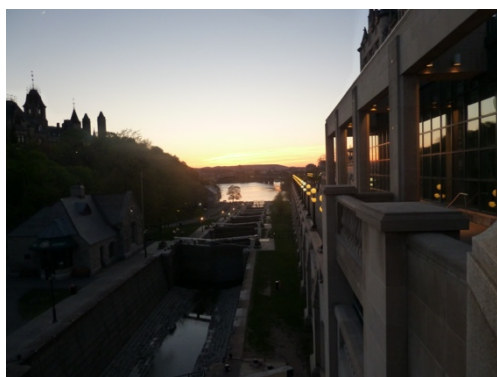
I loathe the obscene darkness of the tomb, to lie
Through the slow hours of stifling gloom,
In shameful, helpless, agony,
Changed by the worm's unnatural cold lust to slime and dust!

Rather for me the sudden flame's embrace, which clings
once..., and therewith thy perfect face
shall fade, the last of mortal things.
So for all time I'll quench my hot desire
in that clean fire.

Letters from America

The letters were first published as separate articles in the *Westminster Gazette*, then collected by Sir Edward (Eddie) Marsh for publication by Sidgwick and Jackson in 1916

A man desiring to praise Ottawa would begin without statistics of wealth and the growth of population; and this can be said of no other city on Canada except Quebec. Not that there are not immense lumber-mills and the rest in Ottawa. But the Government farm, and the Parliament Buildings are more important. Also, although the 'spoils' system obtains a good deal in this country the nucleus of the Civil Service is much the same as in England; so there is an atmosphere of Civil Servants about Ottawa, an atmosphere of safeness and honour and massive buildings and well-shaded walks. After all, there is in the qualities of Civility and service much beauty, of a kind which would adorn Canada.



Parliament Buildings stand finely on a headland of cliff some 160 feet above the river. There are gardens about them; and beneath the wooded rocks go steeply down to the water. It is a position of natural boldness and significance. The buildings were put up in the middle of the last century, an unfortunate period. But they have dignity, especially of line; and when evening hides their colour, and the western sky and the river take on the lovely hues of a Canadian sunset, and the lights begin to come in the city, they seem to have the majesty and calm of a natural crown of the river-headland. The Government have bought the ground along the cliff for half a mile on either side, and propose to build all their offices there. So, in the end, if they build well, the river-front at Ottawa will be a noble sight. And - just to show that this is Canada and not Utopia- the

line of national buildings will always be broken by an expensive and superb hotel the Canadian and Pacific Railway has been allowed to erect on the twin and neighbouring promontory to that of the Houses of Parliament.

The streets of Ottawa are very quiet and shaded with trees. The houses are mostly of that cool, homely kind, with verandahs, on which, or on the steps, the whole family may sit in the evening and observe the passers-by. This is possible for both the rich and the poor, who live nearer each other in Ottawa than in most cities. In general, there is an air of civilisation which extends even over the country round. But in the country you see little signs, a patch of swamp, or thickets of primeval wood, which remind you that Europeans have not long had this land. I was taken twenty miles or more in a motor-car over the execrable roads round here, to a lovely little lake in the hills north-west of Ottawa. We went by little French villages and fields at first, and then through rocky, tangled woods of birch and poplar, rich milk-weed and blue cornflowers, and the aromatic thimbleberry blossom and that romantic, purple-red flower which is called fireweed, because it is the first vegetation to spring up in the prairie after a fire has passed over, so might be adopted as the emblematic flower of a sense of humour. They told me, casually, that there was nothing but a few villages between me and the North Pole. It is probably true of several commonly frequented places in this country. But it gives a thrill to hear it.

Safety

This sonnet was written in October 1914, when the Royal Naval Division was in camp at Blandford. It became the second of the famous War Sonnets. As soon as it was complete, Brooke sent it off to Cathleen Nesbitt: both later wrote of it as 'our' sonnet.

Dear! of all happy in the hour, most blest
He who has found our hid security,
Assured in the dark tides of the world that rest,
And heard our word: 'Who is so safe as we?'
We have found safety with all things undying,
The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal Earth.

We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing.
We have gained a peace unshaken by pain forever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavour.
Safe where all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

Fragment

Brooke wrote this poem on board the troopship *Grantully Castle* en route to Gallipoli

I strayed about the deck, an hour to-night
Under a cloudy moonless sky; and peeped
In at the windows, watched my friends at table,
Or playing cards, or standing in the doorway,
Or coming out into the darkness.
Still no one could see me.

I would have thought of them-
Heedless, within a week of battle-in pity,
Pride in their strength and in the weight and firmness
And link'd beauty of bodies, and pity that
This gay machine of splendour'd soon be broken,
Thought little of, pashed, scattered. . .

Only, always, I could but see them-against the lamplight-pass
Like coloured shadows, thinner than filmy glass,
Slight bubbles, fainter than the wave's faint light,
That broke to phosphorous out in the night,
Perishing things and strange ghosts-soon to die
To other ghosts-this one, or that, or I.

April 1915.

Epilogue: *A little love and good company*
An extract from Cathleen Nesbitt's autobiography ¹

It became fashionable later to decry all the sonnets and speak of them as false and sentimental. But I think they did represent the feelings of a great many of the young men who rushed to volunteer. They all had something in them of public spirit. They felt in one way or another that they owed something to society, some gratitude for the good things that life has given them, their talents and fine education.

Rupert wrote in early April of a pleasant little rest in Egypt, that he had sent me an amber necklace, and that he had had sunstroke and a touch of dysentery: 'It destroys all the harmonies of the body and the soul. I have the biggest headache in the world and of diarrhoea that was part of the cosmic process. Even yet I am but a funnel through which arrowroot is poured.

There were no more letters. I was woken early one morning by Eddie Marsh [Sir Edward Marsh] telling me that Rupert was dead; 'I did not want you to read it in the papers. He has left a letter for you to be given to you in case of his death.'

Then I had a letter from Denis Browne, the brilliant young musician who had been Rupert's friend during his Rugby and Cambridge days. 'It was after the Divisional field day, he was tired out. On Tuesday the 20th he stayed in bed. He was moved to a French

¹ Cathleen Nesbitt (1975) *A Little Love and Good Company* London Faber & Faber

hospital ship and there he died. The end was very quiet and calm. He felt no pain whatever, they said. For the last day and a half he was unconscious. We buried him at night the same evening Friday, April 23rd in an olive grove one mile up the valley leading from the sea. Of all gracious and lovely places it was the loveliest I ever saw, delicious with purple flowering sage and thyme, an olive tree is over his head of which I send you a spray.

Rupert always been in the best of health and spirits. He was the centre of a little group of six of us. Once when we were discussing which of us would die and where we'd like to be buried he said he would like to be buried on a Greek island and some of us wondered vaguely if he would be the first to be taken. I have tried to tell you all I can. I must write to Eddie and his mother. Would you like me to write again? I will see you when it is all over.'



Tris Boukes Bay, Scyros,
where Rupert Brooke died



Rupert Brooke's Grave, Scyros

Questions and Answers

An edited record of the Question and Answer session that followed Peter Hart's talk.

Chris Brooker:

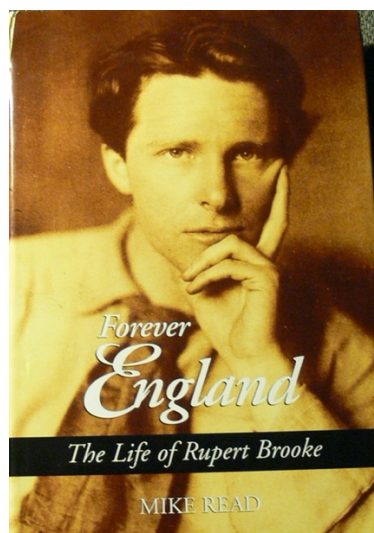
Is it true Brooke fathered a child in Polynesia?

Peter Hart: No idea. I hope so.

Chris Brooker: Did you know he went to Polynesia?

Peter Hart: I did. He wrote a louche poem there².

Nick Peacey: 20 years ago people were fairly sure Brooke had a child with a woman in Polynesia. [Mike Read popularised this idea in his *Forever England*³]. I've recently heard from our trustee Kate Kennedy, who gives us so much help with Gallipoli Music Memorial 2015, that new evidence suggests it's not true. But we don't really know.



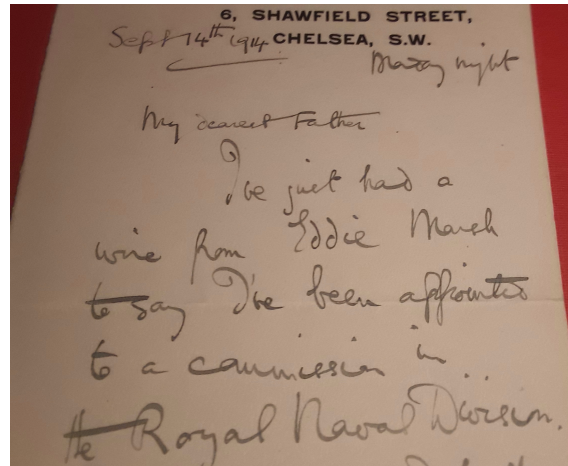
Robert Sells: I am interested in Winston's private secretary. He was, I think, in touch with all the glitterati.

Nick: This was Eddie Marsh, who was a fortunate man in many ways. He was a descendant of Spencer Percival, the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated. A grateful country awarded Percival's family a substantial grant in token of his sacrifice. So Eddie Marsh was well off. He was also very generous to artists of all kinds, and not only to those he took a fancy to, like Rupert Brooke and Denis Browne, but also to others such as Ezra Pound, from very different traditions.

Robert Sells: Marsh went to see the Ranee, Rupert Brooke's mother, and suffered serious criticism. I think she held him responsible for the fact that Rupert and others were seduced into that group. Do you think there's any truth in that? - Was he aetiologically important to the recruitment of these people?

² <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47234/tiare-tahiti>

³ Mike Read (1997) *Forever England: The Life of Rupert Brooke* Mainstream Publishing



Extract of letter from Denis Browne to his father about his commission in the RND (RA Sells Collection)

Nick Peacey: It was certainly Marsh who made sure they were all in the same regiment [and battalion]. I am not arguing with Peter's point that they wanted to go in there because there were exciting people in the Division, not least Rupert Brooke. But Marsh was the force that facilitated their transfer.

Patrick Shaw Stewart who wrote the wonderful poem Peter spoke of⁴ sent a terrible letter from Gallipoli to Eddie Marsh that said something like 'Dear Eddie, You must be feeling awful about putting all your dear friends into the RND and seeing them all killed. This paralysed Eddie.

He wrote about the letter to Louisa, Denis Browne's mother, and she wrote him a really nice letter back saying 'Don't worry. These young men were doing what they wanted to do and you gave them all sorts of chances and opportunities.' When it came to the dedication of the plaque to Rupert Brooke in Rugby School, Eddie Marsh and Louisa Browne went together.

We need to remember that Mrs Brooke lost her younger son Alfred within three months of the death of Rupert. After that she always kept two photographs on easels in her sitting room. If you were a visitor and you started looking too hard at Rupert, she would say, 'I've lost two sons you know' and point you in the direction of Alfred.

Claudia Ives: Peter Hart is the academic we all wish we had been taught by. A brilliant and sparkling manner and I thoroughly enjoyed his tribute to Brooke.

David Willoughby: Peter, can you go a bit more into the detail as to why there was an excess of naval recruits at that particular time and why the Naval Division was formed?

Peter Hart: it was very foolish by Churchill. It was just that when they called up all the reservists, they had more reservists than they had ships. There were 20,000 spare, so very foolishly in my view, Churchill put them into a division. Later on in the campaign they took away the stokers, because stokers are highly trained. It's the same as people now. What's essential and what isn't essential? You can't just be a stoker, just like you can't do

⁴ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57324/i-saw-a-man-this-morning> (Reproduced in full below)

certain jobs that matter to us now. So they gradually strimmed people out from the Royal Naval Division until it became a lot more more normal if you know what I mean. It kept its naval traditions, though, much to the annoyance of the army. And AP Herbert wrote a great poem about somebody....⁵

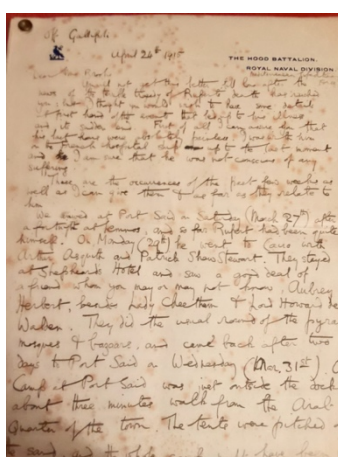
Catharine Wells: A fantastic evening. I just had no idea how brilliant this was going to be. So thank you I would like to donate. I have a question: Who was Cathleen Nesbitt?

Nick Peacey: Cathleen Nesbitt⁶ was a young actress at the time and she represented solace and stability for Rupert Brooke after some tumultuous emotional times, a breakdown - and then he went to America and he went to the South Seas and had an affair with a woman there and may or may not have had a child with her. He came back and, in my view, Cathleen Nesbitt was the one he was most likely to have married. But biographies almost faded her out of the limelight which is extraordinary given what a successful actress she became. She's had a bad deal and we are going to hear a little of her autobiography in the epilogue because I think she's been rather left out and is a much more powerful figure in the whole story than many people realise.

Concluding remarks

Nick Peacey: After Rupert Brooke's burial, Browne and Kelly came back to the troopship and, because the invasion force was off for Gallipoli at dawn, spent a frantic evening packing up all Brooke's stuff to be sent back to England quickly. During that time Denis wrote at least three long letters, one of them to Rupert Brooke's mother.

After Denis was killed on the 4th June, Mrs Brooke sweetly sent the letter on to Louisa Browne. I've got it here in my hand. You heard some of it in Alison's lovely reading from Cathleen Nesbitt's autobiography. It's a long and moving letter. Denis must have worked hard to get three such letters written before dawn. I, my sister Gill, and four or five others in the audience tonight grew up with these stories you've been hearing.



The first page of W.Denis Browne's letter to Mrs Brooke 24.4.1915

⁵ 'Tribute' to Major-General Cameron Shute by A.P. Herbert (see below)

⁶ Cathleen Nesbitt IWM interview <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000729>

Thanks

We would like to thank Stephen Hose, who put together and played the music so well; Alison Guill, who sang and read beautifully while performing miracles with technology in her studio; Ghislaine Peart for her fine tribute to Robert Gibbings; Clemmie and Charlotte Wilkins, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Robert Gibbings for help with the presentation; Peter Hart for his excellent talk and Robert Sells for providing the letters that Peter quoted. The success of the evening would not have been possible without a wonderful audience who tolerated our experimental efforts with Zoom and supported Lauderdale House with their donations - we are most grateful to them all.

Katherine Ives, Director, Lauderdale House

Katherine is the great grand-daughter of Chief Petty Officer (later Sub-Lieutenant) Frederick Stear, Collingwood Battalion RND, who won the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal at the 3rd Battle of Krithia, 4th June 1915. He later won the Military Cross fighting in France.



Fred Stear

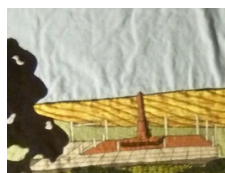
Nick Peacey, Vice-Chair, Lauderdale House, Secretary, Gallipoli Music Memorial 2015

Nick is the great nephew of Sub-Lieutenant William Denis Browne, Hood Battalion RND, who was killed in action at the 3rd Battle of Krithia, 4th June 1915



William Denis Browne

Note: The Collingwood Battalion was so badly mauled on the 4th June 1915 that it was disbanded and its survivors distributed among other RND battalions.



They are our sons as well (detail: see next page)

The Collingwood Memorial. A service of commemoration for the men of the Battalion is held here every year on the Friday nearest the 4th June

Additional references from Peter Hart's talk

Ernest Raymond (1922) *Tell England: a study in a generation* New York: George H Doran
Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15033/15033-h/15033-h.htm>

Joe Murray: Imperial War Museum interview by Peter Hart:
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80008002>

F. S. (Cleg) Kelly *Elegy for Strings: In Memoriam Rupert Brooke*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aK19TZfoHLo>

Recommended: David Childs and Vivien Whelpton (2011) *British and Irish Poets of the Gallipoli campaign, 1915: Heirs of Achilles* London: Cecil Woolf



Ghislaine Peart *They are our sons as well* (appliqué)

Blandford Forum Parish Church, Dorset

I saw a man this morning
by Sub-Lieutenant Patrick Shaw-Stewart
Hood Battalion, RND

I saw a man this morning
Who did not wish to die;
I ask, and cannot answer, if
otherwise wish I.
Fair broke the day this morning
Upon the Dardanelles:
The breeze blew soft, the morn's
cheeks
Were cold as cold sea-shells.
But other shells are waiting
Across the Aegean Sea;
Shrapnel and high explosives,
Shells and hells for me.
Oh Hell of ships and cities,
Hell of men like me,
Fatal second Helen,
Why must I follow thee?



Achilles came to Troyland
And I to Chersonese;
He turned from wrath to battle,
And I from three days' peace.
Was it so hard, Achilles,
So very hard to die?
Thou knowest, and I know not;
So much the happier am I.
I will go back this morning
From Imbros o'er the sea.
Stand in the trench, Achilles,
Flame-capped, and shout for me.

‘Tribute’ to Major-General Cameron Shute

by Sub-Lieutenant A.P. Herbert, Hawke Battalion, RND

Shute became commander of the RND when it was taken into the army in 1916. He was unimpressed with aspects of its performance and made his views clear.

The General inspecting the trenches
Exclaimed with a horrified shout
"I refuse to command a division
Which leaves its excreta about".

But nobody took any notice
No one was prepared to refute,
That the presence of shit was congenial
Compared to the presence of Shute.

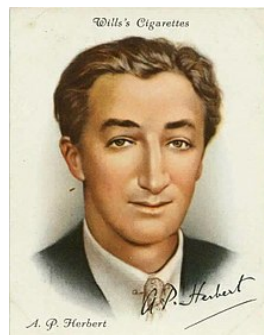
And certain responsible critics
Made haste to reply to his words
Observing that his staff advisors
Consisted entirely of turds.

For shit may be shot at odd corners
And paper supplied there to suit,
But a shit would be shot without mourners
If somebody shot that shit Shute.

After a life spent using his wit to entertain and encourage social reform, A.P. Herbert (APH) eventually became Sir Alan Herbert, Companion of Honour.

Major General Cameron Shute KCB KCMG retired after a successful military career in 1931.

Cameron Shute became a Conservative MP in 1936; Alan Herbert was elected to the Commons, sitting as an Independent MP.



APH