

Unpublished WW1 novel shares secrets of the past with a new generation

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Frederick William Harvey

A heroic World War One soldier's previously unknown semi-

autobiographical novel has come to light following the completion of a project to archive and make public the manuscripts, poems and correspondence of Frederick William Harvey.

F W Harvey's papers are now available to the public thanks to a major collaborative project between the University of Exeter and the Gloucestershire Archives.

The Gloucestershire soldier became well known nationally for his poetry and his acts of courage. Despite having trained as a solicitor, he enlisted in the ranks and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal before being made an officer. Found among Harvey's papers was an unpublished novel titled 'Will Harvey - A Romance', which is a fictional, but semi-autobiographical, novel which covers the early lives and school-days of two brothers. The story then follows them into the trenches of WWI, where Eric is killed (as was F W Harvey's brother in real life) and Will is captured (again as in real life). There were several attempts to have it published however it seems that the post-WWI public was no longer interested in reading about the [war](#).

The importance of the novel lies in the analysis of what events in the novel were based on reality and what was Harvey's invention, according to Grant Repshire, a doctoral researcher from the University of Exeter who was responsible for cataloguing the collection. Repshire said: "Those things that were taken straight from life can give us a first-person view on Harvey's world at the time and how he perceived the events of the war. For example, in real life Harvey chose to enlist in the army as a common soldier, even though his public-school education meant he could have been an officer right away. This is believed to be due to his egalitarian beliefs."

He added: "He only became an officer after earning the DCM and being promoted from within the army. However, in the fictional novel he

chooses to keep his character a private soldier, possibly reflecting his desire to represent the common man rather than the upper and middle classes. This aspect of his novel highlights his belief that all men should be seen as equals."

The collection of papers which have been archived range from text books bearing the stamps of the German censor, in which F W Harvey wrote the first drafts of his prisoner poems, to lifelong correspondence with his old comrades. Through this process of archiving, there is now a better idea of his service as a private [soldier](#) in the trenches prior to receiving a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant.

Prior to now the only narrative available about the events which led to him being awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) - the second highest honour a non-officer could receive - was the official commendation write-up created by the commander of 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment. As usual for military documents of that era it is very succinct and lacking in detail. However, Harvey's personal scrapbooks contained several newspaper clippings with accounts of his views on it. The archive also includes one published interview with him, which describes the event in detail.

Repshire explained: "This interview reveals that Harvey was having trouble remembering the more violent details of the patrol, possibly indicative of post-traumatic stress caused memory loss. Perhaps most telling, he wrote a fictionalised account of this patrol in his unpublished novel 'Will Harvey - A Romance' that was found amongst his papers. Information like this gives us a more complete picture of his service on the front lines."

The archive also includes the manuscript of Gloucestershire Friends - Poems from a German Prison Camp in Harvey's own handwriting. This was the only book of war poetry to be published during the Great War

while the author was concurrently a prisoner of war.

The Collection is being launched by the F W Harvey Society and the Gloucestershire Archives on 8th November and will be available for the public to find out more about FW Harvey through having open access to all the manuscripts, letters and poems which are catalogued and archived in the Gloucestershire Archives.

Roger Deeks, the Chair of the F W Harvey Society, said: "This fabulous collection of letters and papers show the important creative relationship between Ivor Gurney, Herbert Howells and F W Harvey. I am always impressed by the extraordinary role F W Harvey played in developing the first trench newspaper, The 5th Gloucester Gazette, that made trench humour acceptable and appreciated as a morale booster. It paved the way for the Ypres Times. Such information is available in the F W Harvey Collection which has been meticulously archived and catalogued by Grant Repshire. It will be of major interest to scholars of literature, the First World War and life in the Severnvaile and Forest of Dean, for many years to come."

Provided by University of Exeter

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