

*Letter written by Alfred Rix Habershon to his mother Mary Gidley Habershon, Parkfield Rd, Rotherham, Yorks*

SS Nederland

1.30pm Friday 1 July 1898

Dear Mother,

I am at present beginning this letter, as you see on the steamship; and behold, you were wrong for I am not seasick though I own it is calm - & extremely hot the sun blazing down nearly melting us. Excuse the writing, the ship although it is calm rocks somewhat.

I may as well begin where I left you at Sheffield. The carriage was very crowded to Kettering but from there it was less so but extremely close, although we had both windows down.

In London the trains fitted splendidly & I reached Grandma's about 4.30 having eaten all your sandwiches & strawberries. Reaching 46 we e'en had tea & afterwards Uncle Joe showed me my camera with which I am more than satisfied (look here I'm going to try pencil). The legs are splendidly light & show no signs of weakness being quite firm. Uncle seems to have had some bother in getting the right film carriers as these dark slides are very small, but I think he has managed to get them right now. In fact they work quite well. This morning we rose at six (I slept rather badly) breakfast 6.30 cab to Catford from there we booked to St Pauls. (By the way I have only had to pay Uncle Joe £36-8/3. I delivered your note to Grandma all right.) Excuse these interpolations - St Pauls to Queenboro' was a good quick journey about an hour & half. Which passed very quickly. From there we got onboard and started with very little delay. We started badly with our cameras; Uncle thought we had got a splendid picture of a yacht and barge and pressed the spring but later he found the cap had been on all the time and that he had not exposed. I on the other hand in attempting to get mine ready for a snap shot, exposed whilst pointing at my feet. I shall develop this and have it printed, my first attempt with new camera. Since then however I have taken two snaps shots of the vessel we are on, looking down towards the stern. We passed a warship as we came out of Queenbro' & also since then we have passed a torpedo boat going along at a good speed in opposite direction to us, this had 4 funnels.

3.15 - I have just taken two more snapshots one of a Dutch sailor & one of a fishing smack. The sea is much calmer the wind having gone down. We can now see Ostend & one or two other towns on the coast. I have not had to wear my coat yet as it is quite hot.

3.45 - We can now distinctly see the sand dunes which protect the coast.

5.0 – We land. I snap shoot the crowd of porters etc. waiting on shore on the quay. (This is being written in the train). We go through the custom house our baggage however is not opened. Then we go on to the refreshment room & have tea. Thence to the train scarcely any time lost and we start.

I gave up writing in the train; I am now writing at Baden-Baden. But I may as well go on where I left off. The compartment we got into at Flushing was the very last in the train. The whole carriage however was connected by a corridor though the corridor did not extend to the rest of the train. The carriage & seats were very comfortable & large. We had the compartment to ourselves except for a German traveller who could speak English quite well. Uncle Joe carried on a conversation with this chap & we found that he was a native of Hamburg; he talked in the most “fire-eating” fashion about Germany being able to conquer England whenever they liked. He also informed us that learning Latin & Greek was an utter waste of time and that we English ought to spend the time learning German instead. Uncle however informed him that he got his living by teaching these languages. This chap got out in about an hour & then we had the compartment to ourselves. The railway was only a single line of narrow & very badly laid and the carriage rocked immensely, largely because of the carriage being very wide in proportion to the width of the gauge. The guards who come round to see your tickets etc. are most polite. A fresh guard appears to join the train every two or three stations on. The guard going away always comes down to say “Goodbye” to you. In fact we got quite used to the guard coming down with a benevolent smile to say “Goodbye”. It seemed most ridiculous & we roared with laughter every time the guard had gone. Fancy a guard on an English train going all the way down wishing people Goodbye. We only had a few sandwiches & biscuits with us & we had eaten scarcely anything all day. We therefore meant to have dinner at Göch the frontier place & custom house station. But when the train stopped at this place we saw no platform & thus concluded that that we were only waiting for a signal and so we did not get out and so missed our dinner. Well to make up we fed on the rest of the biscuits and chocolate. There was no chance of anything, we knew, until we got to Mainz, 5.0 o’clock next morning. We reached Cologne just after midnight and changed into the train which took us as far as Mainz. The first stopping place after Cologne is Bonn and the only other person in our carriage besides ourselves got out and we were both able to lie down. This Bonn is a university town and in the station three drunk students were kicking up a fearful din in the otherwise silent night. Soon after Bonn I dropped asleep (say at 1.30 in the morning) and I did not wake again until half past four. By doing this I missed all the best part of the Rhine Uncle says. However I was very tired so I expect the sleep did me more good than the scenery would have done. I forgot to say that on entering Germany, that is at Göch, we skipped one hour as the German time is that much later than the Dutch. All through Holland we had been coming through country quite dead flat with sort of toy-looking trees scattered about in perfectly straight rows. The railway seemed to go on endlessly in one long straight line with no curves. When we got into Germany the stations began to assume larger proportions, in fact I was surprised at number of really large covered stations. I have no time to write more just now as I am going to bed so I will leave off at Bonn. I have arrived safely at Baden as you see at about 1.20 this morning and I have been sleeping the greater part of the afternoon and so have no time for more today. I will post this much on therefore.

Much love to yourself and everyone from your loving son,

Alfred