

Rachel's Letters 1940

40 Queensborough Terrace
BAYSWATER W2

January 8, 1940

Dear Family,

I have been back in London for a few days and am busy packing up my belongings to move over to Helen Taylor's lodging at Earls Court. It will be a change to try living on the other side of Hyde Park.

I spent nearly a fortnight at Windsor - the weather was cold, and it was a very comfortable place to be with steam heating throughout. The snow lay on the ground for about a week and the air was crisp and frosty and it was lovely for walking.

I used to walk a lot in Windsor Great Park, which begins at the Castle and covers miles of country. I often saw herds of deer which seemed to be finding something to nibble under the snow. As a matter of fact, it doesn't seem to hurt the grass which appears as green as ever when the snow disappears. There is a fine avenue called the Long Walk which runs as straight as a die for 3 miles with 2 rows of magnificent trees on either side of it. At the end of the walk at the top of a steep rise there is a huge equestrian statue of George III in copper. No cars are allowed in the park, so it is a peaceful place for walking, and everyone takes their dogs there.

I am amused at the way dogs are accepted as a matter of course at the hotels here, and always come into the dining room to meals with their owners. At Windsor we had a French bulldog, a wire-haired terrier, a dachshund and greyhound and strange to relate there were no fights!

I went to see Eton Chapel one day. It is beautifully proportioned and has some lovely glass windows. Henry VI when living at Windsor Castle decided to build a school down on the river flat and designed the Chapel himself. The present Chapel is only what was to be the choir in the original plan, but Henry went out of his mind and it was never finished, but what there is is very beautiful. While renovating some time ago they found some old frescos on the walls behind the paneling and they have now been restored. At present, though, they are all boarded up and any other treasures are stored away in cases.

I went one day to see the picture "The Lion Has Wings". It is very good. A picture-producer and his wife were staying at the hotel and they told me that some years ago they were all asked to make some propaganda films. This one was not considered very successful and was never shown. When the war came, however, it was rehashed and brought up-to-date and has been quite a success.

The sales are all on in London and there are many temptations. It is hard to decide whether to buy things I don't really need at the moment with a view to storing them for the future when they will be dearer and perhaps unprocurable. Woolen materials they say will be very much affected and shoes

Yesterday Helen and I went to the Middle Temple Church (it is the lawyers' own special church in the Law Courts). It is an interesting and unusual Church with a cheerful ceiling with much colour and some fine old crusader's tombs. Its chief attraction is the singing which was exquisite! The Choirboys had all been evacuated and were just home for Christmas and were singing there for two Sundays before going back to the country, so I was lucky to hear them. One strange thing was that the acoustics were perfect for singing but for speaking there was such an echo that it was very hard to hear anything.

I went to a French film a few days ago and was very thrilled with it - I had always heard that theirs are very well produced and acted. They speak French but have English captions. I mean to go to more of them for the sake of my French.

Rationing started today and we have all been presented with 1/4 lb of butter on our own dish which we have to take charge of and make last as long as possible.

Mr. Hore-Belisha's resignation was a bombshell! There is rather an outcry about it at the moment but of course nobody knows the real reason for it. One would think that a man of his

ability and driving force could be ill spared, but I dare say he is difficult to co-operate with, and it is essential to have smooth working in the military machine.

I have just finished an excellent little book called "Why Britain is at War" by Howard Nicholson (Penguin series). It is well worth reading. It is the clearest and most reasonable exposition I have heard. He has apparently always been an opponent of Mr. Chamberlain's policy, but he is very fair to him in spite of that. He expresses much that I have thought but have not been able to put into words. Get it if you can - it is easy reading.

One hears many criticisms of Mr. Chamberlain - that he lacks drive, that he puts his not very competent friends into positions etc., etc. It may be true and, I dare say, criticism is a healthy sign, but for my part I feel that the ordinary person knows so little of the inside facts that it is best to trust the man at the wheel and be thankful that he is an upright man and is doing his best. If they'd ever had the experience of being governed by a Mr. Lang, they would have had something to grumble at! I hear by the way that he is no longer the Labor Leader in N.S.W. I expect that will mean that they will go in the next election.

Love from

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Garden
Earls Court

January 23, 1940

Dear Family,

Don't expect much of a letter from me as I have managed to break my right arm - skating!

I have been several times to the rink with Helen in the evenings and found I had forgotten nearly all I learned last year so I went by myself on Saturday morning to have a lesson.

I went on for a few minutes practice first, fell and came down backwards on my outstretched hand. I knew the wrist was fractured straight away. They first aided me at the rink, and I went over to Westminster Hospital just across the road. There I had the choice of having it set at once by a Resident or waiting till they could get hold of a specialist which during the weekend would have taken some hours, so I chose the former. He gave me an anaesthetic and set it alright, but he put the plaster on rather tight and it swelled and was terribly painful on Saturday night and all Sunday. On Monday morning (yesterday) I went to the hospital and saw a specialist. He took the plaster off (very painful) and put on another one, x-rayed it and found it had slipped out of position. So, then I had to have another anaesthetic and have it reset. The new plaster is much more comfortable, and I have had a good night so I think it will be alright now.

January 26

I have just come back from the hospital. The Doctor was satisfied, and it feels much easier. I have to go every day for massage and movements of my fingers as they are rather stiff from the swelling. It is the newest hospital in London and is very up-to-date and wonderfully equipped.

Helen has been very good to me, helping me to dress etc. This is her typewriter I am using; you see I am not very expert. She is leaving for home in about 10 days' time. I shall be sad when she goes. She is going to fly to Paris and go overland to Naples and join the "Oriana" there. I think it is much the safest way to go these days. She has just had a great disappointment in failing at her second attempt for the MRCP. It is a very stiff exam and people often have half a dozen tries for it, but she is fed up at the present and doesn't think she will try again.

I was to have spent last weekend with Cousin Jessie and Humphrey Lloyd, but they put me off because of colds in the house.... unfortunately for me as I would not then have been skating!

It is still bitterly cold - I don't think the temperature has been above freezing since Christmas. People are skating on the Serpentine and the roads and paths are slippery with ice and half melted snow. There are lots of colds and influenza about which I have avoided so far.

Much love to you all
RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

February 1st

Dear Family,

I am making good use of the typewriter while I have it. Helen has changed her mind about going home and is staying 3 months longer to have another try for her exam. It seems a pity after putting 6 months' work into it to go home without the Degree and she will probably do it easily next time. She won't be staying on here though but is looking for a job as soon as possible.

My arm has been fairly comfortable for the last few days, the swelling has gone down, and I can move my fingers again. I saw the Doctor at the hospital yesterday and was told to come back in a week, but I was not very satisfied. The plaster is now loose, and I learn that it is a bad break of a type that is hard to keep in position. So, I have today decided to be treated privately, and am to go tomorrow to have it re-plastered, x-rayed and if necessary, reset.

I am satisfied that the surgeon is a good man but you don't get much attention at a Hospital Clinic and I don't want to run any risk with it.

The Great Cold continues. Snow and ice everywhere and traffic held up all over the country. In London there has mostly been snow but in the country, there has been a phenomenal "frozen rain"! Six inches of ice covering everything. The railway signals and points would not work, and the electric trains could not make contact with the rails. People have been marooned in trains for as long as four days in some isolated parts. Ailsa Cullen was here last night having just returned from the country, and she said the ice covering everything was not white like frost but clear like glass. The trees rattled in the wind and everyone who ventured on the roads had to put socks over their boots and even then, had difficulty to keep their feet. I think it is thawing a little now; it is raining in London and much warmer, but every now and then rain turns to snow again.

I had lunch with Beryl Crossman today. She has found some London doctor who is able to do something for the severe sinus trouble she has suffered from for years, so she is staying over here for the present.

I had lunch with the Roberts at Putney on Saturday, they were all very cheerful, Cousin Wallis is very kind.

On Sunday I had a long walk through snow covered Hyde Park and took some photos. A few intrepid speakers were up on their soap boxes, but the audiences were very scanty. Lots of people were out walking, though, with their dogs and feeding the gulls sitting on the frozen Serpentine.

I manage to keep extremely comfortable by keeping the gas fire fed with shillings.

Much love to you all

RACHEL

P.S. I have just come back from the Doctor. It was as satisfactory as possible. He took a lot of trouble, he cut the plaster off (a very painful business) and put on another one. The break is still very swollen, but he thought as straight as he could get it, as it is smashed into a lot of little pieces. Unfortunately, the break goes into the joint and he won't guarantee that I will get much movement back in my wrist again. However, they always warn you of the worst, to protect themselves, so we'll hope for the best. I have to see him again in three and a half weeks but will of course see him before if I am not comfortable.

Don't be worried about me as the worst is over, and by the time you get this I shall be almost alright again. It has been a long fortnight, but I have been lucky to have Helen to look after me. I don't know what I would have done without her. She gives me lots of encouragement and sympathy and helps me dress if necessary, and we always have dinner together at night in either her room or mine.

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

February 10th

Dear Family,

Just a line to let you know I am getting on well. My arm has felt better every day and hardly hurts me at all now, and I can use it quite a lot for anything light. I have been knitting today and writing a little.

Helen Taylor is still here I am glad to say. She has a part-time hospital job, but may go to Sheffield any day, if a suitable appointment turns up for her.

I have been to quite a number of theatres in the last fortnight. There are a lot open again now and the prices are about half the usual. What with the blackout, the cold weather and London being pretty empty they are not very well patronised except for the revues which the soldiers like.

I went to see Cousins Ambrose and Jessie last week in a London boarding house. They were simply driven from their home by the cold as the water and electricity both ceased to function. I am to visit their home later when times are more propitious.

It is freezing again today but it has been comparatively warm for some days and it has been nice to be able to walk along the street naturally; not mincing along with your toes dug in to keep your balance.

Nine out of ten people in London have colds or flu. It is a dreadful climate! We have had mild colds but nothing much. In Church on Sunday the Minister, at the beginning of the sermon, requested everyone to have a good cough and get it over!

I went to the pictures with Ailsa Cullen last night - "The Lady Vanishes", very good. Many of the pictures on here were in Sydney before I left.

The Victoria and Albert Museum has opened some of its galleries again and they started here yesterday a series of lectures on French Art. Helen and I went to the first one, and they are going to be very good.

Today I went with a "rambling club" to see over a fine specimen of a house in Adam's architecture. It has been very cleverly renovated and modernised and the architect who had done the work showed us over it. In ordinary times they have 20 or 30 people but there were only 6 today. They have quite a lot of interesting expeditions planned so I shall try to go again.

Much love to you all,

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

February 18th

Dear Family,

I hope this will be the last complaining letter I shall write! I should think my run of bad luck was due to come to an end! I have been laid low by German measles for the last week. There is a tremendous lot of it in London just now. It only lasts a week, but I found it very unpleasant. I apparently had it rather badly and the fever brought on a sharp attack of rheumatism which was worst in my left wrist so that for 2 days I was a picture of misery with both my hands in splints! However, it cleared up quickly and today I am out of quarantine and have been out and feel quite well.

They let me stay here for which I was thankful, and Helen was again wonderful in looking after me.

We went to Church this morning in the little Chapel in St James Palace. There were only about 30 people there and to my surprise Humphrey and Becky Lloyd were sitting opposite to me! I had not met her before; she is very attractive. They had gone there to hear the preacher a Mr. Robins who married an Areley Lloyd, Dorothy.

Then we had lunch at a Lions Corner House. They are very popular places for meals on a Sunday (or any other time). We meant to walk home through Hyde Park but it started to snow hard and we were getting wet, so we retreated into the underground.

Helen has a temporary appointment at a hospital nearby; she is liable to go further afield any day, taking her typewriter with her, but I am able to write with my right hand now, though clumsily.

What a thrilling story the incident of the "Altmark" makes! The Navy is doing wonders, but I am afraid it is paying a heavy price - another destroyer tonight, I see.

Much love to you all,

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

March 5th

Dear Family,

I don't know that there is very much news, but it is time I wrote to you again. We have to economise on paper, so I am writing with single spacing.

I have quite recovered from the measles and feel quite fit again. I visited my Doctor a week ago and he removed the plaster. I missed its support very much at first, but it is nice to be rid of it. There is still a great deal of swelling to go down in my wrist and I think that when it goes it will be in quite good shape. The Doctor says the position of the bones though not quite perfect, is very satisfactory. The wrist is pretty stiff as yet but it has a lot more movement than it had a week ago so I hope it will steadily improve. I have to have massage every day and see the Doctor again in three weeks when I hope he will be able to give me some idea how long it is likely to take. I decided to have private massage as I wanted to give it every chance so I go to a Miss Mortimer-Thomas who is very good and who is taking a great deal of trouble over me. She is an Australian who trained over here, and I went to some lectures she was giving out there a couple of years ago and was very impressed with her. Dr Grace Comfort knows her well and Babs will remember about her.

I knew that Cousin Olga Lee-Smith had a son over here, so I wrote to him and he came out to see me last week. He is a nice boy of 24 who has just entered the Navy and he was in London on a few days leave. He is an engineer and was over here getting some experience when he decided to join up. He has just had his first fortnight's training and Portsmouth and after a few days leave is to join a ship. He said the life in the barracks was great fun but he found it difficult to absorb in a fortnight all the customs and the atmosphere of the Navy which the cadets acquire naturally during the course of years. Saluting seems to be a great worry to him so much so that he wouldn't go out on Sundays when the streets were thick with ratings. Another boy who has just gone to sea over here as an R.N.V.R. is Fred Osborne, Alex's brother. He, I think, is a solicitor in Sydney.

Daisy's nice cousin Dorothy Gurner who moved to the country when war broke out has just been spending a week in her London flat and I have had several meals with her and been to a theatre.

I have been seeing quite a lot of Ailsa Cullen and she has been much exercised in her mind as to whether to go home or not. However, she has settled the matter this week by getting engaged to a James Bragg who has a farm in Sussex and is now in the army.

On Sunday, Helen, another girl, and I went to Kew Gardens and walked along the towing-path of the Thames as far as Richmond. The gardens were beginning to stir to life, the grass very green and a few buds appearing on the trees. It was glorious too to see the sun again! I suppose it has shone occasionally during the winter but there was so little heat in it that one hardly noticed it. In spite of the sun though we are having nasty cold winds now which I dislike much more than the intense frosty cold

No more news so goodbye

With much love to you all

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

March 21st

Dear Family,

I have just come back from a weekend spent between Cousins Ambrose and Jessie, and Humphrey and Becky. They live along the Thames valley near Henley about 10 miles apart. They both have nice homes, A and J have a comfortable modernised house on the high country some miles from the river with lovely views over the surrounding country and beech woods. H and B have a capacious old house near the river surrounded by walled gardens. Both are wondering, as thousands of other people must be, how they are going to keep their homes going in view of the increased and probably increasing taxes.

I heard much family talk and feel well up in the ancestors at present. Humphrey has 3 dear little children about the ages of the Yoi children. It was nice to get into the country again. It still looked wintry, but crocuses and snowdrops are popping up through the grass and the trees looked just ready to burst into life.

I was pleased to see Raymond who came home just before I left. He was such a frail little boy when I saw him last, he looked as if he could not possibly grow up. He was never able to go to school but had tutors and had to live most of the time in Switzerland. At last, he was strong enough to go to Oxford where he was very happy and thanks to a very pleasant personality, he made lots of friends. He is in an engineering firm now and seems to live quite a normal life though he doesn't look exactly robust. I think his family have managed very wisely for him.

I am going away for Easter to stay with a Mrs. Borrowes in Bucks. I don't know her, but she is a friend of Cousin Julius and hearing that I had been ill, she very kindly wrote and asked me if I would like a quiet week in the country.

My arm is not making the progress I should like. I have got a small amount of movement in the wrist since I came out of plaster, but last week I started to lose the power in my fingers which had also got very stiff. The Doctor was worried at first lest I had sustained some damage to a nerve, but he is now satisfied that that is not so. He thinks there is still a lot of swelling about the break which increased when I started to move the wrist and caused pressure on the nerve and inflammation in the tendons of the fingers, so now I have to avoid all the but the smallest movements and if the inflammation hasn't settled down in a fortnight, he will put it back into plaster for a complete rest. It has improved a little in the last few days so I hope I shall be able to avoid that.

He tells me I must count on at least 2-3 months more massage which is rather a blow as one wouldn't choose to waste the spring in London but it is just as well to know what to be prepared for. I am very lucky in my masseuse who is exceptionally capable and is wonderfully good to me. My arm incidentally doesn't hurt me at all now, except on certain movements which I avoid.

Helen is working very hard now; her exam is only a fortnight away.

Tonight's news about the change in the French Government is rather disturbing. Finland has been a sad business!

Much love to you all

RACHEL

P.S. I have enclosed a snap taken in the garden opposite our place to which we have access. I was only just out of bed after the measles so you will see that in spite of that I look very well! My right arm was still in plaster. Helen took it.

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

March 31st

Dear Family,

I have a spare Sunday afternoon so I will get a letter started as I don't think it is very long since I wrote last.

Had a pleasant weekend away in Buckinghamshire at Easter. The Mrs. Borrowes I stayed with was the dearest old lady. The house was a charming old 17th century place, rather gone to seed but comfortable and in a pretty garden. There is a son who works in London and goes home for weekends. He drove me down in an open sports car going about 70 mph most of the way, I could scarcely breathe! He was very nice though and I thought it extremely kind of them both to invite a complete stranger to their home. It was nice little change for me. Cousin Julia Lloyd is a sketching friend of Mrs. Borrowes. Cousin Julia was staying a few miles away in Oxford and we went over to lunch with her there one day.

I am going to move my room next week. I have been very comfortable in this one, but it has no outlook. The window looks onto a dingy looking wall a couple of yards away and it is always pretty dark so that I have to keep the light on all day. I had not thought of moving as I get it very cheaply but yesterday the landlord offered me a better one of his own accord at the same price. I can't think why, but London is pretty empty and if they are slack, I suppose they think they might as well keep the people they have contented. I jumped at it.

On Wednesday I am going to Ailsa Cullen's wedding. She is being very quietly married in a little village church in Surrey. It is very nice of her to ask me; it is rather lonely for her being married over here when she has her family and so many friends in Australia. Her husband has a farm in Surrey but he is in the Army so I don't know whether she will go on living there by herself if he is sent abroad.

Did I tell you I have joined a linguist's club? It is quite fun and good practice; I hope it will make me more fluent. I only belong to an advanced elementary group at present. They meet most days and play games and chat; you can just go when you feel inclined.

My masseuse has been away for a fortnight and I have missed her. She got someone else to do me but of course she doesn't take the same interest, not having seen me from the beginning.

I saw my Doctor again last week. He thought there was a slight improvement but says I must have lots of patience as it will be a long business. It is quite evident now that the nerve is involved but he is certain it is not damaged, only caught somehow in the general swelling about the wrist joint. He feels confident that as the inflammation gradually goes down it will free itself. If it doesn't, they will have to operate and free it, but they wouldn't consider that until the last trace of swelling has gone by which time, we hope it will be alright again. We considered having another consultation but decided there was no point in it yet. I felt rather depressed about it after seeing the Doctor but the last days it has improved ever so much, and I am able to use it quite a lot, so I am feeling very cheerful about it now.

Today has been delightfully warm and sunny. For the first time one has felt one's winter clothing too hot.

Much love to you all,

RACHEL

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

April 12th

Dear Family,

Everyone feels a bit stunned still by the sudden action in Norway, we hang on the wireless for news and wonder what is going to happen next. The Navy seems to be doing great work!

I have started going to a sewing meeting run by the Scandinavian Women's Voluntary Service, making things for the Finns. There are not more than half a dozen people there most days and I like it because they all work hard and don't waste time talking. I can't manage hand sewing at all as I can't hold a needle, but I find I can machine quite well so I drop in for a couple of hours several times a week and have been making boys' pajamas. The woman in charge is a Dane and a very charming one. She is very upset as all her family are in Denmark and of course she can't get any news of them.

Ailsa Cullen's wedding was very jolly. It was quite small only about 20 there and it took place in the sweet little village church down in Surrey and then we went to the country cottage of the bridegroom's uncle, Sir William Bragg for tea. It was all very friendly and informal, Ailsa had managed to gather together a few of her own Australian friends, Sir Phillip and Lady Game among them, but the guests were mostly relatives of James. He is in the Army, so I am afraid they won't have very long together. I think Ailsa is going to stay and look after the farm for him when he is sent away.

I moved my room last week and am delighted with the change. It has a large window through which the sun streams from lunchtime onwards and has attached to it, a small closed-in verandah where I can keep all my luggage. I still look onto the back of houses but between us there are several nice trees.

I had afternoon tea last week with Cousins Flo and Constance. They were both very nice and the former hasn't changed a scrap in the last 20 years! They both asked me to go to them for weekends in the country soon. It is a nuisance I can't get away for longer than a couple of days but that is better than nothing.

I saw my Doctor a few days ago and he was very pleased with me. He says the hand has made more progress in the last fortnight than at any time since the beginning. He admits now that he was worried about it last time he saw it as the trouble in the nerve was very definite, but in view of the improvement it has made since, he doesn't see why it shouldn't go straight ahead now. I am only to see him once a month now and to cut the massage down to 3 times a week, which is a relief. I am getting a lot more power and feeling back into the fingers and am able to use it pretty naturally now for anything light.

Helen and I had an amusing expedition last week with the Linguist Club. About 20 of us of varied nationalities drove in a bus down into Surrey where we stayed at a quaint place run by French people. It was very cheap, a collection of little cabins more like an Australian seaside camp than anything else. There were pretty walks about and, in the evening, we had games and music. One heard a good many languages, but I am afraid English was used most of the time, so it didn't do much for our French.

Much love,

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens, SW5

April 30, 1940

Dear Family,

I am afraid I have been getting careless about writing again as I see it is more than a fortnight since I wrote.

The days slip by very quickly and I am never dull. I have been away for several weekends and the weekdays get very full with massage and one thing and another.

A great thrill last week was Helen passing her exam. It was a great achievement, as it is a very stiff exam and I doubt if there is another woman Member of the College of Physicians in Sydney. I am afraid it will mean that she will go home soon though. She has been away about 3 years now and is keen to get home.

My hand is getting on splendidly now, I can open doors and turn keys and do lots of things that I couldn't. I can grip my knife so that it doesn't fly out of my hand when I try to cut something. Last week I used it too much and it complained by swelling up, but it has settled down again now. I haven't been able to go to the sewing meeting but hope to start again this week.

One weekend I spent with Cousin Constance in Surrey. She has built on to her weekend cottage at Cobham and settled down to live there. It is all very charming and comfortable and as the sun shone and the place was ablaze with daffodils and primroses, I enjoyed it very much. Her daughter, Marabel, has a flat in London, but she has her 2 grandchildren with her for the duration.

Last week I went to see Joyce Chomley (nee Purves). Her husband a journalist is in the Army and she is at a Red Cross Post driving an ambulance.

Arthur Mack has now been moved to the Admiralty in London. Susie and Rosemary came up to visit him last week and I spent a day with them.

Last weekend Helen and I went for a delightful walking tour. We set out with rucksacks on our backs, went the first part of the journey by train and then walked for about 14 miles through Kentish fields and orchards, taking 2 days for it. It was really glorious! Everything was vividly green, lots of fruit blossom out and masses of primroses in the woods. You can get across the fields, stiles etc. We passed through 3 delightful little villages with old timbered houses, spending the night in one. We stopped for lunch at quaint little inns and ate bread and cheese and beer. We arrived home on Sunday night a little foot sore and pleasantly weary.

The budget last week was a bit of a blow with its increases in postage etc. - letters 2.5d each, postcards 2d., telephone calls, beer, cigarettes, matches etc. have all gone up considerably.

The position in Norway doesn't look too cheerful at the moment but I suppose we can't expect it to go easily when all the strategic points were in the hands of the enemy before we arrived.

Much love to you all

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

20 Courtfield Gardens,

May 15, 1940

Dear Family,

The clouds are gathering very rapidly now. This morning we had the news of Holland's collapse. I suppose it was inevitable in the face of such a force, but they have crumpled up horribly quickly and I suppose we are next in the scheme!

People seem to be calm but very serious. It is difficult to know what plans to make to meet the threatened invasion. I am very undecided what to do. As I can't do much in the way of work, it seems rather foolish to stay in London, but yet I want every bit of massage I can get. I saw my Doctor last week and he was very pleased with my improvement. He wants me to continue the massage for at least another month and then in July, when it will be 6 months to have another x-ray to see just what state it is in. He says it will be a year before I get the maximum of improvement, but he thinks the end result should be nearly perfect. It's far from that yet though but I expect it will have to be hard at work at something before long. I think that in a month's time I could probably be more help than hindrance in a hospital. Meanwhile if I decide to forego the massage I may go out of London. Susie rang up this morning to urge me to go there and Helen is down in the country for a few weeks so I may go down to her. I will rather be guided by what my masseuse says when I see her today.

This has been a stirring week what with the Government changes and the invasion of the Netherlands. I was lucky enough to get into the House of Commons to hear the debate on Tuesday of last week. I felt sorry to see Mr. Chamberlain go but things are pretty desperate and if the new combination is stronger it is better so.

The weather is glorious - it is hard to imagine the horrors that are going on! I have managed to have every weekend in the country lately

Much love to you all,

RACHEL

May 16 1940

I finally decided to go to the boarding house in Esher where Helen is staying for at least a week and to come up to town for my treatment (it is not very far). I don't fancy I will stay there very long as it will be expensive and inconvenient, so, if everything remains quiet, I will probably drift back to London soon. In fact, it seems absurd to run away until there is something to run from but everyone was urging me, so I thought I had better do something about it.

I have just had a lovely day walking in the Chiltern Hills with Ethel Stuckey. The beech-woods were heavenly, the ground thick with bluebells under the lovely trees. In the little village of Chalfont-St-Giles we looked at Milton's Cottage with an interesting museum in connection with him. I noticed a book he wrote about the educating of the young in which he says that a boy of 11 should have mastered Latin and Greek and at least 2 modern languages otherwise he has been wasting his time!

Rachel's Letters 1940

The Hill House
Esher

May 26, 1940

Dear Family,

Things have been moving with lightning and appalling rapidity in the last few days. It is just unbelievable, and the future looks black for you out there as well as for us here. However, the fight is by no means over yet and the morale here is good. The tension is awful, but we have got down to tin tacks at last and every ounce of energy is being mustered. God knows if it is in time! We may have muddled along once too often! Think of the amount of munitions I alone could have made in the last 9 idle months if I had been asked to!

I am spending a fortnight here; Helen was having a holiday here and I found London too depressing on my own. It is only 14 miles from town, so I go up for massage 3 times a week. It is the prettiest place with lovely country surroundings and the house has a delightful garden with a golf course though I have to content myself with croquet.

I don't know what my next move will be. My hand is making very good progress now and I shall probably stop the massage in a week or so. I saw the Doctor last week and he is very pleased and says that while it will go on improving for several months yet I can try it out on anything now. It is still very weak, but the active inflammation seems to have gone out of it. They don't think I could attempt nursing with its heavy lifting for another 6 weeks at least but I must do something so may try my hand at farm work.

I feel very restless and would love to come home but as I am here I think I will stick it out but I must find something useful to do and I am so handicapped with only 1.5 hands. However, I suppose I will find a niche sometime.

The spring weather has been glorious. I believe they need rain in France to hold up the German tanks. The R.A.F. has been doing wonders hasn't it? It's the one bright spot in the news.

I went in search of my bank the other day. It is evacuated to Cobham a village near here. After taking a bus to Cobham I found I had a 3 mile walk into the heart of the country and I found them in a large boys' Prep School which had been taken over by four banks together. They have beautiful grounds with swimming baths, golf course etc., so they must have a rather nice life.

They are taking strong if belated action against possible fifth column activities here. Lots of people have been locked up and all important public buildings such as Whitehall and the LLG etc., are being heavily barb-wired and guarded.

Much love to you all

RACHEL

P.S. Helen has got a job with the Blood Transfusion Service which has departments all over England and she goes off to it tomorrow. I shall have to say goodbye to the typewriter as well as her, it has been a wonderful help. Fortunately, I found writing much easier the last few days.

London

June 2, 1940

Dear Family,

This has been a very tense week ever since the Belgians crumpled up last Tuesday - it has felt like a month! It was an awful bombshell when things were going very badly anyway. Rumor has it that the King of the Belgians has been pro-Nazi for a long time so it is a pity some of the people who knew didn't come forward with their suspicions before! For days one felt sick whenever one thought of the B.E.F. in their hopeless position and it was an enormous relief on Thursday to hear that they were beginning to get them away. I had noticed an inconspicuous little paragraph in the paper asking for offers of pleasure craft and other small craft, but I never imagined what it was for. It was an incredible feat. Even so I am afraid the losses have been tremendous, but it gives a chance to draw breath and start again minus 30,000 men, 1,000 guns etc.!

This country has been electrified into vigorous action - munitions making is leaping ahead and strong defensive measures are being taken. They are trying to round up the possible fifth columnists but that is a difficult job, and they are one of the greatest dangers.

I took a walk around the town today to see the sights - all the important buildings such as Whitehall, the L.C.C. etc., have a barrage of tangled barbed wire around them and opposite have been erected little forts built of sandbags with loop holes to fire through.

Golf courses have great trenches gouged across them to make it difficult for planes to land and all the signposts on the roads have been removed to confuse the paratroopers.

I spent a fortnight at Esher coming up to town 3 times a week for massage. It was very pleasant there and peaceful. One is not so conscious of the tension in the country surroundings. I didn't like being by myself in London at all, with not much to do except listen to the bad news over the wireless and no one to discuss it with.

A week ago Helen left Esher to go to a job with the Blood Transfusion Service and a few days afterwards I came back to London to pack and store my belongings and to have a week's intensive massage before stopping it.

I decided a couple of weeks ago that I must either get to work at something or go home if I couldn't do anything useful, the trouble was to find something I could do with one and a half hands.

Everyone agreed that I couldn't do nursing with its heavy lifting. I thought I might manage light farm work and set out to look for it, writing to Ailsa Cullen to see if she wanted any help or knew of anyone who did. Just then I had a letter from Rupert's sister who has a farm, saying that she was sorry that she couldn't ask me to stay as her man had been called up and she was at her wits' end to manage the work. I wrote and suggested myself and she jumped at it, so I am going there on June 11th. It is not a very healthy quarter being only 15 miles from the east coast of Kent, but it is no good worrying about that. It is impossible to say where is safe. It is near the village of Pluckley near Ashford

Last weekend I was to stay with Sir Stafford and Lady Crossland at Buckhurst Hill near Epping Forest. I arrived for lunch having just missed a telegram to stop me as their son had been killed flying, they had only had the news an hour before, but they were simply marvelous - insisting on my staying for lunch and then arranging for me to go for the weekend to some distant connections, the Bernard Howards, who live near Ay and were very nice.

I had dinner with the Wallis Roberts' a few nights ago. Cousin Wallis was pretty pessimistic about everything, but Gwen was more hopeful. People on the whole seem pretty calm and their courage seems to rise with the approaching danger; I know I feel a lot steadier than I did a few weeks ago.

I have just been faced with a problem as I have been offered the job of looking after an old lady in Wales who is a semi invalid but wants to dispense with her fully trained nurse. It is tempting but I have rather promised to go to Mrs. Berthou it is hard to know which my hand will do best.

Rachel's Letters 1940

It is getting on well, but it is very slow. The wrist has about 30° of movement now and is getting stronger every day but the fingers are very tiresome, as if I overwork one day they go back, and I can scarcely use them for a few days. Fine movements such as sewing, and writing worry me more than the heavier things. However, if I look back for 2 or 3 weeks, I can see an improvement and I can now grasp weakly something about the size of a broom handle which I couldn't do some weeks ago. I will try and come up to London from Kent every 10 days or so for treatment and let Barbara Thomas check up on it she is very sensible and helpful.

Much love to you all

RACHEL

Later: I have just heard that the invalid in Wales is off, so I won't have to make up my mind. I go to Pluckley on June 11th.

PPS. I am going to Cousin Jean Fowler for this weekend she is selling Gastard this month.

Rachel's Letters 1940

Thorne Manor Farm
Pluckley Kent

June 17, 1940

Dear Family,

The news of the capitulation of the French Army came through at lunch time today. It is a staggering blow though the way things were going it was almost inevitable I suppose. So now we have to take on Europe on our own! Anyway, we know where we are now. There'll be no more complicated relations with their nations and no more sending away of forlorn half-armed expeditionary forces. At the moment I feel sick about the force we sent over to France the other day - I hope the French have had the decency to give us some warning of their intentions so that they have been able to be got away before this. Poor France has had a terrible fortnight, it is awful to think of Paris and all her art treasures in German hands.

I am very lucky to be here as I have something to do all the time to keep me occupied. I delight in the sheer hard physical exercise after the months of inertia I have had, and I find it very soothing to the nerves. My hand is standing up to it well and improving and I am able to find plenty of jobs within my capacity. I have been busy the last few days weeding and thinning mangle-wortzles which are a kind of enormous turnip to feed the cattle on in the winter. Now I have finished that, and I am hoeing up thistles in an oat crop.

Mrs. Berthou is not strong and runs the farm as simply as possible, no pigs, fowls etc., but just 16 cows and the growing of their food. The 14-year-old boy does the milking, and we share the rest of the jobs. I do odds and ends in the house but not a great deal.

Yesterday I went by bus to Maidstone to see Helen Taylor who is working at a Blood Transfusion Depot there. It is only about 20 miles away but she doesn't get much time off so I don't suppose I will see her very often. Beryl Crossman went home by the Port Line last week.

The weekend before I came here, I spent with Cousin Jean Fowler at Corsham. She is putting Gastard House up for sale on July 5th, but I am afraid she has picked a bad time.

I am going up to London for the day on Thursday to have a treatment for my hand and to make sure that the work is not doing it any harm though I am sure it is not. It is a funny hand, it can hoe thistles, but writing is still very difficult and painful. I am only 50 miles from London here.

Canterbury is quite close and I am dying to see it before the Cathedral is blown to bits but they particularly ask you not to visit the eastern towns except on business so I haven't done it yet.

Much love to you all
RACHEL

P.S. Isn't it a blow about the air mail being stopped! Damn Mussolini.

Rachel's Letters 1940

Thorne Manor Farm
Pluckley, Kent

July 9, 1940

Dear Family,

I feel I ought to be able to write to you such good letters just now with history being made daily on our doorstep but when I come to write the events seem too big for me to cope with and conditions change so quickly - and if my brain could cope with them my hand couldn't so you will have to be content with scrappy notes still.

I am very happy here and feel I am being quite useful as Mrs. Berthou couldn't get any help either inside or outside the house and growing crops to feed the animals is essential just now. It is just what I feel like doing at the moment. The summer days and long twilights are delightful, and I feel very well.

If I keep at one job such as hoeing too constantly my hand swells up and goes numb so I alternate the outside work with a little housework or rest it if I want to. I am fortunate to be somewhere where I can do as much or as little as I like.

July 15th

This place is in the Weald of Kent. It is slightly rising ground just higher than the Romney Marsh which lies to eastward of it and lower than the Downs to the north. The Marsh has been evacuated of stock and the famous Romney Marsh flocks have been scattered and divided in different parts of England, so they won't be wiped out. Mrs. Berthou usually sells her fat steers on to the Marsh but this year to her sorrow she can't find any buyers.

Of course, we see plenty of planes. We see our bombers setting off on their expeditions into Germany (so we imagine) and reinforcements of fighters hurrying over when there is a Channel fight on. When any enemy bombers get through, we hear the sirens and that happens pretty frequently. We had 2 alarms yesterday and one today, but we rarely see any of the planes and they don't worry us at all. They are passing over to more important objectives. When the siren goes, we open all the doors and windows to guard against blast and go on with what we are doing. If I am working in the fields, I keep one eye on a handy ditch or tree to take cover if they should try their machine gunning games. Last week we had alarms 5 nights out of 7 starting at midnight and ending at 4.00am. The usual procedure is to jump into a few clothes and come down and open up the house and then seek a comfortable place downstairs to finish your sleep. One night I didn't bother to come down and had dropped off to sleep again when there was a series of explosions that shook every timber of the house and nearly rattled me out of bed. Five bombs had been dropped 8 or 9 miles away! Another night 3 fell 3 miles away but the concussion was not nearly so great. The German plane has a different engine note from ours - an intermittent sort of drone - and at night you can hear it distinctly. Sometimes the air is just throbbing with the sound of them very high up. The sky will be alive with search lights, but I have never seen them pick anything up and I haven't heard anti-aircraft fire. However, they must get them somewhere as they take a good toll of them every night. While the raid is on you can hear soldiers on motor bicycles patrolling the roads looking for parachutists and challenging everyone they pass.

Every road down to the smallest lane has barricades at intervals ready to be thrown across it, I don't suppose they would stop a tank, but they would be effective against motorcycle troops.

I go up to London once a week for massage which makes a nice little break. Last week Barbara Thomas and I went to see the film "Convoy". It is excellent and much of it was taken on an actual convoy when they had a scrap with the enemy,

I see Helen Taylor from time to time, she spent last Sunday here and last week she was working at Canterbury so I went over and joined her and did some sightseeing. It is a dear old town and very unspoiled and the Cathedral is very fine. Much of the glass has been removed and the tombs of the Black Prince and others were covered with sandbags. Had I come from London I would not have been allowed to visit Canterbury but as we are in the same defense area, a strip along the east coast, we are allowed to move about inside it.

Now that Germany has acquired France's aluminium they are gathering up all they can in this country for aeroplanes. Mrs. Berthou sadly handed over all her saucepans yesterday.

I bought myself a secondhand bicycle last week and am very thrilled with it, I gave 2 pounds 10 for it and it seems nice and light and strong. It is a wonderful feeling not having to put petrol into it! I hadn't ridden for at least 20 years and I had to ride it 9 miles home, wobbling perilously but the next time I took it out I was quite alright. It seemed a good way to explore the country and Ashford the nearest town is about 7 miles away. The village of Pluckley is only a mile away but it is very tiny. I should be able to ride over to Maidstone too. Helen has got one too, so we are going to try meeting halfway next week.

The weeks go by quickly; it has been a glorious summer, one hot day after another. Unfortunately, it has been too dry for the farmers and the hay crop is poor. Now it has started to rain but it is rather late.

I do miss the air mail! I have to settle down now for a long wait for letters, the last I had were May 9th or thereabouts.

I am sorry it is so long since I wrote last, I didn't realise how long it was. I put off writing from day to day as my hand is often tired after its day's work and also there isn't much evening. We are generally busy while the light lasts, have supper at about 9.00 and by the time that is over I am anxious to get to bed to get some sleep before the siren goes.

What an incredible and sad business has been the action against the French fleet!

I hope you heard Mr. Churchill on the wireless last night, he is **most** satisfying and heartening, I don't know where we would be without him! He seems to have the confidence of everyone.

Much love to you all

RACHEL

July 17th

Last night Mr. McMahon-Ball gave a talk on Australia from there. It was excellent and gave a good impression on the feeling there and what is being done. I had no idea you were already so prepared for total warfare. Petrol restrictions to 40 miles per week will be a blow!

Rachel's Letters 1940

Thorne Manor Farm
Pluckley Kent

August 13, 1940

Dear Family,

Things have been livening up the last few days with the big air battle at Dover and yesterday at other ports as well.

This afternoon a swarm of German planes went over the house heading towards London, we have never seen more than a scattering 1 or 2 before. They took 15 or 20 minutes to pass and there seemed to be hundreds, so we are waiting eagerly for the 9.00 p.m. news to see what has happened. Of course, some of them may have been R.A.F. planes in pursuit - I can't tell one from the other. It is a good day for raiding, a little misty and plenty of clouds about. Anyway, they never came back this way and the "all clear" has gone so if they did get past the coastal defences I hope they met something formidable further on. Today is one of Hitler's "dates" but we have had so many of them that we don't take any notice.

Yesterday was a glorious day, warm and bright with a tang of autumn in the air so I decided to bicycle into Ashford and do some shopping and enjoy the countryside. The siren went when I was about 2 miles from Ashford and as all the shops shut promptly it was not worth going on so I sat on a bank in the sun and watched the planes circling about. One was leaving a trail of white smoke behind. I believe it was signwriting to attract attention while bombers slipped in underneath. I saw one bomb fall in the distance at least, I heard the explosion and saw clouds of smoke rise. The raid lasted about one and a half hours but long before than I got tired of waiting and went on into Ashford where I found a restaurant open and had lunch. On the way home there was another one which didn't last long but for the first time I saw fighting-planes chasing each other and heard machine gunfire but it was very high up and I couldn't follow it much.

People take the raids very calmly, but of course, except in isolated spots we haven't had much yet. Somehow it all seems very remote and unreal. It is hard to detect a plane high up in a lovely blue sky with death and destruction and anyway whoever may be hit you feel quite sure you won't be.

People are very calm altogether as evidenced by the fact that there has been for weeks past a heated controversy raging as to what the BBC should have for an interval signal in place of the tick tock which seems to be found depressing! There were thousands of suggestions ranging from a bit of Rule of Britannia to hammering on an anvil and a nightingale singing, finally they chose three chords on the notes BBC.

I had 3 days in London last week in order to see Dr Harding and get his opinion at the end of 6 months and to go to Betty McCarthy's wedding in Oxford. The Doctor was very pleased with my hand since he had seen in last 2 months ago and he thinks it will go on improving for many months and be pretty good in the end. The fingers are certainly getting much stronger. My chief trouble now is cramp and a bad circulation and a contraction of the palm which he thinks will all recover in time. He thinks I am extremely lucky. I am only going up for massage once a fortnight now.

Betty McCarthy got engaged to a Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford and decided to go home as he was being called up in a few weeks and to get married after the war. So, she went on board her ship which hung about the harbour for 24 hours, as they do now, and was further delayed by a broken winch. Meanwhile he, Allan Brown, decided they were making a terrible mistake and spent all night trying to get messages to her to get off again which she finally did 20 minutes before the ship left and they were married in 6 days. He seems very nice and Betty looked very happy. The wedding was delightful being in the College Chapel and the reception in a lovely quadrangle with a velvet lawn, weather worn stone buildings on 3 sides and beautiful old trees on the other. It was very informal and friendly and though I didn't know any one there I enjoyed it very much.

The sales have been on in London and the windows full of temptation. I fell for a Harris Tweed coat and skirt as I felt the need of something very warm last winter. Another useful garment I

got is a pair of very warm dungarees which are quickly donned when the siren goes at night and with a coat on top, I am warm enough for any emergency.

I have seen Helen Taylor several times lately, once we each cycled half way and had dinner together and another time I rode to Maidstone to see a dentist and stayed on for dinner with her, unfortunately the days are getting short now and it won't be possible to ride home after dinner much longer. The roads are not very safe for bicycles at night as some of them are very narrow and nearly all the traffic is military, either huge lorries or motor bicycles going at a terrific pace with only a glimmer of light.

Letters from Australia have started to arrive again after a long break. I see you have cleverly discovered another 1/6d. route. I can't find anything under 4/6d from this end but must enquire further.

There is still plenty to do on the farm. The oat crop is just being harvested (a man comes in with a tractor) and haymaking is still in progress. It is a fascinating occupation, tossing the hay with a pitch fork to dry it and piling it into stacks but you have to keep at it hard to get it in while the weather is fine.

We have just heard the 9.00 o'clock news and though a good many enemy planes got through here and there, there was nothing spectacular so we must have been wrong about our swarm all being German. We often are. Henry, the 14-year-old boy, who works here seems to know them all but I find it very difficult.

I was awfully shocked to hear tonight to hear of the tragic aeroplane crash in Australia. What valuable lives to have lost.

Much love to you all

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

Thorne Manor Farm
PLUCKLEY KENT

August 18, 1940

Dear Family,

I will get a letter started and then perhaps I won't leave you so long without one.

Well the "Battle of Britain" is going on more seriously now sometimes right over our heads. All this week swarms of German planes have been coming over 2 or 3 times a day. We can distinguish them quite well now. Most times they are heralded by the siren but sometimes not - it depends on which direction they come. You hear the drone of their engines very high overhead and sometimes can see batches of 20 or 30 together like tiny white crosses against the blue. Nobody seems to interfere with them here, but I understand that there are different belts at which they are tackled (I am given the lie by a burst of anti-aircraft fire which has broken out this minute, a couple of planes have been cruising around for the last half hour and I have heard some bombs fall in the distance).

Later: We have had a lot of excitement this afternoon, I believe 600 planes came over and 200 tried to get to London via the Thames Estuary. They were turned back by our fighters and turned into Essex and Kent. We heard sounds of a battle at lunch time and between mouthfuls rushed out to see what we could see but they were very high. You hear the hum of the engine zooming up and down as they dive and rise again and the rattle of machine guns. Suddenly I saw one falling spinning over and over - rather a sickening sight, although one felt quite sure they were Germans. It crashed about three-quarters of a mile away, at first I thought it was going to land in our orchard, then we heard 2 more come down, the engine note turns to a falling wail and ends in a crash. 150 were brought down altogether and at least 3 at Pluckley. Some people say more but we can't trace them. I mounted my bicycle after lunch and followed the trail of bicycles to the nearest one, but it was well guarded by soldiers and we weren't allowed near. Anyway, there was nothing left but the tail with a Swastika on it, the pilots were killed.

We are very busy hay making this week, working from early morning till dark as it is impossible to get extra workers and it is important to get the hay in before it is rained on. Not that we have had much rain, it has been a wonderful summer for all but the farmers who have found it rather dry.

August 31st

This has been a very active week overhead, 4 or 5 times a day the Huns come over in a mass. We seem to have a different technique now instead of seeing our fighters going out to meet them over the Channel we now see the hoards come in and at a point a little past here they seem to be met and turned back. Fights go on overhead for hours on end. It is hard to follow them as they are so high, but we have seen quite a number of planes falling and sometimes the pilots floating down very slowly by parachute. Nothing has landed very close. One day when I was watching a bullet, or something fell through the tree I was sheltering under, but it was so small I couldn't find it. Usually we just go on with our work in the fields or in the house and the country is much the best place to be as in a town you really must go into a shelter. People seem very philosophic about it all, though, when I went to London last week I found the people looking very sleepy eyed, they had had four broken nights out of six and have not got used to it. We have been treated pretty kindly at night lately. One night I woke up to the sound of fighting and saw a number of brilliant flares in the sky like enormous stars which indicate that our fighters are up (the censor can cut this out if he likes). A few minutes after some incendiary bombs were dropped and there was a line of fire, but I think it was only in a field - any way it didn't last very long.

The next morning, I was going up to London and I heard an air raid warden on the station here say that there were 16 unexploded bombs in a field just behind the station. Someone asked what he was going to do about them, and he said "Oh, I am just going to drive the cows out of the field, the farm people are a bit shy of them. I hope they were all duds - they must have been as everything looked peaceful when I got home in the evening.

Rachel's Letters 1940

I rode over to Maidstone on Sunday and spent the night with Helen. She leaves there in a few days. I think I will be leaving here soon too as the hay making is over and work is slackening off and I am a bit tired. I don't know where I will go next - perhaps to Cousin Jean for a short rest and then look around for something to do.

My hand has improved a lot lately and writing no longer worries me so much.

Much love to you all

RACHEL

Pluckley

August 24th

My Dearest Howard & Babs,

I have 4 letters of yours to answer June 22nd and 24th which I mentioned having received in my last letter and July 2 and 11th (via America) which arrived the last 2 days. I am very thrilled about the house and I think you are wise to get it.

I got as far as this sitting in a field, I had really come out to work but had my bag with me as there is an air raid on and as there were writing things in it it was a temptation to send you a line as I am always too tired when I finish in the evening at about 10.30. I saw 14 raiders come over a few minutes ago and then a fight broke out overhead. They were very high up but you could see the arcs of smoke from the exhausts as they circled around each other and I think I saw one plane fall, it was coming down very fast then something hit the tree I was standing under and broke off a bit of a branch but I couldn't see what it was. So now I am crouching in the ditch at the foot of the tree. Now everything is quiet again I have been looking for the bullet or whatever it was, but I can't find it.

Well, to return to the house - I really think it is better to buy than to build if you can find anything you want as the latter is a bit chancy and costs more than you reckon at first and these are uncertain times. It is great to have the garden already made, I like the plan of the house it looks very compact and just what you want.

You must send me a plan of the way the house is set in the garden sometime and also its situation in Gordon as I am a bit vague about that but I have a recollection of seeing some very charming new houses near the Gordon golf links. It is thrilling to think that you are all settled into it by now, of course I wish it were at Killara but that really has every possible block occupied and prices are high there. I hope your furniture, carpets etc., have fitted in well. I should like you to think out what you would like from Mother's house as you haven't had anything yet and I think you ought to have quite a lot. Just take anything at all chairs, dressing tables, writing desk anything you fancy and if you let me know what you have taken I might be able to replace them with things from over here. I often see nice things in the antique shops which seem reasonable. The only thing I can think of which I should like to keep is the rosewood card table (round), you can get the things out of store I expect.

I note your suggestion about bringing children out, I had vaguely wondered about it but wasn't sure that I wanted to come out yet and 2 conditions were - training in children's welfare work and to be a good sailor neither of which fits me. However, I shall keep it in mind. It is hard to know what to do, I feel that if I weather another winter here, I might as well enjoy another summer and Helen says, "why not go before the winter". Anyway, when I am next in London I shall try and find out from the Massage Association what demand there has been or is likely to be.

I hear that there is some sort of air mail going now which takes about a month so I will try it. Helen is thinking of sending a cable to her people and mentioning me and a little later I will send one and get you to ring the Taylors up as you may imagine England being peppered with bombs, as a matter of fact though I am always searching I can never find a bomb crater or fallen plane or anything interesting.

Thanks for the snaps of Janet, she looks sweet and is growing like anything.

A happy birthday to Babs though I am afraid this will be late for it. I wonder if Janet had a party in the new garden for hers. I am afraid I haven't got her doll posted yet. There never seems to be a spare minute. We have had an awful rush for the last few weeks and I really feel quite exhausted, much to the indignation of Helen who wants me to leave at once! However, haymaking is over now, and I have said I am tired and must have more rest so things will be easier, and I think I will stay until about the end of September. My hand has stood the test well and is steadily improving. Mrs. B. is certainly quaint, she is very excitable and intense, can be very sweet and charming but is one of those helpless, impractical people who always get someone to help them out, I am the mug at present and have found it trying, doing the housework as well as so much outside work. However, it has suited me well. It has been a

Rachel's Letters 1940

healthy outdoor life and I have felt I have been really useful, and my hand is now in a condition to take on any reasonable job. Also, though I haven't been paid I have had free board. Thank you for Elsie Segart's article, I was interested in it, I expect it would strike any one coming from Europe how remote you are out there from it all but I don't see how it can be otherwise. I was wondering if she had got away from Italy.

I have read through the statement you sent me, Howard, but I haven't had the time to study it thoroughly yet. The chief thing that strikes me is what a lot of work you have done with it. I am very grateful to you. The position looks satisfactory and I shouldn't have any more heavy expenses as I shall not be gadding about. The dentist is the only big thing ahead.

Love to you all,

RACHEL

I hope Janet threw off her cold quickly.

Lansdowne House
Tunbridge, Kent

September 6, 1940

Dear Family,

I moved on from Pluckley a few days ago. I had intended to shortly in any case as the rush of work was over and I was feeling rather tired. However, I got a slight gastric attack and speaking to Helen on the telephone she said there was a lot of mild typhoid about and she thought I had better see a Doctor, so I cast around in my mind what to do as I didn't want to be ill at Mrs. Berthou's, I remembered that Cousin Jean had mentioned a distant cousin who is a Doctor at Tunbridge about 30 miles west of Pluckley, so I packed hurriedly and came here the next morning. I sought out the Doctor, Cedrick Tuckett by name, and found him an exceedingly nice young man with a very pretty wife and 3 small children. They were very kind and friendly and found me lodgings in a house usually occupied by Masters of Tunbridge Grammar School just opposite but as it is holiday time they were able to give me a bedroom and a very comfortable sitting room (it is quite the usual thing over here - the landlady looked quite puzzled when I said it didn't matter about a sitting room and said the bedroom was not big enough - then they serve your meals in your own room on a tray). The rightful owner has left his wireless and a lot of books, so I am very comfortable spending a good bit of my time in bed and having a good rest. I no longer feel very seedy, in fact I feel a complete fraud but I have to keep quiet for a few days until we get the results of various tests but the Doctor doesn't think it will prove to be typhoid.

The Tucketts moved into a new house 2 months ago and is the pride of their hearts. It is a charming place and they have just finished all the repainting and fixing up curtains and carpets. They showed me over it all the day I arrived. The next morning during an air raid I heard a whistling bomb fall and to my horror I learned it had dropped in their garden and blown in all the front of the house. Fortunately, the children were out and no one was hurt but isn't it bad luck. It is the first damage to be done in Tunbridge too.

I find they haven't got used to the raids at night here yet, they haven't had so many as we have. The kind old landlady comes and wakes me up to come downstairs and says not to be afraid she won't leave me alone when my only idea is to turn over and go to sleep again.

Tunbridge seems a pleasant town and is on the River Mersey.

I have just been watching a flock of German planes come over a massed formation of bombers escorted by fighters, I noticed one plane crisscrossing in and out among them and wondered what it was doing and then suddenly realised it was one of ours breaking up the formation, they are powerless to fire at it for fear of hitting each other.

September 9th

I am feeling much better again; I definitely have not got typhoid and should be alright in a few days. I just have to be careful of my diet for a while and think I will stay quietly here for another week after that I have no definite plans.

Today I tried a public air raid shelter, rather damp and uncomfortable, built of brick and concrete below the level of the street and inside, strong struts of timber to keep the bricks from collapsing. The seats are hard and narrow, and it wouldn't be much fun to spend a night in one, but still, one is grateful for them. I was in the street when a raid came over and didn't take much notice until the Warden said "better get under cover, things are likely to happen soon" so I went down and a few minutes after, machine gun bullets were pattering in the street like hail. London has been having a dreadful time the last few days and there seems no defence against the night raids. They pass over here without bothering much about us but it is horrible to hear them surging past and to know what they are up to, I feel worried about Barbara Mortimer-Thomas, my masseuse at St Thomas' and Helen who went up to London last week.

I had a nice batch of letters yesterday from Thea, Aunt Ida, Howard, and Babs.

September 10th

I have just had a dreadful shock. Barbara Thomas was killed by a bomb yesterday. A thousand-ton bomb hit the nurses' home at St Thomas killing four of the massage staff. The terrible part was that she was trapped by falling masonry and was alive when they found her in the morning, and they worked for 15 hours to get her free. She died just as they succeeded.

She is the most irreparable loss to the massage world in fact the world at large. She had exceptional gifts of brain, character, and personality. I have never met anyone quite like her. She was 32, very pretty and vivacious with a tremendous fund of enthusiasm and sympathy which she threw into her work. I cannot imagine a patient not being better from contact with her personality alone let alone her skill.

She was a pioneer of some new ante- and post-natal exercises which have lately been introduced into the hospitals with great success. I first met her 2 years ago in Sydney (she is a Sydney girl) when she came out lecturing on the subject and I was tremendously impressed with her.

When I came over here, I found she was a great friend of Helen's and Barbara Peden's and I met her quite a lot. When I required massage I asked her diffidently if she would do it, as I didn't know if she would be bothered with anything so ordinary as a Colles' fracture but she tackled it enthusiastically and it is entirely owing to her that I now have a useful hand. She refused to charge me, did it daily for months and though nothing of giving me treatments lasting for 2 hours and I can't tell you what her encouragement and optimism meant to me on dark day.

The tragic part is that she started in private practice and took a flat a few months ago and when the war intensified lately they asked her to come back into residence at St Thomas' so as to be able to take her share of duty in special emergency squads. Also, they have been cabling her begging her to go to Australia and get her special work started there and she refused, feeling that she would be running away from her duties at this time. I feel most bitterly resentful that it should have happened to Barbara of all people. She is irreplaceable. Forgive this rigmarole but I have never felt so utterly shattered by anything in my life before. I feel that for me the war began today. I was to have gone up tomorrow for my massage but as I was feeling worried and heard that some hospitals had been hit, I rang up today to speak to her and was told.

Helen had fortunately gone to Scotland the day before the onslaught began, I hope she stays there.

I had a letter from Gwen Roberts today, so they are alright so far. I am thinking of joining her for a few days as she is having her holidays next week.

September 12th

Last night there was ceaseless war of gunfire the whole night. Having just heard Mr. Churchill's speech I made up my mind it was the invasion but having great confidence in the Navy and in the preparations on land to meet it I slept soundly in spite of it.

Today I hear it was an intensified anti-aircraft barrage and it seems to have been pretty successful in turning the planes back from London, I have never heard anything like it before.

I am feeling very well again now.

Much love to you all,

RACHEL

*Copied from the Bulletin
19th August 1942*

The Barbara Mortimer Thomas Memorial Fund now stands at £240 - Women hockey players throughout Australia have responded gladly.

Miss Thomas who was an old PLC Pymble girl went to England in 1930 as a member of the Australian Women's Hockey Team. She stayed on in London to study massage at St Thomas. The Australian girl had a distinguished student career, gained 1st place in England for anatomy. Later she joined the staff at St Thomas's where she held a high and responsible position.

During the hell of bombs which fell on London in 1940, Miss Thomas and 3 other staff masseuses of the hospital died as a result of injuries while in action - now funds are being collected in London to raise Memorials to these 4 brave women in the form of scholarships for training masseuses. That in memory of Barbara Thomas will benefit Empire students overseas. Kathleen Cummins is secretary of the Australian end of the appeal. A group of friends from her Sydney University days, last week added a picture to the collection in Manning House (within the university) and books to the library as a more personal tribute to Barbara's memory.

Rachel's Letters 1940

Lansdowne House
Tonbridge, Kent

September 18th, 1940

Dear Family,

I hope you aren't feeling too worried about me, I sent a cable a few days ago but they couldn't promise when it would go, and inland telegrams take 4 days just now.

It has been hard to know how to describe things here, it is all so terrific, but of course you get the details just as we do. You probably get the papers earlier in the day than we do, as ours are dependent on disorganised railway services to the country and sometimes don't arrive until the evening.

London is having a shocking time - really terrible! I know I don't realise myself what it must be like there at night. There is all the difference in the world between an air raid in the country than in London.

In the former it is just planes overhead, the pop pop of a few close A.A. guns and the roar of distant ones. Now and then bombs drop in the distance and occasionally close enough to shake the house - or if you are unlucky closer than that, in London it must be just bedlam! Every bomb must hit something.

The day before yesterday I went up to London for Barbara Thomas' funeral. There was to be a service in St Thomas Chapel at 10.15 but during the night more bombs caught the hospital wrecking the Chapel, the administration block, the kitchens, the dispensary, the power plant and everything essential to its running, as well as some of the wards, so the hospital has had to be evacuated altogether. I saw some of the massage staff who had spent a dreadful night in the basement, choked with brick dust and the smell of cordite from the bombs and with the walls rocking to the explosions. They were only able to hold a very short service in the little mortuary chapel and then 6 of us drove to the Brookwood Cemetery near Guildford, 2 hospital sisters and 4 of Barbara's Australian friends, Helen among them. It was rather sad as she had hundreds of friends over here, but it was impossible for them to get there. The rescue squad who worked so hard to get her free refusing even to stop for meals, were all at the service in their uniforms.

I went up from here by bus and of course it was interesting to see what London looked like after a week of bombardment. In the main it looked much as usual, but one was continually coming across closed underground stations, portions of road roped off, damaged buildings and buildings reduced to a heap of dust. Coming through the SE workers residential suburbs there were mile and miles of houses without a window left in them and every few hundred yards a house completely wrecked. In the city the people seem to be going about their business as usual and were quite cheerful. It is hard to get much business done in a day as it is a matter of fitting it in between air raids and communications are difficult. Things are repaired with wonderful rapidity, but conditions change daily, and it is a matter constant adaptation. There were several warnings the day I was up there, but it was very quiet, and I didn't hear any planes or bombs.

September 22nd

The siren is now taken as an "alert" rather than an alarm signal as the latter was too disorganising. They have had to alter the ruling that post offices closed with the sirens, as postal matter was accumulating to an impossible degree and letters were taking a week and telegrams 4 days to get to their destination and telephones went instantly on to an "emergency only", so that businesses which were trying to carry on normally found it impossible. The latest idea is that they have a second signal for "imminent danger".

Helen Taylor came here to join me a few days ago. She had been in London on business for some days and said the nights were frightful - crouching in a passageway while the walls rocked, and the doors flew open and dust and smoke poured in from the street. She was sure the house had been hit but found on investigation that the bombs were several hundred yards away. The noise of the AA guns seems to be terrific, but people find it comforting as a lullaby, feeling that something is being done about the raiders.

Down here it is wonderfully peaceful in comparison. Last night we were sitting quietly after dinner when there was a sharp retort and glass showered into the room from a broken window. We at once thought of bombs, parachutes, guns etc., and it was quite an anticlimax to find a stone and to discover it had been thrown by a boy at a cat on the wall and had missed it. So many extraordinary things are happening that one forgets the ordinary things.

I don't know what I am going to do next, I decided to stay here till I felt quite fit and Dr Tuckett recommended me to a very good dentist and I am taking the opportunity to get some dental work done. I was going to have all my bottom teeth out as the gums have been sore ever since I left home and I have been in and out of dentists all the time but this man says he can save them so he has started given them some drastic treatment, cutting down the gums and treating them for a couple of weeks so I am hoping for great things.

We have been reading a very good book on Australia "Waltzing Matilda" by Haskell.

Wasn't it a marvelous feat removing the bomb from St Pauls! I think it is the bravest thing I have heard of - it would be done in such cold blood!

I feel very lazy here but it has been a lovely rest and I am now very fit again. As soon as my teeth are finished I shall go up to London and see if the Women's Voluntary Service are in need of helpers and if not I will try to get something to do in a hospital. I am still liable to be called up at any time to a hospital in Bedfordshire as an auxiliary nurse but haven't heard anything from them. There seems to be no demand for massage yet.

There is an autumn tone in the air today and the trees are beginning to turn. It has been lovely having Helen here for a few days and we have pottered about the country on our bicycles. She rode down from London with her luggage in a rucksack on her back as there were no trains (except in a very roundabout way the day she came. Now I believe they are all running again to timetable. I have tried to get some picture papers to send you with the pictures of the damage in London but you can't buy them unless they are ordered in advance so I hope your papers have had some.

The newspapers have been wonderful, several of them have had their works bombed but they have managed to produce the papers as usual if a little bit late.

Much love to you all.

RACHEL

Tonbridge Kent

October 5, 1940

Dear Family,

I was busy for several days last week helping at the Women's Voluntary Service Depot to give out clothes to East-enders who have had their homes bombed. Most of them were already down here for hop picking but they have lost everything they left in London. They also have only what they stand up in! Why they should have come away for several weeks hop picking without a change I don't know, but in any case, I don't suppose they have much. Many of them were certainly genuine and very sad cases. They won't be sent back to London when the hopping is over but to one of the safer counties. Some were very grateful and some went away grumbling because they couldn't get complete outfits for every member of their family. It was rather difficult for us as we only had what clothes had been able to be collected from people in the district and not nearly enough to go round. Of course they can get grants from the Government but this was just some extras to tide them over for a little while.

I went up to London again on Wednesday to interview the Massage Association and see what likelihood there is of my getting work. I have been wanting to see them for some time but they are evacuated to a village about 40 miles north of London and it took me all day to get there and back. The secretary was very nice and I felt it was quite worth going as hitherto I have only been a name on the list. She was not terribly encouraging said the demand has been very slight so far - but she seemed inclined to help me to something if possible. Meanwhile I have had an offer of work in a hospital in Wellington, Somerset. It is not much of a job really just probationer's nursing with practically no pay but I would get my board and lodging and as it is a maternity hospital it would be new to me and I should like the experience. I am still tied up with the dentist here so I am hoping they will wait a couple of weeks for me.

London looked rather more battered than when I saw it a fortnight before. It is very sad and infuriating but business seemed to be going on much as usual. The shops were making a gallant show. There are practically no windows left in Regent Street but they either had their display in the empty space open to the street or had business as usual placards up on the hoarding out front. Some of the big stores in Oxford Street have been badly hit, it seems so unfair when the one next door may be untouched and doubling its business.

Most of the trains seem to be running alright again; they perform wonders at repairing damaged lines quickly.

It is great as you approach London to see the main familiar landmarks still there. The dome of St Pauls looks solid and reassuring.

I have been watching the Australian Election results with interest. Mr. Menzies doesn't seem to have a working majority; I hope he will be able to form a National Government.

Tonbridge

October 19th

I must get this off the weeks do fly by! I have been sending my letters by air mail but don't know if there is much in it as they go via South Africa and take about 6 weeks.

Helen has been in the wars. A bomb caught the hospital where she was doing a temporary job at Croydon on October 5th, she was sleeping in a downstairs room for safety but this particular bomb penetrated 3 floors before bursting on the landing outside her door, most of the debris appears to have gone over her bed and landed on the one beyond killing its occupant. Helen was very lucky but her left hand has been pretty badly injured, part of one finger has gone, her wrist is fractured and badly cut. It was really a wonderful escape. She managed to climb out over the wreckage and got immediate attention which was lucky as she had cut an artery. She is now in hospital at Epsom and is getting on very well. She is up and goes for walks with me when I go over to see her and is very cheerful.

I went up to London again yesterday and of course I find the damage more extensive every time I see it. It is hard to describe it as one is alternatively horrified at the destruction and

amazed at how much is left untouched. The damaged and demolished dwelling houses on the outskirts of the city certainly extend for many more miles. Driving out of London you could count the houses with windows left in them on a couple of hands until you reach the country where it is only a house here and there.

The railways have had a pretty bad time but it is marvelous how quickly repairs are effected. Even so, of course, there is much disorganisation of train services. I watched the people streaming home from work yesterday evening, thousands on foot, thousands on bicycles and every motor vehicle loaded to its utmost with a human freight.

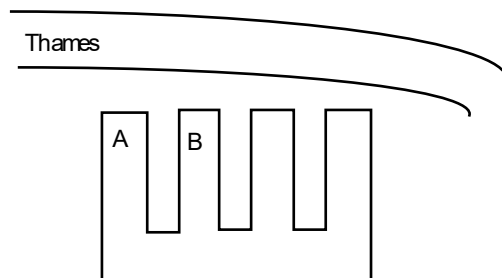
Some shops are keeping a skeleton staff sleeping in the basement for a few days on end and then they go home for a few days.

I believe Regent Street and Piccadilly Circus caught in badly again yesterday but I didn't see it, I noticed all the windows in the Henry VIII Chapel of Westminster Abbey were smashed and the stone work badly scarred. Many windows in the Houses of Parliament have gone and part of the end wall of the Big Hall but otherwise they are intact. The statue of Richard, Coeur de Lion, outside looks comical with his upheld sword badly bent and his horse's fetlocks in splints.

They do well to keep the trains running at all but they are very late and crowded it takes me many hours to get across to see Helen at Epsom. I have tried it by every possible route. Today I went by 3 changes of buses and it was a lovely trip. The country is very colourful just now, the grass very green, the trees gorgeous, masses of yellow, orange and brown and splashes of scarlet and crimson.

I still have no definite work yet but several irons in the fire. The Wellington job has not eventuated that is to say I haven't heard anything further, but many letters never arrive. I have applied for a massage job at a hospital in Durham and a few days ago I heard there was an Australian Hospital established at Godalming so I raced down there to see what was doing. They said, as I expected, that all appointments were made from Australia but they took my name and said it was possible I might be called on. It was refreshing to see Australian faces and lean forms propping up posts and walls and to hear a familiar accent.

On Wednesday I went to London to get warm clothes out of my luggage which is stored at Harrod's warehouse at Hammersville on the bank of the Thames. The building has parallel wings running towards the river like this



My things were stored at A. An aerial torpedo had struck B the day before making a crater 40' deep and hurling two loaded pantechnicons into the river and one on to the roof of a 2-storey block. My block had only windows cracked and my luggage not so much as any dust on it although the crater was not 20 yards away; the ways of blast are very strange. Wasn't I lucky? I hastily removed a suitcase more than I had intended and still keep thinking of things which I wish I had brought away.

I found Hammersmith was very close to Putney so went over to the Roberts for lunch. They were alright but rather feeling the strain of the noisy nights and there have been a good many hits about Putney. They all have their beds in the downstairs rooms but are considering moving to a relation's house at Richmond where they could inhabit a basement and perhaps sleep more easily. Gwen is on duty 2 nights a week at the Gloucester Road Tube Station to give first aid or any help required to the thousand people who sleep there nightly.

Yesterday she came down and spent the night with me and thought it very peaceful, though the planes never cease droning overhead all night. We spent a lovely day in the country - took our lunch and went to Pluckley, where I went and saw Miss Berthou, and Gwen inspected a small cottage which she thought might be useful as a weekend retreat. Unfortunately it had just been let. It is no use looking for houses in the so called safe areas now - the only hope is in the danger zones. They are no longer dangerous compared with London particularly now that fears of invasion seem to be less.

The manufacture of silk stockings has been prohibited - rather a blow but I suppose we will get used to all having thick and ugly legs. In the winter, anyway, it will no longer be a struggle being warm and looking nice but it won't be so good in summer; lisle stockings are vile. People are laying in enormous stocks. I am not bothering to do that but I will get a few pairs. English stockings are poor anyway.

Tonbridge has been pretty lucky up to date but it had a bad jolt today when a bomber complete with bombs (ours I fear) got out of control and came down on a row of houses demolishing a whole street, only one woman was killed, surprisingly, but a good many were hurt.

I am feeling very well now, - the gastric ulcer seems to have gone and my teeth will be finished next week, I shall be glad to get away - it was an ideal place when I wanted a rest but I am getting restless now. I am waiting for a reply to letters about work.

I was always moaning about my hand - I don't know whether I have ever mentioned that it is wonderfully better since I have been resting it here. I can write easily now and it is such a relief. I think I could use it for anything, now though of course it is not perfect

I am afraid you won't be getting much, if anything, for Christmas, shopping is difficult; you are asked only to buy essentials and shipping space is limited and should not be filled with unnecessary things. I may send some little things to the kids but I doubt even that, it is not very certain they would arrive either.

Chocolate has suddenly become almost unprocurable, otherwise food supplies are very plentiful. Butter is the only thing which is a bit scanty - 2 ozs per week supplemented by 4 ozs of marge.

I dare say this won't reach you much before Christmas so it brings my greetings and lots of love from

RACHEL

Tonbridge

November 26th

Dear Family,

There still isn't much news but I must start a letter. I see by the paper that letters by airmail have been found to take the same time or a little longer than those by sea so there is no point wasting 1/3d. I had a letter from Howard yesterday dated August 30th and a later one, dated sometime in September, both reached me on November 2nd.

I am still busy with the dentist one thing after another keeps turning up but I think I will be finished with him this week.

I have been trying to make plans and decided today to go to a hospital in Surrey as an auxiliary nurse. It is not what I would choose but there seems nothing in message and I must get to work at something. I may still hear from some of hospitals I applied for but I am not very hopeful and I can't wait on indefinitely; I know that 3 of them already have posts filled and there is such a lot of competition that I am at a bit of disadvantage with my Australian qualifications. I thought of joining the W.R.E.N.S. so went up to London yesterday to make enquiries, I saw Alex Osborne's sister, Nancy, who is one of the Heads but she advised me against it, said there was no vacancy suitable for me at all. So I decided on the other and made a stipulation that I should be free if wanted for my own work, to which they agreed rather reluctantly. They like to nail you down for the duration, but I hope I shan't be at it very long as it won't be a very interesting job. I don't know when I am to go yet but I should imagine probably next week.

Helen came out of hospital today and has come here for a few days before starting work again; her hand seems to be getting on well but is pretty weak.

The last fortnight has been exciting one with the action at Toranto and the amazing success of the Greeks and the sad but thrilling end of the "Jervis Bay".
I often wonder where Rupert is.

November 29th

As soon as I had posted my letter accepting the auxiliary nurse post I had one from the Massage Association telling me to apply for a massage job at a hospital at Weymouth, so I am again in uncertainty. I am afraid I won't be popular if I leave the first one after a few days. However, my application for the second may not be any more successful than they have been in the past.

Howard will be very sad about the fate of Conventry (I think I remember rightly that he lived there for quite a long while). They have had a dreadful time there - I think it was the most intensive and concentrated raid there has been here. I saw gruesome pictures of it at the cinema yesterday.

Bristol has been the latest sufferer so I hope the Gawnes are alright.

London has been having an easier time and with the help of the Pioneers they are clearing up a lot of the mess and it looks much better.

I went up for the day on Wednesday and had lunch with Ethel Stuckey who is still nursing in a hospital in North London. She is thinking of going home to Australia, as, in spite of the air raids she says they are not busy enough to make her feel it is necessary to stay over here and she is rather homesick.

Here is a good story I heard yesterday, you may have heard it - A British prisoner of War in Germany wrote home to his friends in England and said we are being very well treated here, we have plenty of food and warm clothes, you can tell this to the Army and tell it to the Navy and especially tell it to the Marines!"

We are getting indications that we shall have to tighten our belts before long but they say there will be no shortage of essential foodstuffs. Certainly we haven't felt any pinch yet but there are

varying supplies of many things. At present eggs are very precious, biscuits are hard to get just now, owing to many factories having been bombed as well as shortages of sugar. Marmalade is almost unprocurable as Seville oranges are not being imported. Bananas will be seen no more after next week. My landlady here is marvelous. She always manages somehow to produce excellent meals. It must give her a bit of a headache finding substitutes for what she can't get but the results are most satisfying. I think I shall rather miss the marmalade when Mrs. Such's supply runs out so if anyone feels like sending me a small tin, it would be very nice. I don't know how much one is justified in filling up shipping space - that is the only thing about it.

December 1st

Helen leaves here today, it has been nice having her this week. We have been to several pictures and over to Maidstone to visit some of her friends there several times. I still don't know when I shall be leaving here, the dentist has nearly finished with me, so I hope soon.

Love to you all

RACHEL

Rachel's Letters 1940

Farnham County Hospital
Farnham, Surrey

December 20th 1940

Dear Family,

I have left you a long while without a letter but it has been quite impossible to write since I came here. I came at a few days' notice and started work here on 5th. I knew nursing was a hard life but I never knew how hard until I tried it - it's terrific! I have just about enough energy left to crawl into bed at the end of the day. I have written no Christmas letters or cards nor done any shopping. Besides the long hours it is awfully hard at first because you don't know just what to do or how to do it and nobody has time to tell you, you just learn by getting into trouble for doing things wrong! I struck 2 very busy days to begin with and the Sister of the ward is very temperamental and only the fact that I had to give a weeks' notice kept me there at all. However, at the end of the week I was finding my feet a little and at the end of 2 weeks was beginning to like it in spots. But then I got a very bad cold with some antrum trouble and lost my voice so now I am in bed in a little private ward having a good rest, getting some letters written and making a quick recovery. Unfortunately they think the antrum is caused by the teeth I have just spent vast sums getting filled and crowned so then they will have to come out after all and I hoped I had done with the dentist!

I don't know whether I will be here for Christmas or whether I will be back on duty or whether if they give me a few days I will be able to go down to Susie. She is not very far from here.

To my surprise I was not put in the Nurses' Home which is full but billeted out in the town. I only sleep there and have all my meals at the hospital. I am fortunate in being with 2 nice old ladies, 2 sisters, ex-school teachers. One was a governess out in Kenya for many years. They are very kind to me and invite me to sit by the fire when I come in the evenings and there is always plenty of hot water (some people can't get a bath at their billets at all). The only drawback is that it is a mile from the hospital and I have to be on duty at 6.30 a.m. so it is not much fun plunging out into the dark, wet, cold at that time. We get off at 8.00 p.m. and have 2 hours off some time during the day. Had I realised the conditions would be so hard I don't think I would have come here until the worst of the winter was over. However, there does seem to be a genuine shortage of nurses so that is perhaps some satisfaction in being here.

It is not a very attractive hospital - mostly workhouse and infirmary attached - a collection of rather dingy buildings scattered about. You walk miles from one part to another, all outside, and get very wet getting to the dining room.

I think they are having great difficulty with their nursing staff and, the standard of nursing doesn't seem very high. It is supposed to be a training school but there seems to be very few probationers; only sisters and then a gap down to riff-raff like myself who have picked up bits of training anywhere and anyhow and seem to be given responsibility much too soon because there aren't enough people for the senior jobs.

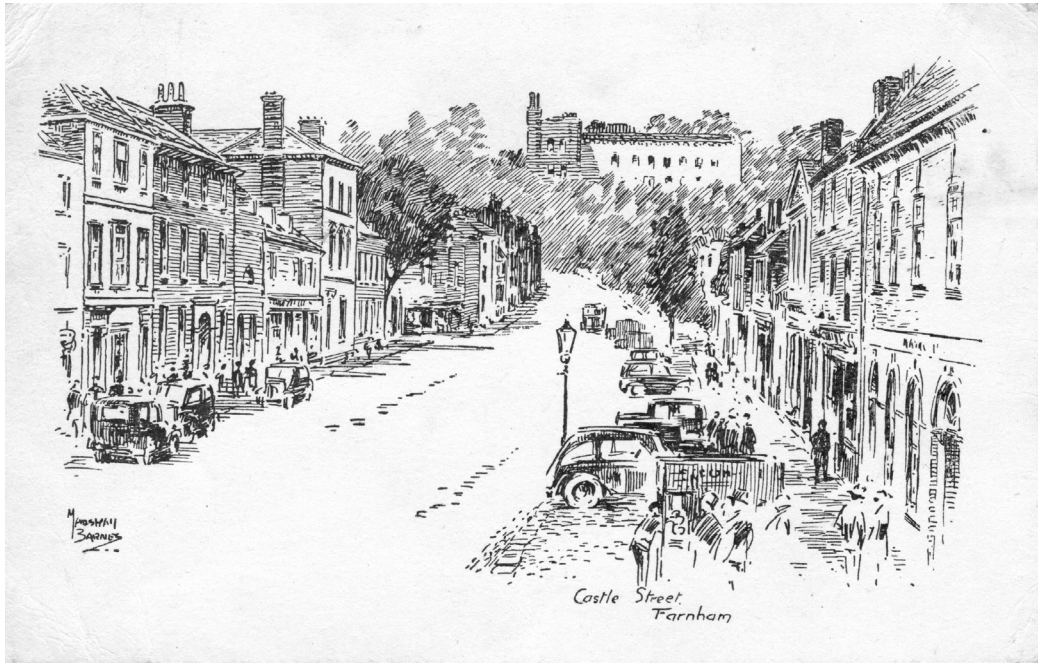
However, they have been kind and considerate to me since I have been off colour and they feed us very well considering there is a war on. I am always ravenous for my meals.

I don't know how long I will be here I hope not too long, as I am still hoping for one of the massage appointments for which I have applied.

The war news has been encouraging and cheering. The action in Egypt has all taken place so quickly that one can hardly realise it. I expect the Australians are glad to get into action at last. Greece still maintains its advances! I think afterwards the stand made by them will prove to have been one of the key points of the war. Its effect has been marvelous.

I have heard from some of the cousins this Christmas, they all seem to be weathering the blitz alright. I shall be thinking of you all, I will send you a cable if I am allowed out of here in the next few days.

Much love from,
RACHEL



Postcard with a picture of Farnham on the front on the back it says:

Farnham is a pretty little town and full of historic association dating back to the Norman Conquest, the Castle you see at the end of the street dominates the town, it is very old but it is still occupied by the Bishop of Guildford. When I was in Tonbridge Mrs. Greig, widow of the late Bishop lodged in the same house. She gave me an introduction to the present Bishop's wife, hoping I might be invited to the Castle but so far we haven't been able to fix up a meeting.