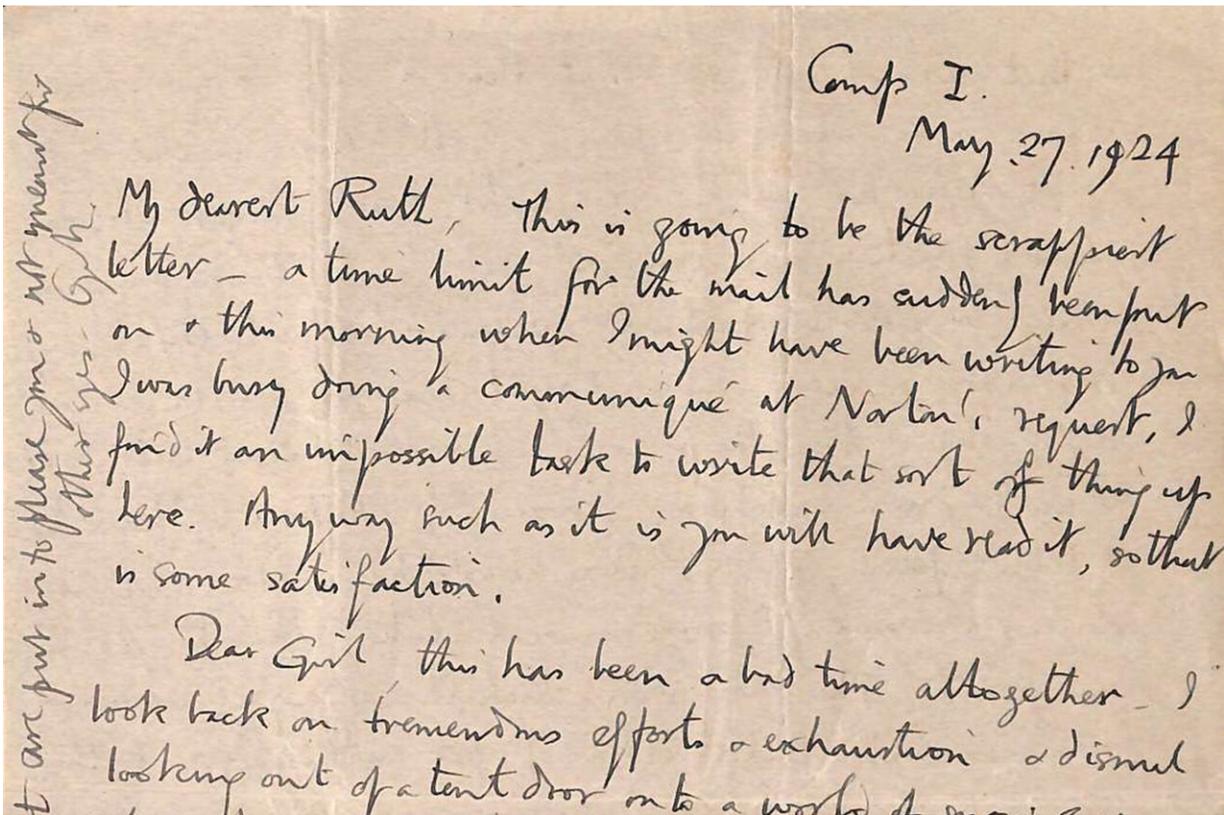


Everest mountaineer's letters digitized for the first time

April 21 2024



1st page of the final letter from George Mallory from Camp I, Everest, to Ruth Mallory, 27 May 1924. Credit: The Master and Fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge

Letters written by the famous mountaineer George Mallory have been made available to a global audience for the first time, in the centenary

year of his fatal attempt to scale Everest.

An alumnus of Magdalene College, Cambridge, Mallory is known for purportedly replying "because it's there" when asked by a reporter why he wanted to climb Everest. There is still debate about whether he and his climbing partner Andrew "Sandy" Irvine did in fact make it to the top of the mountain.

The bulk of the collection is made up of letters written between Mallory and his wife Ruth from the time of their engagement in 1914 until his death on Everest in 1924. Among them are the very last letter he wrote before his final Everest summit attempt and three letters that were retrieved from his body in 1999. These letters survived 75 years in his jacket pocket before his body was discovered.

The letters cover some fascinating topics including:

- His first reconnaissance mission to Everest in 1921. There were no existing records or maps, it was uncharted and this was the mission to see if it was even possible to get to the base of Everest.
- His [second mission](#) to scope out Everest. This mission ended in disaster when eight Sherpas were swept off the mountain and killed in an avalanche. Mallory blamed himself for this tragic accident in his letters.
- His service in the First World War including his eyewitness accounts of being in the Artillery during the Battle of the Somme.
- Letters from his 1923 visit to the U.S. in the middle of prohibition, visiting speakeasies, asking for milk and being served whiskey through a secret hatch.

quite doubtful if I shall be fit enough. Irvine
 will probably leave 8 or 2 of N, S, & self with Geoff
 & the other 2 to make up 4 for two parties of two
 each. But again I wonder whether the monsoon
 will give us a chance. I don't want to get caught
 but our three day scheme from the Chang La will
 give the monsoon a good chance. We shall be
 going up again the day after the monsoon - six days
 to the top from this camp!

Mails have come^{ing} tumbling in these last days
 - three in rapid succession - your dated from Westbank
 with much about the car - I fear it has given you a lot
 of trouble; Clare's poem with which I'm greatly delighted;
 a good letter from David from Py P - will you please thank
 him at once as I shall hardly manage to do so by this
 mail. Mother writes in great spirits from Aix.
 It's a great joy to hear from you especially but also from
 anyone who will write a good letter.

The candle is burning out & I must stop.
 Darling I wish you the best I can - that your anxiety will
 be at an end before you get this - with the best news which
 will also be the quickest. It is 50 to 1 against us but we will

Great love to you
 from your loving
 George
 have a whole lot of messages from
 people

Final page of the final letter from George Mallory from Camp I, Everest, to Ruth

Mallory, 27 May 1924. Credit: The Master and Fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge

The letters to Mallory from his wife Ruth are a major source of women's [social history](#), covering a wide variety of topics about her life as a woman living through the First World War.

The letters are free to view on the [Magdalene College website](#).

College Archivist Katy Green said, "It has been a real pleasure to work with these letters. Whether it's George's wife Ruth writing about how she was posting him plum cakes and a grapefruit to the trenches (he said the grapefruit wasn't ripe enough), or whether it's his poignant last letter where he says the chances of scaling Everest are '50 to 1 against us,' they offer a fascinating insight into the life of this famous Magdalene alumnus."

Extracts from the letters include:

From Mallory's [final letter to his wife Ruth](#) before the attempt:

"Darling I wish you the best I can—that your anxiety will be at an end before you get this—with the best news. Which will also be the quickest. It is 50 to 1 against us but we'll have a whack yet & do ourselves proud. Great love to you. Ever your loving, George."

Mrs. R. M. Mallory
Cambridge

Mrs. Reade evidently enjoyed very much. I don't think I was very good company. My period had just come and I wasn't at all on the spot. I have just fallen down from ladders & all trying to get the climbing things into the loft. Luckily I did not hurt my self at all. I have heard from Mr. Raxworthy. My bank balance is overdrawn £23 & your £112 that is £935 in all. He suggest we sell of our £500 Vickers 4% which would bring in £400 - £400 National War Bond for £420 If we get £2500 for the Holt we need only sell the Vickers I think so I will tell him only to do that for the present.

Dearest one I do hope you are happy and having a good voyage. I am keeping quite cheerful & happy but I do miss you a lot. I think I want you companionship even more than I used to. I know I have rather often been cross and not nice & I am very sorry but the bottom reason has nearly always been because I was unhappy at getting so little of you. I know its partly stupid to spend the times I do have you for those when I don't.

Very very much love to you my dear one
Your loving
Ruth.

Final page of letter from Ruth Mallory to George Mallory, 3 March 1924.
Credit: The Master and Fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge

From the [only surviving letter](#) from the Everest period in the Archive that Ruth Mallory wrote to her husband.

"I am keeping quite cheerful and happy but I do miss you a lot. I think I want your companionship even more than I used to. I know I have rather often been cross and not nice and I am very sorry but the bottom reason has nearly always been because I was unhappy at getting so little of you. I know it is pretty stupid to spoil the times I do have you for those when I don't."

From a [letter from Mallory's sister Mary Brooke](#), written from Colombo, Sri Lanka:

"I hope you have been getting the weather reports all right—it will be very interesting to hear whether you can trace a connection with our weather & how long afterwards. Since sending you the observatory report yesterday we have had the most terrific storm... It was most violent for nearly three hours so if you get the same you had better be on the look out..."

More information: You can access and download the letters here: [Magdalene College website](#).

Provided by University of Cambridge

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