

**CATALOGUE OF
THE IVOR GURNEY ARCHIVE**

Gloucestershire Archives, Gloucester

D10500/1/C/1/1

**ORIGINAL WORKS:
CORRESPONDENCE 1912-22:
Letters to Catherine Abercrombie**

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National Manuscripts Conservation Trust

Subseries Gloucestershire Archives D10500/1/C/1/1 [1916]
 (acc.47705) **Letters from Gurney to Catherine Abercrombie**

Description: Letters written to the wife of poet Lascelles Abercrombie, Catherine, whom Gurney had met in 1915 when he called at the Abercrombies' house in Dymock hoping to find Lascelles.

3 letters Notes: Catherine Abercrombie recalls Gurney and his visit in a 1959 recollection of Gurney's visit in 1915. See D10500/4.

Item D10500/1/C/1/1/1
 (SR8.33, 7-11) Letter from Gurney to Catherine Abercrombie [c.mid-June 1916]

Description: A letter which begins by thanking Mrs Abercrombie for her letter and the book (a copy of her husband's play, *Deborah*). Gurney writes of his initial experiences of France, and their first 'strafe', obviously having only recently arrived at The Front. He writes at length of the Welsh soldiers whom he met on arrival in the trenches, being the Glosters' instructing batallion; of their conversation, and of his joy at hearing a cuckoo whilst the same call was cursed by one of the Welsh, having been all he could hear as a friend lay dying in his arms. He complains about the cost of writing paper, about the books he is reading, and looks forward to the time after the war.

8pp. Notes: Manuscript; pencil. Addressed 'Somewhere in France'. Published (from a transcription by Michael Hurd) in CL91.

Item D10500/1/C/1/1/2
 (SR8.33, 3-6) Letter from Gurney to Catherine Abercrombie [c.25 June 1916]

Description: Gurney begins by thanking Mrs Abercrombie for her present, which must have been the copy of Lascelles Abercrombie's play, *Deborah*, acknowledged in his previous letter. Gurney's letter is largely concerned with a critique of this work, likening it in parts to hearing a Beethoven quartet after that of Debussy, and to Elgar's symphonies. Gurney speaks of life in action and under fire in France, where they have been stationed for a month and where they 'have had two bad times'. He writes out the song, 'I want to go home', and writes of the talk amongst the men of the Prussians 'over there, or with us', pre-echoing his poem 'To the Prussians of England' of October 1917. He also gives a short extract of a poem, perhaps by him, titled 'Life'. There is talk of patriotism, of Gloucestershire (where he dreams of one day getting a country cottage), and mentions also a moment of quiet when he was desirous of a grand piano and the second book of Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues - again perhaps prefiguring the poem 'Bach and the Sentry' (November 1916).

8pp. Notes: Manuscript; pencil. This letter is undated, but the mention of having been in France a month would locate it as c.25 June, they having arrived in France on 25 May.

Item D10500/1/C/1/1/3
 SR8.33 (1-2) Letter from Gurney to Catherine Abercrombie [Early July 1916]

Description: This letter begins evocatively with 'The terrible majestic sounds of the great guns begins in the distance, and I put down "Deborah" and turn to the 'phone (for I am a signaller) and call up to see if all's well'. *Deborah* is Lascelles Abercrombie's play, and Gurney begins by reinforcing his great admiration for the play, for all he remembers of his comments in the previous letter seemed 'cool and critical'. He tells CA that his songs are being performed, and that 'even the poor unwashed unshaven neglected lousy and altogether unspeakable

private may have his little triumphs, though a hundred miles away'. He writes of Wilfrid Gibson's *Friends* ('good stuff') and *Battle* ('a washout. No bon'), and goes on to speak further of poetry and his desire to be home and all the joys of England.

4pp. Notes: Manuscript; pencil. Although undated, the performances mentioned by Gurney of *The Twa Corbies* ('last week') and the *Five Elizabethan Songs* ('next Saturday') took place respectively on Tuesday 27 June and in early July (possibly Saturday 8th) 1916.