Remembering the First World War’s greatest playwright, R C Sherriff

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The project will particularly focus on his great play 'Journey's End', the action of which takes place in a British dugout on the eve of the great German offensive of March 1918.

Sherriff's papers are held at Surrey History Centre in Woking, the home of Surrey Heritage and will be catalogued and preserved as part of the project. Using this unique collection, Surrey Heritage will work with The RC Sherriff Trust, Kingston Grammar School and schools in the Borough of Elmbridge to bring Sherriff's own experiences on the Western Front to a wider audience, through a newly commissioned play and dramatic workshops. Volunteers will have the opportunity to learn archive conservation and packaging skills to make the precious records accessible to the public.

As a junior officer in the East Surrey Regiment, Sherriff spent four gruelling months on the Western Front until he was wounded at Passchendaele in August 1917. Sherriff's papers contain the hundreds of letters he wrote to his parents and friends. He later used these letters in the writing of his play Journey's End, first performed in 1928 with a young Laurence Olivier in the lead role. It remains a key part of the literary legacy of the First World War. Sherriff went on to be a successful Hollywood scriptwriter, responsible for such classics as 'The Dambusters' and 'Goodbye Mr Chips'.

Commenting on the award, Helyn Clack, Cabinet Member for Community Services, said: "We are thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund so that this remarkable collection can be properly preserved and used to promote understanding of what it was really like to serve on the Western Front".

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: “This impressive collection of R C Sherriff’s works, once restored and catalogued, will give people an incredible insight into his life and his personal experiences of fighting on the Western Front. The First World War changed the face of modern history touching the lives of millions of people and we at the HLF are committed to funding a variety of projects which will create a deeper understanding of the heritage of the conflict. Capturing individual stories such as R C Sherriff’s will form an important strand of the commemorations happening across the country.”

Notes to editors

About Surrey Heritage
Surrey Heritage brings together Surrey County Council's expertise in caring for and promoting our county's rich past. It is based in Surrey History Centre, Woking, which collects and rescues archives and printed materials relating to Surrey's past and present. On the Centre's six miles of shelving are documents going as far back as the 12th century, which tell the story of the county and its people for present and future generations.

Further information

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