



Paul Middleton

BACK

TO

WAR

LETTERS

Jun 1915 to Oct 1915

written by
JOHN SEYMOUR LINDSAY
DCM

BACK TO WAR - LETTERS
JUN 1915 TO OCT 1915

Edited and Published by
Paul Middleton

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FACTS ABOUT THIS BOOK

This copy of Back to War - Letters Jun 1915 to Oct 1915
contains 69 letters



FOREWORD

John Seymour Lindsay DCM (JSL) left a fine record for us to read. He wrote hundreds of letters to Mildred his fiancée then wife, and Frank his brother, describing his experiences and feelings, sometimes candidly but more often hiding the reality. I have shown every letter with a full transcription.

This Third Volume of Letters takes us from the end of May to the end of October 1915 and journeys from his release from Hospital to a quick marriage in London, to training in Rouen, St Omer and Calais before moving up to the Belgium border and Cassel, Bourgbourg, Bergues, Wormhout and Watten, preparing for a new excursion to The Front.

The letters passed through the military Censor so it takes us some time to decipher where he actually was, but in hindsight and with some important clues it is possible to trace his career. He experienced devastating losses of his friends, he showed great bravery and privation, but above all what shines through is his enduring love of art. Maybe this saved his sanity. Among the platitudes of comments on the weather and his physical state, his letters continually refer to his sketching of colleagues, the trenches and the nearby villages. He obviously was well respected by all ranks in his Battalion – probably because of his age (in August 1914 he was 32) and his eccentricity.

Read his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which can be found at the end of this book. Here you will be convinced that he was a true hero and polymath.

Paul Middleton 2013

Chronology

FIRST WORLD WAR

Sept 1914 Private No.1006 5th London Rifle Brigade 2nd Battalion

16 Dec 1914 Served in France Theatre of War

Jan 1915 to Jul 16 1915 1st Battalion

12 Mar 1915 No.3 General Hospital, Le Treport.

12 Mar 1915 Transferred to Convalescent Depot

May 1915 Second Battle of Ypres

26 May 1915 Transferred to Base Depot Rouen

16 Jun 1915 Licence granted and married

Mildred Ethel Williams (died 1948)

at Holy Cross, St Pancras, London

Aug to Nov 1915 Cassel, Caestre and Poperinghe

11 Mar 1916 DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal)

awarded to L/Cpl John Seymour Lindsay

for action on 3 May 1915

July 1916 Battle of Gommecourt

19 Jul 1916 Sgt gazetted with direct commission as

2nd Lieut at Bienvillers

Sept 1916 wounded and invalided home and then served

with 3rd Battalion LRB

8 Oct 1916 2nd Lieut wounded

23 Apr 1917 1st London Reserve Brigade, including LRB,

moved to Aisne Barracks at Blackdown

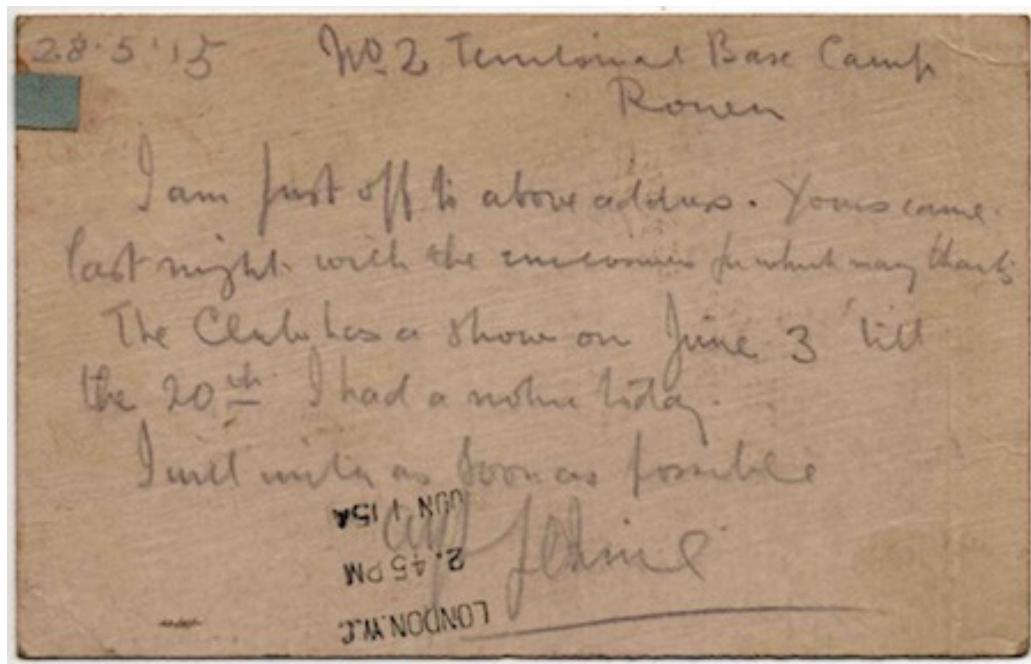
19 Jan 1918 Lieutenant

9 May 1919 Received Great War Invalided Certificate

Chapter 1
Letters 28 May 1915 - 18 June 1915
Base Camp Rouen and St Pancras, London

Recovering from the hell of Ypres must have been more of a mental problem than physical for JSL. His wounds proved not to be serious but how would he have kept those images of the Front to the back of his mind? Probably through two things: his continuing love of practical art and burying himself in the trivia of Mildred's social life in the UK.

His modesty concerned a citation for bravery in the field *'The Sergeant ... very much overstated my case'* which was not to be formally recognised until months later, meantime he had other matters to attend to!



28 May 1915

Postcard


No.2 Territorial Base Camp Rouen

(to: MEW)

I am just off to above address. Yours came last night with the enclosures for which many thanks. The Club has a show on June 3 'til the 20th I had a notice today. I will write as soon as possible.


AYL (Always Your Loving) Johnnie

On Active Service



Y.M.C.A.

**WITH THE BRITISH
EXPEDITIONARY FORCE**



Y.M.C.A.

Address reply to:

Name Private Lindsay No 1006 No 2 Territorial Base Camp
Rouen.
 Section _____ Company _____ Battalion LRB Regt _____

THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE,
 56 GENERAL POST OFFICE,
 LONDON.

30th I 1915

Mine Billa

It was jolly good of you to send on the letters, I am so sorry I have missed the Churston letters.

I am glad you have a good time at the Broads Cottage, & get down in "style" I hold the trains responsible. My letter writing is very limited, 2 per week! so I must answer all other letters when I rejoin the Bat.

I hope the Russell-Davies have taken the Henfield Cottage. It is a grand part, quite close to Albourne (I did one of Albourne for the "West Sussex Gazette").

The Sergeant who speaks to Mr. R.D. very much overstated my case.

The Sisters at No 11 were awfully kind getting me all sorts of good things from under clothes to cigarettes. Cream buns etc. they are Sisters Mac Bain, Priest & Mac Farlane.

Tell Evelyn I could not find the Soldiers Club but I am going to try again.

The Doctor in my ward was a Great friend of Francis Street!

There is an awful lot of sketching to be done in Rouen it is simply

30 May 1915

YMCA BEF

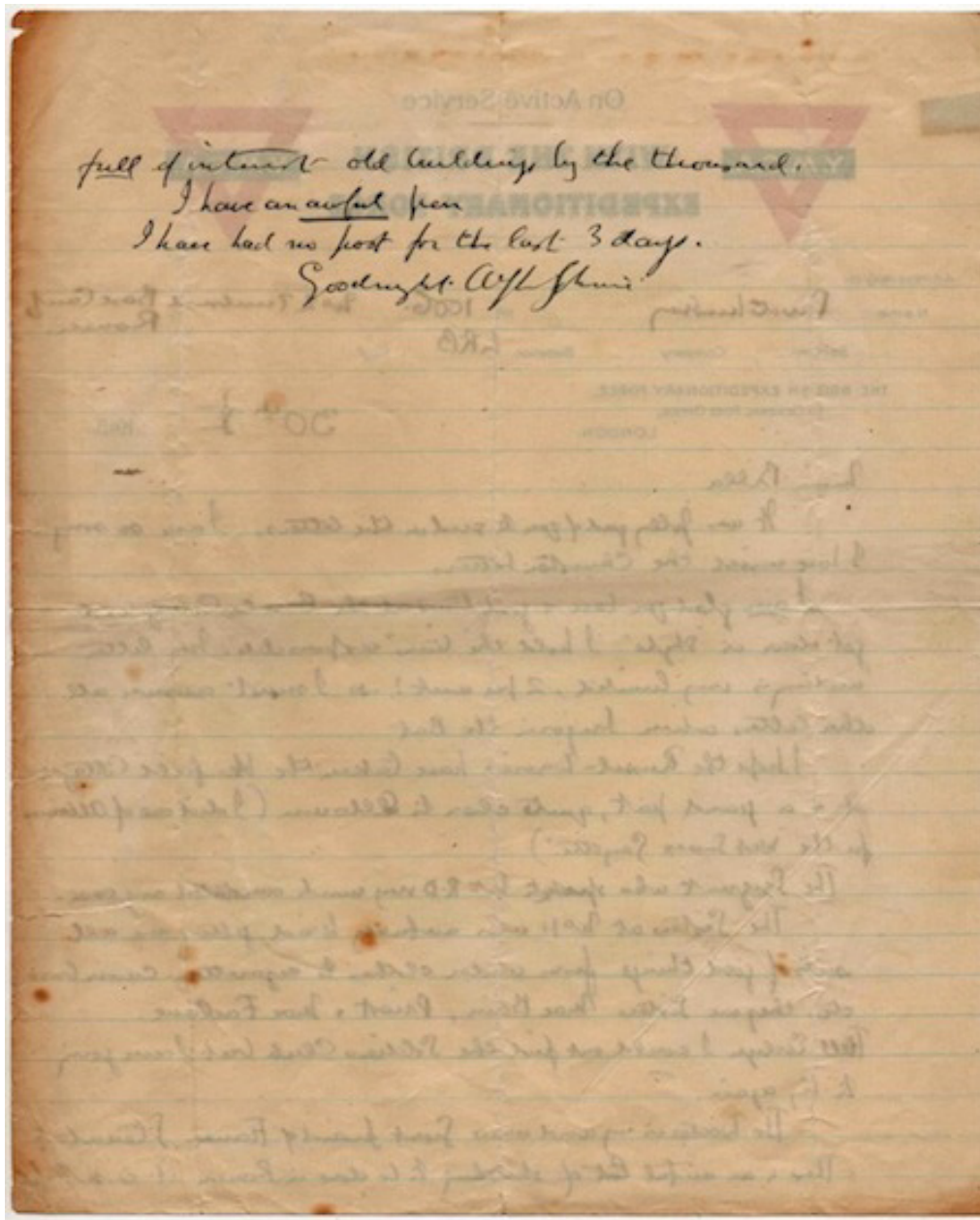
Private Lindsay 1006 LRB

No.2 Territorial Base Camp

Rouen

Mine Billa

It was jolly good of you to send on the letters, I am so sorry I have missed the Churston letters. I am glad you have a good time at the Broads cottage, and get down in "style" I hold the trains responsible. My letter writing is very limited, 2 per (postcard back and front above) 28 May 1915 to Mildred Ethel Williams from JSL week! so I must answer all other letters when I rejoin the Bat. I hope the Russell-Davies have taken the Henfield Cottage it is a grand part, quite close to Albourne (I did one of Albourne for



the "*West Sussex Gazette*"). The Sergeant who spoke to Mrs RD very much overstated my case. The Sisters at No.11 were awfully kind getting me all sorts of good things from under clothes to cigarettes, cream buns etc they are Sisters MacBain, Priest and MacFarlane. Tell Evelyn I could not find the Soldiers Club but I am going to try again. The Doctor in my ward was a great friend of Francis Stewart! There is an awful lot of sketching to be done in Rouen it is simply full of interest old buildings by the thousand. I have an awful pen. I have had no post for the last 3 days. (Ed: No.2 Territorial Base Camp, Rouen. The Camp was obviously a Hospital because of the references to Doctor and ward).

Goodnight AYL Johnnie

Private Lindsay W. L. Territorial Base Camp
1006 LRB
Rouen.

30 May 1915.

Mine Billa

Tons of thanks for yours. I called at the Hospital yesterday but missed the mail.

I don't know what to ask you to send out except some cash. Can you let me have F & B £2 in a registered letter to this camp? it would follow me up if I go before it arrives.

I was down at Rouen yesterday on pass & had a look at some of the Churches & other antiquities. Just grand. I also had a dinner the first for 8 months! I will write you a proper letter later on but I must catch post at 8.30 AM.

AYL Johnnie

Thank Sid most frightfully for his wishes & quid I will write him.

how to P.

30 May 1915

Private Lindsay 1006 LRB
No.2 Territorial Base Camp
Rouen

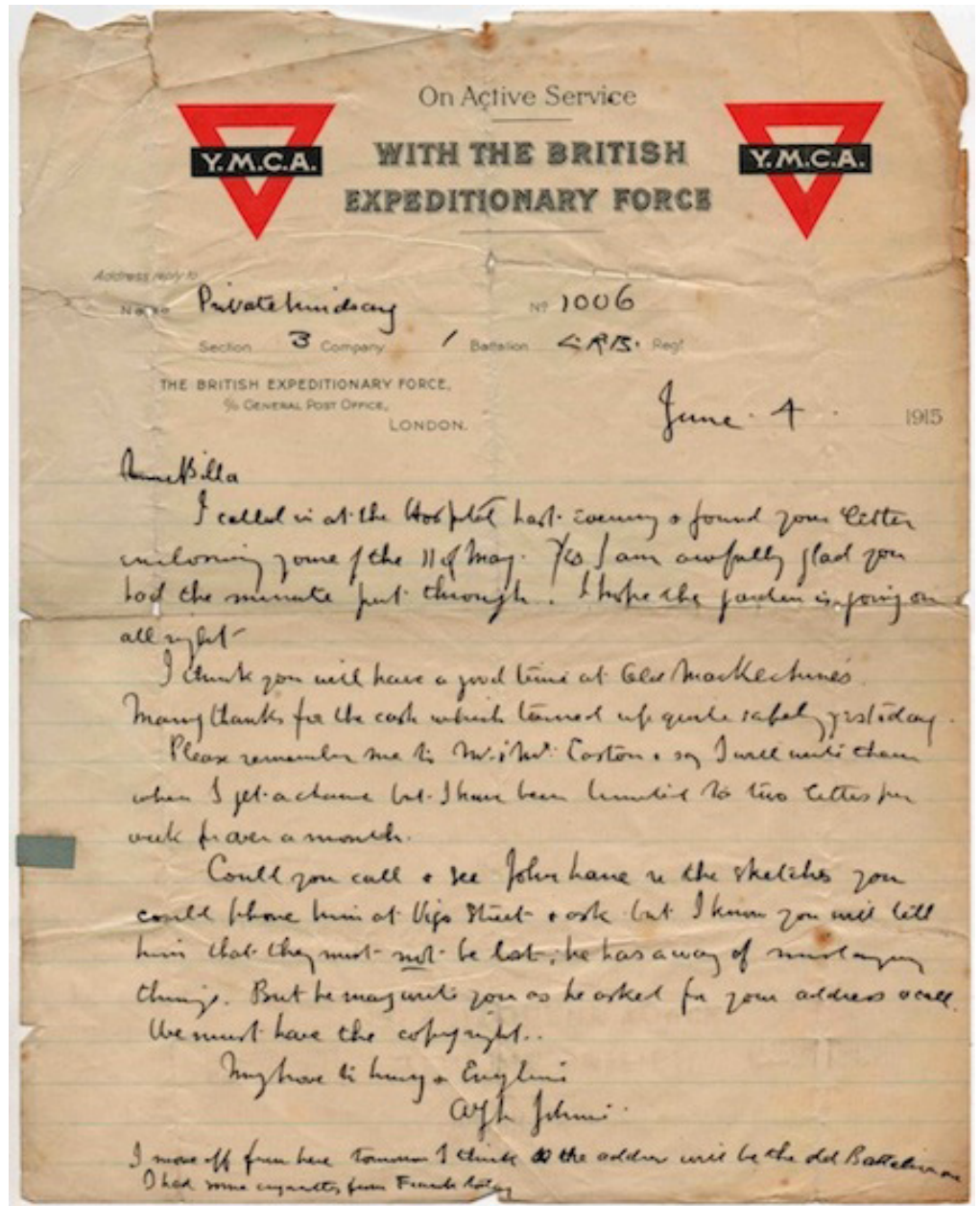
Mine Billa

Tons of thanks for yours. I called at the Hospital yesterday but missed the mail. I don't know what to ask you to send out except some cash. Can you let me have F and B £2 in a registered letter to this camp (?) it would follow me up if I go before it arrives. I was down at Rouen yesterday on pass and had a look at some of the Churches and other antiquities. Just grand. I also had a dinner the first for 8 months! I will write you a proper letter later on but I must catch post at 8.30AM.

AYL Johnnie

Thank Sid most frightfully for his wishes and quid I will write him.

From the 30 May JSL resided in the No.2 Territorial Base Camp in Rouen. He had much more freedom here as he visited some of the churches and other antiquities and had his first dinner for 8 months. He asked for and received £2 from Mildred via registered letter and then states that he limited to writing 2 letters per week for a month. At this early stage of the war all the supply services including postal, were stretched to bursting point.



4 June 1915
YMCA BEF
Private Lindsay
1006
3 Company 1
Battalion LRB
Regiment

Mine Billa

I called in at the Hospital last evening and found your letter enclosing your one of the 11th May. Yes I am awfully glad you had the minute put through. I hope the garden is going on all right. I think you will have a good time at Old Mackechnie's. Many thanks for the cash which turned up quite safely yesterday. Please remember me to Mr and Mrs Easton and say I will write them when I get a chance but I have been limited to two letters per week for over a month. Could you call and see John Lane re the sketches you could phone him at Vigo Street and ask but I know you will tell him that they must not be lost; he has a way of mislaying things. But he may write you as he asked for your address as well. He must have the copyright. My love to Lucy and Evelyn.

AYL Johnnie

I move off from here tomorrow I think so the address will be the old Battalion one. I had some cigarettes from Frank today.

12 June 1915

Line of
Communication
France

Mine Billa

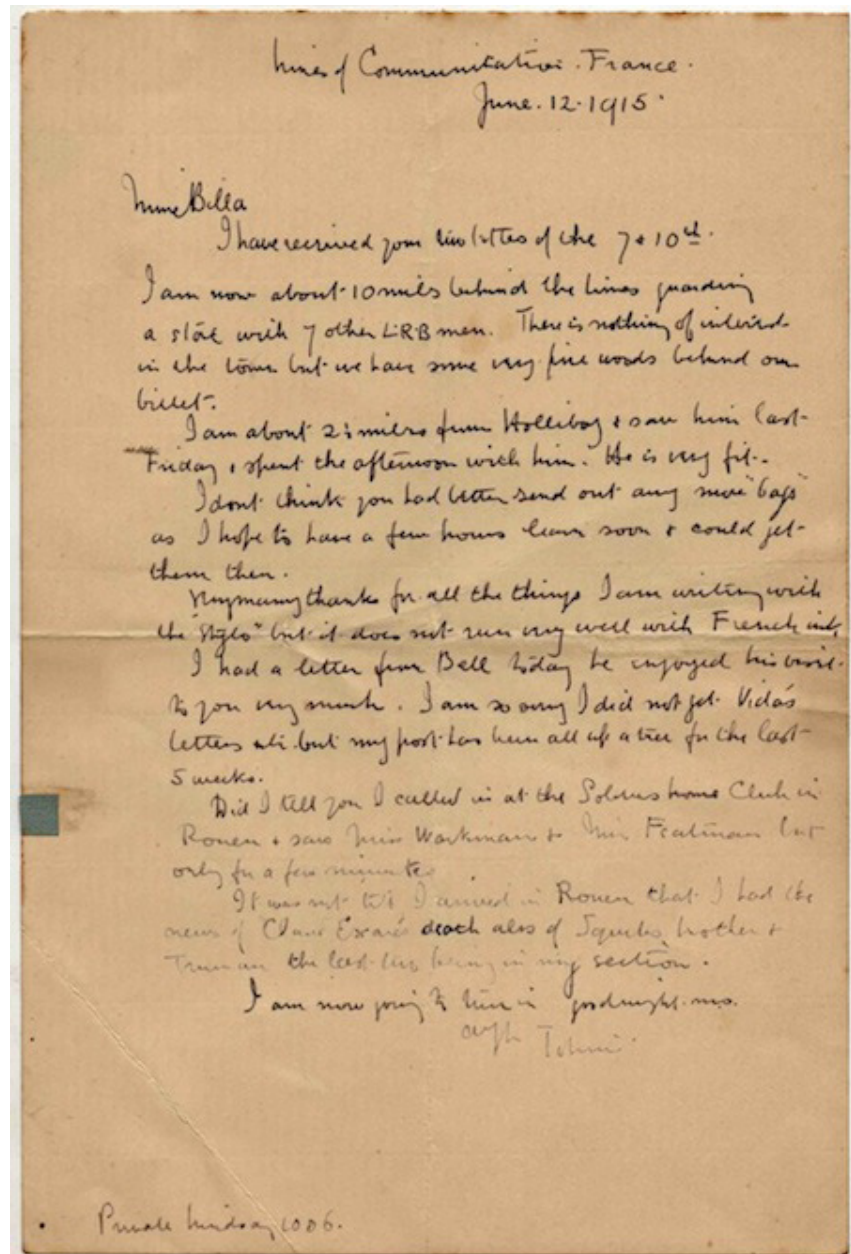
I have received
your two letters of the
7 and 10th. I am now
about 10 miles behind
the lines guarding a
store with 7 other LRB
men. There is nothing
of interest in the town
but we have some very
fine woods behind our
billet. I am about 2½

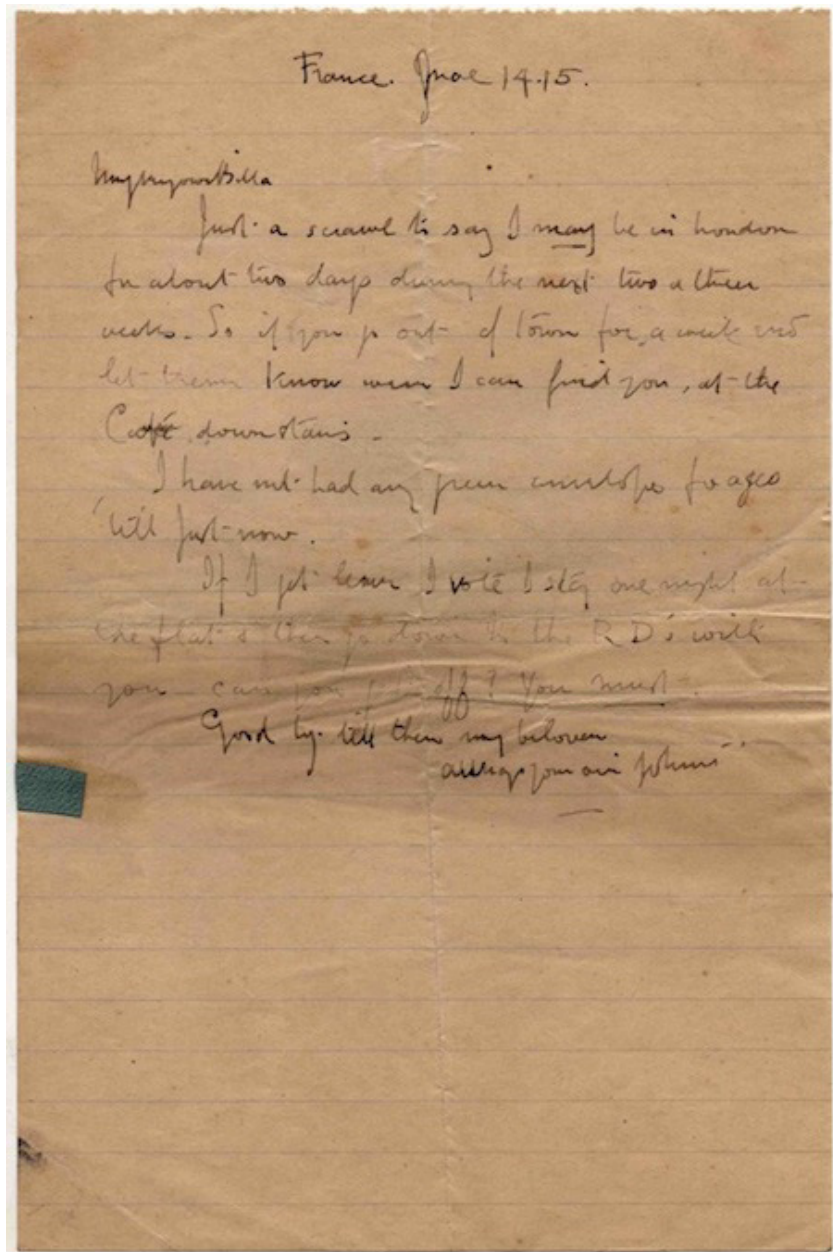
miles from Holliday
and saw him last Friday, spent the afternoon with him. He is very fit. I don't
think you had better send out any more "bags" as I hope to have a few hours
leave soon and could get them then. Very many thanks for all the things I
am writing with the "Stylo" but it does not run very well with French ink. I
had a letter from Bell today he enjoyed his visit to you very much. I am so
sorry I did not get Vida's letters etc but my post has been all up a tree for the
last 5 weeks. Did I tell you I called in at the Soldiers Club in Rouen and saw
Miss Workman and Miss Featman but only for a few minutes. It was not till I
arrived in Rouen that I had the news of Claud Escaré's death also of Squibs
brother and Truman the last two being in my section.

I am now going to turn in tonight (?)

AYL Johnnie

Private Lindsay 1006





14 June 1915

France

My very own Billa

Just a scrawl to say I may be in London for about two days during the next two or three weeks. So if you go out of town for a week end let them know where I can find you, at the Café downstairs. I have not had any green envelopes for ages 'til just now. If I get leave I vote I stay one night at the flat and then go down to the RD's with you. Can you get time off? You must. Goodbye til then my beloved.

Always your own Johnnie

On 16 June 1915 JSL managed to get back to London by and obtain a Licence to marry Mildred Ethel Williams his sweetheart for ten years. Their letters in June gave no hint that this was planned, but marry they did on the 27th June. He had only arrived from France the day before and left again for Rouen the same day. Two days leave and no honeymoon. If you married by licence, this meant that the banns did not have to be read, and so the marriage could take place sooner. Obviously there were various different reasons why people would choose this method, but as the marriage took place in 1915, the most likely reason was that the husband was about to go to war, so time was of the essence.

18 June 1915

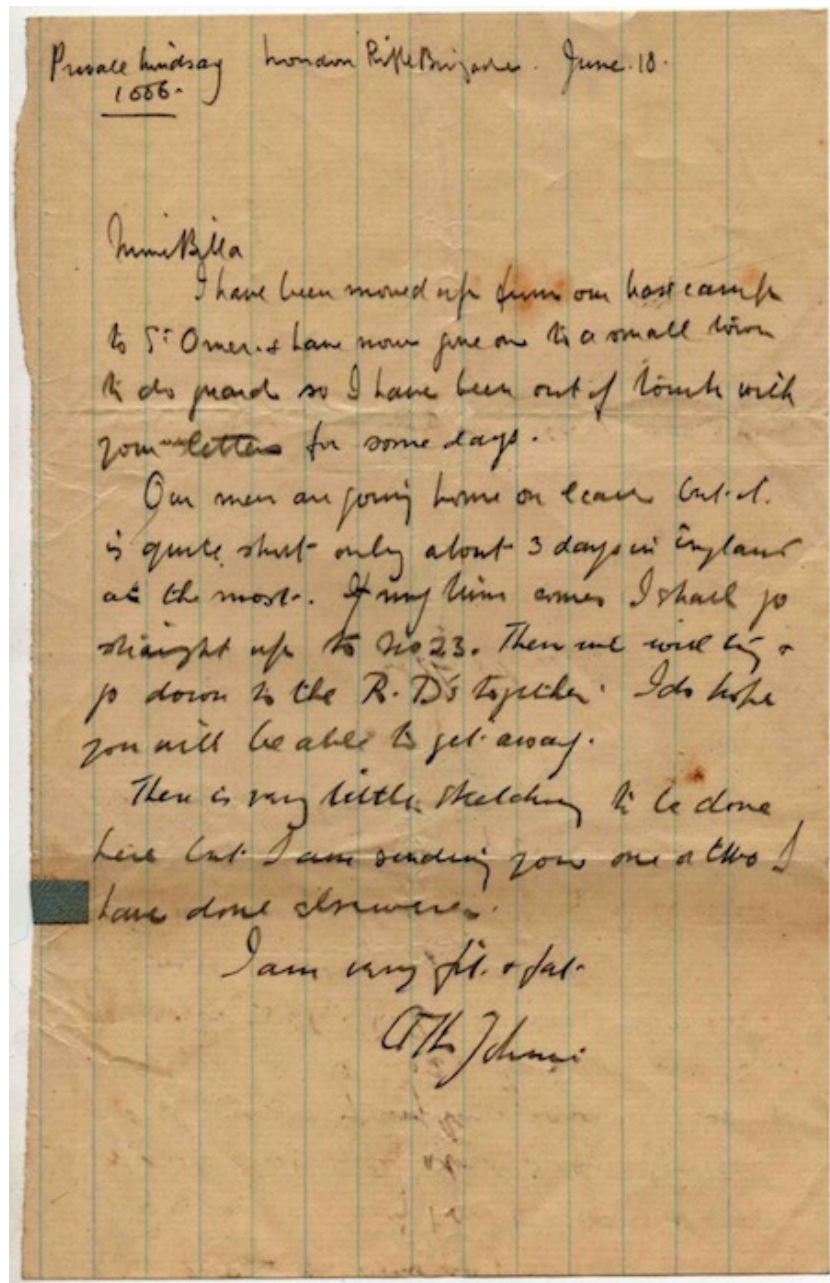
Private Lindsay 1006
London Rifle Brigade

Mine Billa

I have been moved
up from our base camp
to St Omer and have
now gone on to a small
town to do guard so I
have been out of touch

with your letters for some days. Our men are going home on leave but it
is quite short only about 3 days in England at the most. If my time comes
I shall go straight up to no.23. Then we will try and go down to the RD's
together. I do hope you will be able to get away. There is very little sketching
to be done here but I am sending you one or two I have done elsewhere. I
am very fit and fat.

AYL Johnnie



Such was the transitory nature of arrangements in those hectic months
of 1915. We now know that John Seymour Lindsay and Mildred Ethel
Williams were married by the Registrar during 2 or 3 days leave In June 1915.
We have no details of other attendees, best man or any of the arrangements.