

AN UNASSUMING COUPLE

Extracts of letters from Florence Rose Cox (Rosie) to Lance Corporal Alfred Gough 013376, 96 Company Cookhouse, A.O.C. (Army Ordnance Corps), Aldershot. These are from the several dozen letters that my grandfather kept beside him in a small box till his death. In the same box, wrapped in black ribbon, were letters of condolence for their daughter's Joy's death during the London Blitz.

From correspondence, it seems that Rosie and Alfred had been seeing each other as sweethearts as far back as 1909 when Alf was 15 and Rosie 16. Even though they lived in the

same road, Bower Street in Bedford, their parents knew nothing of the romance until weeks before the wedding.

Rosie had poor health. As well as getting headaches which passed down to my mother, Rosemary, as migraines which could last two or three days, she also had back problems (again Rosemary inherited this and had to take a gap year before starting college age 18 when she spent several months prone with her back in plaster). Rosie writes to Alfred in 1911: *"When I got up that morning I felt just as if someone was trying to chop my back in half. I didn't say anything about it as I did not want to disappoint the friends with whom I was walking. My back does not ache so much when I lie down. Dear Alf, will you ask God to make me better or if it is his will because I am so wicked."*

The couple wrote to each other almost daily while he was stationed at Aldershot for nearly three years – Alfred joined up in 1915. Rosie usually wrote in pencil rather than pen and ink. I think this was for speed as with pen it was necessary to dip/suck up ink every few lines – in those days one could ask the postman to wait while you jotted down a response to a letter. This special three-page letter was written in ink. At this point, two years into his stint, it seems Alfred has been teased by fellow soldiers about not drinking (he was teetotal), and not fraternising with local girls.

24 April 1917: *"My Dearest Boy, Thank you so much for the loving letter which I received safely last night. Well dearest I think that was the most lovely letter I have ever received from you. Well I have read it through so many times and could not make up my mind exactly how to answer it. I thought I had better tell Mother about what was in it. So I did, and Dad as well. Dad says I can do as I like as I am quite old enough, and Mother says the same, but of course she raised a few objections, as I was sure she would do, but she was very good indeed about it. She said she thought that you would make a good husband and so did Dad. Dad says there is one thing, if you get married now, there can be no to-do, as we could not afford it, I told him that whenever it was I should not want any fuss at all.*

You are such a dear Boy to say that you still want me, after all that I told you. You are such a good and kind Sweetheart. I hope I shall have the good fortune to have you always as a good and kind husband. I know it must be rather bad for you dear to have to put up with what the fellows say to you. I hope that you will always have the strength of will to hold your own against them..."

26 April 1917: *"...Boy would you like to see me in white or shall I have a dark dress. I expect you will say 'What do you want yourself?' so I must tell you that I would prefer to have white, see it isn't as if I am ancient is it, it could do for my summer Sunday dress then wouldn't it. Our Mother says I may have the money to get the material as I should not be able to make it if I were rushed in anyway..."*

2 May 1917: *"...I am impressed by your savings Boy, if I had been about you wouldn't have saved as much, you would have wanted to buy me things [he would have received just under 13 shillings a week pay by the Army]... My Dear old Boy, you are a good one, and I love you ever so much, I wish I could come and jump on you and kiss all your troubles away, I know you would smile then. You must try and keep cheerful all the time 'cause if you don't, I shan't make you any bacon rolls for your dinner, so there..."*

5 May 1917: Rosie writes that Alfred's mother, Leah, has talked to her and says that her husband had a very bad heart (like Alfred) and he also had fits, so Alf will need looking after and does Rose think that she can do that? This throws Rosie and she spends two pages of today's letter saying Alf should perhaps look for a stronger woman to help him, after all, when the War is over there will be plenty of young women available. Alf writes to his own mother immediately and reprimands Leah and in the following letters Rosie asks Alf not to pursue the matter and that she no doubt meant it as a warning about the worst things that could happen. She continues: *"I also think that your mother thinks that a War Wedding would be unlucky. But somehow I think all will be well if we do venture on our new life, I am sure that God will help us decide... and I do want to get a few things together, everything does cost such a lot of money, see, even two pairs of stockings cost about 6/- now dear and I have not been able to get the underclothes that I need some new shoes and corsets..."*

17 May 1917: Rosie writes to say that Alf's mother won't be present at the hastily arranged wedding in ten days' time as she will be on a holiday with Alf's older sister Sophie. The hotel rooms have

already been paid for. *"And I have now finished making my dress dear. I might tell you that I'm afraid that the other folks will all look better than your little girl, their things are classy like, and mine, well, it is a poor sort of thing. I have trimmed Dorothy's (Alf's younger sister) hat and I have decided dearest for it [the wedding] to be on Monday 28th, as that seems to be what will suit everyone best so I hope that you will get a nice long leave Boy, if it was on Sunday it would have to be at eight o'clock and I cannot get up very early as you know..."*

22 May 1917: *"...About me asking you again if you love me dear. I only wanted to know if you might have changed your mind, 'cause you know dear that it will soon be too late to run back won't it. No duck that really wasn't the reason, I just wanted you to tell me again just to make quite sure like..."*

"I have still got some nasty abscesses in my mouth, it makes me feel very washed out. I hope they will get better by the end of the week. I think I will have to take some licorice powder..."

1 June 1917: Sent by registered post with photo. *"My Own Dear Hubby XXX, You say dearest that you have not got used to being away from me yet, well dear Boy I don't believe I ever will again, it does seem so*

different now somehow. You seem so much more to me now..."



Alfred Gough married Florence Rose Cox on 28 May 1917

I am sorry to say that I still have got the toothache and I am also feeling the effects of all the doings now. I feel awful weak this week, my hands are shaky and my legs too, I just feel a bit of a wreck, but never mind darling I will sure get over it someday. I will wait till you get home before I have the teeth out...

I am sure dear that you were disappointed to hear about the photos. Don't be too upset over them, I am almost ashamed to send them. I am ever so sorry to have spoiled the photo. It's a pity we could not get them done on the Monday itself. I gave Mother the 4/- to pay for them...

Well ta-ta dearest for now I am sorry I cannot write a long letter now, but will tomorrow. Heaps of fond love and big kisses and loving thoughts XXXX From Your Little Wife Rosie XXXXX"



My wife now wears Rosie's wedding ring and I wear my grandfather's

Certificate of Marriage.
Pursuant to the Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Acts, 1836 and 1898.

1917 Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of St Cuthbert, Bedford in the County of Bedfordshire

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
118	May 28 th 1917	Alfred Gough	23	Bachelor	Lance Corporal	119 Bowers St Bedford.	Thomas David Gough	Deceased
		Florence Rose Cox	24	Spinster	—	7 Bowers St Bedford	William Cox	Builder

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by Licence of W.R. Lott by me W.R. Lott Rector.

This Marriage was solemnized between us Alfred Gough and Florence Rose Cox in the presence of us William Cox and William Gough.

I, W.R. Lott Rector of St Cuthbert, Bedford in the County of Bedfordshire do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the entry No. 118 in the Marriage Register Books of the said Parish and that such Register Books are now legally in my custody W.R. Lott.

Witness my hand this twentieth day of May 1917