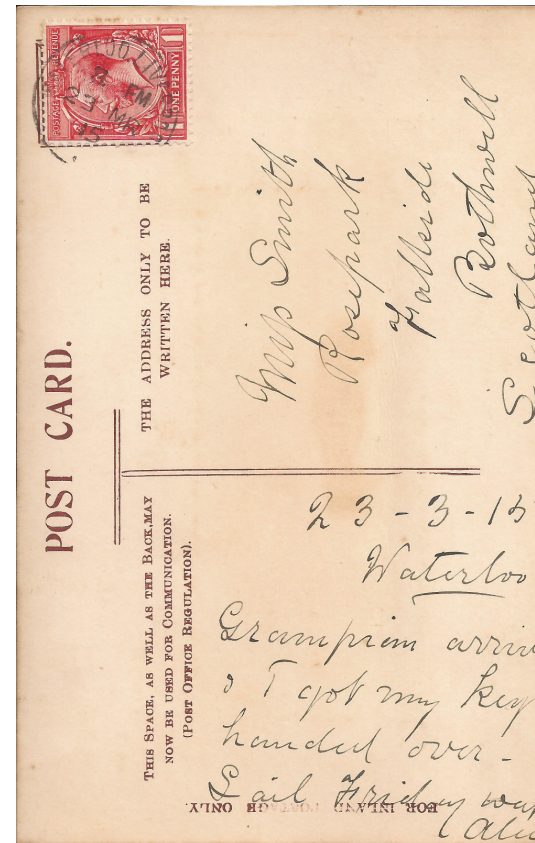


Great War in the Villages Project

Colin and Sheena Smith now live in Wellesbourne. Colin has kept a small collection of postcards with illustrations woven in silk. The collection was handed down to Colin. They had originally been sent to a relative, Elizabeth Smith.

Such cards were very popular during the First World War and were sent from soldiers to family members, loved ones and friends. This particular collection consists of cards sent by two men, "Alec" and "John Orr" to Elizabeth. We have not yet found out anything about the two and what happened to them. It appears Alec was serving on merchant ships involved in the war effort particularly troop transport. John Orr may have been a soldier in France. Nor do we know a lot about Elizabeth. She apparently died young.

The first card was sent on 23rd March 1915, when "Alec" announced he was due to sail on the RMS Grampian "Friday week"

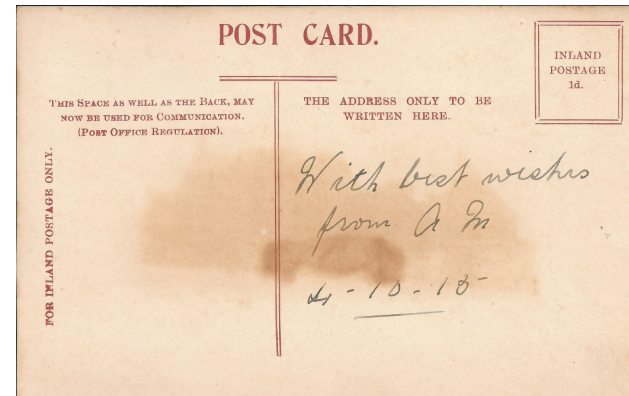
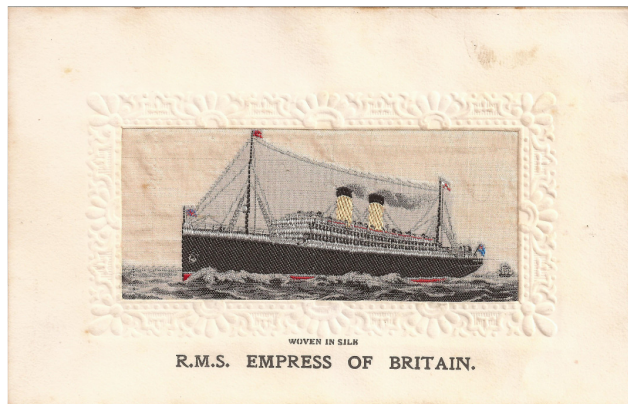


The RMS Grampian was built in 1907 in Glasgow for the Allan Line. Before the war she was sailing between Glasgow or Liverpool and Canada. In September 1914 her return trip from Canada was used to transport part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force to Europe.ⁱ

Great War in the Villages Project

From his postcard in 1915 we can assume “Alec” was on board as part of the crew on the outward voyage to Canada which then returned with 18th Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force in April 1915ⁱⁱ. The RMS Grampian spent the rest of the war making the crossing to Canada. In 1921 she was gutted by fire whilst being refitted in Antwerp and was sold for scrap.

By October 1915, “Alec” was apparently sailing with the RMS Empress of Britain. Elizabeth’s collection of cards included the one below. The Empress of Britain was built in Glasgow in 1905. In 1914 she was converted to an Armed Merchant Cruiser and saw service in the South Atlantic. We have no information to show when “Alec” joined the Empress of Britain but it is likely it was after April 1915 assuming he returned on the Grampian from Canada with the CEF. In 1915 she had been converted to troop carrying duties and saw action in the Dardanelles perhaps with Alec serving. Later in 1915 she was damaged by fire. In 1916 she took up duties with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces until the end of the war.



There is no further news of Alec until 1919 when he sent two further cards in the collection. (See later)

John Orr

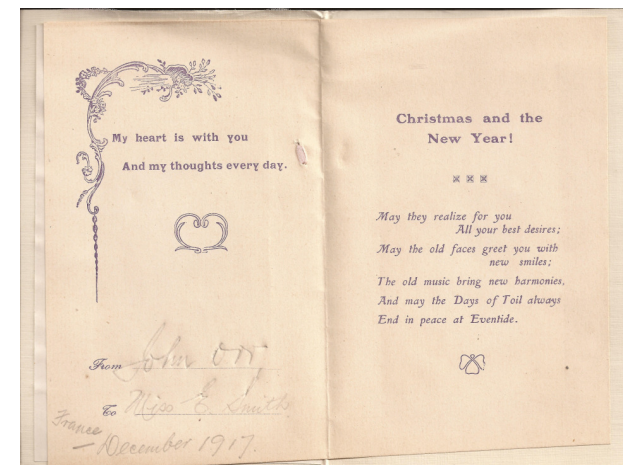
However another friend, who we think was a John Orr sent her card “I’m thinking of you” which had a small pocket in which was a small card printed “Forget me not” and on which someone had written “To Miss E. Smith 21/1/1917” The assumption that it was John Orr is based on some similarities in the hand writing on the cards.

The “Forget me not” card and its insert are shown below.

John Orr also wrote to her in December 1917. He sent the remembrance card shown below with the penciled message, “From John Orr to Miss E. Smith, France, December 1917”

Great War in the Villages Project

We have not been able to find anything about John Orr and can only seek to guess what he was doing in France. As this second card is written in pencil was he serving in the trenches? That the card only mentions "France" may indicate he was complying with military censorship. But this remains pure speculation.



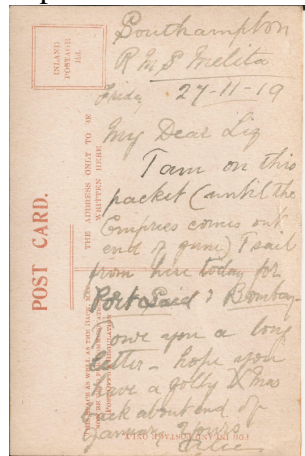
Great War in the Villages Project

The final two cards are from Alec serving on the RMS Melita.

The Melita was built in Glasgow, fitted out in Belfast and purchased by Canadian Pacific. Her maiden voyage was in January 1918 to New Brunswick. By 1920 she was on the Liverpool to New York run. *However in 1920 she made a trip for the British Government to Bombay.* She had a long career being a cruise ship until being sold for scrap in 1935. She was rescued by Italia and used as a troopship then air bombed in Tobruk and scuttled in 1940.ⁱⁱⁱ

Alec's first card is 27 November 1919. He is in Southampton and intends to sail with Melita whilst waiting to the "Empress" in June. He writes "My Dear Liz". His message shows that he is on the trip to Bombay that the ship is making for the British Government.

We last hear from Alec from the Melita in 1920 probably in January or February sending a belated "Happy and Prosperous New Year".



Alec survived the Great War but we do not know what happened to him nor for that matter whether John Orr did survive and whether they maintained their friendship with Elizabeth.

Contributed by tony_whiteley@hotmail.com

- ⁱ War Diary of the 18th Bn Canadian Expeditionary Force
<http://18thbattalioncefc.wordpress.com/outward-bound-the-r-m-s-grampian/>
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.gwpda.org/naul/1cdncvy.htm>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.greatships.net/melita.html>