



Writing Home - 1

Letter writing was an important aspect of life for soldiers on the Front. Not only was it a good pastime, but it kept the soldiers up-to-date with what was happening at home, with their families and loved ones. Soldiers would spend a few days or weeks at a time on the front line, then periods at rest, behind the line, in the support trenches. It was normally in their rest periods that they would write their letters.

The following letter was written by a soldier called John Henry Carmichael, or 'Jack', to his mother, Williamina on 22nd September 1917.

Jack's grandfather was the Head Gardener at Craiglockhart and his family lived there for many years. When Jack was in France, at war, he wrote many letters home to his family, at Craiglockhart.

Carefully read the letter and then answer the questions that follow. There is also a letter-writing exercise where you have to put yourself in Jack's shoes, on the front, writing a letter home.

22 September, 1917

My Dear Mother,

You will see from this letter that I am out of hospital back to the Battery. I feel all right now but was pretty groggy at first. Your recent letter was waiting for me when I got back and it came in very handy as I couldn't quite get any pay while in hospital and we are having a rest at present so you may be sure we can make the cash fly when the opportunity comes, it isn't often we get the chance. I had a nice parcel from Aunt Nellie yesterday. I hope you got my letter all right with her's enclosed.

I met Earnest Jeffrey last Wednesday and it was a surprise I had just left hospital and was changing trains at a station when I ran up against him, he was going to the very place I left so I was very lucky to have met him, he is looking fit but not so stout as he was. He was saying that he met Grandpa at Craiglockhart when he was home on leave.

What do you think of the War now? It looks as if Germany is getting a bit fed up by this time if one can believe the papers. Anyway, I hope he throws in the sponge soon, as we are getting a bit fed up out here.

I met a Bannockburn chap called Buchan while I was in hospital, he is in the Australians and had been home in July. He used to work with the Rubber Co. but I don't remember ever seeing him before. How are things going on at Viewforth, is father still working away? I hope you get a good tenant soon as I wouldn't like to leave the "City of the Rock" just yet. Alan and I are bound for Australia after this little lot is over. So tell him to keep cheery. I will close now.

With much love to all from your loving son,
Jack

1
James
Saturday
Sept. 22nd

My Dear Mother,

You will see from this letter that I am out of hospital back to the Battery. I feel all right now but was pretty groggy at first. Your wq. letter was waiting me when I got back & it came in very handy as I couldn't get any pay while in hospital, & we are having a rest at present so you may be sure we can make the cash fly when the opportunity comes, it isn't often we get the chance. I had a nice parcel from Aunt & Willie yesterday. I hope you got my letter all right with her enclosed. I met Ernest Jeffrey last Wed. & it was a surprise. I had just left hospital & was changing trains at a station when I ran up against him. He was going to the very place I left so I was very lucky to have met him. He is looking fit but over,

2

not so stout as he was, he was
saying that he met Grandma at
Brighton when he was home on leave.
What do you think of the war now,
it looks as if Germany is getting on
a bit fed up by this time if one can
believe the papers, anyway I hope he
throws in the sponge soon, as we are
getting a bit fed up out here. I met
a Bannockburn Chap called, Buckle
while I was in Hospital, he is in the
Australian & had been home in July, he
used to work with the Rubber Co. but I
don't remember ever seeing him before.
I hear one thing going on at Vimy, it
is rather still working away. I hope
you get a good tenant soon as I
wouldn't like to leave "The City of the
Rock" just yet. Alan & I are bound
for Australia after this little job is over
so tell him to keep busy. I will close now
with much love to all from your loving
son John

Letter from John Henry Carmichael to his mother Williamina, dated 22 September, 1917
from the collection of Edinburgh Napier University.

With kind thanks to the late Dr Peter Carmichael for donating these letters to the collection.

Questions

Q1. From his letter, what words or sentences tell us that Jack is recovering from some sort of illness or wound?

Q2. What words or sentences show that Jack has had enough of the War and hopes it will soon end?

Q3. Soldiers on the Front would often try to think about the future, and what they were going to do when the War was over. What was Jack's plan?

Q4. Why do you think it was important for soldiers to think about the future?

Q5. Who did Jack meet last Wednesday?

Q6. In his letter, Jack tells his mother he met a chap from Scotland. Where was he from, and what was his name?

Q7. In his letter, Jack asks *"What do you think of the War now? It looks as if Germany is getting a bit fed up by this time if one can believe the papers. Anyway, I hope he throws in the sponge soon, as we are getting a bit fed up out here."*

(a) Why would the papers suggest Germany is "getting a bit fed up"?

(b) Why do you think Jack might not believe what the papers say?

(c) Think about the role of newspapers in wartime. Would a German newspaper tell the same story as a British newspaper? If not, why?

RSVP

It is 20th November, 1917. Imagine you are Jack Carmichael. You have just spent 2 weeks on the front lines in France. It was wet, as it has been raining non-stop for about a week. Your boots and coat are wet right through and have not dried all week!

Write a letter back to your mother. Perhaps you don't want her to worry, so tell her cheery things. Perhaps you are tired, cold and fed up. Put yourself in Jack's (soggy) shoes and write a short letter home. Use as many descriptive words as you can.

France, 20th November 1917

My Dear Mother,

Thank you for your letter, I am glad to hear you are well and...

