

Aunt Rachel's letters 1944

Newcastle-on-Tyne

Jan 15th 1944

Dear Family,

I hope you all had a happy Xmas wherever you were. I had quite a nice time though it won't make exciting reading as it was exactly the same as last year – Xmas Eve to Stocksfield to Cos. Catherine Hodgkin, Xmas Day with her, and back to N'cle in the evening to dinner with the Hills (Jessie Wishart's friends), and the New Year weekend I again spent with Vera Welton (a colleague) in her country cottage at Humsbough on the North Tyne.

Cousin C was as kind as ever, and I was pleased to find her better than last year, when she seemed to be failing rapidly. I was waked with my usual stocking full of odds and ends and given more presents at dinner time. She could not, of course, buy things on that scale now but she is an inveterate hoarder, and must have an inexhaustible glory-hole from which she extracts things as she gives to dozens of people in the same way – mostly odds and ends picked up on one of her travels years ago, and she can give you in detail the history of everything and the occasion where she bought it. She has a most remarkable memory for a woman of 80.

Shopping was difficult this year, and I confined mine to a few books. Children's toys were a problem to parents (I believe it is just the same with you) – very scarce and shoddy and at terrific prices.

Second-hand shops did a good trade in shabby old things, but they were really better value.

Many rag toys were produced out of scraps.

We were afraid we should have nothing for children's Xmas trees at the RVI, but things rolled in well – golliwogs, stuffed rabbits etc, and used toys.

The New Year weekend was pleasant – we just lazed and went for walks alternately.

It has been amazingly mild again this winter – so far -even milder than last year when we did have some snow at New Year. We have had none yet. The Clerk of Weather must be on our side and be helping our fuel economy effort.

There is a sense of tension about, waiting for the second front to open up. Everything seems set for the invasion and we hear many hints of preparations being made.

The Russians keep up their amazing push. We pound away at Germany's heart from the air, and the Navy has dealt effectively with the U-boats (to say nothing of the Scharnhorst), so all looks bright. Things seem to be hanging fire a bit in Italy, but I expect the weather, in that difficult country, is the cause. It is a great relief that Churchill is recovering, we can't spare him.

I only have one room now, but it is fixed up quite nicely as a bed-sit, and I find I fit in quite nicely. In fact, it has great advantages, as it is less to keep clean and, in the cold weather is nice and warm for undressing and also for reading in bed. They wanted my bedroom for a prospective maid, but needless to say, the maid has not eventuated, and to my horror my land-lady and her husband moved in there. Every sound can be heard through the communicating door, so if I sit up late I have an anxious time trying to creep into bed quietly and turn off the light without a click, as she watches the amount of electricity used most carefully.

I go to work these mornings by the light of the setting moon, and I never get over the oddness of it. Very beautiful it is, shining through the bare trees in the park I cross.

Much love to you all,

Rachel

Aunt Rachel's letters 1944

Newcastle-on-Tyne

March 15th, 1944

Dear Family,

I see, on referring to my last letter book, that I have treated you rather worse than usual lately so here goes, without any further delay.

We have had an exceptionally mild winter – the second in succession, which is lucky with fuel not too plentiful and miners on strike. I have never felt cold all the winter. We had one week lately of constant snow falls, but the ground must have been warm, as it hardly lay at all. Now we are enjoying all the usual thrills of spring – crocuses, snowdrops, blackbirds warbling, lighter evenings, and real warmth in the sun.

I have been awfully fit this year and feel very cheerful – no colds or flu. I don't know whether it is due to the injections I had or absence of germs.

Last weekend our staff went in a body to a Massage Congress in Leeds. They have one in London every year, but lately there has been a stirring of life in the provinces as they feel they do not have sufficient say with the Central Board, and this congress was a new venture. We had 3 days of lectures, demonstrations etc – all very interesting. A few of them we cut so as to combine some pleasure with the work. We did ourselves well, deciding that as time was short and we were working hard we had better be comfortable, so we went to the best hotel and wallowed in luxury. It was great fun while it lasted. Good food, private bathrooms to every bed-room, and lots of sights to watch in the hotel lounge.

We didn't have much time to see the sights, but it seemed a fine town with wide streets and good buildings, if somewhat grubby with the smuts floating around from the factory chimneys.

Otherwise life has been uneventful lately. I have been to a few pictures, "The Four Feathers" was very good.

I have just had my bicycle done up ready for the summer and have been invited to a country cottage for Easter with the Hills.

The other day a Miss Traill came to the hospital to see me. She comes from Melbourne and is a cousin of the various families in Sydney. She had heard of me from a mutual acquaintance. She has been here since 1938 and is spending the war with a friend on a farm, where she works hard. She is elderly and, I hear, an artist, and she seemed very nice. I am going to spend a weekend on the farm sometime soon.

Oranges and lemons have been arriving here lately from Sicily and are warmly welcomed. We have had 2lb of sweet oranges each and one of lemons and Seville oranges have been sold unrationed. There is not so much demand for them on account of a shortage of sugar for jam making, but I find they are quite nice eaten like grapefruit for breakfast, with a spoonful of sugar on them overnight.

Well no more news. Dear love to you all,
Rachel

Aunt Rachel's letters 1944

Humsbough, Northumberland

May 7th, 1944

Dear Family,

I am having another of my very nice weekends in the country with the Weltons. The country looks just glorious and the woods are full of bluebells and primroses and the gardens are a picture.

As I told Thea in a letter a week or so ago, I have just made the decision to leave the R.V.I. It will be quite a wrench to leave as I have been very happy there, but I think I've been there long enough and should have a change and get some new experience. I feel very wedded to the North and have all my belongings here, so if possible, I shall still make it my centre and keep some sort of room that I can return to from time to time. I am not sure what my next move will be but am thinking of getting some experience in one of the hospitals where the new scheme of rehabilitation is in vogue. In our hospital there are too many patients and not enough space to specialise in it, but there are many convalescent hospitals where the progress of the patient on a plan, and he goes through more and more vigorous exercise until he is fit to return to work.

I don't know that I'll like it very much as class work doesn't appeal to me much, but I feel I would like to know something about it and now seems to be a good time to make a move.

I have just been listening to Mr Curtin giving the BBC postscript after the Sunday night news. It is an item for which they always try to pick someone of note or something exceptionally interesting. I was very favourably impressed with him. He sounds straight-forward and unpretentious and seems to have the right ideas. I hope great things for the future of all will come out of this conference.

We await the start of the inevitable invasion with much tension, dreading it, but longing to get it over. All plans for the future which involve travelling are very tentatively made. I think it cannot be long now. Mercifully, we have no qualms as to the result eventually.

I had a lovely little holiday at Easter, 4 days in the country at the Hill's cottage. It was in quite a wild bit of moor-land 8 miles beyond the little town of Rothbury, which is in the hills north of N'cle. It is easily accessible by bus in peace time, but now they don't run so it is not so easy. However, we were able to get that rare treasure, a taxi (from Rothbury), going there and returning we spent all day over the walk, taking our meals with us, and it was very enjoyable.

Cousin Jean Fowler died a fortnight ago. Her heart had been weak for some time. I was very nervous about her undertaking that trip to Scotland with me last year, but all went well, and it was a very happy holiday for us both.

She has been very kind to me, and I shall miss her. I was always fond of her. I enjoyed her keen wit, and her sharp tongue hid a very warm heart.

We had a successful effort last week to raise money for "Salute the Soldier" week. The Massage Dept raised over £400 in a week in Savings Certificates (from patients, staff etc), and made a straight out £150 with a Bring and Buy stall and tea one afternoon after work. It was very little trouble. With the money we bought certificates which will eventually go to the R.V.I. when they revert to cash. People brought groceries and other food stuffs, clothes, toys etc. and not a thing was left on the stall.

My room looks nice with bowls of spring leaves which I brought back from the country. It also has a grand new carpet. My landlady went to a sale and gave £45 for a carpet (second-hand). When she got it home it wouldn't fit in any of her rooms and had to be put in mine, it being the biggest in the

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house. It looks nice but I am terrified of spilling something on it when cooking on the gas ring so have papers spread wherever it might get damaged which rather spoil the effect.

Well, I am only drivelling on, so I'll stop.

Love to you all,

Rachel

Aunt Rachel's letters 1944

Newcastle-on-Tyne

June 6th, 1944

Dear Family,

I have just come back from a nice weekend spent on a farm near Alnwick. I have mentioned an Australian Miss Traill whom I met and who is at present living with a friend, a Miss Robertson, who owns the farm. It was interesting as well as a pleasant rest. It consisted of about 1000 acres (I think) of grazing land stocked with Black Angus cattle and little black-faced sheep. The latter are very wild. When I tried to touch the wool of a pet lamb it leapt to the other side of the stable, although it was in the middle of taking its milk calmly out of a bottle. Of course, at present there are many acres under cultivation compulsorily, growing wheat.

The house was very old and comfortable, with the usual solidly-built out-houses clustered around it, built of the same stone as the house and making an attractive picture. The Northumberland farms are particularly cosy-looking, as they are built in a circle or square so as, with the addition of a few stone walls, to enclose all the yards for animals, hay-stacks etc. They are usually built of grey stone here and look very nice against the background of very green fields and hills. It is funny how the way each county runs to a pattern, according, I suppose, to the material available and local conditions. In Durham, just south a little, all the farms are white-washed stone.

They have a nice idea in many country houses, and this was one of them, of dividing the garden from the fields by a ditch instead of a fence, so that the flower beds and lawns run on, apparently unbroken, into the fields.

I had a lazy time and as it was quite hot got thoroughly sunburned and midge-bitten, and I ate an enormous amount of cream and eggs which seemed too good to be true.

I had a game of golf the other day; the first I have had in England. We started out at 8pm and played till 10. I seemed to have forgotten some of my old bad habits and had acquired a few new ones. The first 2 balls I drove off, having been in my bag for 5 years, flew into pieces, the skin going in one direction and the core in another. Fortunately, the next few hung together, as new ones are unprocurable.

I knew that Margery Young (Milong) had married somewhere in the North of England, but had no idea she was living only about 10 miles out of Newcastle in the little coastal town of Blyth, until I heard from Thea who had met Mrs Young in Perth.

So I got in touch with her and we have met several times. She is a nice girl, very natural and simple, rather like her mother, I think. I hadn't seen her since she was 10, so should never have recognised her. She is married to a clergyman who was out in Aust. as a Bush Brother. He seems very nice and she helps him very whole-heartedly in the parish work. It is a drab little mining and ship-building town; its only attraction is a nice little beach which is now shut off with barbed wire.

My plans for the next couple of months are now a little more concrete. I am leaving the R.V.I. at the end of June. Then I shall go to London for a week or so's holiday with Susie. For the last half of July, I am going for 2 weeks to a miner's Rehabilitation Convalescent Home in the country a few miles north of Newcastle. There I hope to combine some new experience with a pleasant country life. At the beginning of August, I am going for a fortnight to a maternity hospital in Newcastle to brush up a little ante- and post-natal work. Then I think I shall have a week in Scotland.

After that I have no plans but expect to have no difficulty in getting holiday jobs, or a more permanent job if I wish. It will be a wrench to leave R.V.I. but I am already looking forward to the change and the variety. I shall keep a room in N'cle as a resting place if possible.

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Of course, the invasion and its attendant complications may alter all my plans as travelling may be impossible.

It is grand news that the allies have entered Rome and what a relief that it has not had to be smashed up in the process. Our forces are doing a great job.

Love to you all, Rachel

July 8th Well the fight is now on in earnest! The initial invasion has succeeded wonderfully well. May it continue! The R.V.I. was evacuated of all possible civilian cases last week and we now await casualties.

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Aunt Rachel's letters 1944

Hartford Hall, Bedlington
Northumberland
July 25th

Dear Family,

I seem to have had so much moving about and changing occupations involving study etc, that letters have been neglected, and as usual my poor family comes off worst of all.

Well, since I wrote last on June 6th many things have happened. The invasion pushes on in the right direction, the Russians are within a few miles of East Prussia, the Italian campaign goes on well and now there are signs of disruption inside Germany which may have good consequences for us.

The only not so good news is that of the flying-bombs. It is hard to realise up here where it is so peaceful what they must be enduring in the south, but I believe, it is pretty awful. They say that the strain is even greater than in the Blitz, as they come incessantly day and night, and with very little warning. People seem to have settled down to a life of sleeping in shelters or under the table at night, and by day going about their business dodging the 'doodle-bugs', prepared to duck at any minute.

I never went to London after all. Susie had been writing discouragingly for some time, saying that it was no place for a holiday, but I still thought I'd risk it. However, the day before I was to leave, she telegraphed "Strongly advise you not to come". So, I didn't.

I filled in a little while very happily just pottering about at home, and then joined a friend and went to Seahouses, a little fishing village up the coast a bit. There was a nice beach, not wired off (at least, it had been, but Italian prisoners were even then bust cutting away the barbed wire, which was a good sign). We didn't swim, though we had gone prepared, as it was pretty cold. (We haven't had our ration of sunshine this summer – only 2 hot days so far and week after week of grey skies.) We bicycled to Bamburgh, a few miles further up the coast – a delightful village with a magnificent castle (still habitable) perched up on a cliff overlooking the town and the sea. It was from an island just off here that Grace Darling and her father set off to rescue the survivors from a wreck. Her grave is at the Bamburgh church. A few miles further north is Holy Island, the seat of Christianity in England, where the first missionaries landed and established a church and a monastery. We hoped to go there, but the tides were unfavourable.

I left the R.V.I. with many regrets. They have been awfully nice to me there and I had become very attached to the staff and the students. They gave me a grand farewell and presented me with a very nice watercolour of a part of Newcastle.

It is usual for the staff to give a small present to a departing colleague, so I was not unprepared for that – Miss Nicholson usually steps into our little staff room just before we go on duty on the last day and makes the presentation. But I was stunned when I was told to go to the students' common room at five to two, and there were the whole 50 students drawn up and the staff. Miss N and the head-student made me a nice little speech, to which I had to reply to the best of my ability. It was rather overwhelming but very nice of them. The reason was that I had latterly had a good deal to do with the students, and also, I think, it was a gesture to my country, which I appreciated.

Now I am at a Miners' Rehabilitation Centre for a fortnight and am having a most interesting time. They take 40 men here when they leave hospital, and during their convalescence they have a combined holiday and period of intense physical training to get them ready to return to work. They have massage and whatever they require in that line, progressively vigorous exercise classes, and

suitable games and occupational therapy, filling in an 8-hour day. Apart from that they are free to amuse themselves but must come back to sleep. They enjoy it thoroughly and are like a lot of kids together. It is a large country house with a beautiful garden and is ideal for the purpose. The Miners' Welfare Commission draws a little from every ton of coal mined and has lots of money to spend, so the place is equipped with every desirable apparatus for treatment and sport. It is the ideal way to convalesce. I feel it is due to them, for when you see them playing about in their shorts and singlets, you realise that, though tough and wiry, they are a pale and puny lot who have never had their share of sunshine and good food. Theirs' is a dangerous job. Many of the cases are fractured spines, and all are accidents due to falls of stone or something of that sort. Yesterday my job was to take a party of "early legs" bicycling and today to take "advanced backs" down by the river to saw enormous logs with a cross-cut saw.

Just before coming here I had a hurried trip down to the Midlands, to Nottingham, to attend a weekend course in class leadership, which I thought would be helpful for here. It was useful and interesting but very strenuous and the travelling was awful. It took me all day to get there though the distance isn't great, and of course the trains were very crowded.

My time here has been as good as a holiday – just enough work to avoid boredom and most comfortable conditions of living and beautiful surroundings. And the food! I had forgotten what really good food can be like! The garden provides peaches, grapes, raspberries, tomatoes etc galore and the cooking is first class.

I have just received a lovely batch of letters from you all.

Love, Rachel

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16 Eslington Tce, Jesmond, Newcastle

Aug 17th 1944

Dear Family,

Not much news as far as my small affairs are concerned, but I may as well get a letter started. The war news continues to be splendid on all fronts, and the new one launched yesterday in the south of France should hurry things up.

Mr Churchill even allowed himself to foretell a not-too-far-distant end to it all! I fancy the resistance may stiffen as we approach Germany itself, but I don't see how they can hold out long against the battering from all sides they will get.

We have been expecting the long-threatened rocket bombs, but they haven't arrived yet. I imagine the air force is doing some good work at their source. I hope they don't eventuate, as they sound much more unpleasant than the flying-bombs and they are bad enough. There are any number of evacuees up here from the South, mostly mothers and small children. They are billeted with house holders or empty houses are commandeered, furnished with bare essentials and handed over to several families.

I was going to spend next weekend with Marjorie Mann (Young), but she now has a house full, so I am going for the day instead. At present the billeting is voluntary, but a census has been taken of all unused rooms and it will be compulsory if necessary.

When I last wrote I think I was at Hartford Hall, re-educating miners backs and knees. After that I spent a fortnight at the Newcastle General Hospital in the Maternity Unit, brushing up my knowledge in that line and adding to it considerably. It was a great change and very interesting. The R.V.I. had no such department. I was not paid so I could not have done it for very long, but it was quite worth it. I just went and came as I liked, gave the mothers their exercises and watched anything interesting.

Now I am on quite a different line. I am doing Vera Welton's private practise for a couple of weeks while she is on holiday. Her rooms are next door to my digs, so it is very convenient. I can sit at home and watch for the patients to arrive. It is just pleasantly busy and there is a certain amount of travelling about to patient's houses which makes for variety.

At the end of September, I am having a fortnight's holiday, staying at the Manse in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, where I went with Cousin Jean last year.

Then I am going to Hexham Emergency Hospital for 6 weeks while the staff there have holidays. That sounds very strenuous but interesting. They are nearly all wounded from Normandy and the present staff is quite inadequate to deal with them, so they work long hours and just treat as many as possible and leave the rest. They are trying to get extra workers but, so far without success. The catch about it is that it is a train journey of an hour, and longer on a non-express train to Hexham, but for a limited time I shan't mind that.

Love to all. Rachel

Huntly, Scotland

Sept 10th, 1944

Dear Family,

Here I am back in Scotland having a very pleasant, restful holiday. I am staying at the Manse where I came for a few days with Cousin Jean last year, and I decided not to rush about and fit in as much as possible this year but to spend a fortnight in the one place. My host and hostess are extremely kind and I am rapidly gaining weight on a diet of delicious 'cookies' under which heading come every imaginable of bun, scone, pancake etc.

This is a very clean-looking little country town with rolling country all around., every inch of it cultivated and the harvest in full swing. The people are very agreeable and have the prettiest voices. I went to a concert last night and heard the bagpipes skurling (couldn't distinguish the tune), and Loch Lomond, Ye Banks and Braes etc sung as they should be sung.

I went to Aberdeen for a day's shopping and sightseeing. It is a beautiful town with wide streets and fine buildings. Everything is built of the local granite which is a silvery-grey with flecks of quartz of something in it. When the sun shines the flecks sparkle and the whole town looks quite fairy-like.

I was amused, on walking through one of the parks to see 2 old men playing draughts under an archway. The draught-board was marked out on the ground and was about 8 or 10 feet square, and the enormous draughts were moved with sticks like boathooks. Quite a lot of passers-by had stopped like me, to watch the game, which is evidently quite a feature of the town.

The Gallery has a fine collection of copies of ancient statuary, many of the originals of which I had seen in Europe and was pleased to see again.

I borrowed a bicycle and saw something of Aberdeenshire, and one day had a trip to the coast where the scenery was fine.

In one tiny village I found an excellent tailor with a good selection of nice-quality woollies, so I had a skirt made and got as many odds and ends as my coupons would run to.

I had been trying for 6 months to buy a pair of ordinary tan walking shoes but the scanty supplies that come in were always sold out by the time I could get to the shops, so I tried the village shops in Huntly, after finding Aberdeen hopeless too. To my surprise they produced several possible pairs and said, "Shall we send them to the Manse for you to try on at your leisure?"! Such a change from queuing! In fact, I found small town shopping very successful altogether and came home with some Kirby-gips, hairpins and other rarities.

It is now, by the way, Oct 12th. This letter seemed to get stuck halfway.

Coming home I spent a night in Edinburgh, which I always like. It was terribly full and I had trouble to get a bed; after writing to quite a number of hotels who didn't even answer my letters, I was glad to get a bed at a GFS hostel, which was pretty rough but better than the station waiting-room. There are always crowds of troops on leave here, and all the summer they have had the nice idea of having a band playing in the afternoon and evening in the park which, as most of you know, runs along the valley between Princes Street and the Castle hill. There are seats all along the slopes, and a flat space at the bottom where the young people dance. It gives them cheap entertainment and a festive air to the town.

I went to the zoo during a spare hour or two, but was disappointed in it after ours, though I am told it is better in peace time.

On my return 3 weeks ago, I started working at Hexham Emergency Hospital, relieving while the members of the staff go on holidays in turn. Hexham is a nice little town with a fine old abbey, west of Newcastle along the Tyne. It takes about an hour by train to get there.

The Emergency Hospital is one of the hundreds of wartime hospitals that have sprung up like mushrooms all over England. A collection of long huts connected together by concrete paths, roofed

but otherwise open (the passages I mean, not the huts). Each ward has 45 beds, very close together and of the rather flimsy, folding ARP pattern, such as we used, and complained about, fire watching. The hospital is staffed by trained sisters and staff-nurses, VADs and Nursing Auxiliaries. Considering that the latter two haven't had much training they do a very good job, and the nursing seems quite efficient. There is pleasant, slightly informal atmosphere about the whole place.

We have 5 or 6 hundred casualties there, mostly from Normandy on or about D-Day. They are a cheerful, likeable and rather pathetic lot, hopping about on their crutches or lying in bed earnestly making felt toys, slippers etc. They are all orthopaedic cases and, having had emergency treatment in France, have been drafted from receiving base hospitals in the South of England.

They are nearly all in need of physiotherapy, and the massage staff of 5 is hopelessly inadequate to deal with them. They are hoping to get 4 students from the RVI when they qualify in November. We do our best to give each man the most essential part of the treatment he needs, but we wish it could be more. However, they seem to do quite well on the whole. Thanks to penicillin the wounds are nearly all beautifully clean and heal rapidly.

Of course I find the life strenuous but am standing up to it alright. I leave at 7.45am, work like blazes all day till about 6 or sometimes 7, getting home at 8 or 9pm. If I particularly want to go out in the evening, which I do about once a week, I just stop at five and try to make it up the next day. Two nights a week I go to Haydon Bridge, a little village about 10 miles from Hexham, where Betty Phillipson, one of the staff, has a tiny weekend cottage. It is a nice little change and saves a lot of travelling.

I only took the post for 2 months but may stay on a little longer till they are settled with more staff. I don't think I shall stay all winter unless badly needed as it is such a long cold journey. Needless to say, I don't have much time for writing, and my Xmas mail to Australia has suffered badly. If this reaches you at the right time, I wish you all a Happy Xmas and hope I may be with you by the next one.

The black-out has been considerably relieved which has eased the discomfort of the coming winter. It is strange to walk along the street and see chinks of light everywhere, and semi-transparent curtains; also, to walk along confidently and briskly without fear of kerbs or lamp posts. You can now welcome a visitor without turning out all the lights before opening the front door and greeting them in the black dark!

The war news continues grand. The stiffened resistance on approaching German soil was only to be expected and I hope will soon be overcome. I daresay Mr Churchill and Stalin together in Moscow, are hatching a grand knock-out blow. And in the Pacific things seem to be working up for intensified action, too.

I have just been reading an interesting book called 'The Germans' by Emil Ludwig, himself a German, though I imagine from the freedom of his writing, out of Germany now. He makes a historical survey of them from the days of Caesar, assessing the good and bad traits in their national character very fairly, and showing the same characteristics appearing again and again from then till now.

Which reminds me, I have had 10 German patients in the Prisoners of War ward. They are quite polite and amiable on the surface, and we avoid the subject of the War.

Going to Scotland I had the misfortune to lose my camera in the train. A few of us got into an empty carriage when the train came to Newcastle, but were turned out of it a few minutes later as it was being detached from the train. In the flurry of changing in a hurry I left it in the rack, and although I telegraphed from Edinburgh a few hours later, when a search was made, all that could be found was the empty case. Ironically, I had just got some films after being several years without any!

Love to you all, Rachel.

Aunt Rachel's letters 1944

Newcastle-on-Tyne

Dec 3rd 1944

Dear Family,

Not much news this time, but I mustn't let the gap grow too large. I am still at Hexham Emergency Hospital and am staying there till the end of the year. After that I have no plans, but if nothing suitable has turned up for me about here I shall take a few weeks in London and look around for temporary work there. So far, I have been lucky in finding jobs within reach of home (such as it is), and I don't want to move my belongings yet.

I heard from Gwen Roberts lately. Their house had been damaged by a V2 and they had had to turn out of it for some weeks. The old people were rather shaken but are now alright and back again.

Work has here been much easier lately as all the staff are back from holidays. It is a very nice place to work and I shall be quite sorry to leave. We are now working quite reasonable hours and I usually get home between 6.30 and 7. It is cold running from ward to ward in the open, but doubtless healthy, as we all seem to survive it alright. In the New Year 4 of the ex-students are coming onto the staff, so I am just staying till they come.

For Xmas I expect I shall go to Cousin Catherine Hodgkin at Stocksfield as usual.

I have given up going to the little cottage at Haydon Bridge twice a week with Betty Phillipson as it was getting very damp, and a fire in it twice a week was not enough to counteract it. I used to think the English fussed overmuch about the airing of beds, houses, linen etc before I realised how the perpetual damp seeped into everything.

I wrote to Australia House again lately asking about the possibility of a passage home at the end of next year. They replied that it was too far ahead to make any promises, but they would do what they could when the time came, which was better than I expected as I had heard most discouraging accounts of the years it was going to take to get everyone home (2 years after the end of hostilities with Japan!).

It has not been terribly cold yet. It is too much to expect a 3rd mild winter running, but at any rate we shall be over the shortest days before it starts.

The old Lloyd cousins, Cha, Jessie and Julia are very excited as their sister Constance, the artist, who has lived in Paris for years and was caught there by the war, has just returned to England. They have had no letter from her for years, but heard occasionally through the Red Cross that she was alright.

There seems to be a bit of a holdup in Holland just now. I'm afraid the Rhine and the Siegfried line are going to take a bit of crossing, and it must be mortal cold for our poor lads fighting in the mud and slush!

Happy New Year to you all - Rachel.