

Alec Waugh's postcard from Mainz

On 28 March 1918, Second Lieutenant Alec Waugh, Dorset Regiment, attached to the Machine Gun Corps, was captured by the German army near Arras. Back in England the press reported that Alec was missing, presumed dead. In fact, Alec spent the remainder of the war in Prisoner of War camps at Mainz and Karlsruhe. Following the Armistice on 11 November 1918, he was released and arrived back in London on 5 December 1918. Alec's account of this period of his life, *The Prisoners of Mainz*, was published by Chapman & Hall in 1919.

Alec Waugh later referred to the eight months he spent as a Prisoner of War as 'The University of Mainz'. The camp had an Educational Committee that ran classes for the prisoners and also a library. Among Alec's fellow captives was the writer Hugh Kingsmill Lunn, the brother of Arnold Lunn whose novel *The Harrovians* (1913) had greatly influenced Alec and the writing of his first novel *The Loom of Youth* (1917).



THE DOOM OF YOUTH.
Frontispiece by Raphael Theodore Roussel,
The Prisoners of Mainz (1919).

Prisoners of War interned abroad were permitted to send letters and postcards. To improve the speed handling prisoners' mail a specific office known as 'Kriegsgefangenensendung' was set up. On 6 April 1918, Alec Waugh wrote a postcard on official Mainz camp stationery to a schoolmaster at Sherborne School, Geoffrey G. Morris. The postcard bears the stamp of the Camp Censor and F.A. cachets (F.A. stands for 'Fristgemäß abgefertigt' indicating that the letter was released because it exceeded the time allowed for censoring mail). The postcard is date stamped at Mainz, 6 May 1918, a month after Alec had written it.



Geoffrey Grant Morris (1888-1938) had come to Sherborne School as Sixth Form Tutor in January 1915. Due to the war, schoolmasters were in short supply, particularly young ones, but because of defective eyesight the then 26 year old Geoffrey had been medically disqualified for military service. Geoffrey's academic credentials were impressive: a Scholar at Eton College and at Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1911 to 1914 he was a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, and also edited the *Cambridge Review*. It is no

wonder that Headmaster Nowell Smith was pleased to appoint him. While working at Sherborne School, Geoffrey lived at The Old School House in the Abbey Close, a stone's throw away from both Sherborne Abbey and the School, and it is to this address that Alec addressed his postcard from Mainz. Although Alec never made it into Geoffrey's Upper Sixth Form class (he was expelled in July 1915), both Alec and Geoffrey were members of The Sophists, the School's literary and debating society, where they took part in debates and play readings.



Two young schoolmasters at Sherborne School in 1919, one of whom may be Geoffrey Morris.

From the tone of Alec's postcard to Geoffrey it would appear that they had become friends during the two terms they had spent together at Sherborne. The purpose of Alec's postcard was to wish Geoffrey a happy birthday (he would be thirty on 6 June 1918) and he begins the letter with a misquotation from Robert Louis Stevenson's dedication to Charles Baxter in *Catriona*, his sequel to *Kidnapped*: 'Cast up as by a freshlet on these ultimate islands' should read 'to cast me out in the end, as by a sudden freshet, on these ultimate islands.' Alec tells Geoffrey that Arnold Lunn's brother is a fellow prisoner of war and that he is spending his time reading and writing:

'My dear Geoffrey

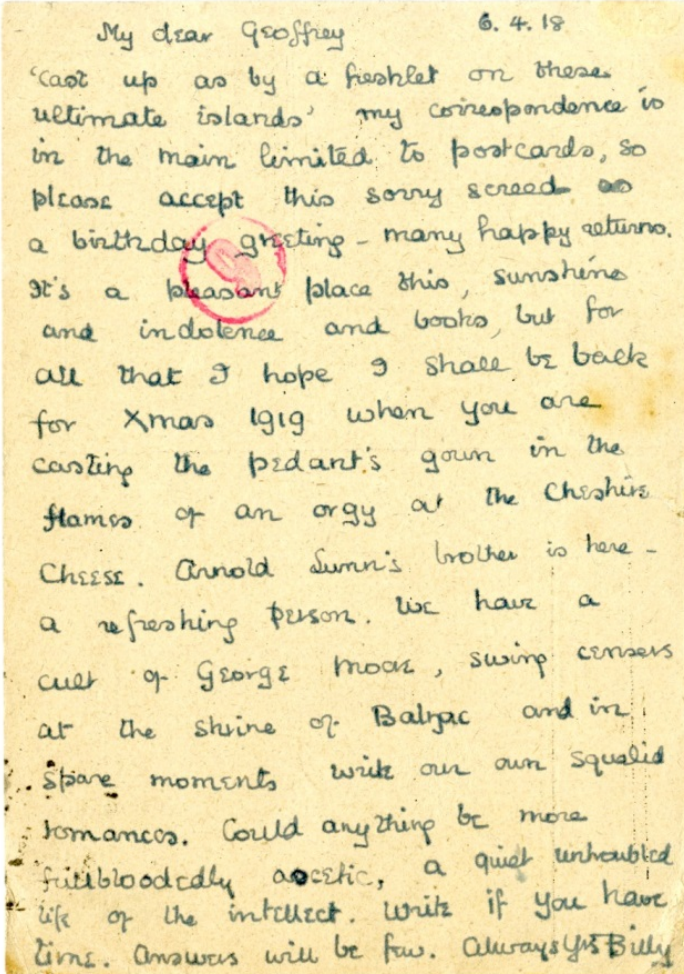
'Cast up as by a freshlet on these ultimate islands' my correspondence is in the main limited to postcards, so please accept this sorry screed as a birthday greeting – many happy returns. It's a pleasant place this, sunshine and indolence and books, but for all that I hope I shall be back for Xmas 1919 when you are casting the pedant's gown in the flames of an orgy at the Cheshire Cheese. Arnold's Lunn brother is here – a refreshing person. We have a cult of George Moore, swing censers at the shrine of Balzac and in spare moments write our own squalid romances. Could anything be more full bloodedly acetic, a quiet untroubled life of the intellect. Write if you have time. Answers will be few. Always Yrs Billy.'

In April 1919, Geoffrey left Sherborne, having been elected a Fellow and Classical Lecturer at Corpus Christi College. He remained at Corpus Christi College, becoming bursar in 1928, until he resigned his College offices in 1934. He died in Chelsea on 20 June 1938, aged 50.

Geoffrey's obituary appeared in *The Times*, 22 June 1938:

'Mr. Geoffrey Grant Morris, who was formerly Fellow and Classical Lecturer and Bursar of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, died on Monday at the age of 50 from pneumonia. The son of the late Mr. P.C. Morris,

L.L.M., he was born at Chelsea on June 6, 1888. At Eton, where he was in Mr. R.P.L. Booker's house, he won the Newcastle Scholarship, was editor of the Eton College Chronicle in 1907, and was captain of the Oppidans in 1906-7. From school he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he was a scholar. He had a brilliant career, gaining Browne medals for Greek and Latin epigram in 1908-9, the Winchester Reading Prize in 1910, and the Charles Oldham University Scholarship in 1911. He was also prox. acc. for the Chancellor's medal in 1911. In 1909 he was placed in the First Class of the Classical Tripos, Part I, Division I, and in 1911 in the First Class of the Classical Tripos, Part II. He was elected to a Research Fellowship at Jesus in 1911 and held that for three years. Debarred by his eyesight from military service, he then went to Sherborne to teach the Classical Sixth Form. In 1919 he was offered and accepted a Fellowship and Classical Lecturership at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He became bursar in 1928. He was a member of the Council of the Senate from 1922 to 1930. In December, 1934, he resigned his College offices, and his Fellowship expired three years later. Such is a brief outline of Morris's academic career. His interests were, however, even more varied than this suggests. Until the breakdown which led to his retiring from college work, he played a considerable part in university affairs, as the principal organizer of Conservative opinion alike for Parliamentary elections and in university politics. For some years he took a great interest in horse-racing and was almost as well known at Newmarket as in Cambridge. It is, however, as the most loyal and affectionate of friends and one of the kindest of men that Morris will chiefly be remembered, and that by an extraordinary variety of men in many and varied walks of life. He married in 1922 Daphne, only daughter of the late Professor Adam Sedgwick, and had two daughters. There will be requiem Mass at the Church of the Holy Redeemer, Cheyne Row, to-morrow, at 10 a.m. The burial will take place afterwards at Brookwood Cemetery at noon.'



My dear Geoffrey 6. 4. 18
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Alec Waugh's postcard from Mainz Prisoner of War camp to Geoffrey G. Morris, 6 April 1918.