

# Transcript of Rose Luard's letter describing the landing of Zeppelin L33 in Little Wigborough, 24 September 1916 (D/DLu 76)

B[irch] R[ectory]

Sunday afternoon

Sept 24 1916

Dearest Grimes [?],

Oh, we've had the most lovely thrilling night of our lives, followed by a godless [?] glorious morning, gazing our fill at the vast skeleton carcass of a ZEPPELIN at where in the world do you think? The wilds of Little Wigborough! What a Sunday morning?

At 11pm on Sat night we heard either loud bombs or guns, Ipswich or Harwich direction, wh[ich] made our windows rattle we rushed out & heard a distinctly distant monster. F[re]d much thrilled (He was home for the week end) as he'd never even heard the throb [?] of one before. At about 1 Daisy woke us all up again & we all listened out of Fred's room, the spare room, lovely starlight night. Then leaning out of the window we just saw a bright light all over the sky in the west as we bolted like rabbits to G's room, all 5 of us. It was a killing night the boys in their pyjamas all of us trying not to wake father who slept peacefully through everything. Percy & D got to your window just in time to see a red ball in the sky, behind the fir trees, a good [p2] deal hidden by them. G[rea]t excitement at the time!

We think that must have been the ~~Bittercay~~ Wickford one. Thinking fondly [?] that the show was over for the night Percy went to father's room to see if he was all right, Fred back to the spare room, & we were just shutting the windows, when suddenly there came the most brilliant red light wh[ich] blazed all over the sky, & lit up the room like daylight. It came from the lawn direction, so we rushed madly back to the spare room, crowing with excitement. There was a glorious light glowing straight ahead, over the field, with a g[rea]t column of smoke in the middle of it. Percy managed to get there in time to see a flame spurt in the glow. Everyone was mad with excitement, & we all went off our heads like the people you read about in the papers when the Enfield Cuffley one went down. It was a g[rea]t pity we had to do it all under our breaths so as not to wake father! There was a great glow for about 1/2 hr & we watched it die down. Then we were so uplifted that we adjourned to Percy's fire and had a most festive beano with cigarettes & Raid chocolate and sweet biscuits. The crowning touch being Fred arrayed in Percy's Cassock for warmth! He looked exactly like a verger. And so to bed at 2am feeling that early service was much too near, & so it was!

[p3]

We thought that it might be at Tollesbury & we weren't far out as it was actually at Wigborough, between Wigborough & the Wigborough creek.

What apparently actually happened was that the engine began to fail at Tiptree so a Tiptree man told me this morning. We spotted that ourselves last night more or less. And it had to come down in the very rural reaches of Little Wigborough, only missing a cottage by 40 yds. It looks as if it had only missed it by a hairsbreadth. Then they set fire to it themselves which is what we saw. One man was burnt to death, but 21 were unhurt. *[Perhaps this was a rumour at the time – none of the crewmen of L33 were killed.]* Imagine the feelings of the cottage woman. She apparently relieved them by making tea for the whole crew! Whether at the point of the bayonet or the nose of a revolver history doesn't say, but tea they had. Then the 21 Germans wandered disconsolately along the road till they found a Special Constable, & to him they surrendered!!! Just think if it had been Percy or Douglass! What would you do with 21 Germans at 2 o'clock in the morning? What he did do, I don't know, but I think they were interned in Mersea until the military arrived from Colchester and took them over!

[p4]

The Zep. is a vast monster, lying in its naked framework of girders, across 2 fields & a land between them. Parts of it look absolutely unhurt, but of course the gas bag is all burnt and the bottom machinery part is all smashed on the ground, & its back is broken & bent in several places, so that it looks like a gigantic antediluvian reptile of sorts, with its nose posed in the air, & its tail intact behind. I tried to make a very rough sketch of its shape as it looked from the stubblefield, which was the nearest we were allowed to go, about a field off.

It was something like the overleaf but of course all the papers will have lovely photographs of it I expect. No one was allowed to go nearer than a field off: it was being guarded by a cordon of soldiers so one couldn't see any details of where the guns had been or the propeller or anything. But the mere sight of the huge reptile, all gleaming girders in the bright sun was extraordinarily thrilling. And our aeroplanes were brightly buzzing in the blue sky over head. A dazzling day & a very happy heterogeneous crowd of country people, mixed with Colchester of course, all taking their Sunday matins in that pleasant form. A good many [p5] soldiers and officers of course from Colchester, with their womenfolk & I saw one old General & lots of red tabs prancing [?] about on the stubble with the common herd. It was Fred & I who swelled the godless crowd. I persuaded him to come with my in the morning. Daisy & Nettie have gone this afternoon, but I expect the few hundreds will have swelled to thousands this afternoon. It was such a jolly local crowd, gazing at their own Zeppelin, none of y[ou]r hoards from London. Our Policemen got near & picked up a bit of the burnt gas bag covering and gave it to George

whom I met on the field & he gave a bit to me. It is very fine canvas with a silky sheen on it.

I can't tell you how jolly it felt to look & know that our beloved little sea creek corner of Essex has at last come into its own in the Zeppelin line, after having impotently heard them come & go all this long time & Little Wigborough of all places! Dear Mrs Theobald was calling here yesterday afternoon. She little knew what a reluctant & impressive involuntary guest the parish was going to harbour in a few hours time! Her own glebe land as a matter of fact!

Later

D & N had the time of their lives, as by the time they got there, it had developed into a grand Derby Day with thousands & all the nobility and gentry and the populace jammed into Wigborough's narrow lanes. They'll tell you about it.

[Written vertically up the left side of the page]:

I haven't enjoyed myself so much since the war began! Will tell you about it later, D.

[p7]

Do you realise that within 5 minutes we saw two Zeppelins go to a burning death, we rocking wildly from side to side of the house. The ~~Leytonstone Bittericay~~ Wickford one looked just like a harvest moon behind the fir trees & of course didn't make the wonderful flooding of red light that the Wigboro' one did, illuminating the whole countryside for miles around.

What has been so extraordinarily funny, is that parallel with and sandwiched in with all this wild Zeppelin excitement, were our Pilgrims, peacefully going on with the Pilgrimage of Prayer & holding dear little prayer meetings on the heath, all mixed up with aeroplanes buzzing like bees over head, motors, & motorcycles, & cycles all tearing past on their way to Wigboro', & their congregation bustling back from the Zeppelin, breathlessly trying to be in at the death at the Prayer meeting too.

I can't begin about the Pilgrims now. I'm dying of delayed sleep & I go to school tomorrow! Haven't given it a thought!

Love & kisses

Please send this on to Kate as soon as possible.

Rosy