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## From the Trenches: Cross-Campus Digital History Collaboration

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## From the Trenches: Cross-Campus Digital History Collaboration

### Abstract

In September 2015, our team launched The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs ([www.jackpeirs.org](http://www.jackpeirs.org)), a digital history initiative built on collaboration between faculty, students, and library staff. The project is founded on amazing primary source material, but with limited financial support and little dedicated staff time. We leveraged the creativity and hard work of our team members to build a website that is maintained by students and enhanced whenever possible with features and commentary from faculty and staff. Members of #TeamPeirs discussed the evolution of the project, the nature of our collaboration, and the intersection of audiences we have discovered.

### Keywords

Jack Peirs, H. J. C. Peirs, digital history, digital humanities, First World War, World War I

### Disciplines

Archival Science | Digital Humanities | European History | Military History

### Comments

Presented at [The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference \(MARAC\)](#) Spring Meeting in Hershey, Pennsylvania on April 14th, 2018.

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# From the Trenches

## Cross-Campus Digital History Collaboration

**Gettysburg College**

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Ian Isherwood '00, R.C. Miessler, Jenna Fleming '16, Meghan O'Donnell '18

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# #TeamPeirs

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Visiting Assistant Professor

**Amy Lucadamo '00**

College Archivist

**R.C. Miessler**

Systems Librarian

**Jenna Fleming '16 (2014-2016)**

**Kevin Lavery '16 (2014-2016)**

**Melanie Fernandes '17 (2016-2017)**

**Meghan O'Donnell '18 (2016-2018)**

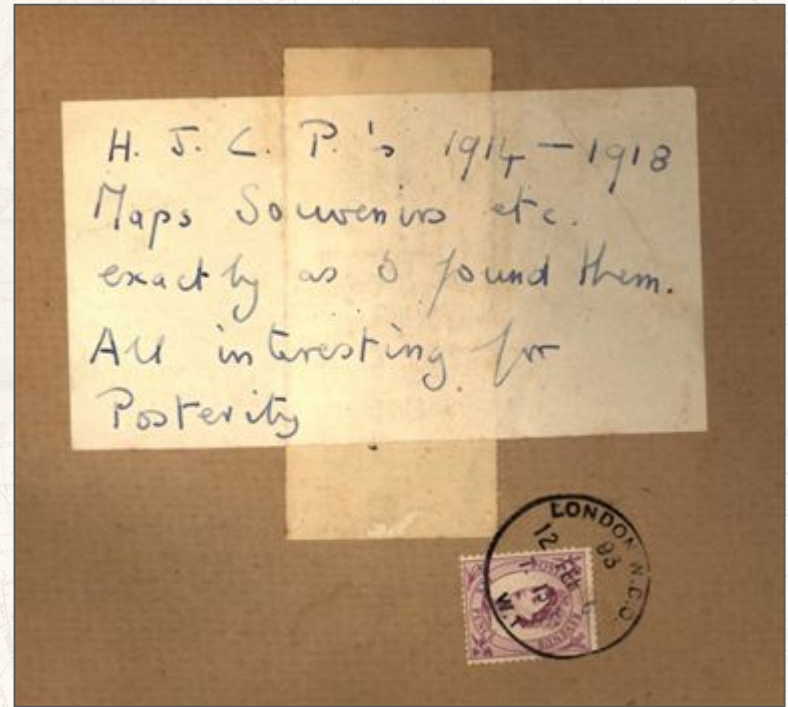
**Jesse Campana '18 (2018)**



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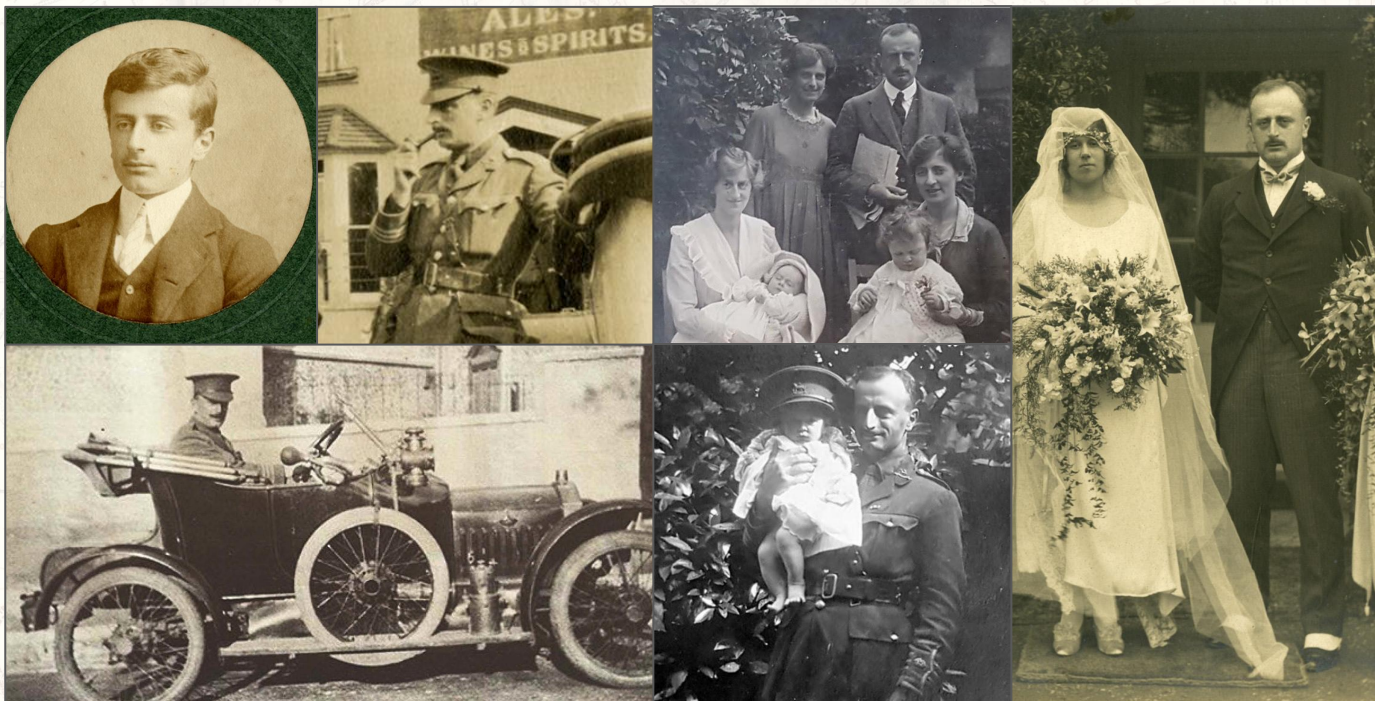
# The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs

- Around 300 letters, documents, artifacts, maps, and photographs from a British officer of the BEF
- All currently on loan to Special Collections and College Archives Gettysburg College
- Family requested that everything be digitized and made freely available without copyright restrictions
- The Peirs Project = blog + social media
- Engaging with WWI scholars, enthusiasts, genealogists, & students



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# Hugh John Chevallier "Jack" Peirs



*Photos of Jack and his pram, his sisters, and nieces appear courtesy of Will Hall.*

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# Collaboration



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# Vision and Beginnings

- Classroom connection with student
  - Traditional research paper
  - Family support for new initiative
  - Assembling a “dream team”
  - No idea what we were doing
- #workedout

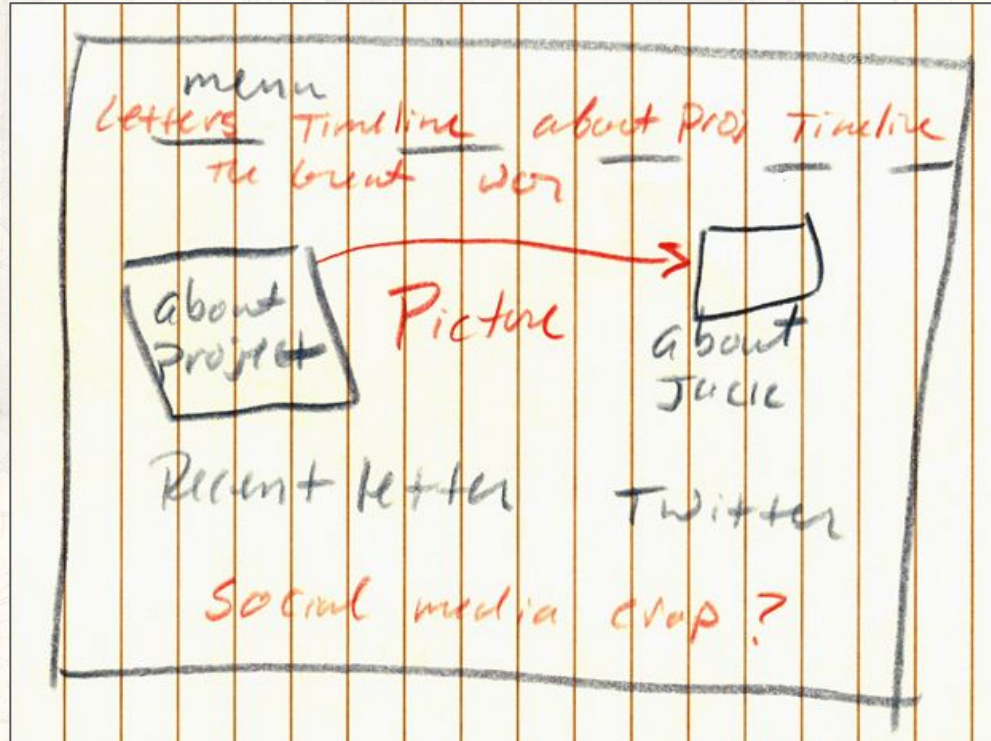


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# Getting Started



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# In the Digital Trenches


	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	Year	Month	Day	Time	End Year	End Month	End Day	End Time	Display Date	Headline	Text	Media
2	1915	9	14						<style "display:none">	<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/letters/14-september-1915/">14 September 1915</a>	We have got a grenadier Corporal over here now, trying to teach us to throw bombs, but he is a priceless ass & we know as much about it as he does	<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Peirs_L_1015-00-14">http://jackpeirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Peirs_L_1015-00-14</a>
3	1915	9	17						<style "display:none">	<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/letters/17-september-1915/">17 September 1915</a>	I went to watch the to-day practising. They themselves a beautiful tunneller and reple hidden loop holes	
4	1915	9	19						<style "display:none">	<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/letters/19-september-1915/">19 September 1915</a>	The Censoring of the most unholy job. In their spare time we at any rate newspaper write reams daily wensored by the Co goes off.	
5	1915	9	21						<style "display:none">	<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/letters/21-september-1915/">21 September 1915</a>	They had a respirator other day when one people came along Bosch gas & filled a then people walked came out coughing safe.	
6	1915	9	23						<style "display:none">	<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/letters/23-september-1915/">23 September 1915</a>	While we have been we have had no ch off letters.	
7	1915	9	28						<style "display:none">	<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/letters/28-september-1915/">28 September 1915</a>	We went into action 20 officers and 10 quite all right, tho touched I don't know	
8										<a href="http://jackpeirs.org/letters/30-september-1915/">30 September 1915</a>	Just after leaving the came under machine	

The screenshot shows the WordPress 'Edit Post' interface for a letter dated 21 March 1918. The interface includes a sidebar with navigation options (Dashboard, Posts, Media, Links, Pages, Comments, Appearance, Plugins, Users, Tools, Settings, WP Lightbox Bank, Google Analytics, Twitter, Collapse menu) and a main content area with a rich text editor. The right sidebar contains publishing options (Status: Published, Visibility: Public, Published on: Mar 21, 2018 at 10:00), a format menu (Standard, Aside, Image, Link, Quote, Status), and categories. The letter text is visible in the main content area, and a transcription image is also present.

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# "My Dear Mother ..."

HOME ABOUT H.J.C. PEIRS ABOUT THE PROJECT WHERE IS JACK?

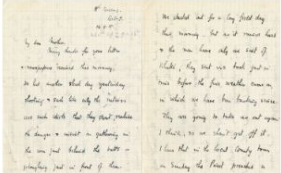


My dear family 11. 9. 1916.  
Here I am again in the burrow + a pretty

Home > Letters > 14 September 1915

## 14 September 1915

Ian Isherwood September 14, 2015 0



Transcription  
8th Queens  
B.E.F.  
14.9.15

My dear Mother,

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# Peirs 2.0

**The First World War Letters  
of H.J.C. Peirs**  
a digital history

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## About

Welcome to the First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs, a digital history project at Gettysburg College.

Jack Peirs was a British officer in the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment. For three years, Peirs served on the western front, fighting in every major campaign waged by the British Army from 1915 to 1918. During the war, Peirs rose in rank from Lieutenant to Lieutenant-Colonel and he was decorated with Distinguished Service Order (two bars) and named a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George at the King's Birthday Honours in 1919.

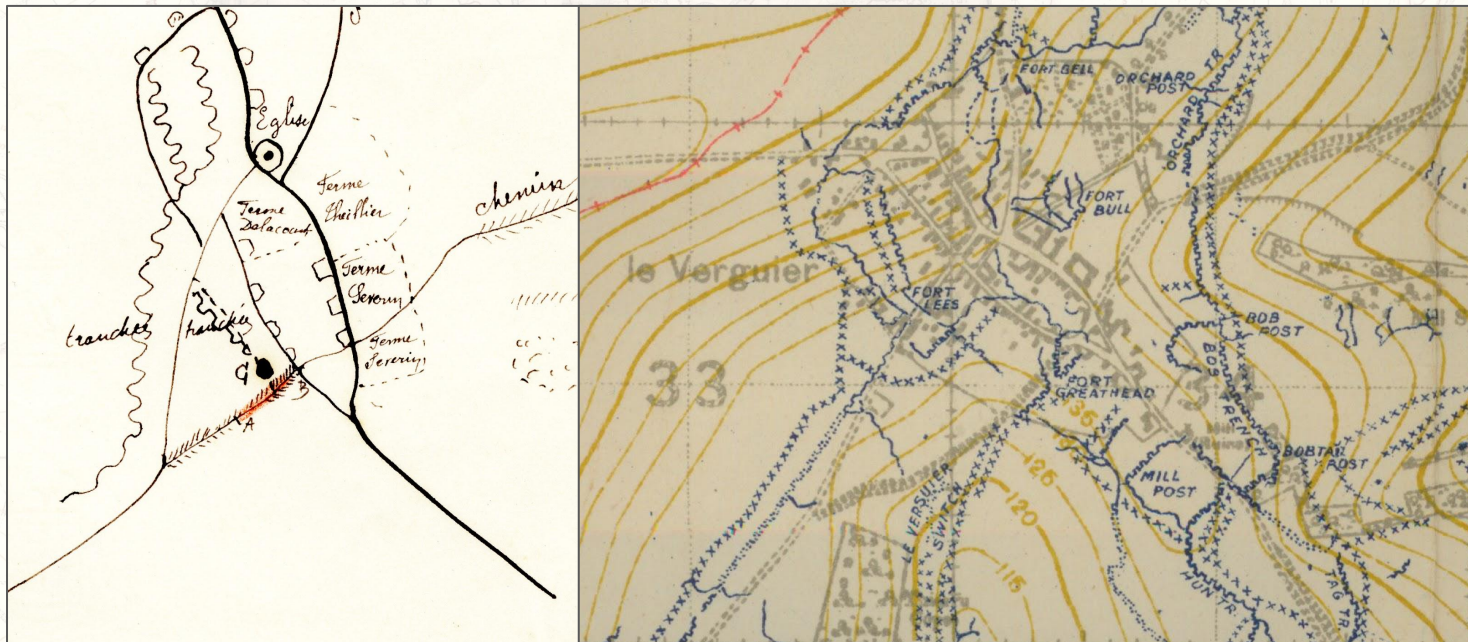
Jack Peirs saw hard service and he was a prolific correspondent. He wrote home weekly to members of his family of his experiences at the front. On the hundredth anniversary of the day in which Peirs composed each letter home, we will release his words here for you to read.

Please feel free to engage with the site. Use these letters in your research (properly attributed) and in your classroom. Bookmark our page, share our posts on social media, and follow H.J.C. Peirs on twitter and Instagram ([@jackpeirs](#)) and like our Facebook page.

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# Mapping the Great War (Then)



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# Mapping the Great War (Now)



**LE VERGUIER - 21-22 MARCH**

Trenches - Bombardment of positions with regular and gas shells commenced at 4:30 AM. The Headquarters is moved again to a sunken road on the southwest corner of Le Verguier.

The dugout was on the buried cable route, but by 7 AM all telephone communications with the forward companies was lost.

At 10:30 AM Companies A and C were cut off from retreat by the enemy. A Company's Lance Corporal John Sayer showed incredible resistance for which he later received the Victoria Cross.

At 3 PM Peirs arrived to take over command and attacks on the village begin. Throughout the night Peirs leads counterattacks.

On the morning of the 22, only Fort Greathead and the Battalion Headquarters remain and Peirs ordered a retreat, against his orders to hold the town.

StoryMapJS | Leaflet | © OpenStreetMap and contributors, under an open license



Caves, near Fort Greathead, as photographed in 1919 by the mayor of Le Verguier.

## German Assault on Le Verguier, March 21-22, 1918

The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs: A Digital History

A time-based map of the German assault on the French village of Le Verguier, March 21-22, 1918.



**Bombardment Begins: Graham Post and Molly Post, March 21, 1918, 4:30am-6am**

**Bombardment Begins: Graham Post and Molly Post, March 21, 1918, 4:30am-6am**

Notes from Diary: Bombardment begins of town and back areas. Lasts for eight hours. Shells of all calibers and gas. Lt. Field returns from NML and alerts Graham and Molly groups.

Image: The remains of a farm at Le Verguier. Taken by Charles Severin, mayor of Le Verguier, 1919.

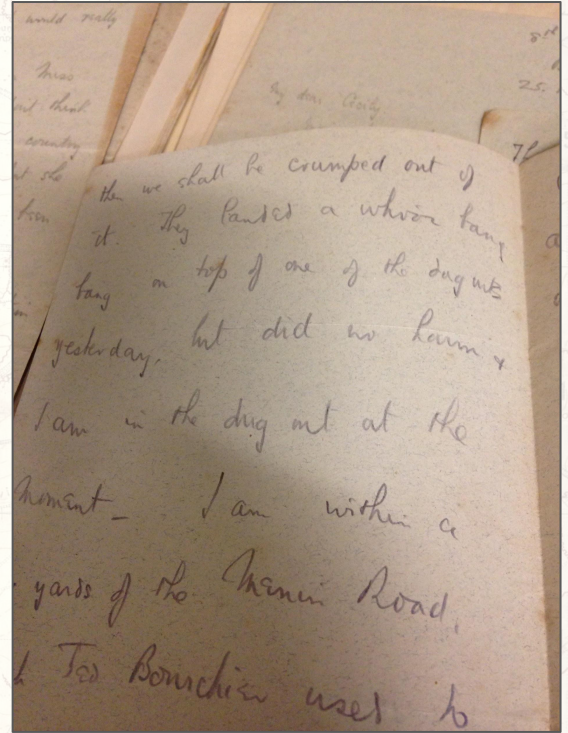
- Report of Nislet: Ascension Wood, March 21, 1918.
- Bombardment Begins: Graham Post and Molly Post.
- Battalion HQ Moved to Sunken Road: March 21.
- Telephone Lines Severed: Shepherd's Copse Company.
- Runner Sent from Dring Post to Shepherd's Copse: March 21.
- German Attack Begins on Priet Farm Posts: March 21.
- Withdrawal to Orchard Post: March 21, 1918, 10:30am.

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# Student Roles

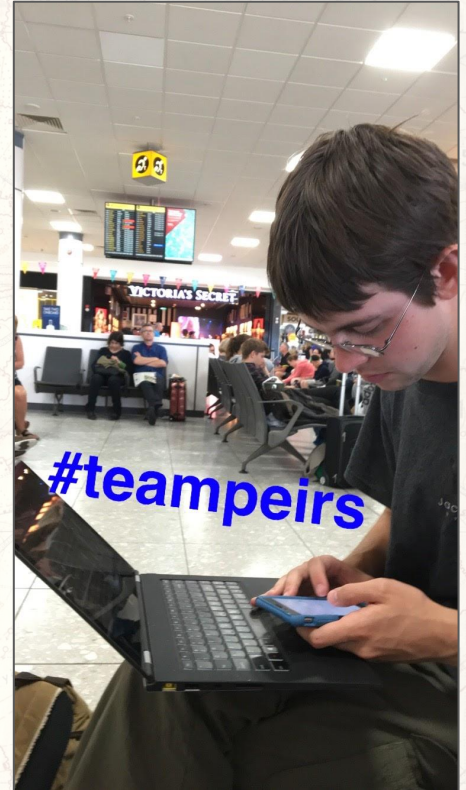
- Starting with a student
- Working as a library intern
- Guidance vs. freedom
- Collaboration from the start



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# Moving Forward

- Developing our goals
- Actually working “from the trenches”
- Making the project better
- Research is truly a process



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# Controlling the Vocabulary

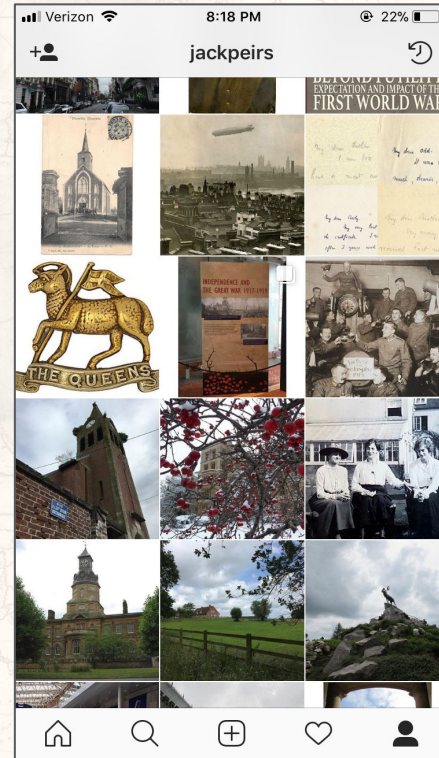
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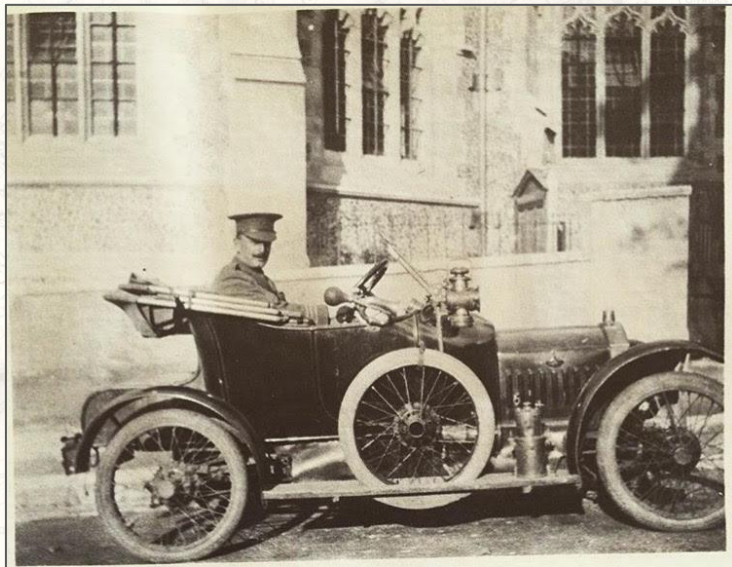
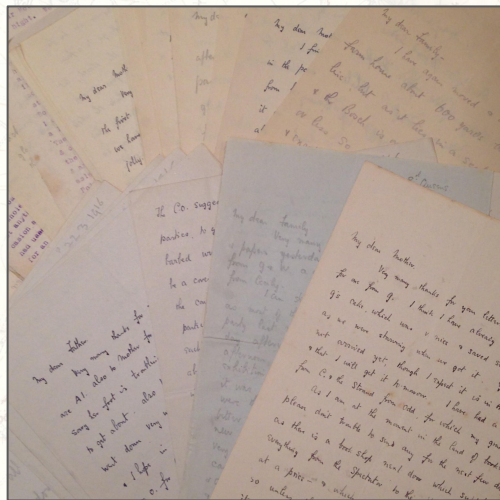
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# New Territory



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# Simply A1



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# Field Research & Archival Research (2016)

- Internal grant funded
- France, Belgium, & England
- 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of the Somme
- Visited battlefields, archives, cemeteries, & monuments
- Peirs-specific sites in/near London



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# Field Research & Archival Research (2018)

- Crowdfunded
- France & Belgium
- 100th anniversary of the defense of the town of Le Verguier (German Spring Offensive)
- Live broadcasts to classes in Gettysburg & on Facebook Live
- Connected with local people



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# Back in the Trenches



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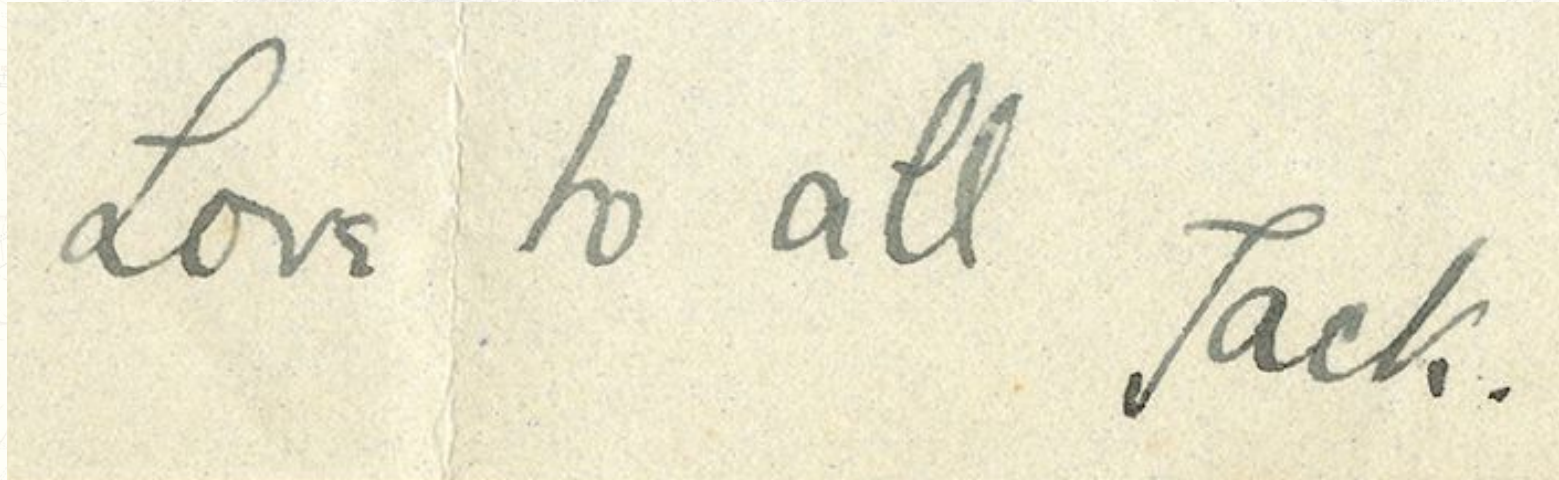
# #TeamPeirs Reflections and Evolution



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# Thank You!

<http://jackpeirs.org> // [jack@jackpeirs.org](mailto:jack@jackpeirs.org) // [@jackpeirs](https://twitter.com/jackpeirs)



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