

Letters from Eileen Mary Ambrose to her husband Arthur Barry Ambrose

Saturday 10 06 1944 – 40A Russell Road – air letter 65

... had a letter telling me the Ministry of Health pays for 6 months training, board and lodging and pocket money (doesn't say how much!) It also includes the syllabus - Elementary Anatomy & Physiology, Elementary Psychology, an introduction to Surgical Medicine and Psychological diseases and disorders, theory of Occupational Therapy, Department routine and ward work, and an introduction to several crafts. I had to give my next of kin so put "Husband serving with MMF overseas" and then put Daddy's name and address - I thought that the best thing to do.

...

I've never been to Birmingham before but we have some relations there - pastry fork wedding present came from them - so I think I shall go tomorrow (Sunday) afternoon and hope they'll be able to put me up. Trains are so bad that the Officials can't guarantee that there will be any trains at all so I'll make certain of being there by 2pm on Monday if I go on Sunday.

Continued Tuesday 13 06 1944

... All being well I start on September 11th at Birmingham for 6 months, board, lodging and training free plus £1 per week pocket money. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? The hours are very good, all week-ends free, about 1 long weekend Friday to Monday per month and a fortnight holiday during the 6 months! However it all depends on the references. Financially I shall be OK keeping on 40A Russell Road [*Eileen's flat in London*] and I start at £200 per annum and more but the one snag, I have to sign an agreement to work for the duration and in any part of the country. This sounds bad but the woman said in my case it would be very probable that I could get an appointment in London. Will you please let me know by return what your opinion is. I personally think the opportunities offered are worth the risk. The financial side is so good and the work is lovely. I saw round the workrooms and all the students were very nice girls and they were doing all sorts of things I like.

Monday 05 07 1944 – Little Milton – air letter - 73

You remember what the London blitz was like and what it felt like to be in it. There isn't really time to be afraid and everybody is so cheerful that it makes you yourself the same. Well it's exactly the same this time. But after all you have to face up to the possibility that you may be one of the unlucky ones. If anything happens to me promise me you would carry on with your work, just the same.

Tuesday 06 07 1944 – 2 Temple Grove – air letter - 74

Well we've had it as far as 40A Russell Road is concerned, it just isn't! First I am perfectly safe and well and most of our stuff is too. Yesterday lunch time I had a telegram at Little Milton [*where she had been staying with her aunt*] saying that 40A was damaged and to go straight home to No 2 [*her parents' house*].

A letter came from M this morning telling me most of the furniture is more or less OK. I travelled up at 08:30, met M and D for lunch, then M and I went to No 2 [2 Temple Grove] dumped my luggage the went off again to 40A. The flying bomb fell (on) a very little way off and the house is a complete wreck. How so little damage has been done to our furniture, I cannot imagine.

Sunday 09 07 1944 – 2 Temple Grove – air letter - 75

A lovely piece of good news with this letter – I've been accepted for the course in Occupational Therapy and I start on Sept 11th in Bromsgrove, Birmingham. Isn't it good. In some ways being

bombed is a good thing because I shan't have to keep on the rent – I may give M & D a little per week for looking after my stuff, I pay them 15/- per week while I'm living there. Also there is always someone there to see that everything is OK.

Wednesday 19 07 1944 – 2 Temple Grove – air letter 79

You ask me about the bombs. It's not much good trying to make things look good because you're bound to see newspapers or hear other people's accounts. As compared with the 1940 41 blitz, I don't think these can compare with the intensity of those days. Each individual bomb does about as much damage as a land mine or perhaps more but there is no penetration. This means the blast affects a far greater area and yet I don't think it causes as many casualties as the more eruptive kinds. There are a great many minor casualties from flying glass. The one that landed near 40A caused only one death – that was an old lady who died in hospital of shock. Of course it fell at a time when there were very few people in the houses, 3 – 4 in the afternoon. There is a very different effect on the people with these than with the normal type of raid – if any type of air-raid can be called normal. In the old days the planes came over, they were met with ack-ack fire, fighters attacked them, then some managed to drop a stick of bombs and that was the end of that lot. With these blasted things you hear the thing buzzing for ages, there is no gunfire in the populated areas for obvious reasons, the same applies to the absence of fighters, then you hear it stop and you have to wait. That is when the strain comes. It may come for you or it may be going the other way. It may come down in a couple of seconds after the noise stops or may sail on for several minutes before it dives. So you see the worst effect it has is the element of strain. If one can control oneself sufficiently well to make up one's mind to go to sleep in the safest spot and not take any notice, that is the best thing. Worrying makes no difference.

...

Perhaps it would be a good idea to give you my new address now. Your letters seem to reach me at the shortest time in nine days which I think is excellent. I arrive there on Sept 11th and it would be nice to have a letter there nice and soon. The address is:-

~~“D” Block,~~
~~Nurses Home~~
Dorset School of Occupational Therapy
E. M. S. Hospital,
BARNLEY HALL,
BROMSGROVE, WORCS

I crossed the first two lines out as I think they only apply to luggage! For anything very important use the London address.

Tuesday 12 09 1944 – Bromsgrove – air letter 102

Well I have arrived safely ...

... I'm going to tell you a lot about this course – because I doubt if I shall have much time to do much else besides work and I think you'd rather have letters about the work than none at all.

The hospital is pretty large – not sure how many beds, and School of O.T. is a very small section of it. We have cubicle sleeping quarters – 2 in each – quite spacious in area but no springs to the beds (better than no beds, I agree) and not much room to put things. Also those hut cubicles are at least ¼ hour's walk from the School. Breakfast isn't till 8:15 so I don't have to get up frightfully early. My bike is still at the station so when it arrives it will simplify matters. We work 9:00 till 12:40 with ¼ hour break at 11:00, then from 2:10 till 3:40 then tea then from 5:00 – 7:00. On Wednesdays we are free between 2:00 and 5:00 for shopping and we work till 12:20 only and are

off all day Sunday. We have a long weekend from Friday 12:20 till Sunday night once per month and there are rumours (pretty definite) of a fortnight's holiday during the 6 months. So far nothing about pay! We are being told over and over again that we are going to have to work terribly hard to fit everything in by the time of the exams. So many people say so (previous course people) that it must be true. This means that probably my letters will be less frequent but I'll write at least once a week. I may have to resort to airgraphs in between. Here, I shall look forward to your letters more than ever so please keep sending me as many as possible.

All the people in the school are a very good type – some very much younger than me, some older. There is one extremely nice girl married to a man in Burma in the army, whom I get on with pretty well. Also a trained nurse but a very human one who has nursed abroad a lot and is very good company. My cubicle companion is not very expansive, is considerably older than me and has been doing O.T. for 2 years.

So far all the work we have done has been cord knotting and an introductory lecture on Psychology. I am not worried about the crafts but feel that I may find the Psychology and Anatomy rather tough. Most of the other students seem to have had far more experience than I have – the trained nurse, art teachers, people who have done lots of O.T. or several years of Red Cross nursing etc.

Wednesday 13 09 1944 – Bromsgrove – air letter 103

We went into Bromsgrove this afternoon in our Wednesday shopping time 2-5. It is a much bigger place than I imagined and quite a good shopping centre. I now have my dear old bike with me which I think is going to be invaluable to me here. I managed to order the Telegraph, also your John O'London, so I shall be able to send you some newspapers after all.

I am not at all worried about the financial position here now as the £1 a week pocket money has been confirmed and I most certainly shan't have the time to spend even that amount in a week! This means I shall be able to SAVE the entire allowance. The work is so interesting and such fun that we don't mind a bit working so hard and being with such nice girls – every one of them seems to be nice – makes such a difference. ...

Two of the girls came into my cubicle tonight and chatted and looked around and admired your photographs which sit on the dressing table. One is married (there are 3 married ones out of 28 on the course) and the other engaged to a man who has been overseas for 5 years.

Our marriage has given me the opportunity of doing a kind of work which I have chosen myself, a bigger thing than it would at first appear to be.

Esmé and I are going to the cinema tomorrow if Bromsgrove can produce anything more recent than Ben Hur – it is rather a primitive <unreadable>. After a week nearly of knotting and netting with a couple of Anatomy lectures and a Psychology one, thrown in, we feel we need a little relaxation. Knotting and netting sound the simplest things in the world but they're hellishly difficult to learn for hours on end and also to make perfect samples for the exam as we have to do.

I have tried the piano in our sitting room – it sounds rather like an out of tune harpsichord but my efforts were appreciated by several people nevertheless. Music is the one thing I miss rather here but there is hardly any time to miss it!

Saturday 30 09 1944 – 2 Temple Grove – air letter 107

It is lovely to be back here and sleep in a comfortable bed and have food served nicely. Another thing it is the first time I've been home since the blackout instructions were lifted. It doesn't affect me much at Bromsgrove as we still have the blackout curtains. You aren't allowed naked lights but have to have some curtains. When Esmé and I went to the cinema in Bromsgrove we saw the street lighting again which quite thrilled us. I haven't been out after dark in London yet.

More money rolled in yesterday! All the 1943 Certificate people (that's my group) were told to go up to the loony bin to be paid. (The loony bin is Barnsley Hall Asylum, basis of the EMS hospital and the School of O.T.) We were all presented with little envelopes containing £4-3-4. It seems astonishing to think that we get our board and lodging and tuition free for 6 months and are to get £25 pocket money thrown in!

Tuesday 03 10 1944 – Bromsgrove – air letter 110-1

I am really beginning to feel the pressure of work now in that I don't seem to have any time at all to write letters. We have many more lectures now and have learnt knots, nets, tufted rugs, woven scarves, tablet weaving and braid rugs, and have got to make samples of all these crafts and do our notes in our "spare time" - after 7pm! The thought of how much anatomy physiology medical students must have to learn appals me after the lectures we have for O.T. I'm enjoying every bit of it. I brought back your Gray's Anatomy – it will be extremely useful to me. We have a very small book – Seer's Anatomy and Physiology for nurses.

Sunday 05 11 1944 – Bromsgrove – air letter 122

This evening Mac gave us a list of our exams:

- Anatomy
- Physiology and First Aid
- Psychology
- Departmental Management
- General Applied O.T.
- General Medicine, Surgery and Psychiatric conditions
- Terminology, indications and contra-indications
- and two days practical and oral!

Each paper is 3 hours.

Be sure you'll get no letters for about a fortnight during Exam time!

Darling I'm afraid I must take things seriously, don't you agree? She also gave us a list of crafts which consists of 47 samples!! Really I feel quite overwhelmed and have great fears of my ability to achieve the certificate by March.

Tonight is a horrid wet windy night. It was beastly coming up to "D" from the hospital. It was pitch dark and you know how scared I am and wind and rain makes it worse. Esmé skidded on ice on the road this morning and fell off and had to go to Casualty but is not badly damaged. But you can tell how pleasant (?) the weather is.

Sunday 19 11 1944 – Bromsgrove – air letter 127

How strange there should be another Ambrose at the hospital. I don't think I've ever met one before. I'm afraid I've had to go back to Trobridge for one of our crafts – leather modelling. We have to do a sample and I couldn't possibly do one of those awful grape designs you see on arty crafty handbags so I decided I'd do a crest. I don't know if the Ambrose family possesses one. I've dug up the Trobridge one again. I've finished my handbag which has no decoration on it, not thonged but looks just like one you'd buy in a shop. In fact I'm rather proud of the result especially as it has pockets for lipstick, comb, mirror and cigarette lighter and papers. I continue to be amazed at what professional looking results we are able to achieve. The fur gloves look rather good too. Tomorrow we start on department – I feel rather as I did when we used to start on a new ward.