



DURHAM
AT **WAR**



YOURS TO A CINDER

The wartime correspondence of Lieutenant Angus Leybourne
8th Battalion Durham Light Infantry
and Connie Kirkup of Birtley, Co. Durham
exchanged while Angus was a prisoner of war in Germany and Switzerland
1915-1917

PART 1: 1915

This correspondence was very generously loaned to the Durham at War project by the Leybourne family and portrays a very British wartime romance. All rights to this material are reserved by the family.

Angus Leybourne, from Gateshead, was an officer of the 8th Battalion Durham Light Infantry, who was wounded and taken prisoner at Ypres in April 1915. He was one of the first British prisoners of war to be transferred from Germany to internment in Switzerland at the end of May 1916.

Connie Kirkup was a family friend who wrote to him throughout his captivity. Angus proposed to her by letter from Switzerland and she eventually travelled out to visit him in January 1917. Connie was the matron of the hospital hut at Birtley Munition Works in 1916.

[Durham County Record Office](#) and Durham at War volunteers have assisted with the transcription and editing so that this correspondence can be shared with a wider audience online during the First World War centenary.



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Connie Kirkup to Angus Leybourne, 30 April 1915

7 Bulkeley Terrace

Beaumaris

Anglesey

30 April 1915

Dear Angus,

I hear from home that the Durhams are in the thick of it, is this correct? I have been comforting myself by thinking you would be in training for a month or so, but this morning's news has knocked that on the head. I do hope Phil & you are alright. I feel so mean & apparently heartless to be away here enjoying myself when so many are doing the opposite, but it wouldn't make any difference if I went into a torture chamber would it? Ernest has been here for four days leave and left yesterday, I am staying with Mr & Mrs Brookes, Elsie is well and Mary (the babe) is a perfect cherub you would fall in love with her at once I can just picture how she would chuckle at your laugh, I don't mean in amusement, it is infectious.

We have not done much sailing since I came last night was dead calm, so Janey took me out in the little dinghy, to teach me how to row, result - blisters. We are not able to go outside the Straits because of those Germans (whom we expect soon to be subdued now that the 8th have met them) so we have only a small sailing boat, 3 sails and about 22 feet long, we came up the straits at a fleeting pace the other night wind & tide with us. Janey & I both wished Phil and you were with us enjoying it all instead of what you are doing, wherever that may be.

Mother and I called at Mrs Leybourne's before I came away but she was out she telephoned & asked us to go on Tuesday, but I came here on Monday, Mother went, I shall go & help to keep her cheerful when I return.

Annie Brookes wrote and asked me to go to Colwyn Bay for this weekend, but I don't



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want to leave here. It is just about a year since she was up at Eighton Lodge & we played tennis at your house.

Now I must stop, I expect you get heaps of letters, more than you have time to digest. Goodbye and good luck.

Your sincere friend

Con

Any messages for Miss Elgar?

Angus to his mother, Mrs Maud Leybourne, 11 May 1915

Lazarett Josefshaus

Paderborn

Deutschland

11 May 1915

My dear Mother,

I am wondering whether you got my last postcard, I suppose they will go by Holland. I wrote a great long letter of 12 pages about 5 days ago but the Censor returned it saying it was far too long. Lest you did not get my first postcard I will repeat the important items. I am now a prisoner of war at the above address. I got wounded in my left leg. A bullet went in about 3 inches above the knee where the seam of the trouser comes. It came out behind the knee. I am getting on very well now. The wound having healed up without any trouble at all. The only thing that is left is the fact that I have not got the use of the muscle that works my foot upwards. The above house is a Catholic convent which has taken about 40 of us and are looking after us very well indeed.

You might send me the following articles as soon as you can:

1 box of 100 cigarettes



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1 lb tobacco
Some plain chocolate or toffee
1 pair puttees
1 cap badge
1 khaki shirt
1 pair combinations
3 pairs of socks
12 handkerchiefs
Cleaning material for buttons
2 good books

Also if you can, find Holdsworths' pocket book of Engineering. It is in my study. I think on the table by the window. It is a small book with very thin paper. I think you had better put these things in some kind of bag or case, as I have nothing to keep them in at present.

It is a very long story to tell you all the happenings since I left you and space will not permit. I will have to leave this for a fireside chat. Well the chief thing that concerns me is how long the war will last. Before I forget, send a weekly times or something with reliable reading in it, also a box of 4 quinine tabloids.

You might write to Lieutenant Carpenter Durham Light Infantry [DLI], Territorial Force, British Expeditionary Force, GPO London, & ask him if he could speak to Mr Ramsay, the transport Officer of the 8th DLI & get my valise sent home. I got wounded pretty soon in the battle & after a day or so was taken by the Germans to their Red Cross Station, I then had a 3 days' journey in the train before I landed at the above address. I have got heaps of time to write. In fact time hangs very heavy on me, but I am limited in the amount of letters I may write, so you can tell my friends that I should very much appreciate a letter although I may not be able to reply. I suppose I will just have to possess my soul in patience, however you rest assured that I am alive & kicking with nothing but a gammy leg to bother me. I do hope things are going well with good old



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England and all at home. I am somehow expecting to be back about August or September, I hope it may be so. I suppose Muriel will be at school now & Helen at Guy's Hospital. Give my love to all

Your loving son

E. Angus Leybourne

Angus to Connie, 21 June 1915

Feldpostkarte

Bruderhaus 21.6.15

Postmark: Munster (Westf) 1, 7.7.15

UK postmark: JUL 14 [19]15

Miss Kirkup

Leafield House

Birtley RSO

Co Durham

England

Send directly to the family

I am at: Bruderhaus, Paderborn, Westfalen, Deutschland

Name and Christian name: Elliot Angus Leybourne

Regt: 1st line 8th Durh L I

Comp: "B"

Notices: I suppose you have heard of my fate by now from other sources. It is certainly rather bad luck to be in this predicament so soon but it is all part of the game. I have not heard any news of the Batt[alion]. How is Phil. I almost dare not ask you. But I trust he is still safe and sound. Let me know how you are going on. I am here with 3 Canadians. I have been removed here from Josefshaus. It will be two months before I am out of the Hospital, but you may [write?].



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Remember me to all whom it may concern at Birtley with special reference to Leafield.
Coulson Major, Ritson, Wood & myself are in Paderborn.

E L

Angus to Connie, 12 August 1915

Miss C. Kirkup
Leafield House
Birtley
County Durham
England

Bruderhaus
Paderborn 1/W
Deutschland
12 August 1915

My Dear Constance,

Which sounds as if I were going to ask you for something, but really I had not this intention on my honour, unless it be to ask you to keep on writing your letters of wit & sarcasm, which are like the food of gods to me. You are just about as bad as Muriel, who wrote to me the other day & said she was at that moment eating some very nice chocolate biscuits & bemoaned the fact that she could not send me some, which could not be exactly regarded as in the category of the impossible. You, on the other hand write & say, "I have had some excellent photos taken shall I send you one?" So now I will have to wait two months before I see this masterpiece of photography. However, I will not fight over the matter if you promise to get it off on receipt of this letter.

I was very glad to get that book which Mr Kirkup sent, would you thank him from me for it. You will have heard from me through mother that I am now installed in better



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quarters & am living in a style a little nearer approaching those of my home surroundings, only as regards eating and accommodation of course. Friends have to be substituted by letters & I can assure you they are a pretty poor substitute. A young "Frau" comes here every morning with a little girl, to see her husband who is here in hospital, she wears a hat very like the one you came into the Mess with at Conway when you suffered the ignominy of waking us all up just after a good meal.

It would be impossible to discuss all the topics of conversation that you have in your letters, but some have interested me very much indeed. Phil certainly seems to be having a very good experience of Warfare at present. We can expect to see him on General French's Staff before this business is over & then there will be no approaching Leafield. I hope you will allow me to come to dinner or supper sometimes however. I am sending this letter via Muriel as I owe her a letter so I hope you will not think that I am taking a liberty, in not delivering it direct to you. I was rather tickled to hear about Bradford & his intended marriage. Until I got your letter saying that he was in England I was quite under the impression that he was killed.

I have just received a very lively letter from Marjory in which she says that Phil K. is back on leave & will no doubt be going along to see Philis. Marjory's letter smells of that beautiful face powder she is accustomed to wearing (& it certainly brought back memories of dances (where you interceded for me with some success). Criterions, Hippodrome etc. & a thousand things which make the difference between freedom & imprisonment. The chief feature about this life is the absolute lack of anything to do or think about & perhaps more than that the lack of any female element for that always gives one a lot to think about & as I have always been brought up in a home where the women predominate I find this life surpassing dull. But I think it is the same with all. The war will stop soon simply because the men will be so keen to get back to their wives & sweethearts that they will just give the job up & say I'm off home I've had enough of this.



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You ask me about the looks of the Canadian Officers, to me the question is a little difficult as I never knew the difference between a handsome, pretty or ugly man, they are like babies to me they all look very alike. Rumour has it however that Mr Scott is very good looking with a simplicity to be wondered at in a Canadian (he is a parson's son), while Lieutenant O'Grady is good looking [he is] argumentative to a degree, so that sometimes we get very annoyed with one another & he has an almighty opinion of his country which he regards as "God's Country" but overlooks the fact that God also made a few more at the same time. However, these incidents make no difference to our friendship & I am very lucky in having them here for company.

There is a German student who is training to be an officer, who comes here quite often at present. He speaks English very well, & it is most interesting to hear his views from the German standpoint. We however keep clear of any subjects which we know will cause any violent opposition of opinion. We are both convinced we are right & I am afraid it would take more than arguments to turn our views. With individuals in such a state of mind it is no wonder nations are fighting. Your nursing abilities must have reached a high state of perfection by now & I can only deplore the fact that I was not privileged to be nursed by one so accomplished.

Well! Space is getting very short now so I will have to end this epistle of "drivel" as it certainly is. You must excuse so much nonsense but there is little of sense to talk about here. I cannot close without however thanking you again for writing so regularly, I always keep your letter until the last as I know I will be amused with them. So many, many thanks. Remember me to Mr & Mrs Kirkup, Mr & Mrs E & the Kid, Janey, Winn if she is with you & all the rest & heaps for yourself. I am

Yours very sincerely

E Angus Leybourne.



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Angus to Connie, 28 October 1915

Kriegsgefangenensendung

Gutersloh 28.10.15

Postmark: Gutersloh 11.11.15

UK postmark: London ES NOV 17 [19]15

Miss Kirkup

Leafield House

Birtley RSO

Co Durham

England

Allemagne. Germany. Offizier-Kriegsgefangenenlager Gutersloh

Many thanks for letter & enclosure, sorry am not able to write a letter but only two p[er] month for home. Your discription [sic] of hats, feathers & roses was interesting although you did scorn the idea of telling a man about them. A view of them in Tilley's would be an acme of delight now. Remember me to Mr & Mrs Kirkup, Ernest, Phil, Mr Hall. Very sorry to hear about Mrs Ernest. Please tell her how sorry I am to hear about her illness. Birtley must be very busy now. I hear that Phil is a Staff Captain now. Yes, I have seen my 26th but do not agree with your assertion about your 25th. Cheers!

E L

Connie to Angus, 18 November 1915

18 November 1915 Sunday

Dear Angus,

Isn't it disgraceful, it is 12:30pm & we have only just landed downstairs. Mother was the most energetic, but that was simply because she would not miss going to meet Elsie & the Babe in the motor, she adores Mary & plays all day long with her, strange how soft Grandparents are, we tell Dad & Mother we were never spoilt the way Mary is, even



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Dad makes unearthly noises, and looks so disappointed when her Majesty doesn't laugh. However I suppose it is the way of the world, and we were spoilt the same way.

I didn't write you last week because I'm afraid you will be getting so spoilt with so much attention. I mean so many letters. Mrs Leybourne said there was about half a sheet in your letter to her of people's names to acknowledge letters from (aren't you glad you are not expected to answer them?) Oh by the way, thanks for your postcard it was like talking over the phone & the person at the German end had said "Hello" or "yes" or some such syllabic utterance it let us know you were there at any rate. You might at least have said what you thought of the photo. I expect you think it flatters me & didn't want to say so, but you could have said something. Why don't you get WR to do drawings of you all, he is a bit of an artist, isn't he? I remember going over to tea at his house at Hetton once & the walls were lined with his paintings. If I were a prisoner that is the way I would spend my time, a drawing book filled with all the people in the camp. I can't draw for nuts but that makes it all the funnier. I did a copy of a calendar EHK [Connie's brother, Ernest Hodgson Kirkup] found in one of the huts at Hornsea when their Battalion went in. I will send it (if I don't funk it) in a parcel of bits of things Elsie & I are sending you for Xmas. (Not a Xmas parcel by any means). Don't say a girl sent it, the calendar, for goodness sake in case they find out who.

Phil has gone back again he got 2 extra days leave, one he spent in London, then when he got to France he could not get forward immediately & spent a day in Boulogne. But is back at the Health Resort now. He isn't a Staff Captain, he was only acting as one for a time. Willie Johnson has a Company now. Ramsay is on the Brigade Staff & is doing well I hear. Phil is just the same as ever.

We have got a new cook, the best so far, and one night on Phil's leave E[rnest] & E[lsie] were coming down to dinner so, I arranged what I thought a jolly good repast. But Phil said it wouldn't be dinner without a hors d'oeuvres. I said he must remember he wasn't exactly at the Trocadero or the Cri. However he made me call the cook into the drawing



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room & endeavoured to give her (a trained hand) instructions. However, in the end he ended up by saying "you know" to which she replied "yes sir". The funny part was that at the announcement of the meal, the maid landed on the passage floor with the hors d'oeuvres & smashed the dish, luckily there was more in the back regions, & some of us knew nothing about it until after. Phil wrote a menu in French at which Ernest made insulting remarks at the frequent occurrence of 'a la'. I do wish you could have joined us in the fun, never mind, as we say to Mary, "wait till you are older", it must be aggravating. It was Elsie's Mother who was ill not Elsie but glad to say she is improving. EHK is back at Hornsea.

Goodbye.

Your sincere chum

Connie

Connie to Angus, 13 December 1915

Leafield House

Birtley

13 December 1915

My dear Angus,

Just time for a few lines off to you before I have to have an early lunch and then go to Newcastle upon Tyne. I started to write to you yesterday after midday dinner, I do think a big midday meal makes one sleepy. I was especially sleepy yesterday, and had to make an effort not to snooze because I was in charge of Mary, once or twice I closed my eyes and was nearly off, but she came immediately and poked me to wake me up. Bother the telephone!

I had a glorious ride yesterday morning with Uncle Austin, he came at 10.30 and we went over by Urpeth through the woods & over Uncle George's fields, he tried to teach



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me to jump, but I just managed to scramble through a hedge (tearing my new habit en route!) and then eventually I rolled off onto my back, on a frosty ground. Have you ever come off a gee? I never felt so absolutely pumped, I couldn't get my breath for ever so long, lucky thing Uncle was there to catch Lassie. When you come home we must try and beg, borrow, or steal a horse and come with Uncle and I some morning. He is one of the Best!

I have had another interruption so must leave and go for lunch and finish tonight.

8.00pm. I have been to Elswick Works [munitions factory in Newcastle upon Tyne] this afternoon what a business getting in, I wanted to see the ambulance room there, we are probably going to be needed in the new works here to staff an ambulance room & temporary hospital, but more of that if it comes off.

I have been to Harrogate this last week. Not quite so lively as the Dance. Marjie is in France of course, and Phyllis is in black for Geoff Simpson, poor old Geoff has been killed, he was very badly wounded and was under chloroform but died, and really it seems better that he is dead, if he had lived he would have lost both legs. Phyllis never really appreciated him, she wasn't engaged to him, but he intended to be on his first leave, and left money in his will to buy her a ring. It isn't the funny looking Manchester Geoff Simpson, it is the Harrogate Geoff, an awfully nice fellow. Phyllis may be coming down to stay with me for a few days soon, while she is at Harrogate she can't help but feel miserable.

Arnold Heatherington is at the Front now but not yet in the Trenches. Will Avery is also there, in the same Division as Arnold. We had Walter Armstrong up to see us the other night, he is very fit, home on leave. Roy Burnett has also been home, but I was away at Harrogate. Win is just the same as ever, she got up a 90 minutes concert at a doll exhibition while I was there at which she said she hopes you get the Xmas cards that we sent and the Stockton Times tho' you may have it already. How do you like the



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calendar. Look here I don't expect you to write me, as I have said before Mrs Leybourne must have all (except an occasional line to Elsie Elgar I suppose, isn't that her name?)

Yours sincerely Connie

Angus to Connie, 29 December 1915

Kriegsgefangenensendung

Gutersloh, 29.12.15

Postmark: Gutersloh 9.1.16

UK postmark: London ES JAN 15 [19]16

Miss Kirkup

Leafield House

Birtley RSO

Co Durham

England

Allemagne. Germany. Offizier-Kriegsgefangenenlager Gutersloh

When I got your letter with photo, my PC [postcard] had already gone, hence no comment, or I assure you I would have 'burbled' about it. Not much room in a PC so will leave it for when we next meet. Your letters are full of interest & bring me back to Durham county with all its attractions. Sorry you have had a bad toss from your horse. Awfully tickled with your calander [sic]. Tell Phil I have a good dusk story for him not for you (sorry). Remember me to all, yours

E Angus Leybourne



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