

An Evacuee's Letters Home

by Sian W

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Contributed by

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People in story:

John Swallow

Location of story:

Oxford and Kidderminster

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This series of letters have recently come to light after the death of John Swallow in 1999. They must have been saved up carefully by his parents and have passed down to me with other family papers.

John was nearly 13 when war was declared, and the first letter is to do with his birthday presents!

As a child's first-hand impression of the first year of the war they are intriguing. John was a fairly ordinary child from the East End of London who was lucky enough to have relatives to whom he could go at the outbreak of war. As his father explains to the authorities:

Immediately prior of the war my wife, son aged 12 years, and myself were staying with friends at Eynsham, near Oxford.

In accordance with instructions given by the Government that no child was to return to an area that was to be evacuated, arrangements were made for my son to stay at Eynsham, which, incidentally, was a reception area for the London County Council.

Subsequently, arrangements were made for him to attend Southfield School, Oxford, and I have paid the fees demanded by the Essex Education Committee.

His period of being evacuated was split between the households of two aunts, whilst his parents returned home to London, with their pet dog, Gyp. John's father had served as an observer/radio operator in the Royal Flying Corps, and later the RAF during World War I, and had caught malaria then, and had not been well since, so he carried on with his peacetime job as a social worker in London.

At first it seems from the letters that it was really rather like a holiday, with school, but as time goes on, and his parents visit and leave again, and John is shuffled about, discontent grows until finally, together with many thousands of other city children in the same position, the decision is made to bring him home. In time for the full fury of the Blitz! The family spend the rest of the war together in Ilford. Sleeping in their beds during air raids! Going to school, and generally carrying on with their normal lives. The whole area was heavily damaged by bombing, there were no windows in their house, the roof sagged, and the other end of their street was demolished by a V1 flying bomb; but all, (except Colin) survived the war.

Oxford City Waterworks,
Swinford,
Oxford,
11-5a.m.

15-9-39

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Many thanks for your nice letter received this morning.

I have just finished my elevenses.

I have just started Pitman's Shorthand and I now know about 40 words.

Colin has given me a big knife with a long, fat blade for cutting things (in fact, I even cut Paddy's meat with it,) a thing for making holes, and a pencil sharpener.

Jean has gone to Auntie Marion's for her holidays at Birmingham. Auntie Phylis was not well enough to have her there. Jean went on Tuesday and I sleep in her bed now.

I am wondering about my school. Auntie is going to Oxford this afternoon to see about it.

The secondary schools have not opened yet.. Colin starts school on Monday.

I am very interested in the shorthand. Jean started teaching me before she went away.

Gwen then gave me a book on the Gramologues of the system and she also gave me a French book at the same time.

You may see a cut under the m of time on the previous line. That was made by my new knife (it is a very old one really as you may see by the rust).

Auntie thanks you for her letter and will be sending you one soon.

Give my love to Gyp and I hope all are well. I am! So are Auntie, Uncle, Colin and Paddy.

We all send our love John

Oxford City Waterworks,

Swinford,

Eynsham,

Oxford.

16.3.40

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thankyou very much for your letter received yesterday morning.

I hope Mummy has completely got rid of her cold and that you have not got another one.

Hope Grandma and Gyp (John's dog) are well also.

I received a letter from Auntie Winnie yesterday and sent a letter off with Auntie's. I am going down there during the holidays while Brian (cousin) is at school.

I am looking forward very eagerly to seeing you on Friday..

Our summer holidays are between July 26th and the day before my birthday inc.

September 18th..

Mummy, I expect, has received a letter from Auntie after she had received mine.

Paddy is not registered with Narpac.

I have been out for a long time with old Pad. Auntie and Jean (cousin) went into Oxford on the 10..30. Jean came home on the 1.00 and Auntie on the 2.20. Paddy and I went to meet them both.

Will you let us know which coach you are coming on. If you come by the 10..00 United Counties, you get in at quarter to two and there is a bus at quarter past. You can go back on the 5..25 and catch the 6.15 United Counties. You can come by Black and White if you like and get here at 2..00 but you have to go back by 3..30 from Eynsham. I will tell you any further news when you come.

From your everloving son,

John

Oxford City Waterworks,

Swinford,

Eynsham,

Oxford

8.15pm 27.3.40

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thankyou very much for your letter, Winston Churchill, cross-words and such like

received yesterday morning.

I am glad to hear that you got home safely.

How is your eye, I hope it is better.

As, on Wednesdays, we have the afternoon off and I met Auntie outside the Ritz at 1.00 pm and we went to see *Gulliver's Travels* and Tommy Trinder in *She couldn't say no* in which we had a good laugh: it was a quite good show.

Auntie has written to the billeting officer.

While in Oxford today, Auntie took my blazer to be cleaned, shoes to be mended and a new gas mask case (a black one).

I hope you are all quite well back there. We are quite well here. I am sleeping in Colin's bed and it is nearly the same as old times. The room faces north. The wardrobe, cupboard, Colin's bed, fireplace are in the same place and the wall is the same shape. I expect Gyp (dog) is enjoying himself with Colin and it seems as though Bonzo (cat) is enjoying himself with Jane.

On Monday last, Auntie, Uncle and I went up to Farmoor and then turned right and went for a good way down the road to Cumnor.

I shall write to Grandma and Mrs. Shaw tomorrow.

I started the new Saving thing when I went back to school yesterday.

Tell Colin that Mr. Freebairn Smiff(th) wrote to him, thanking him for helping him to find his little boy and that he found him. Uncle opened the letter as he thought it might be an important letter from Eric Rees!

I am just about to devour a large portion of egg and chips.

Excuse the writing, it is a bit worse than usual because I had some homework and did not start this till quarter past eight and I had to rush it so as to finish it by tonight..

Well, goodbye till next time,

From your everloving son,

John

Oxford City Waterworks,

Swinford,

Eynsham,

Oxford,

6 . 4 . 40

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thank you very much for this letter you have sent me, Actually I do not know whether I have answered it or not, but I believe not partly because I still have the unused stamped envelope. Up to today, I thought I had answered it.

I have written to Grandma.

I hope Mummy received my card in time, and please excuse my writing which I am sure you will after hearing my story.

I was playing cricket on Monday. As you perhaps know, it was a very hot day. A bus left Gloucester Green at 6.30. I left school at 6.05. I just caught a bus at the Garage after running part of the way down the road. You can tell I must have been hot - playing cricket - very hot day - running. Anyway, I got off the bus there (I usually get off where you walked up the brick rails - to the wall - up a sort of hill), and walked to the Post Office. I got 2 penny stamps and one of them tore in half because one of them didn't come out of the slot properly. It was 6.20 when I arrived at Carfax again and then I had to go round Woolworth's and buy a postcard. I bought the card and serged through masses of people to the post box down George Street. It was then 6.25 and a post went at 7.00pm. I put the card up on the wall and, luckily having some ink in my pen, began to write. I wrote ever so quickly and the stuck the stamps on and rammed it down the hole of the letter box. By the time that action was performed, it was 6.30 and I was over 200 yards from the bus station. Luckily, those buses hardly ever leave on time and I just caught it. The next one would not have got me home until quarter eight.

I have not seen anything Mummy would like for her birthday and if you could give me any help I would be pleased.

We have a sentry at the gate now, and he stops everyone who is unauthorised from coming in. You have probably heard the rest of the story from Grandma.

Paddy is sitting beside me crunching a biscuit. I am sitting in the deckchair in the garden writing this Auntie is peeling potatoes in the sink and I think she has finished now as she has thrown the peels in the dustbin.

I am going to Christ Church today on the 12.25 pm bus and I shall take this in with me if I don't forget it and will post it at the G.P.O.

In Art (printing with indian ink and square ended pens), I have been recommended to our Form Master (with two other boys) if he wants any printing work done.

It is a beautiful day today as it has been for nearly a month now - not a cloud in the sky, sun pouring down on your head etc.

I hope you are still keeping in the best of health as you put it. We are!

I have got the Eire stamp you sent me but it is a better stamp than the one I have already got.

I have not had my eyes seen to yet.

I believe that 'A Chump at Oxford' has already been here. The Film I mean, not me! Ha! Ha!

I have to go to school on Saturday this week worse luck. Well, I cannot think of more to tell you now, so cheeereeh,

From you everloving son,

John

Oxford City Waterworks,

Swinford,

Eynsham,

Oxford,

?? 4.40

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

(A letter dealing with the Waterworks sentry ...)

... . Of course he knows me now as he knows everyone at the works. He sometimes has a long chat with me when I am waiting for the bus. You better look out when you come along, next time. He puts down the movements of everyone: puts down the time I go to school, and what time I come home again etc. He's a very nice man and he's got some ideas on how to deal with anyone who attempts to run the blockade.

Auntie received Mummy's letter safely and will be replying when she sends Mum a present. I am going into Christ Church earlier today in fact it is the same as Thursday now: we have to be there by 2pm which means having dinner at 12 noon, leaving here at 12. 25 and getting to Oxford by quarter to one. But that's not all: we come out of Christ Church at 3. 20. I have over 2 hours to wait in Oxford in the waiting room. I dare say I will get the present between 3. 20 and 4. 15 and save carrying it round Ch. Ch. with me.

Uncle has just come in and Auntie has come downstairs.

By the way, our sentry's name is Mr Jordan.

I cannot think of any more to say now so toodleoooo,

From you everloving son,

John

Lower Willingdon,

Sussex

7.4.40

Dear Joan and Ted

How are you both? I hope you had a nice weekend at Oxford and no doubt John enjoyed your visit, you must miss him terribly Joan, but it is nice to know that he is not

with strangers and is doing so well at his new school. Jean of course gave us all the news. She seemed to enjoy the visit here. Since she has been back I have received a letter suggesting the programme for us all to fix in our holidays, no doubt you will hear too when they get my letter tomorrow. It is proposed that I should go to Oxford with Andrew from July 20th to Aug 3rd then bring John back with me until Aug 17th when you come to Eastbourne and have him back with you for a fortnight, then you take him back to Oxford, which is of course providing that you can fit in accordingly. Sounds quite exciting doesn't it? You will be pleased to know that Andrew is still doing well. I am enclosing the promised postcard for you, it is a very good one of him taken at ?? He now says Dad! Dad! And Mum-ma! What about that? It must run in the Armstrong family what! By the way, have you heard from Brian P lately, I haven't but I believe I owe a letter so must drop a line tonight.

Well! Cheerio sister Zig, hope you are both well.

With love

From your affectionate sister

Phyl

Oxford City Waterworks,

Swinford,

Eynsham,

Oxford,

16 . 04 . 40

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thank you very much for your letter received yesterday morning.

I hope you will like the present I am sending you, also Aunties. I bought mine on Tuesday and have waited until today for Auntie to get hers. I will be going into Eynsham when I have finished this to post the parcel. I would have bought a bigger present had I known I would not have to pay postage on it.

I hope you are all quite well: we are perfectly well here thank you.

Thank you for sending me those things and the florin:- the game, the Fomo; the card, the socks, the handkerchief etc.

Well bang goes Paris !!!

Auntie and I went into Oxford this morning on the 10.20, i came back on the 12.20 and Auntie on the 1.00pm. She got a new pair of shoes, but, owing to the fact that brown calf is made in Germany, we were not able to get brown shoes so we got black.

We have just got our first bag of peas out of the garden which we are going to have for our dinner tomorrow.

I saw 'As You Like It' by a cock named Shakespeare at Southfield. There was no scenery or anything but otherwise it was not too bad.

It is very hot today.

Auntie asked our sentry (when we went into Oxford) about getting into the gate by some other means than the main gate, and he said that they would not know the layout of the gates and would probably think they continued solidly all round and that it would be unlikely to climb over and so would force the main gate.

When waiting for school at Christ Church I read a Book.

Well, Auntie is also enclosing a letter and she will include the things (if any) I have failed to enter.

Well goodbye for the present

with great love, from you everloving son, John

St Johns Avenue,

Kidderminster,

Worcs.

10. 30 am 19. 04. 40

Dear Mummy and Daddy

Thank you very much for the letter received on Wednesday morning and which Auntie thought was a letter for Brian

In that letter or should I say on the envelope you addressed it to 'St. John's Rd'; this should read St. Johns Ave'. (I probably put it at the top of my letter). Auntie thinks that St. Johns Road is near the hospital but is a short road not having about 150 houses in it as in St. J. Ave. so it came here.

Yesterday morning old Timbuck (cat) chased a rabbit while Brian ran out after it and caught it. Brian asked Auntie if he could keep it for a pet but Auntie refused so Brian let it go. Yesterday I read the whole of one of Brian's books.

On Wednesday, Brian had to go to the allotments so I went over to them to watch: they are a part of our Road where there are no houses but a wide open space of fields in one of which the Kidderminster allotments are. About 3.30 (Brian left at 4), the postman came and we could see him take in the presents and Brian sent me over to see what they were. They happened to be a Pears Encyclopaedia from Auntie Phyllis and Uncle Colin and a box of 'Carefree' chocs from Auntie Beryl.

On Sunday Brian and I went to Habberley Valley (about 2 miles away) and Brian climbed up a big sandstone rock there.

We are all quite well here thanks: hope even Gyp is quite O.K. now, I bet he had tummy ache.

Has Aunt Ethel (motorspirits) gone back yet.

For meals here, we have breakfast at 8.15: dinner at 1.15 to 2 (1 .15 weekdays ex. Wed. on Wed. at 2) and at 2. 30 on Sundays: tea at six and supper at 9.

I am glad you liked mon réport.

Auntie Winnie is just going into the town to get some meat for dinner.

For the last four nights we had had games of Totopoly (sister ship to Monopoly, only costing 8/6d) It is a horse racing game and the horses have to go through training first and then on to the race track with all sorts of advantages and disadvantages : my horse came in second last night but was disqualified for having a white disadvantage card (swizzle).

Well, I can think of nothing much more to say now, so toodleooooo
from your everloving son,
John.

St. Johns Avenue,
Kidderminster,
Worcs,
10. 15 am 30. 4. 40.

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thank you very much for your letter just received.

I still have a little of my cough left and all the rest of us are perfectly well except for poor Auntie Winnie who fell downstairs yesterday morning.

It was about 10 past 7. I had just woken up. Brian was still asleep. The 7 o'clock news was on. Auntie began to mount the stairs CRASSHH BUMP BUMP BUMP BUMP BUMP CRASH. Then there were several groans. I jumped out of bed waking Brian up, to see Uncle kneeling by the side of Auntie who was prone at the foot of the stair, her head against the post at the bottom. Uncle got up and got some water and Auntie began to revive and when he got back Auntie knocked the cup and

. until 11.30a.m. I hope she got it. I left here about 9. 25, and, because of no stamp went to the post office near Kidderminster and I missed the 9. 45. Auntie Ethel (Motor Spirits) has my return bus ticket.

Well, as I can think of nothing more now, I must close,
From you everloving son,
John

4, Kent View Gardens,
Seven Kings, Essex
11th June, 1940

Dear Sir,

I enclose herewith original circular letter received from the Essex Education Committee and I would be glad to know if it is the wish of the Government that the scheme of evacuation of children is to be defeated by local Education Committees.

I beg to place my case before you for your consideration.

Immediately prior to the war my wife, son aged 12 years, and myself were staying with friends at Eynsham, near Oxford.

In accordance with instructions given by the Government that no child was to return to an area that was to be evacuated, arrangements were made for my son to stay at Eynsham, which, incidentally, was a reception area for the London County Council. Subsequently, arrangements were made for him to attend Southfield School, Oxford, and I have paid the fees demanded by the Essex Education Committee.

He is receiving practically full-time instruction and his reports show that he is making excellent progress after an interruption of studies immediately following the war.

He has become used to a new environment, both at his billet and at school, and is quite happy and comfortable.

The fact that he has wished to stay there and that we have permitted him to stay there since the commencement of the war must be considered sufficient evidence that everything is satisfactory.

He has given no anxiety to the Authorities responsible for evacuation by returning home. In view of these facts I cannot think that the Government desire to uproot him again and cause further distress to the child and his parents.

As 120,000 children are being evacuated from London this week it seems absurd to move my son from a place that can be considered safe as any place can be in the anticipated circumstances.

The alternatives offered by the Essex Education Committee are almost brutal.

Particularly the third, which threatens to deprive children of the scholarship they have won if they do not accede to the demands of the Committee.

If the welfare of the children is the chief concern of the Authorities, the children must remain where they are if they so desire it.

If the object of again depriving the children of friends and a new environment to which they have become used after the final parting is to make administration easier, then I suggest that new methods of administration should have been adopted months ago, and that it is now too late.

May I have the favour of an early reply?

Yours faithfully,

R.E.Swallow
Oxford City Waterworks
Eynsham
Oxford
15.6.40

Dear Joanie,

Sorry not answering your letter before... But I have been waiting to get you a little gift for your birthday. As usual, couldn't see anything and landed home without each time I went to Oxford.. However I hope you will find the enclosed knicks useful..

John has told you we got his shoes at last.. What with him playing cricket and being at school each time I went to Oxford. I couldn't seem to fit it in at all.. I had to get him a

black pair, couldn't get his size in brown.. They are quite a nice pair and were only 8/11..
The soles of his brown ones are through so he has just got the new ones in time.. Shall I
have them mended.. Jean has just been asked if she would mind taking her holiday so
as to get it over before the summer session.. So she starts on Thursday.. Joe does not
know anything definite about his holiday yet,, so he wants me to take Jean up to
Yorkshire so the are going to manage here without me.. Joe will have to look after John..
Colin will not be home much., he starts his exam on the 8th July.. I wish we could have
all gone together.. I haven't heard from Yorkshire yet as to whether they can have us..
The trains up to Catterick are awful we shall have to change 5 times. Wouldn't do for
Jean to go alone,, at least it wouldn't be very nice.. She would no doubt land up there..
Its the devil suddenly having your holiday thrust upon you. Have you heard any further
news of Ruby,.

Cheerio for now

Love from all

Eth.. ..

Oxford City Waterworks

Swinford

Eynsham

Oxford

6.00pm 19.6.40

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thank you very much for the letter received this morning.

Auntie tells me to tell you to make my sock a bit bigger in the future please!

I hope you are all okeydokey (well) there: we are in the best of health here thank you.

???Guess?guess?guess?guess??? Auntie Phyllis is coming down tomorrow! !!! Auntie

Ethel and Jean are going to Yorkshire for their holidays tomorrow. According to the
telegram Bonzo and Andrew are coming down as well.

Did you see or hear any of the 100 enemy planes which came over the E Coast
yesterday (Tuesday)? One plane was shot down in Essex.

The news is certainly very bad, as you say. The Germans will never conquer Britain,
never.

It is a very fine day here today.

Uncle and I are going to the allotment now and as there isn't another post tonight, I am
going with him. Yesterday we had the hose on.

Well, I have arrived back again, and we have got some jolly good grub (very tasty, very
sweet):- some peas, carrots, parsnips, turnips etc.

Colin (who has been to cricket practise and got 13 runs) and Jean (who has been
watching him) have arrived here.

I have to go to school on Friday (all day) and Saturday morning this week instead of all
day Saturday: I do not know why this is.

I have had my new green thing (to stop a new gas) fixed to my gas mask at school
today. Auntie and Uncle, Jean and Colin haven't got theirs done yet. I expect you have,
haven't you.

I played cricket on Monday, stayed in for about half an hour and only got two runs.

Wally Castle (the son of the lady at whose house I broke my record by eating 8 pieces of
bread) came on Sunday, and we had games with Cocil and Farno, and also of the
ordinary playing cards (snap and beatyouneighbouroutofthebox).

Well, that is about all I have for you now, so goodbye for the present,
so goodbye, Love,

Oxford City Waterworks,

Swinford,

Eynsham,
Oxford,
??06.40

Dear Mummy and Daddy,
(First sheet missing)

.....Homework today, I think,

Uncle promised me that if I'm here next summer, we shall walk into Oxford via the river. I hope you are quite well. I hope you, Grandma, Auntie Betty, Uncle Bert etc, are quite well. Give my love to the latter ones and keep a big lot for yourselves. If you would like me to draw any other maps for you, such as a plan of the Chlorine House or different parts of Oxford, I will see what I can do. (or perhaps Southfield).

Auntie has gone into Oxford today. She went on the five to two. I think she is coming back on the 4. 15. Paddy has just eaten a biscuit. Did Gyp like his? I have not done any more knitting yet.

Auntie is getting on well with Jean's new frock.

Jean has started corresponding (sending letters or writing letters to me in the lunch-hour) with me!

Have you made an acquaintance with Mr Linfield yet?

I have palled up with a small new boy named Ronald . He comes from Rose Green (Middlesex) and has been evacuated with his father's (a schoolteacher) school.

On the night before last, there was a very bad thunderstorm so I am told. Mr Hopkins (the Geography master at Southfield) was talking about the winds in Australia and the rainfall an example of which we had here last night. I didn't quite catch that, so when he asked who slept through, I , who had woken up one in the night because the sheets had come off, kept my hand down. Then one of the boys said something about a storm and so it came out, so I stuck my hand up quickly.

I am making a dictionary of 'People of the Second World War' for use with my War book. I am copying it out of 'War Illustrated'.

As Auntie went to Oxford, I had to keep the fire going. I put my hand (index finger) on the bit with which you pull out the black thing in the front (the ventilator, and blow me it was terrifically hot, and a scald resulted on my index finger of my left hand. It is not very much though - just stings.

Well, I do not think that there is much else, so goodbye for the present,

I am

Your everloving son, John
Oxford City Waterworks,
Swinford,
Eynsham,
Oxford.

vendredi//6/. 30 p.m.//. 28/6/40//

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thank you very much for your letter received this morning: merci beaucoup pour les crosswords and the 'Question Times'.

Nous avons eu deux raides du ciel - une lundi et une mardi. Pendant le deuxième raid Je dors; mais durant le première je n'ai pas dormé. The second one lasted for four hours, the first lasted for an hour.

Well, I am very pleased to hear that you are quite well.. At the moment of writing, we are in the best of health. We did not hear any guns or bombs in our raid either. I did not get up in the raids. I am in a safe place in my corner.

Mais apres la guerre vous dites.

Nothing has yet been done to my glasses: They are indeed, long winded.

I have just been up to the rabbit warren with Pad, but as we were going for another walk from the warren, he made off to the houses - the silly ape.

30am.

I hope you are still quite well: my cold is nearly better, Mummy's is getting better. Brian's is nearly better and Aunt Wins about the same.

Last night, I went to the Rosedale Model Railway Club (of which I am now a member). Brian and I set out at about 6. 25pm and it was just drizzling and there was a wind. We got to the R.M.R.C. O.K., but when we came out, it was pitch black and the rain was coming down in sheets. When we go to the club we usually come out at about 8pm and if the sirens have not gone, we go and get some fish and chips in a side alley (see diagram). So we came out and went to the shop as the sirens had not gone. But on the way there down the side road, somebody put a big telegraph pole in the way, and I went into it in the pitch black! I bent my glasses a bit, and I have a small bruise on my forehead this morning. We got to the F & C shop without further incident, but on the way back, we had nearly got to the traffic lights and Brian was just saying that if it had been an iron lamp post, I would probably. . . and Brian fell from me. He had fallen off the pavement in the dark and into the wet gutter.

Nearly back, I trod in a puddle, the water of which came right over my shoe. Anyway, we got home safely and enjoyed the fish and chips.

It is raining now and the garden is soaking wet and the sky is dull and very overcast and grey.

Tim is up on one of the chairs. My coat and hat are drying.

Brian has his mid-term next Saturday and Monday.

On Monday, I went to see 'Pinocchio' with Mummy, Auntie and Uncle. I did not like it very much, although it was very cleverly done. It was very noisy.

Mummy and Auntie are just going into Kidderminster.

The baker has called.

Last Saturday, I went to the school with Uncle, and was told that there were serious epidemics of Scarlet Fever and Measles and that the Head had considered closing the school, but the authorities had advised him to keep it open. The A forms were overcrowded and so he said that I was to go in a B form which would mean that I would have to drop Latin. Anyway, as I had a bad cold, Mummy decided to keep me anyway, as there was a serious epidemic at the school, until after the mid-term.

Fancy you breaking your teeth and Mrs. Roberts' bed ! ! ! Just like you ! ! ! !

Well I cannot think of more to say now so toodleoo for a couple of days,
from your everloving son,

John

P. S. As I have used up all but one sheet of the paper you sent me, will you please send some more.

Mummy wants to go home now that she has had a rest, and if she decides to, may I come as well? It was Mummy who wished to come to start with and not I, so that now Mummy wants to go, don't you think that it is only fair that I should come as well?

Four bombs were dropped on Blackstones about four miles away.

.

Your everloving son,

John

St Johns Avenue,

Kidderminster,

Worcs.

5. 11. 40. (Guy Fawkes Day)

Dear Daddy,

Thank you very much for your letter just received.

I hope you are still quite well. I have still got my cold and have done a whopping great sneeze. Otherwise we are well..

Last Sunday, we had a bit of excitement: Brian and I were playing in the dining room

and Mum came in and said 'Did you hear the warning'. We said 'Yes'.

Mum: Listen; there's a plane going over

Brian: Its all right. I bet it is a British one, probably a Blenheim. I will go and see. Wow ! !
! Its a Heinkel..

And so it was. A Heinkel HE111S flying almost directly overhead and about 1,000 feet. It had gone over a little way when two black bombs dropped from it, there were two blinding flashes and two terrific bangs: they dropped near the railway station in Kidderminster. It was rather a foggy day.

The day before yesterday, we turned on the radio on short wave to hear Haw! Haw! We couldn't get him so we got some Morse. It kept on giving out V.

.....
Yesterday, we turned it on again at about the same time, and once again on the same wavelength, we heard it again. ..._ ..._ ..._

Rather monotonous ! We twiddled it round again and 'U-36' we heard giving out a message. We also heard an S.O.S. from a boat on Sunday and the submarine which had sunk it was giving out a message as well.. I am learning Morse, and know all the letters and numbers. I can do about 5-10 words a minute ! ! !

It is rather a miserable day here today although the dawn was lovely. It is raining now:- about the 7th in succession.

Mummy has definitely decided to come home now, and as she can't leave me behind, I am coming too. After all, the reasons are quite good:-

1/ A number of the carpet factories here have been turned into munitions factories.

2/ That Heinkel bomber layed a couple of eggs on Kidderminster F.A. ground.

3/ I cannot get fixed up at school here.

4/ It wont be dark until 5. 30 pm in midwinter.

5/ The raids will probably almost cease in winter, as the airfields in Northern France, Holland and Belgium (which were used by our men) have become waterlogged: the Jerries will have to build concrete runways which will be bombed by us.

6/ If we have to go, we might as well all go together - you have got to die sometime and it might as well be painlessly by the bomb as by a long illness or something..

7/ We can easily sleep indoors.

8/ We would come out of school at 4pm in any case under the new scheme.

9/ I have already caught a cold while I have been here owing to being kept indoors by the rain, for, cold, etc.

10/ We have no clothes here, the fields are wet, etc.

So Mummy has decided to come home by the 8.10am train from Kidderminster on weekdays. Which day do you think will be best.

Well, I can think of no more news now, so toodleoo till sometime this week or next,.
John.

St John's Avenue

Kidderminster

5 November 1940

Ask the milkman

to leave extra

milk please.

Joan XXX

My dear Ted,

Many thanks for your letter just received. I felt really worried when I did not get it yesterday and you can imagine how relieved I was to get it.

Well, as John has already told you we are catching the 11.16 from Kidderminster, this goes to Birmingham and we catch the London train from there. This is due at London at 2.35. We are told that this was is far better than the way we came as it is a fast train and

usually it is not more than a few minutes late.

Do not misunderstand John when he says we do not wish you to meet us at Liverpool Street but, if you cannot manage Paddington I think it would be better for us to come the best way we could don't you, for I could not tell at what time we would reach Liverpool Street Stn could I. I would love to see your face when I alight at Paddington but please do not put yourself out as I would rather have you when we reach home.

It has been blowing a gale here all night and pouring with rain. I don't think I've ever seen so much rain as I've seen here.

Well my darling all news when we meet on Thursday. Do take care of yourself.

From your everloving wife, Joanie.

From the Headmaster of Southfield School which John had attended in Oxford comes this letter in 1942:

Dear John,

You couldn't possibly have sent me any news that was more unwelcome than the news of your cousin's death. Boys of Colin's character are all too scarce and in the short time you were with us you must have realised how highly he was esteemed here.

This last term has been terribly cruel - Nigel Gidney - Cyril Leonard - and now Colin Boustead !

Where are his father and mother living now : they aren't at Swinford now are they? Do me the kindness of putting their address on this card and posting it will you?

I hope you are well.

Very sincerely

A. H. Flemming-

Flying Officer Colin Boustead (RAF Volunteer Reserve) was killed on Wednesday 5th August 1942, aged 22. He is buried in Barkingside cemetery, Ilford. (Grave 242). The grave is in the care of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. (www.cwgc.org)

The other people mentioned are:

Flt. Lt. Nigel Gidney – Killed on 27th June 1942, age 23, and buried at El Alamein.

Pilot Officer Cyril Leonard RAFVR – Killed on 8th July 1942, age 21, and buried in Oxford.