Archive Reference: GB 0532 Cwl JSGPT

Papers of John Steel concerning the Gulf Peace Team:

Interim Catalogue

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# Introduction

This archive comprises the papers of John Steel, a teacher and peace activist, who played an essential role in the creation and organisation of the Gulf Peace Team (GPT). The GPT set up a peace camp on the Iraqi-Saudi border to protest against the First Gulf War. This has been described as the ‘first nonviolent interposition’ of campaigners between warring sides in history (Burrowes, 1991, cited in Publications, below). The Team’s experiences however exemplify the strategic, financial and communication issues faced by international groups seeking to protest in war zones.

This catalogue is ‘interim’; it is published as part of our ‘First Sort’ programme which aims to put basic information about new archives into the public domain as quickly as possible. We will refine and enrich it in response to user demand.

Alison Cullingford, Special Collections Librarian.

# Collection description

## Reference code

GB 0532 Cwl JSGPT.

## Title

Papers of John Steel concerning the Gulf Peace Team.

## Dates

1990-1997.

## Level of description

Collection (fonds).

## Extent

0.39 linear metres.

## Name of creator

Steel, John (1914-1997), activist

## Biographical history

John Steel was born in 1914. He served in the British Army from 1940-1946, including campaigns in North Africa and Italy, and imprisonment as a prisoner of war in Germany. From 1948 to 1974 he was a teacher. Steel was active in various peace campaigns, including the League of Nations, and later Ex Services CND and the Gulf Peace Team (GPT).

The GPT was an international group of activists which aimed to set up peace camps between the opposing forces in the Gulf, without taking sides in the conflict. Its first meeting was arranged by Pat Arrowsmith and David Polden on 1 October 1990. An advance party, including John Steel, was sent to establish a location for the camp with the Iraqi authorities, the Saudis not having responded to initial overtures. The chosen site was at Ar’ar, a border crossing on the Iraqi-Saudi border. The peace camp officially opened on 21 December, and activists gradually began to arrive. On 16 January, the date of the expiry of the UN Security Council deadline which was shortly followed by intense aerial bombardment, there were 73 activists present. They were evacuated to Baghdad ten days later, and then to Jordan. Steel was one of the group who chose to stay on, initially with the aim of setting up a camp in Jordan, then, following the end of active hostilities on 28 February, taking an interest in humanitarian causes in the region.

Following his return home in May 1991, Steel as treasurer undertook to manage the large debts incurred by the GPT (over £43,000). After great difficulties, he was eventually able to satisfy all creditors, with a small sum left over sent to Medical Aid for Iraq. John Steel died in 1997.

## Immediate source of acquisition

Donated by Anne Worrall, daughter of John Steel, in 2016.

## Scope and content

The archive contains three main kinds of records:

1-2. John Steel's Daily Notes, a diary of his time in the Gulf in 1990 and 1991, plus a set of photocopies of the Notes.

3-12. Correspondence files organised by year, containing John Steel’s correspondence with activists and supporters, circulars, press cuttings and other material relating to the GPT. The earlier files are mostly concerned with campaigning, the latter with financial matters.

13. Files concerning the finances of the GPT and Steel's management of its debts.

## Appraisal

The archive has been lightly appraised. Duplicates and published works have been weeded. It is likely that future appraisal will reveal further irrelevant material on detailed investigation.

## Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

## System of arrangement

Items have been kept in files as received. The original order within files has been maintained wherever it could be ascertained.

## Access conditions

Available to researchers, by appointment. Access to archive material is subject to preservation requirements and must also conform to the restrictions of the Data Protection Act and any other appropriate legislation. This archive contains many files which include personal data and are therefore restricted under the Act.

## Copyright/conditions governing reproduction

Copies may be supplied or produced at the discretion of Special Collections staff, subject to copyright law and the condition of the originals. Applications for permission to make published use of any material should be directed to the Special Collections Librarian in the first instance. Rights in the Daily Notes have been retained by the Donor (research reprography under the library/archive exceptions to UK copyright law is acceptable). Steel's other rights have been transferred to the University of Bradford to be managed by Special Collections. There are in addition many third-party copyrights in the archive. The Library will assist where possible with identifying copyright owners, but responsibility for ensuring copyright clearance rests with the user of the material.

## Language of material

Mostly English, some text in Arabic.

## Related collections

The Imperial War Museum's collection of sound recordings contains several interviews with Team members, including John Steel, recorded in 1991, reference 12327.

## Publications

The work of the Gulf Peace Team has been discussed in many books and journal articles. The following titles are particularly relevant to this archive:

Bhatia, B., Drèze, J. and Kelly, K. (2001) *War and peace in the Gulf: testimonies of the Gulf Peace Team.* Spokesman.

Burrowes, R.J. (1991) The Gulf War and the Gulf Peace Team. *Social alternatives,* 10 (2), 35-39.

Steel, John (1995) Bringing peace to the Gulf. In Stanleigh, R. (editor) *On active service for peace: Ex-Services CND*. Ex-Services CND.

## Note

Information in this description is derived from documents in the archive and the published sources listed.

## Archivist’s note

Described by Alison Cullingford.

## Rules or conventions

ISAD(G) 2nd edition.

## Date(s) of description

July 2017.

## Indexing

### Persons

Steel, John (1914-1997), activist.

### Organisations

Gulf Peace Team.

### Subjects

Persian Gulf War, 1991.

# File and item level descriptions

## 1 Daily Notes and associated documents

**Date:** 1990-2016.

**Level:** File.

**Extent:** 1 file.

### 1/1 Daily Notes by John Steel

**Date:** 1990-1991.

**Level:** Item.

**Extent:** 4 notebooks.

**Scope and content:** The Daily Notes are John Steel’s diaries of his time in the Gulf. He attached notes to each of the notebooks to explain that the books were separated in June 1994 to facilitate photocopying for the preparation of a book by Robert Burrowes. Each notebook was given a letter and the pages numbered with this letter. One notebook ‘E’ is missing and there appear to be some gaps elsewhere, e.g. missing entries for days 90-93.

#### 1/1/A Daily Notes A, 16 November 1990 - 10 December 1990, Day 1 to Day 25.

#### Date: 1990.

**Level:** Item.

**Extent:** 1 notebook.

**Scope and content:** Diary portion numbered A1-A65, followed by pages of names, addresses and notes.

#### 1/1/B Daily Notes B, 11 December 1990 - 23 December 1990, Day 26 to Day 38.

**Date:** 1990.

**Level:** Item.

**Extent:** 1 notebook.

**Scope and content:** Diary pages numbered B1-B17.

#### 1/1/C Daily Notes C, 24 December 1990 - 12 February 1991, Day 39 to Day 89.

**Date:** 1990-1991.

**Level:** Item.

**Extent:** 1 notebook.

**Scope and content:** Diary pages numbered C1-C67.

#### 1/1/D Daily Notes D, 17 February 1991 - 26 March 1991, Day 94 to Day 131.

**Date:** 1991.

**Level:** Item.

**Extent:** 1 notebook.

**Scope and content:** Diary pages numbered D1-D58.

### 1/2 Colour photograph of team members

**Date:** 1991.

**Level:** Item.

**Extent:** 1 photograph.

**Scope and content:** Three people, holding signs expressing sentiment 'We choose to stay' sitting on a carpet in front of a fence.

**Note:** photograph is known to have been reproduced in Peace News and elsewhere. Subjects and photographer not yet identified.

### 1/3 Whereabouts of London Gulf Peace Team members 25/1/91

**Date:** 1991-2016.

**Level:** Item.

**Extent:** 1 side.

**Scope and content:** Typed sheet listing names and locations. Annotated by Anne Worrall in April 2016 with details of internet name searches and whether or not the Imperial War Museum has made a recording of the individual.

### 1/4 Circulars and correspondence

**Date:** 1991-1997.

**Level:** File.

**Extent:** 1 file.

**Scope and content:** GPT 1991 circular in English and Arabic (?) re Schmeisani demo on 15 February 1991, versions of document ‘Was there another way?’, letter from Steel dated 1 August 1997 to Kathy Kelly re possible donation of records to Bradford, correspondence with IWM, photocopies of sections pertaining to Steel from Bhatia (2001).

## 2 Photocopied set of John Steel's Daily Notes

**Date:** 1990-1991.

**Scope and content:** Photocopies of 1/1/A-D.

## 3-11 John's Steel's Gulf Peace Team papers

**Date:** 1991-1997.

**Level:** Series.

**Extent:** 9 files.

**Scope and content:** Correspondence, leaflets, circulars, press cuttings, reports, finances of GPT.

### 3 Gulf Peace Team 1991.

### 4 Gulf Peace Team February-March 1992.

### 5 Gulf Peace Team June-December 1992.

### 6 Gulf Peace Team 1993-1994.

### 7 Gulf Peace Team January-June 1994.

### 8 Gulf Peace Team July-31 December 1994.

### 9 Gulf Peace Team January-end of May 1995.

### 10 Gulf Peace Team June 1995/1996/1997 with briefings 1991 and 1992.

### 11 Gulf Peace Team 1996-1997.

## 12 Personal letters

**Date:** 1990.

**Level:** File.

**Extent:** 1 file.

**Scope and content:** Envelope of GPT addresses, correspondence and other papers circa 1990.

## 13 Finances

**Date:** 1991-1996.

**Level:** Series.

**Extent:** 9 files and a day book.

**Scope and content:** Files relating to financial affairs of GPT.

### 13/1 Creditors (3 files).

### 13/2 Day Book.

### 13/3 Donors.

### 13/4 Finances, to end 1991.

### 13/5 Cash books, ledger, inventory.

### 13/6 January 1993 with comments figures Jan/March 1992.

### 13/7 March and April 1993.

### 13/8 1993-1996 Hackney Debt Management.