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Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 1

Welcome to a writers war, a National Lottery Heritage fund, First World War Centenary project produced by Chrome Radio for the University of Oxford, faculty of Mediaeval and Modern Languages. In partnership with year 10 students from Oxford, Spires Academy. In the final podcast in our series.

00:00:21 Speaker 1

We visit the archives of Morgan College, which holds an extensive collection of letters and other items relating to the colleges participation in the First World War.

00:00:37 Speaker 1

President Warren at home.

00:00:54 Speaker 3

Welcome to modern college Oxford. I'm doctor Charlotte Berry and I'm the college archivist and records manager.

00:01:00 Speaker 2

And I'm Ben Taylor, the assistant archivist. Here we're standing in the oldest part of the college, the cloister, which was built in the late 15th century, a part of the original design for the college, and on the 1st floor of the cloister is the old library, which is the.

00:01:12 Speaker 2

Journal Library and we've got a few items out there that we'd like to show you, so if you'll follow us up, we'll show you inside.

00:01:33 Speaker 3

Well, in the old library now it's quite dark. We have lots and lots of leather bound books, have a very splendid light blue and gold ceiling and very rich red wolves.

00:01:43 Speaker 3

We're going to have a chat about some of our World War One items. What I've been trusting this at the moment with the centenary of the First World War.

00:01:52 Speaker 3

We're really lucky to have such an extraordinary collection that documents so many of our former staff, fellows and students. One of the benefits of having such an amazingly rich archive here at Morgan is.

00:02:03 Speaker 3

That we can do very comprehensive research into the lives of all of these men we've been able to do that mainly through the work of two of our former fellows called Emeritus Fellows.

00:02:15 Speaker 3

Richard Shepard and David Roberts, who have spent several years researching the biographies of around 200 men who were killed in the war and the project is called the slow dusk.

00:02:27 Speaker 3

We've put together a website with as much information as we have found and the nature of archives is that new material surfaces.

00:02:35 Speaker 3

All the time.

00:02:36 Speaker 3

So at the moment we are researching one of the German members of college. We didn't really know very much about him, so one of our fellows who is a German specialist has been backtracking across Europe trying to track this guy down or also increasingly being contacted by family members who have additional photographs who.

00:02:56 Speaker 3

Are interested in the biographies that we have. We've even been contacted by custodians of cemeteries in Belgium, for example, wanting to honour the modelling war dead in their cemeteries and wanting to know who these people are.

00:03:11 Speaker 2

We have some really fascinating items. First of all, the war letters of President Warren Warren was president over the college during the First World War, and he collected about 1200 letters sent to him by ex modelling men who were serving at the front, or sadly, quite often from their relatives. Thanking Warren, 4 letters of condolence.

00:03:31 Speaker 2

Knowing the death of this.

00:03:32 Speaker 2

It's a huge collection and as you read it, you can see that these people are encountering each other in the trenches.

00:03:37 Speaker 2

They're writing back to Warren with news of other friends. You really get a sense of a community at war.

00:03:42 Speaker 2

We also have some memorial volumes, about 200 modelling men died in the First World War and most of them are in these volumes and we have a few personal papers from people who.

00:03:52 Speaker 2

And direct experience of the war.

00:03:53 Speaker 2

Most notably George Bonner, who was a student here in 1914 just for one term. And then he joined the Army, spent two years in France, and then was invalided out with what they called Neurasthenia Shellshock and spent some time in Craiglockhart Military Hospital, where Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen spent some Time Warner was a poet himself, wrote a large number of.

00:04:14 Speaker 2

Poems as well as short fiction. Most of it was never published, but we are very lucky to have his archive here.

00:04:20 Speaker 3

One of the other things we're going to look at our the President notebooks. We have about 3 shells of these or bound in very large volumes, and they're one of our style items in the.

00:04:29 Speaker 3

Archive these were kept by successive presidents, right up to the fairly late 20th century. There the first thing that we go to if we get an inquiry.

00:04:37 Speaker 3

They are like gentlemen's commonplace books or scrapbooks. So the president at the time would stick in items of interest that might be news, cuttings, letters, sometimes photographs, postcards in the First World War.

00:04:50 Speaker 3

You're seeing press cuttings of men from modelling, enlisting, signing up, going off, updates of what's happening to them, and then, sadly, the notifications of death.

00:05:00 Speaker 3

But also lots of other snapshots on what's actually happening in college while the war is still going on, it's still functioning to some extent, so it might be that a certain fellow has been appointed examination results, new students coming up, Fellows getting married, but also anything of interest more widely, so it's a real snapshot of our social history.

00:05:24 Speaker 3

This is the one that covers 1918, so we're coming to the end of the ball. All sorts of things are in here.

00:05:29 Speaker 3

The page I'm looking at has Captain Gordon. Men killed in action. The page opposite, and the next page.

00:05:36 Speaker 3

We've got the.

00:05:36 Speaker 3

President's account of Maine warning. The larger tenants of visitors. The weather was cold sun was shining.

00:05:43 Speaker 3

And on the previous page, if I just carefully.

00:05:47 Speaker 3

Leaf backwards again. We've got comments from the president about the weather forecast, April the 27th, 1918. There ever since Wednesday has been very fine.

00:05:57 Speaker 3

After the early morning, and there's been a good deal of missed. Today, the president saw in his gardens several tortoiseshell butterflies and one Peacock butterfly.

00:06:06 Speaker 3

And also a toad enjoying the sunshine and warmth and the bottom of that page. You've got two tiny little news cuttings from the church times talking about modelling colleges mission, so this is a social work project in central London.

00:06:20 Speaker 3

Sub over former students were working there as chaplains. We have the death here of the Reverend Ivo Hood, who had come here as a student and then was working on the mission, returned home to get married and then went out and was killed. He was an army chaplain who was on a stretcher party.

00:06:40 Speaker 3

And that's unfortunately when he got killed by a shell exploding.

00:06:44 Speaker 3

In the previous page.

00:06:45 Speaker 3

You have the visit of the Princess Mary to Oxford. It's her first official visit to Oxford. She's coming to present badges and service stripes to women, agricultural workers.

00:06:57 Speaker 3

She has a huge swanky reception put on for her at Trinity College, and then she comes along in the afternoon to maudlin college to have tea.

00:07:05 Speaker 3

With Lady Rowan, the president's wife, before she pops off back to Windsor on the evening train.

00:07:11 Speaker 2

What we have here is one of three memorial volumes that the college collected and bound together at the end of the First World War.

00:07:19 Speaker 2

It's arranged alphabetically. The college sent forms to the parents of every man who died asking for a photograph and some details. It's open here at the page for Herbert Westlake Garton.

00:07:31 Speaker 2

Who was born in 1892? He was captain in the 9th Battalion Rifle Brigade and he was wounded in 1915.

00:07:38 Speaker 2

Invalided home with concussion and shell shock the same year and then killed in action in 1916. September the 15th, 1916.

00:07:46 Speaker 2

We have a portraits of him in military uniform with his name underneath and then a TypeScript from what looks like an obituary, probably in a local newspaper.

00:07:55 Speaker 2

Captain Herbert Westlake Garson was the third son of Mr and Mrs Charles Garten, advanced Edward sorry, he just left Oxford to study for a diplomatic service when war broke out and joined the army. Immediately he was gazetted.

00:08:06 Speaker 2

2nd Lieutenant in August 1914. Promoted in November of the same year, receiving his captaincy, February 1915, he was wounded on August the 10th and returning to his regiment after insufficient rest was shortly after invalided home suffering from concussion and.

00:08:20 Speaker 2

When fed the service, he was offered an appointment in Egypt, but his sense of duty to his regiment decided him to refuse it and to return to France where he served till the end.

00:08:27 Speaker 2

The following extract is from a letter written by.

00:08:29 Speaker 2

A brother officer. He was killed in action on September the 15th on the Somme whilst leading his company in the attack practically at the moment that the battalion which was in front of the big advance made its objective.

00:08:39 Speaker 2

He must have known that the duty assigned to us had been successfully performed and that the operations generally had been triumphantly successful.

00:08:46 Speaker 2

His was an end which if we ought to die out here, we might well envy his influence with the men was a tremendous help to us and his example of what a real Christian gentleman and soldier can be and do will be a continual inspiration to us who remain to carry on.

00:08:59 Speaker 3

We've got 2 letters that relate to Garten, a letter from Garten himself from the front, and we have a letter from his father writing to Herbert Warren saying thank you for the letter of condolence.

00:09:11 Speaker 3

Physically, they're actually very different. The one that we have from Garten to the president at modelling in July 1916 is written.

00:09:18 Speaker 3

In pencil he's on the front. Conditions are pretty bad in the trenches, as you can imagine. He's got a very scrappy piece of paper and he's scribbling in almost unreadable writing. It's quite faded. That's partly why it's.

00:09:31 Speaker 3

Hard to read.

00:09:32 Speaker 3

Dear Mr. President Southwell, with whom I am at present having dinner says that he thinks I ought to write to you today.

00:09:39 Speaker 3

I'm afraid I never attended a body. That's a model in college reunion while I was.

00:09:44 Speaker 3

Up, but this is a day, I think, that we've drunk to say, Floreat Magdalena, that's our motto and he's gone out into the trench.

00:09:53 Speaker 3

All goes well here, and there's not really much to tell you, and he goes on to talk about a whole series of other modern men who are in the trenches. There's this network of communication between them and model him.

00:10:05 Speaker 3

He says, I think myself very lucky in that I've had the three most perfect years of my life at modelling before this broke out, and I shall always feel I cheated fate there at any rate.

00:10:17 Speaker 3

He goes on to say that he's hoping that the war is going to finish fairly quickly, and it's only summer 1916.

00:10:23 Speaker 3

I hope you're well and what's left of college flourishes. I'm afraid when we do all meet again at Oxford, there were many gaps in old friendships. He goes on to give his kindest regards to Lady.

00:10:36 Speaker 3

A few months later, in October, sadly, he's being killed and we have a very different letter family note paper and it's the father writing to President Warren to thank him for his letter of sympathy, and also updating only other brothers who are still out serving their country.

00:10:55 Speaker 3

Wayne Garten is talking about the gaps in old friendships. He mentions Harding, who he says can never be replaced, and we have some of Harding's correspondence in the collection, which Ben is going to talk about now.

00:11:08 Speaker 2

Pat Harding was from quite a wealthy Scottish family, a keen cricketer and very much a star student and a great favour to President Warren's.

00:11:16 Speaker 2

This letter is from Patrick Harding at the top, has written attached third Cameronians, which is a Scottish infantry regiment and the address is negg in Cromartie which is just north of Inverness on the northeast coast.

00:11:28 Speaker 2

Of Scotland, Harding is writing in ink, possibly quite quickly. It is quite spider in scribbly, but also lots of flourishes and curlicues.

00:11:36 Speaker 2

Harding writes Teamster president, thank you so much for your kind letter and good wishes. I am afraid my aunt's death was a dreadful blow to my uncle, but he alone of all of us, was in a measure prepared for it as he was the only one who knew how great the danger was.

00:11:50 Speaker 2

I'm very disgusted about not having got to the front with the first battalion of my regiment to which I was gazetted but I was gazetted a few days too late and they went off without me.

00:11:59 Speaker 2

Consequently, I've had to come here, I hope, and trust that I may get out as soon as possible. This is rather the end of the world, but glorious scenery, and at present beautiful weather the officers mess is the vestry of a church.

00:12:10 Speaker 2

I hope you are quite recovered by now. Yours sincerely. Patrick Harding.

00:12:15 Speaker 2

You can hear from that that Patrick Harding is keen to get to the front. He's chafing at the delay, and I think this was a feeling that a lot of young men had at the beginning of the war they wanted to get on and do great things.

00:12:25 Speaker 2

Sadly, not very much later, we have another letter in the Harding Papers, but this one is from Robert Harding, Patrick Harding's father. It's dated 7th of July.

00:12:34 Speaker 2

1916 and it's a thank you letter for Sir Herbert Warren's letter of condolence on Patrick Harding's death.

00:12:40 Speaker 2

It's a smaller letter, postmarked Brockworth house Gloucester, and it has a black border which you see a lot in letters about death at this time.

00:12:48 Speaker 2

Robert Harding writes, dear Sir Herbert, I write to thank you so very much for your kind letter of sympathy.

00:12:54 Speaker 2

The extremely kind words you have written are most consoling and much appreciated by us. How dear Pat would have loved to know how highly you thought of him as he so often talks of you and those happy days even during the war.

00:13:08 Speaker 2

Those four years at Oxford were simply blessed for him. And oh, if only he was there. Now I know from the high opinion you have of him that you can well realise the great blow and sorrow we are going through.

00:13:19 Speaker 2

He was the Joy and pride of our lives, and we longed to watch that career, which had every promise to do honour to his family name and short as it was, it succeeded.

00:13:28 Speaker 2

But he seemed to be everything in the world. The sun could be, so it makes it all so much.

00:13:32 Speaker 2

Harder to bear.

00:13:33 Speaker 2

We are compiling a little book of his letters and diary during the war which when completed I will not fail to send you.

00:13:39 Speaker 2

I am sure Pat would have been delighted for you to have his photo, so I am sending you one which was taken in April 1915.

00:13:47 Speaker 2

Thanking you and Lady Warren again for your kind letter, which will always be treasured. Your sincerely Robert Harding.

00:13:54 Speaker 3

Ben was talking about some of the many students who were killed in the war, but we have a fellow in the President notebook called Mackworth after Christopher Paul Mackworth and his situation is a little bit unusual. He was in the Rifle Brigade, but he actually came back safely in 1917.

00:14:13 Speaker 3

And then started wolwark. Unfortunately he took his own life in rather sad circumstance.

00:14:20 Speaker 3

Is there are several news cuttings here in tiny tiny print listing the details of the funeral details of his scholarship that he had here at modelling, where he read classics.

00:14:32 Speaker 3

Then he went on to join the bar. He was a teacher.

00:14:35 Speaker 3

For a while.

00:14:36 Speaker 3

Then he became an assistant to the classics tutor here at modelling.

00:14:40 Speaker 3

And then became a fellow in 1913, just before the war broke out and I just read from the death notice here.

00:14:48 Speaker 3

He had hardly time to settle down when after two years the fatal August of 1914 arrived and brought his work to an abrupt close, sweeping away his pupils.

00:14:58 Speaker 3

He sought at first civil employment, but soon found that did not satisfy him, and he applied for and received a Commission in the Rifle Brigade. So he goes off to war, comes back.

00:15:09 Speaker 3

Again, goes to a course at Clare College in Cambridge and his remarkable intellectual gifts found employment at the War Office.

00:15:16 Speaker 3

He is clearly struggling at this time with what was then called Shellshock, and there's a very poignant, very short news cutting on the opposite page with capital letters at the top.

00:15:27 Speaker 3

In quotes, I cannot sleep and this is looking at the inquest leftenant AC Mackworth age 31 Rifle Brigade shot himself in his flat in London, leaving this note on table.

00:15:41 Speaker 3

I have committed suicide because I cannot sleep and for no other reason. Telephone to my brother left tenant Colonel JD.

00:15:49 Speaker 3

And in another account, his early loss would be mourned by many young and old who knew him, either at school or at Oxford, in the Army or military service.

00:15:59 Speaker 3

He was just one of those to whom Oxford might have looked for special help when they languished full day of reconstruction arrives. It was characteristic that he should wish to be brought back to us.

00:16:09 Speaker 3

In a beautiful little Holywell cemetery within sound and sight to the tower of the Modelling College, which he loved so well.

00:16:17 Speaker 2

Another member of.

00:16:18 Speaker 2

Modern college who suffered with shell shock during the war was George Bonner. George was a student here, although only for a single term in 1914 before he went off to war.

00:16:28 Speaker 2

He served in France for over two years, first in the Staffordshire Regiment in the infantry regiment, and then he transferred to an anti aircraft.

00:16:36 Speaker 2

Hillory regiment.

00:16:38 Speaker 2

In 1916, he was invalided out with Shell Shock. What they then called neurasthenia was informally known as shell shock and was sent to Craiglockhart Military Hospital.

00:16:49 Speaker 2

Craiglockhart was a specialist psychiatric military hospital. I think the first in the UK just outside Edinburgh. It was opened to deal with the.

00:16:58 Speaker 2

Increasing number of psychological casualties that the British Army were seeing from war as the stress of modern industrialised warfare told on men who were physically uninjured. A lot of the time.

00:17:09 Speaker 2

They were treated in quite a forward thinking way for the time they were encouraged to re engage with life through arts through creative expression, arts and crafts and handiwork through gardening in an attempt to ground them back in the real world and bring them away from the memories of the horror that they'd experienced. One of the ways that creative expression.

00:17:29 Speaker 2

Took form was in a magazine called the Hydra which was a play on words Craiglockhart Hospital had previously been a hydrotherapy unit.

00:17:39 Speaker 2

People would take the waters. It was a spa really, but it was commissioned and repurposed as a military.

00:17:45 Speaker 2

Hospital the Hydra also is a mythological many headed snake like Beast and the legend said that for every head of the hydra that you cut off, 2 would grow back in its place.

00:17:55 Speaker 2

It's a very apt metaphor for psychological trauma where the more you try and repress it, the more you try and deal with it. It seems as if it comes at.

00:18:03 Speaker 2

You from a different direction the hydra.

00:18:05 Speaker 2

Was a magazine for all sorts of literary expression, so there was poetry in here short fiction, the odd cartoon as well as news of what was going on in Craiglockhart. So there was a lot of social activity games being played, theatrical productions being put on.

00:18:21 Speaker 2

And there are also some advertisements for military equipment for shops and cafes in Edinburgh. Lots of patients contributed to the hydra amongst them.

00:18:28 Speaker 2

See free too soon and Wilfred Owen the Great War poets and George Bonner was the editor of the Hydra for several editions. The 1st edition that he edited has two Siegfried Sassoon poems in it.

00:18:41 Speaker 2

Either he was very close to Sassoon in terms of the time he spent there, or possibly even crossed over with so soon in one of his other editorials, he mentioned how Wilfred Owen has just returned to the front.

00:18:53 Speaker 2

These copies of the Hydro magazine we have four were found very recently, only about four or five years ago in an attic, in a house in Oxford.

00:19:01 Speaker 2

Very close to this college belonging to George Bonner's son Austin. What's especially exciting about these 4 copies of the Hydra is that two of them were previously thought to have been lost. There were no copies of them anywhere.

00:19:13 Speaker 2

In the world, as far as anybody knew, Austin Bonner in fact had two copies of each of the additions, so we were able to take one and the other went to Edinburgh Napier University, which holds the records of Craiglockhart.

00:19:28 Speaker 2

Following Austin Bonner's death, he was already a very old man. When we met him, he was in his 90s.

00:19:32 Speaker 2

It turned out that he had bequeathed a little bit more material to us, which included owners Certificate of Commission into the Army, and a variety of other papers, including four books of poetry which Bonner had carefully written up in.

00:19:47 Speaker 2

Fair copy in Softbaits exercise books.

00:19:50 Speaker 2

I have one in front of me now and on the front is written poems 1918, nineteen, 19 and 1920. Inside this book it's a fair copy of probably the only over war poem the ***** ever wrote.

00:20:01 Speaker 2

A lot of his poetry is quite whimsical and deals with landscape or mythology. He was very interested in Celtic mythology, likely spent a lot of time.

00:20:10 Speaker 2

In Wales.

00:20:11 Speaker 2

He wrote a little bit about his time at Craiglockhart, but really only one poem that conveys the experience of war.

00:20:18 Speaker 2

And it's very different from anything else he ever wrote. It's very stark, and it's quite harrowing. It's called, let us taste of the joy of battle, which is a quote from the Iliad in the Iliad. It has a heroic and epic feel.

00:20:31 Speaker 2

It's meant here in a satirical way.

00:20:33 Speaker 2

Another manuscript copy of the poem we have includes a dedication to William Beach, Thomas, which again must have been satirical.

00:20:39 Speaker 2

William Beach Thomas was a British newspaper correspondent for the Daily Mail, who was much derided and disliked by many serving in the trenches for his very jingoistic portrayal of the war. He seems to view it as a great game.

00:20:53 Speaker 2

Let us taste of the joy of.

00:20:55 Speaker 2

Battle in a shell hole. He crouches. This officer unable to go forward.

00:21:01 Speaker 2

He is afraid.

00:21:03 Speaker 2

His men are either dead or have gone forward, except one who a few yards away, shattered and screaming.

00:21:11 Speaker 2

Prays to be shot.

00:21:13 Speaker 2

But the officer scarcely heeds.

00:21:16 Speaker 2

Before him is the barrage into which no power mortal or immortal can impel him.

00:21:22 Speaker 2

He has reached that point where the mind no longer controls the body.

00:21:26 Speaker 2

Vaguely tumultuously through his brain thoughts of his life come crowding of how he had planned to die. Rushing with a laugh into the fight. Having tasted the joy of battle.

00:21:38 Speaker 2

With this to slink down among the shadows, slowly extinguished is intolerable, he laughs, hoarsely

00:21:45 Speaker 2

He is a.

00:21:47 Speaker 2

He thinks of his friends of the tables shining by lamplight, where there was laughter where the world was real and not hell.

00:21:55 Speaker 2

Now they will despise him, his friends, and speak of him in whispers as one who failed pity will be his at their hands, pity and faint contempt.

00:22:04 Speaker 2

At last he sees the face of a woman. Will she to despise or understand? Once I was a brave man and she loved me. Now I am a coward. Will she love me still?

00:22:16 Speaker 2

An aeroplane, overhead hums, coward coward.

00:22:20 Speaker 2

Love is greater than death, but greater than both is fear.

00:22:24 Speaker 2

But God, why does he permit such suffering?

00:22:27 Speaker 2

He cries like a child.

00:22:29 Speaker 2

Coward, coward. The sound of a heavy shell grinding through the zenith.

00:22:34 Speaker 2

The end of misery.

00:22:40 Speaker 2

You could say that George Bonner lived through the war, but he didn't really survive it. He came back to College in 1919 and completed his degree and then tried to become a writer.

00:22:50 Speaker 2

He had several journalistic articles published, a few poems, but he continued to be troubled by lack of sleep by headaches and.

00:22:59 Speaker 2

In 1929, he hanged himself from his bedroom window.

00:23:03 Speaker 2

So like Mackworth, the effects of the war in the end killed him.

00:23:26 Speaker 1

That brings us to the end of our Series A writers war. It was a National Lottery heritage fund. First World War Centenary project produced by Chrome Radio for the University of Oxford. Faculty of mediaeval.

00:23:40 Speaker 1

And modern languages in partnership with year 10 students from Oxford Spa Academy.

00:23:46 Speaker 1

Thank you for listening.