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.