

## 4 Constrained Mobilities: Epistolary Parenting

### From the Trenches to Cheruvally

‘I love you darling sweetheart,’ writes Frank Hawkings (letter, 21 October 1921), ‘and my one tantalising dream, is to have your sweet softness for my own to caress and kiss, to hear your voice in the bungalow, to lay my cheek against your hair and to kiss your eyes.’ He is writing from an unexpected place, Cheruvally Estate, Travancore, to Dorothy Cummings, his fiancée, whom he had met while on leave from the front during the First World War (Figure 4.1). He has been working on this rubber plantation in South India for two years, writing ardently to his fiancée to join him. For her, of course, this is no easy decision. They met during the First World War, and became engaged soon after, but now she has to decide whether to follow this ardent young man to India, to leave a comfortable, semi-rural middle-class life in the pretty riverside village of Topsham in Devon (southwest England) where she grew up, to embark on the long sea journey to India, and to enter a life very different from everything she has known. Sitting in the heat of India, Frank keeps on writing.

Still 16, but lying about his age, Frank Hawkings had left school and joined the Queen Victoria’s Rifles (QVR) as a private in 1914 (see Figure 4.2). Soon he was experiencing the grim, cold, wet life of the trenches. As Frank described his early introduction to winter in the trenches near Wulverghem (West Flanders, Belgium) on 1 December 1914:

it is beastly cold and wet and our feet are frozen. We are looking forward to the night. We can then get out and run about a bit and so get up the