

In Remembrance

10 November 2005

On the eve of Remembrance Day, the Fund set up 25 years ago in memory of those who gave their lives for the UK has saved top secret papers, diaries and letters of the man who headed the British Armed Forces, Field Marshal Alan Francis Brooke (Lord Alanbrooke).

As Churchill's military right-hand man, Brooke's papers give a compelling insight into the Second World War. The revealing collection ranges from incisive diaries to candid top secret letters signed by Montgomery, Eisenhower and Churchill. They were under threat of being split up and sold off to private collectors until the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) stepped in. With a £182,000 grant, the NHMF is helping King's College London to buy the papers, ensuring they will always be kept safe and accessible for the nation. Additional funding came from the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, The Friends of the National Libraries, The King's College London Annual Fund, and alumni of the College.

Modern day war hero, Private Johnson Beharry V.C., who was awarded the Victoria Cross for outstanding gallantry whilst in Iraq in 2004, commented: "We must never forget the men and women who have given their lives for this country. The National Heritage Memorial Fund allows us all to honour their extraordinary acts of courage, and ensures future generations can do so too. Congratulations on 25 years of inspiring service to the nation!"

Liz Forgan, Chair of the NHMF, said: "What wonderful news to mark this year's Remembrance Season. It's also a poignant way to celebrate our own Silver Jubilee and 25 years of saving the very best of Britain's heritage, as a 'living memorial' in honour of those who fought so bravely. Like every item saved, these papers and the stories within them are part of our shared inheritance. Their loss would have been a national tragedy."

Known as "the soldiers' soldier", Field Marshal Alan Brooke (1883-1963) was a key figure in WWII and was famous for keeping Churchill 'in-line'. Following the outbreak of World War II, Brooke commanded the II Corps of the British Expeditionary Force, playing a vital role in the evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk. In his role as Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, he served as the foremost military advisor to Winston

Churchill, the War Cabinet, and Britain's allies. Today he ranks as the fourth most decorated man in British military history.

His papers give the reader a rare insight into the top-level direction of the war, with descriptions of War Cabinet meetings, details of informal conversations and records of official meetings with Allied army commanders and members of British, US and Russian High Commands. Packed with gems of information, such as observations on Churchill's first meeting with Stalin and Montgomery despairing of Eisenhower's 'ignorance as to how to run a war', each document is a piece of world history.

The papers also offer glimpses of social history such as Indian high society life, through items including a gold framed invite to Christmas Week from a Maharaja in 1910. With many documents yet to be fully researched, the collection will have many more revealing stories in its midst.

The Brooke papers join over 130 other archives saved by the NHMF including the manuscripts of Sir Walter Scott, Siegfried Sassoon and Bryson and McAdam – the latter being the most important Irish Language manuscripts in Northern Ireland.

Notes to editors

Commenting on 25 years of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, who served in the Navy in the Second World War, said:

"There are many memorials in stone to the thousands of servicemen and women who laid down their lives for their country in World War II, so that future generations of their countrymen might remain free and independent, and be able to enjoy our rich national heritage.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund is not like other memorials. Since it was established 25 years ago, it has sought to honour these service people, as well as the many others who have given their lives in the cause of international peace, by rescuing treasures of our heritage that would have disappeared with our freedom, or which would have been lost for other reasons. The Fund is a lively and continuing memorial, and I am quite sure that those it commemorates would feel well satisfied with its considerable achievements."

King's College, London, is one of the oldest and largest colleges of the University of London with 13,800 undergraduate students and some 5,300 postgraduates in

nine schools of study. Housed within the College Archives, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives hold the personal and semi personal papers of over 650 senior British defence personnel of the twentieth century. Access is free and anyone can use the archives, by appointment.

Further information

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