

The Isle of Wight Rifles and Gallipoli

In July 2015 funding was obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project focusing on the Isle of Wight Rifles and Gallipoli. The project was spearheaded by the Island's Heritage Education Officer Estelle Baker, in partnership with Carisbrooke Castle Museum and the Isle of Wight Record Office, and commemorates the 100th year anniversary of World War One.

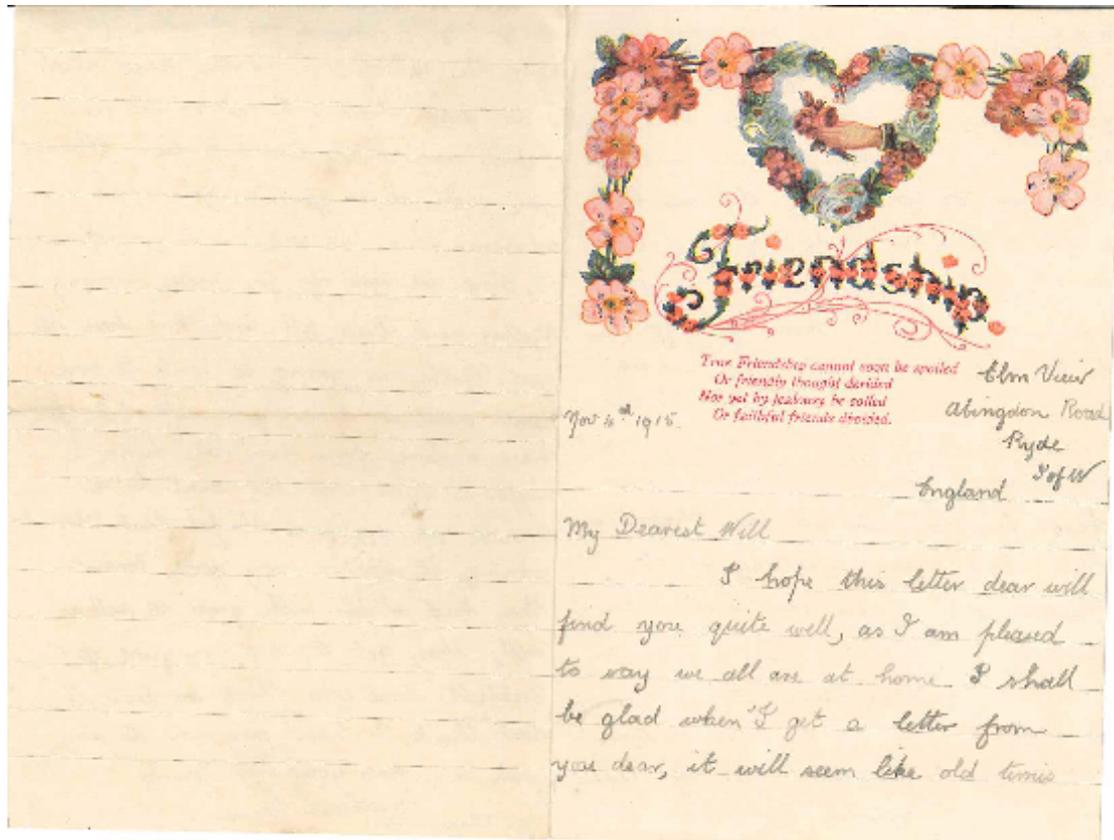
The project used previously unseen archive material from both the Record Office and Carisbrooke Castle Museum to explore the stories of the soldiers of the Isle of Wight Rifles. In particular their experiences of training and going off to fight at Gallipoli, and the effects that the war, and the death of loved ones, had on their families back home. It also looked at the daily experiences of two Islanders during the war.

The Rifles were fully mobilised on 4th August 1914. In April 1915 they were sent to Bury St. Edmunds for training, and then on to Watford for the summer. They formed part of the 163rd Brigade, who set sail from Liverpool on the Aquitania on the night of the 30th/31st July 1915. The attack began on the 6th August, the day the rifles arrived at the island of Lemnos. They entered the conflict on the 10th August, landing at Suvla Bay and were in reserve for the first couple of days. 120 Isle of Wight Riflemen were killed at Gallipoli, 81 on the first day of action on the 12th August, and at least 45 Island soldiers from other regiments also lost their lives in that disastrous campaign. Gallipoli saw around 58,000 allied soldiers, and 87,000 Ottoman Turkish soldiers killed, with around 300,000 men, from both sides, seriously wounded.

With the help of a team of dedicated volunteers we worked on transcribing, repackaging and interpreting a range of archival material. Items held at the Record Office include the letters between Emmie Tutton and her sweetheart Rifleman William Buckett, and George Vernon Upward's diaries, giving his thoughts on the progress of the war and becoming a conscientious objector. Upward secured a conditional exemption from conscription due to his work as a grocer's manager, which was considered a certified occupation, on the condition that he remain in that line of work. We also hold Florence Oglender's diaries written between 1914 and 1919, as well as Ryde Military Tribunal records which give the names of men exempt from conscription and the reasons for exemption. Material loaned to, and held by Carisbrooke Castle Museum includes the Isle of Wight Rifles' training and preparations for war, shown through photographs relating to Leonard Ledicott.

The story of Emmie Tutton and William Buckett, sweethearts from Ryde, is particularly heartbreaking. Will was reported missing on 12th August 1915, and it seems likely that he was one of those IW Rifleman killed on that first day advancing upon the enemy. However Emmie and his family did not find out his fate until April the following year, and continued to write to him in the hope that he was a prisoner of war somewhere in Turkey. At the Record Office we have the letters Will wrote to Emmie between April and the beginning of August 1915, and the letters that Emmie wrote to him between August 1915 and April 1916, which were all later returned to her when Will could not be found. We also have correspondence sent to Emmie from third parties, some of whom were soldiers in Prisoner of War camps, replying to her letters, which she had sent in the hope that someone had some news of her Will.

Shown here is a scan of a letter to Will from Emmie, dated 4th November 1915, almost three months after he had been killed.



again like it was when you were at
 Hatford. What kind of weather are
 you having out there we hear it is very
 hot in the day and cold at night.
 What ever do you think the Gas Works
 want girls from 16 to 18 years of age
 to empty the gas meters what do you
 think of that dear, know good for me
 to try and get the job because I am
 to old dont laugh mind dear. I am
 not the same as you happy days dear
 What about some if it pudding now
 Last Sunday week all the Chapels in
 Hyde had a large meeting in the
 Theater after chapel the place was
 packed even the gallery, we were in
 the Choir on the stage, I can fancy
 hearing you say awank. Mr Mortimer
 wants me to play the organ for Peoples
 own Sunday afternoons as Eddie Jeff
 is giving up playing for Sunday afternoons
 after the 14th of this month, What shall
 I do dear shall I do it or not dear
 I dont care much about it dear. When
 you write dear give us your full
 address where we can send your parcels
 to. How are you off for socks, Granny
 Mother and Dad all send their love to
 you. Mother is going to write to you
 next week, I know you will like to
 have a line from her she hopes
 nipper is quite well. We went to a
 concert up Babfield Chapel last Thursday
 evening it was a very good concert
 they had stalls with goods to sell as
 well, they got £7.11.0 very good for
 Babfield dont you think so dear. I
 dont think I have any more to say
 with love from your ever loving
 sweetheart
 Will
 God Bless you dear

The transcription below is of the last letter Will ever wrote to Emmie; written whilst he was onboard the Aquitania bound for Gallipoli. The transcription retains the original spellings. Punctuation has been added in order to improve the flow and make sense of the text.

1/8/1915

2370 Rfn W.H Bucket
 B Coy 1st Batt 8th Hants Rg
 Mediterean Expeditionary Force

My Dearest Emmie

Just a few lines to let you know that I am alright and that I have not fed the fishes yet. We are having a lovely time dear, it was a bit rough the first day but we soon got over that. I can not tell you where we are or the name of the ship. I am still with my chum and his cousin, we have a jolly nice cabin to sleep in. We get plenty of good food and plenty of it. I hope you are it (in) the best of health dear, as it leaves me at the present. Give my love to Mother, Dad & Granny and remember me to Mr & Mrs Mortimer. Now I must come to a close with best love and kisses from your everloving sweetheart

Will

xxxx Good bye
 xxxx and God
 xxxx bless you
 dear



Photograph of William Buckett

Throughout the project various education sessions were run by the Heritage Education Officer for schools and community groups. The end result will be the production of an educational resource pack on the Isle of Wight Rifles and Gallipoli, using examples from the archive material. The pack will be sent out to all Island educational establishments and libraries as well as being available online through the Heritage Service website.

**Joanna Stuiver BA(Hons), PGDip
Searchroom Assistant, IW Record Office**