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Clough, Louise (2013) In our quiet country village they lived. ARC Magazine (288). pp. 26-28.

Official URL: <http://www.archives.org.uk/>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/2656>

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Clough, Louise (2013). *In our quiet country village they lived*. ARC Magazine (288), 26-28. ISSN 17452120

Published in ARC Magazine, and available online at:

<http://www.archives.org.uk/>

We recommend you cite the published version.

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“In our quiet country village they lived” – The Dymock Poets Archive and Study Centre

On the eve of centenary commemorations for the First World War, it seems fitting to tell the story of a group of poets who congregated in the Gloucestershire village of Dymock just before its outbreak. From 1911 to 1914, British poets Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Wilson Gibson and the American Robert Frost had all settled in Dymock, a quintessential English village on the Gloucestershire – Herefordshire border. They were visited regularly by fellow poets Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater and Edward Thomas, gathering as a commune now referred to as the Dymock Poets. Eleanor Farjeon also regularly visited Dymock. The University of Gloucestershire Archives and Special Collections holds the Dymock Poets Archive and Study Centre, established in 1995 as a research resource on the poets and to promote interest in them. The collection is part of our wider Gloucestershire Poets, Writers and Artists special collection, comprised of material of a literary or artistic nature relating to the county.

The Dymock Poets are part of a broader literary movement known as Georgian Poetry. New poetic traditions were being formed focussing on nature and the day-to-day experiences of ordinary people. This contrasts with the starch Victorian world they had left behind but not yet embraced the hedonism of the inter-war years that were to follow. The Dymock Poets took much inspiration from each other and the surrounding Gloucestershire landscape, ideally suited to the type of material they produced. Their collective formed a brief idyll before the impending upheaval of war.

Dymock pulled these poets together from places far beyond Gloucestershire. Abercrombie had been born in Ashton upon Mersey, Gibson was from Hexham in Northumberland, Brooke from Rugby, Warwickshire. Thomas and Drinkwater were Londoners, Thomas also being of Welsh descent. Frost had travelled further, born in California but raised in New England. Their differing experiences of place and culture makes their common endeavours in Dymock even more extraordinary, providing a unique snapshot in literary history of great interest to researchers.

The congregation of the poets in Dymock was a real catalyst for their own personal work. Thomas met Frost in 1913 and wrote his first poem “Up in the Wind” the following year, having previously published collections of essays. Thomas and Frost had a particularly close friendship, and would often walk together for miles through the Gloucestershire countryside. Abercrombie and Gibson enjoyed a similarly close acquaintance. They produced and published the “New Numbers” periodical which showcased the work of the Dymock Poets amongst others. The issues were produced as a cottage industry and numbered only four parts, bringing together some of the best work by the Dymock Poets and we hold a rare set of the work.

The peaceful setting of Dymock contrasts sharply with the carnage of war which sadly claimed the lives of Brooke and Thomas. Frost returned to the United States where he was to become one of the most acclaimed American poets of the twentieth century. Abercrombie went on to become an academic, Drinkwater a playwright, Gibson continued as a poet. All three were involved in war work.

The collection is comprised of both archive material and secondary-source published works including many first editions by the poets themselves as well as wider criticism. There is also a variety of multi-media resources. We hold personal papers and manuscripts relating to Abercrombie, Gibson and

Brooke, as well as personal papers of Edward Thomas's daughter Myfanwy. The Friends of the Dymock Poets and the Edward Thomas Fellowship are organisations dedicated to the study and celebration of the Dymock Poets, and both have deposited their administrative archives with us.

The collection also includes secondary-source works by related Georgian poets such as Walter de la Mare, W. H. Davies, John Masefield, Siegfried Sassoon, and fellow Gloucestershire poets Ivor Gurney and John Haines. Our Gloucestershire Poets, Writers and Artists collection also includes a variety of works by Cheltenham poet James Elroy Flecker.

For more information on the Dymock Poets Archive and Study Centre, please see our website www.glos.ac.uk/archives or email archives@glos.ac.uk.

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