

Soldiers in Love

Park Hall Camp, Oswestry, World War II



While posted to Park Hall Camp, Oswestry in 1939 and 1940, Gunner Gilbert Bradley was in love with Infantryman Gordon Bowsher. That love was mutual and they exchanged numerous love letters.

The letters from Gordon to Gilbert were found in a trunk in Brighton, after Gilbert's death in 2008, and were purchased, on behalf of Oswestry Town

Museum, over a period of time from 2013. Initially it was assumed they were letters to Gilbert from a girlfriend, with the initial 'G'. The letters cover the period from 1939 to 1944.

On transcribing the letters, it became clear that they were between two men. The letters are very eloquent and reveal the way in which their love was constrained by the moral and severe military and legal sanctions of the day.

In one letter Gordon urges Gilbert to destroy all the correspondence. Fortunately he did not, leaving a unique record of their lives. In others they try to imagine if and how they will live together after the war, should they go to California, should they be faithful to one another or not? They look to a future when their love will be accepted.

To avoid persecution, lovers of the same sex have not kept written records of their love (for some this still applies today), so the survival of Gordon's letters is hugely significant in recovering the history of LGBT lives.

Wednesday January 24th 1939

My darling

... I lie awake all night waiting for the postman in the early morning, and then when he does not bring anything from you I just exist, a mass of nerves...

All my love forever
G.

Friday January 19th 1940
Perpethy, Brixham

My own darling

... Now before I go any further I want to ask you to do one thing for me in deadly seriousness - I want all my letters destroyed... Please darling do this for me...

Till then & forever I worship you
G

February 12th 1940, Park Grange

My own darling boy

... There is nothing more than I desire in life but to have you with me constantly... I can see or I imagine I can see, what your mother and father's reaction would be... the rest of the world have no conception of what our love is - they do not know that it is love...

February 1st. 1941 K.C. Gloucester
Regiment, Priors Road, Cheltenham

My darling boy

... For years I had had it drummed in to me that no love could last for life... I want you darling seriously to delve into your own mind, and to look for once into the future... Imagine then the time when the war is over and we are living together... would it not be better to live on from now on the memory of our life together when it was at its most golden pitch...

... I think your mother is fully aware that we intend living together after the war....
Your own
G.



Raven Hotel, Shrewsbury
where the soldiers sometimes
used to stay



Park Hall Camp during the war

<http://oswestrytownmuseum.co.uk>

