The research conducted with the help of the SAIF grant confirmed what I had suspected from previous research: Primary documents located in manuscript collections at the British Library in London, King's College Archive Center in Cambridge, the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives at Cambridge University Library, Dartmouth College Library, and Princeton University Library as well as letters to myself from several of Rupert Brooke's biographers reveal that the Rupert Brooke Trustees did in fact engage in censorship and subterfuge in order to keep the Brooke legend as patriotic poet intact. Most references to Brooke's socialism, atheism, and bisexuality were deleted from his writings before publication. The collection of letters I previously edited for Yale University Press—a collection that had been suppressed for eighty years—is the most glaring example, but a closer look at the letters previously published by the Brooke Trustees show that many were silently altered to delete offending references. Too, the correspondence from trustee Geoffrey Keynes to and from various Brooke biographers reveal that the biographers also were strongly discouraged from printing anything on these topics.

I first presented the results of my research at the South Central Modern Language Association annual convention in Memphis on November 1st, 2007. Subsequently, I shared my work with colleagues by presenting a more complete report to UWP's Humanities Department Forum in the spring of 2008 and also taking part in the 2008 Poster Day. An article summarizing my research has been accepted for publication by the peer-reviewed journal ANQ and will appear in the forthcoming edition. The article is copied below.

The Bowdlerization of Rupert Brooke

Keith Hale

When Rupert Brooke died of blood poisoning on his way to fight the Turkish forces at Gallipoli in 1915, his friends in England were quick to turn him into a national hero—a patriotic symbol of the many young men of England going to war. To maintain the patriotic legend after the war, Brooke’s biography was altered beyond recognition. His mother refused his choice of literary executor, Edward Marsh, selecting instead his boyhood friend Geoffrey Keynes, who spent the rest of his life suppressing unsavory rumors about Brooke. When Keynes edited and published a collection of Brooke’s letters, he deleted much of the evidence that would have proven that Brooke the man was not the same as Brooke the legend. In selecting the letters to be published, Keynes in particular refused to include sensitive letters between Brooke and James Strachey—the brother of Lytton and translator of Freud—saying they would appear in print "over my dead body" (Rogers 6).

Keynes’s refusal to allow the Brooke-Strachey letters into print almost certainly was due to the strong homosexual current running through the correspondence. Even at Rugby, Keynes had tried to moderate that side of Brooke, complaining of Brooke’s "decadent" posing and expressing his disapproval of Brooke’s flirtation with Michael Sadleir. To his credit, Keynes did publish many of Brooke’s letters to him about Brooke’s adolescent romances, with few omissions; however, he was reluctant to print anything the adult Brooke had to say on the subject.

Keynes’s edition of the letters, as it happened, appeared over the dead body of Dudley Ward, a co-trustee of the Brooke estate, who had said Keynes’s selection "completely misrepresented"
Brooke and who kept the edition from being published as long as he was alive. Although an avid bibliophile famous for his personal library, Keynes was easily shocked, and—at least in his younger days—had no qualms about destroying literary and historical documents. Following his brother Maynard Keynes’s death, Geoffrey was inclined to destroy the letters between Maynard and Lytton Strachey—letters filled with the details of Maynard’s love affairs with the painter Duncan Grant and other young men of Brooke’s circle. Fortunately, James Strachey and Maynard’s biographer, Roy Harrod, intervened and the letters were preserved.

It is, however, certainly possible that years earlier, when Geoffrey took control of much of Brooke’s correspondence, there was no such fortuitous intervention and many of Brooke’s most sensitive letters were destroyed. James Strachey, for one, refused to allow Keynes access to his letters from Brooke, and at least one person who did send letters to Keynes later received a letter from him saying they had been lost. Brooke’s mother is another individual who might have been inclined to destroy certain documents. When her husband Parker Brooke died in 1910, she destroyed all his papers unread.

We know from Brooke’s surviving letters that for several years he wrote long letters to two fellow Rugby boys—Denham Russell-Smith, whom he later seduced, and Michael Sadleir, with whom he had what he termed an "affaire." It seems that none of the correspondence to or from either boy, except for a letter written much later by Brooke to Sadleir concerning a literary matter, has survived. Letters from Brooke to Denham’s mother in which he compliments the hammock on which he and Denham liked to lie and kiss each other have survived, but no letters to the boy himself. Keynes acknowledges the letters to Sadleir existed by saying in his collection that Brooke’s early letters to Sadleir were not preserved (Brooke, Letters 35). One of Brooke’s biographers who tried to track them down, Michael Hastings, believes that "The Sadleir trustees got hold of letters, via, presumably, the earlier more cautious Brooke trustees, and they have no doubt been destroyed" (Letter).

As mentioned, before Brooke died, he appointed Edward Marsh as his literary executor; however, his mother refused to honor the choice and instead appointed a group of four men, headed by Geoffrey Keynes. Marsh had been managing Brooke’s affairs since before Brooke’s death. It was his name on Brooke’s publishing contract with Sidgwick and Jackson, and it was he who had been representing the three poets named as heirs in Brooke’s will. When Mrs. Brooke convinced Marsh to step aside in favor of Keynes, both the publisher and the heirs refused to deal with Keynes and only acquiesced after intervention from Marsh.

Marsh’s troubles with Keynes and Brooke’s mother, however, were far from over. He was writing a memoir of Brooke to be included as an introduction to Brooke’s Collected Poems, and he soon found both Mrs. Brooke and Keynes acting as tandem obstructionists to his project. Mrs. Brooke insisted that Marsh not include anything about Brooke’s socialism, then after the memoir was published, she complained that it wasn’t a complete account of Rupert and didn’t even mention his socialism. She also insisted that Marsh ask Keynes to write something for the book, and when Keynes refused, she withdrew her permission to publish. Marsh wrote to her expressing dismay that, after all the trouble he had taken, he should be made to suffer "because someone else, over whom I have no control, refuses to write" (Hassall 386). Eleven days later, Marsh sent an announcement to Sidgwick and Jackson of the memoir’s postponement: "owing
to the wishes of the family’--I should like to insert the word ‘bloody’ before ‘family’, but I won’t insist on this" (391). Eventually, Marsh was allowed to publish, but even though he honored the many limitations placed on him by Mrs. Brooke and Keynes, they still were unhappy. Keynes in his autobiography complained that Marsh’s memoir had contributed to the idea that "Brooke’s unmanly physical beauty was often taken as an indication that he was probably a homosexual and therefore to be despised" (Gates 165).

The first biography of Brooke aside from Marsh’s memoir was to have been written by the American explorer Richard Halliburton, who unfortunately drowned at sea before completing his book. While working on it, he had been disappointed to find that Mrs. Brooke and most of Rupert’s friends were reluctant to divulge information about the poet. "I was made aware of a peculiar subterfuge going on round me," he wrote. "One Trustee of the Brooke Estate made a point of telephoning some of the families I approached to insist I be allowed to see no material they might possess" (Stringer 63). Brooke’s friend Justin Brooke wrote to Halliburton, "I think you may find it hard to get Mrs. Brooke’s permission to print all that you would naturally desire." The poet St. John Lucas-Lucas, who had sent Halliburton his letters from Brooke, later wrote, "Mrs. Brooke is far from pleased with me for letting you have them. [...] Please don’t think me very dictatorial, but the rule that Rupert’s friends must make is that Mrs. Brooke’s wishes in any matter concerning him are absolute law." Noel Oliver, in politely refusing close cooperation, said she believed it was not yet possible to write a full account of his life: "The spectators must wait another 50 years or so for anything like a full picture," she wrote. Dudley Ward refused cooperation for the same reason, writing to Halliburton, "I do not think that the time has come for the publication of a full selection of his letters, and such partial selection by you as would be possible would only give a misleading impression." The concerns of Ward and Olivier were, of course, accurate. Keynes, who had been collecting Brooke’s letters himself, allowed Halliburton to see only a selected few.

With Halliburton’s death, no Brooke biography was published until 1948, when Arthur Stringer, using the materials Halliburton had been able to gather and conducting extensive research on his own, published Red Wine of Youth. However, the most interesting conclusions made by Stringer while writing his book--that Brooke was homosexual and had died from venereal disease--never appear in its pages. Stringer did make his opinions known to Brooke’s Canadian friend, Maurice Brown, who reported them to Keynes, who wrote to Stringer to refute both suggestions. Keynes said he hoped Stringer would "not allow your book to be even remotely coloured by the idea that Rupert was in any way abnormal." But the idea of Brooke being homosexual was an increasingly touchy subject for Keynes. Robin Skelton soon added to Keynes’s concern by writing to him that "my generation and all succeeding generations will continue to regard Rupert as a plaster-cast Apollo with homosexual tendencies." Keynes, working on his collection of Brooke letters at the time, wrote to Cathleen Nesbitt, "The letters should effectively dispose of the widespread belief (particularly, I believe, in America) that Rupert was ‘queer.’" Given that hope, Keynes must have been dismayed when Julian Jebb’s review in The Times asked the question outright: "Was he a suppressed homosexual or a narcissist or impotent? Or did he really have a very successful sex life, but no love life? The combination of guilt, affectation, emotional demands and condescension which fills his letters to Katherine and Cathleen only obscure the truth." But it was Timothy Rogers’ review in English that distressed Keynes the most. Rogers said the publication was an example of "much that has gone amiss in the Brooke store: the evasiveness,
the resistance to inquiry, in a word the possessiveness" (80) and faulted Keynes for not including the more controversial letters (83).

The main problem with Keynes’s *The Letters of Rupert Brooke* and with the biographies written by Christopher Hassall, Robert Brainard Pearsall, John Frayn Turner, William E. Laskowski, and even Timothy Rogers, is censorship. Each writer is very selective in what he presents, apparently not wanting to destroy the Brooke image. Hassall’s biography was meant to be definitive, but it is too concerned with the trivial and too little concerned with the controversial to be a true accounting. Another biographer, Paul Delany, says "the essential flaw of Hassall’s work was that it had to please Sir Geoffrey [Keynes], which meant that it gave a fundamentally distorted and incomplete view of Rupert" (xv). For his part, Keynes insisted that Hassall’s life of Brooke and his own collection of letters "served to discredit the Rupert Brooke legend and to establish a truer valuation of his wholly masculine character and mind (Gates 169-70), a statement that clearly reveals Keynes’s mission regarding the poet. Many others who have written about Brooke seem to share this mission. Robert Pearsall chose to ignore any homosexual inferences regarding Brooke and wrote that at Rugby School Brooke "developed no crushes of any kind" (16), a statement contradicted even by the Brooke letters published by Keynes. Self-described in his preface as "an old soldier myself" (8), Pearsall dismisses Brooke’s long-standing friendship with James Strachey by saying that James and his brother Lytton "were jealous and fussy men, buzzing homosexuals, whom Brooke could not like and ultimately came to hate" (40). Rogers apparently shares this view of James Strachey. Despite the fact that James was Brooke’s closest friend for many years, Rogers in his biography dismisses him with the line, "That [Strachey] made sexual advances to Brooke is likely, and likely that Brooke repelled them" (6). Nigel Jones, who wrote what is for the most part an even-handed account of Brooke’s life, nevertheless says in his introduction that "the Stacheys and most of the Bloomsberries were truly poisonous people" (xvi). Even so innocuous a book as Sandra Martin and Roger Hall’s *Rupert Brooke in Canada* denigrates Brooke’s male relationships. They write of Brooke’s days at Rugby: "Rupert was amused in a disdainful, superior way by a crush another boy suffered for him" (11), which again is hardly an accurate account even of the Brooke letters published at the time.

That so much of the material written on Brooke has come from the pens of writers who were at best eager to prove him heterosexual and at worst completely homophobic is unfortunate. It is also ironic that in at least ten books the authors felt it necessary to protest that Brooke was not homosexual. No Brooke biography had ever claimed he was. Only recently have Paul Delany’s biography, *The Neo-pagans: Rupert Brooke and the Ordeal of Youth*, my own edition, *Friends and Apostles: The Correspondence of Rupert Brooke and James Strachey*, and Nigel Jones’ *Life, Death & Myth* presented evidence that Brooke was at least at certain times in his life and at least to some degree bisexual, but even these three recent books never claim he was homosexual.

Delany, like Stringer, Hastings, and Rogers before him, felt compelled to mention the reticence—and indeed, obstruction—he encountered among some Brooke acquaintances while compiling his biography. He says Keynes "had gathered a mass of documentation on Brooke [...] he controlled it, and he was temperamentally unable, over the years, to allow unhindered use of materials he considered sensitive" (xiv).
It is a shame, of course, that Keynes’s collected letters of Brooke do not paint a true picture of the man. Rogers says the problem with Keynes edition is that it "is hopelessly incomplete; there are three hundred excisions (for various reasons) from the fewer than six hundred published letters, and some of the closest friendships are unchronicled" (5-6). Rogers arrived at the three hundred figure by counting the deletions in the letters that Keynes indicated with ellipses. Actually, there are far more deletions than even Rogers realized, for Keynes made many of his deletions silently. When Keynes finished his collection and sent the manuscript around to the other Brooke trustees and several of Brooke’s friends, he was dismayed to find that the work met with unanimous disapproval. Among the more pointed replies he received was this from Dudley Ward: "It was my own fault to allow myself to be hustled by you into agreeing, however reluctantly, before I had been able to read your proposed selection in typescript, as you originally promised." To be fair, it should be mentioned that Ward, if anything, was more conservative than Keynes and perhaps objected on the grounds that Keynes had included too much rather than too little. But it is more likely that Ward objected to the manner in which Keynes edited the collection to make some of Brooke’s friends look better than others. Ward specifically mentioned his disapproval that Keynes had included some disparaging remarks regarding James Strachey.

Keynes edited the letters heavily. The correspondence from his editor at Faber and Faber is full of exasperated inquiries of "Why delete?" and "Why bowdlerize this?" The editor cited "bowdlerization" on six pages of the galleys, and other alterations and omissions on many pages more. All of Brooke’s frequent uses of the word "bugger" were changed or deleted, I believe, except for one. When used as a noun, the word, under Keynes’s editorship, became "beggar." When used as a verb, the word and the surrounding sentence were usually deleted altogether, often with no indication a change had been made. Keynes also deleted the names of Brooke’s schoolboy lovers, Charles Lascelles and Michael Sadleir, even when the names appeared in completely innocuous passages. He also deleted mentions of homosexuality even when the situations did not involve Brooke, as when Brooke in a letter to Virginia Woolf provides an account of two fourteen year olds "buggering" a ten year old in a church vestry.

Keynes also deleted, without so much as an ellipsis, Brooke’s flippant reference to his own bisexuality in a June 1911 letter to Katherine Cox: "I stayed at the Grange with Gwen & Jacques [Raverat]: and though Gwen’s the only woman in England, & Jacques almost the only man, I’ve never lusted for, I’d a bad touch of that disease you too’ll have known." Nor would Keynes print Brooke’s October 1911 letter to Cox mentioning a "beautiful, shining workman." Nor does he use a letter to Cox written in February or March 1912 containing an interesting account of Brooke’s arguing with his mother about Cox: "I felt the red creep slowly up--Damn! It’s just as it always was; even from the time when the holiday mention, at lunch, of the boy of the moment in the House (with apologies, dear!) left me the level red of this blotting-paper, & crying with silent wrath."

Keynes also deleted the following lines from Brooke’s November 30, 1908, letter to Erica Cotterill:

I can imagine cases where I think a man or woman ought to live with someone he loves very much, and [...] produce children by somebody else. This might happen if the person one loves is
sterile, or diseased with some hereditary disease, or of the same sex. Do you understand about loving people of the same sex? It is the question people here discuss most, in all its aspects. And of course most of the sensible people would permit it.

And, of course, Keynes included no letters to James Strachey at all, saying, as I mentioned earlier, that they would be published "over my dead body." Brooke’s letters to James eventually were sold to the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library in November 1967 under condition that no one have access to them for ten years without the permission of Strachey’s widow. Jon Stallworthy, who had joined Keynes as a Brooke Trustee, wrote to the Berg curator two years later that even when the ten year period passed, it was unlikely the Brooke Trust would grant permission for the letters to be published. However, times changed, and Stallworthy did eventually grant permission for publication of the Brooke-Strachey letters, though he, too, remained very concerned with mentions of homosexuality in the book and with the manner in which the Brooke Trustees were portrayed in the introductions and footnotes. Nonetheless, with the publication of *Friends and Apostles*, a major, suppressed piece of the Rupert Brooke puzzle is now in print, and now, finally, a true evaluation of the poet as a man is possible. Noel Oliver was correct: It did take a number of years before a true accounting of Brooke was possible. But even she might have been surprised that it took not fifty but eighty years.

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