

Newcastle-on Tyne

Jan 4th, 1942

Dear Family,

I watch the progress of events in the Pacific anxiously, and try to picture the defence preparations that you must be making in Australia. I comb the papers for news. There is not much but I gather that you are building shelters, sandbagging things and evacuating children from the coastal towns. The Japanese successes came as an awful shock and it takes so long to get reinforcements and sea-forces out from here even if they can be spared! America will be formidable when she gets going, but, again, it takes so long and meanwhile our poor island is in great peril. One had a comfortable feeling that Singapore was an unconquerable bulwark, but now one is not so sure. The loss of the Repulse and the Prince of Wales was a terrible tragedy and has left the field so free for the Japs. Our coastal towns are so vulnerable, and I shudder to think of the damage that could be done to Sydney in a few hours of bombardment. May it never come to that! I am wondering how wholesale the evacuation has been. It is such a difficult problem for parents to decide. I know your civil defence services etc have been organised for a long time and would soon be in full working order. Let's hope they'll never be needed. I have no doubt of the eventual outcome, but time is so precious, and the Japs are pushing on so fast that I dread what may happen in the interval before the Allies full strength gets going.

I have had a very pleasant Xmas season. Xmas and New Year's Day off. The first I spent with Mrs Hodgkin in her old museum-like house in the country. There were only the two of us, so it was quiet, and a bit exhausting as she was deaf and had to be shouted at, but it was very comfortable. She was very kind - showered presents on me, and the cook managed to produce wonderful meals with a genuine pre-war flavour.



On New Year's Day all the Massage Staff spent a picnic day at Miss Welton's country shack (she is one of our members). It was a lovely day – bright and fresh, and we alternately went for brisk walks and got full of fresh air and sat by a big fire and ate.

The weekend between I spent with some other cousins, an old Mrs Kaye, who has a house about 10 miles out of Newcastle and has 2 married daughters and their various husbands and children with her for the duration. They were a cheerful household and had a children's party one afternoon which was fun.

A lot of patients stayed away from treatment so work at the hospital was slack, and altogether I feel as if I had had a good rest. Tomorrow we start again at full swing.

The news is good from Libya and Russia, thank goodness.

I am very fit and cheerful.

Love to you all, and good luck in 1942.

Rachel

Aunt Rachel's Letters 1942

Newcastle

Jan 24th, 1942

Dearest David,

Many thanks for your lovely long letter which I much appreciated. I know you have no spare time for writing so I shouldn't worry you to, but I do enjoy your letters.

You have certainly had your fill of worries in 1941. May this year bring you better things! I hope you have dependable men now on the place, but I expect they are hard to get – almost as hard as women.

Fancy the wool-shed block at Yamala selling at last! It should ease your worries a bit, though of course it considerably reduces your area and limits your scope.

I think it is splendid that you are managing to raise the money to pay Miss Scott and Townsend. I hope I haven't worried you too much about it. Perhaps it was not as urgent as I felt, but it seemed to me that unless someone agitated a bit it would (very naturally, under the circumstances) drag on indefinitely. However, only you can tell whether it can reasonably be managed now, so you must do what you think best.

What a busy time Bun. has had! I don't know how she copes with so much. You certainly have a grand wife!

I am staggered at the account of all your set-backs during the year – it couldn't have been much worse. However, as you say, all you can do is hang on and sow and wait, hope for the best. I am glad the rain came in time to save your crops.

Since I finished Bunny's letter your parcel has arrived. Thank you so much for it. It is most welcome and such a nice lot of things! The sheep's tongues will certainly be a treat. I feel rather guilty when these nice parcels come along, as we are not really short of food, but of course it is a bit monotonous and I do enjoy the little extras and they make it easier to have a visitor. Also, it is rather difficult to do the necessary shopping in the winter, as to ease transport difficulties the shops have been shutting at 4:30 to get the shop people away before the factory workers. Australian jam is always a treat, it is so fruity, and my ration never lasts out, and the tinned milk will be very useful as they have lately had to cut down our allowance for the winter.

A few days ago, the 'Country Life' you sent arrived and I have been browsing over it and enjoying all the familiar names and items of news. Of course, it is not all cheerful reading – strikes etc are disheartening to hear about at this time – You'd think that the Japs on the doorstep would make them sit up, but it seems not.

It's the same here, the miners go out on strike, though the need for coal is desperate, but they have more excuse here as their conditions are not good and it's a hard life.

There were a lot of interesting articles in it. I see Indigo(?) Jones is still going strong and his forecasts seem pretty good. I see too, that, as here, when the price of anything is controlled it goes off the market. I fancy that here they get rid of them in the Black Market, or to friends and neighbours where they have no marketing experience. They can't expect people to go on growing the necessary things unless they can subsidise them to cover the costs. Total war certainly brings many problems – it needs super-wise heads to deal with them. Mr Curtin seems to me to be pretty sound, and strong

too. He seems to be doing well. It is a tragedy at a time like this that, as you tell me, some of the members of the govt. are only out for the party.

The Pacific news has been a bit disturbing the last few days, with signs of another big attack impending. I hope Australia is bristling with well-armed Americans.

It was a grand job turning the Japs out of Papua, but I fear it is only the beginning. Anyway, things are going well on this side, and if Stalin can keep it up in his corner, and Montgomery in his, there may soon be troops to spare to help out there. I hope to goodness they get you some decent rifles before the Japs arrive! Or, better still, that they never arrive!

The Hobart people must be thrilled over Tulloch's decoration. It was good work. They were pleased at your ringing up to congratulate them.

You must all be parched for a good holiday by the sea, but I suppose, apart from the difficulty of leaving the place, the coast is not a very desirable place to be just now. What a choice of landing places the Japs have all round the coast! The only comfort is they'll never get far inland. And, after all, we have a Navy!

I still have not made any plans about coming home -I suppose I'm here for the duration, though I think any adverse turn of events out there would bring me before. There is a pretty big demand for masseuses here now, and I don't think there is an urgent one out there. Each winter I toy with the idea of going out at the end of summer, but I don't. I am quite happy here, and too busy to be lonely, but I do hate missing so much of the children at all stages. Yours seem to be fine boys and to give you no anxiety. I am glad John is getting on well at school and hope Tom does too. How quiet the house will be without them. I hope you will be able to manage TAS for John before long.

Much love to you, old chap, and all the best,

Rachel

Newcastle-on-Tyne

Jan 28th, 1942

Dear Family,

It is time I sent you another scribble though there isn't much news. All the news is being made at your side of the world! It is a very anxious time. I can well imagine all the frenzied preparations that must be being made, and I keep wondering how they are affecting each of you personally.

I wish I had more confidence in the politicians out there, but I suppose at this juncture they are doing their dis-interested best. I hope so, anyway. I should feel happier with Menzies in control.

I hope Mr Churchill is right in his conjecture, made in the House of Commons yesterday, that Japan would hesitate to invade Australia, and scatter her forces still more, at any rate until she is more firmly established everywhere.

Australia has been very much in the headlines here lately. Unfortunately, much of what they quote as the opinion out there is taken from "Truth" and suchlike papers and is misleading. I was glad to hear Mr Churchill say, though, that the Aust. Forces will be sent home to defend their country.

Things still go wonderfully well in Russia, and, not quite so well in Libya at the moment.

We have just been through a very cold snap – lots of snow and ice, pipes frozen so that we have had no hot water for a week, but fortunately the cold stayed unfrozen.

I haven't minded it at all and am feeling very fit. I work in such a super-heated, steamy atmosphere all day that I get thoroughly warmed and quite enjoy the walk home in the cold air. It is a bit hard to keep warm in the evenings as coal restrictions prevent one having as good fires as usual, but I have lots of warm clothes, and pile them on regardless of appearance.

Last week was my long weekend which we get every 2 to 3 months. I had planned to go over the see Llewyn and Joan Roberts in Yorkshire, where he is stationed, but it was a cross-country journey with several changes of buses and the weather was so bad that I was afraid of not getting there or, worse still, not getting back. So, I put it off, and now hear that they are being moved down south again next week, so I am sorry I have missed them. Llewyn has had a lot of ill-health lately and is disappointed at not being sent overseas, but apparently isn't strong enough at the moment.

So, I stayed at home for the week-end and did a lot of mending and odds and ends. I spent one day in Durham having a look around. It is quaint old town, all narrow little streets winding up and down steep hills with a river at the foot of them. A magnificent Norman cathedral and an old castle (now Durham university) stand on the top of one of the hills with a sheer drop down to the river. It must be the most beautiful site of any cathedral in England. I must visit it again in the spring when it should be lovely. The countryside looked very bleak on Saturday and the river was frozen.

Work goes on as usual. I like my patients, mostly Tyne shipyard workers or miners. Their North-country accent is still a bit of a puzzle to me, but I am getting used to their expressions. They like to start a sentence with Eeeee--, as an expression of surprise or emphasis. It can be drawn out to any length and is very expressive. Hinny is a term of endearment, and canny is a favourite adjective for describing a person, but it hasn't the Scotch meaning, that we know, but means "nice" or "homey". "Eeeee he's a canny lad".

Love to you all and confusion to the Japs. Rachel

Newcastle-on-Tyne

Feb 19th, 1942

Dear Family,

The news gets worse and worse. The last few weeks seem like a bad dream, and I can hardly realise that Singapore has really gone, and 30,000 of our men with it. And today comes the not unexpected news of the bombing of Darwin, so the fight is really on. It is a horrible prospect. In the papers I read that the country is on a full war footing, every man and woman mobilised for some sort of action, and all industries turned over to war production. How I wonder how it is affecting each one of you! I long for letters but feel I must face the prospect of being cut off for a time, as the sea warfare is bound to be intensified. There has been a long gap in my letters now, but I may get a batch all together soon.

The people over here are very disturbed and anxious at the way things are going, and there is much murmuring and adverse criticism of the powers that be. There certainly seems much to criticise, but one has to try to keep in mind that one does not know all the facts, and that we are still of necessity fighting a defensive battle with what we can, while waiting for production to creep up.

Loyalty to Mr Churchill is still unshaken, but many people consider he is keeping too big a burden on his own shoulders and should share the responsibility. I doubt that others could do better, but the trouble is that mistakes are so terribly costly, and it is hard to take a wide and long view of the whole thing when each separate action seems so vital.

It does seem that Singapore should have been more strongly defended, or not at all, but it might have come off. I feel that Darwin can be regarded more as an island than Australia itself, and that the Japs are more likely to push on in Burma and India than to attack the southern part next.

The escape of the German ships up the Straits of Dover was a bitter shock, on top of everything else last week, and raises the invasion bogey here again. Yes, poor Mr Churchill certainly has his work cut out to spread our forces about the world judiciously! And the Americans are taking a hell of a time to come to life! About 1944 they'll rally round and pick up the pieces!

My small bits of daily news don't seem worth writing, but here they are.

It has been warmer lately, and I go to work by day light. Today there was even a weak sun shining and I sat up on the flat roof after lunch, though it was too cold to take my hands out of my pockets. I had my hair permed yesterday, as sachets for waving are now prohibited and I thought they might soon be unprocurable, but they tell me they are evolving new methods.

Soap is now rationed – 2oz of toilet soap per month and the same of washing soap. I expect we'll soon be feeling a lot of repercussions from the Pacific in our supplies, but we have been very lucky so far.

On Sunday I went to see some friends of Joan Roberts who are stationed here. A naval captain and his wife called Weeks – both very nice. They had spent some years at Jervis Bay.

Much love to you all. God keep you safe.

I am thinking about you all the time.

Rachel

Newcastle-on-Tyne

March 10th, 1942

Dear Family,

I had a nice batch of letters from Thea, Howard, Babs and Aunt Ida lately. Howard's with nearly a month between two letters arrived the same day. You all sounded calm and cheerful despite everything.

The Japs didn't take long to make mincemeat of Java – It was hardly to be expected that they would be able to hold out long. I was cheered to see yesterday that American troops and naval units were arriving in Australia, so I hope they are sending them in worthwhile quantity – and planes!

I am very fit and have been revelling in 2 days of unclouded sunshine, weak and sickly though it is. The grey days are not unpleasant, I like them, but it is only when the sun struggles through and gives you quite a shock of surprise, that you realise you literally haven't seen it for weeks or months! Last week we had 2 days of unexpected blizzard which piled the snow into deep drifts on one side of the roads, leaving the other side almost bare and blew it in under the tiles in masses, so that when it thawed it dripped through the ceilings and poured down the walls – an awful mess! But that is over now, and after 2 quite warm days we feel that Spring is on the way.

We have just had a "Warships Week" in Newcastle-on-Tyne to raise money to be invested in Gov. stock. They got nearly 4 million – about £14 per head – which seemed good. Mis Halliday, my landlady, and Miss Elliot, an energetic and vivacious Scotch dressmaker who has lodged here for years decided to have a function in the house to raise money to give as a gift. It took the form of a whist-drive (10 tables) and a bring-and-buy sale. Miss Elliot has a lot of friends and a big connection of customers. And quite a lot of people came along, bringing an amazingly varied collection of goods to sell. Everyone worked hard, the house was in a turmoil for a week or so, and Miss Halliday's temper suffered, but it was a great success, bringing in £57, instead of the £20 we aimed at.

I am thinking of moving soon, as I'm sure I could manage much more economically by doing for myself. I should enjoy it for a change, and in the warmer weather don't want to be tied to coming home for a meal at 7 every night, or to have to pay for my meals if I am away for a weekend. So, I have been inspecting dozens of flatlets and bed-sitting rooms. So far, I haven't found the perfect one. If they are fairly cheap, there is always a catch about them – they are dirty or the cooking or bathing arrangements are impossible, or they are miles out of town. However, it is quite fun looking around when I don't have to move in a hurry. I am toying with the idea of an unfurnished dental surgery at present! It has central heating and running hot water, and a hole in the floor where the dental chair stood, which will have to be covered by a mat. It has cupboards built in which would help with the furnishing.

A more practical idea would probably be an offer I had today to share part of a house with a member of our staff, but we haven't gone into details yet to see if it would work.

The North-country people are wonderfully kind and have been very good to me. One of our staff, Mrs Barfelt, who is rather older than the others, has a flat with her grown up daughter, and she gives me an open invitation there, and always expects me to spend Sunday evening and have supper with them. She has several lonely medical students she mothers too, who blow in for meals 2 or 3 times a week – I don't know how she makes the rations spin out, but they never go hungry.

I went to see "Macbeth" on Saturday but John Gielgud, the star performer was ill, and the understudy was poor. Still I enjoyed it.

Love from,

Rachel

Newcastle-on-Tyne

April 18th, 1942

Dear Family,

I mean to write every 2 to 3 weeks at least, but the time flies by and it nearly always seems to be a month – this time it's more!

The RAAF seems to be doing very good work in New Guinea and America is beginning to make itself felt, so I hope we'll have some good news before long. My poor Burma is having a bad time. It is hard to picture all those charming, primitive villages on the river in the throes of mechanical warfare.

I have had a change at work lately. Every six months we have a move, so I have gone from the 'Bath Room' to the Radiant Heat Room where there are rows of beds with heated cradles over them and various sorts of lamps. It is not quite as hectic as the other, but busy enough. It is a pleasant room; cheerful chatter goes on as the patients sit around the lamps toasting themselves and you hear the views of the miners, shipyard workers, sailors etc. They are a nice lot, always so polite and helpful. They constantly produce chocolates out of their pockets for us, or a few eggs – very decent of them when they are so hard to get.

It has been a late Spring, but there are signs of green on the trees at last and lots of daffodils everywhere.

I have been looking for a flatlet or suitable bed-sit for some time and have ended by changing over to that arrangement without moving. I picked up a little gas-cooker in a junk shop for 15/- (they are unprocurable new) and have it fitted in my room, so I am independent. It is a nice room and I should be comfortably settled but for the fact that the landlady is tired, can get no help, won't take a holiday and so her temper is almost unbearable and we are all on the verge of leaving.

I have had several little trips away lately. One week-end Gwen Roberts came up from London for a few days and we met in York – walked around the old city walls, went to a service in the Minster etc. Then Gwen came on to Newcastle for a few days.

I hear Gerald Roberts is somewhere in the north of England, but I haven't been in touch with him yet.

At Easter we had an extra day, so I went to Wark, about 30 miles away on the north Tyne, where Jessie Wishart's friends have a little private hotel. It is a very pretty spot with both moorland and river valleys to walk in, but it was still disappointingly cold and showed no sign of Spring.

Last Sunday I spent the day in the country with a cousin I discovered here, Mrs Kaye. Her house is about 10 miles from Newcastle and has a lovely garden which was full of hyacinths. It was a long walk from the bus, and the Home Guard were being very active in the fields all the way – skirting round the fields in the cover of the hedges, crouching under gorse bushes and haystacks and challenging people as they passed by. Sunday morning is their time for practising manoeuvres.

Life goes on quietly. We have an occasional raid at night, but nothing much. More and more food stuffs are being rationed, but they are well apportioned and there is plenty of variety. Anything with metal or rubber in it is hard to get but we manage.

I expect you are suffering for many more shortages than we are. I was rather horrified to hear in a letter from Sydney the other day that you are rationed for milk. I at least imagined you to have plenty of natural produce. I suppose transport is the difficulty and perhaps the drought, which seems to be dragging on and to be very serious.

Aunt Rachel's Letters 1942

I can't imagine how you are managing on ½ oz of tea particularly country people in the summertime!
I feel guilty at having a little store that you have sent over to me and feel I ought to send some of it back!

Love from, Rachel

Newcastle-on-Tyne

May 12th, 1942

Dear Family,

I am still in the same place, though still looking for the perfect flatlet to move to, I have been trying for about a year to get a new valve for my little wireless, or, failing that, to hire one or buy a cheap second hand one. They are very hard to come by, so I was delighted a few weeks ago to come across a hire service which actually had one. It is such a joy to have it on or off as I wish, and is great company, particularly now that I eat alone. One of my colleagues has had a room here for some weeks which has been very nice for me, but she is leaving soon.

I had a lovely week-end in the country a fortnight ago at Miss Welton's cottage. The primroses in the valleys were glorious – millions of them – we picked great bunches. The valleys were sheltered from the biting NE wind which nearly always seems to blow here, and we lay and toasted in the sun and I felt as if I was on Bondi Beach – really warm for once. Unfortunately, it was a farewell visit to the cottage as they have had to give it up as the farm on which it stands has changed hands.

This week-end I am going to try Youth Hostelling – I am a bit nervous of the crowd of boisterous young bicyclers and hikers in corduroy shorts who will probably regard me as an interloper, but it is worth trying. It is a cheap and easy way to see the country.

The recent American Naval activity seems to have averted, for the time being at least, invasion plans for Australia. I cannot think that the Japs will tackle the S. Eastern part of Aust. yet awhile, but they seem to be very likely to try to get a footing on the North and West coasts to control that part of the sea. Bad luck to them anyway.

It was nice to get a cable from Howard a few days ago, and to hear that you were all well.

Poor old cousins Cha, Jessie and Julia have had a nerve-racking time lately with the raids on Exeter and the S. coast. They are hard on old people. I believe their house in Bath was unhurt, though Bath had a bad time. It is sad, as it is a lovely city. Cos. Hareward and Julie Roberts were also much shaken by the raids and may have to leave their house on account of the foundations being undermined. Joe Tangye was not so lucky. He had just taken a house in Bath and settled in with his wife (who is expecting a baby in a few weeks) and a 3year old daughter. He had turned the house into 2 flats at a good deal of expense. They went down into the cellar during the raid and the bombing was very heavy. They stayed there until the heat became terrific and the walls of their cellar started to bulge. Then they crawled out over piles of debris with a wall of fire on either side from the adjoining houses. In the morning nothing was left of the whole street. They lost all their belongings, but of course were very lucky to get out alive.

May 17th

I am just returning home after a lovely week-end in the country. Am sitting in the park at Hexham waiting till it is time for my train – very sunburned and dirty. I thought of going to a service in the fine old abbey here, but was turned away for not having a hat, which strikes me as a mistake these days when 9 women out of 10 don't have hats on unless they have set out specially to go to church.

The long evenings are really lovely, and the double summer-time stretches them out till about midnight. We have had an awfully cold spring, so a mild day is much appreciated.

I spent last night in a Youth Hostel, which was quite fun. There are 2 dormitories and a common room with a stove in it. A warden looks after it. The women's dormitory held 20 – double decker

beds consisting of canvas stretched across a wooden frame – no mattress – you have to carry or hire a special sheet sleeping bag, and they provide you with 3 blankets and a pillow – no food provided, but cooking facilities. Everyone was friendly and pleasant – the leader of a hiking party asked me to join them – they were only doing a short walk of 20 miles that day! I preferred to follow the directions of another walker who advised me about a gentle stroll along the riverbank. It was very beautiful – the beech trees just coming into leaf, lots of blue bells and primroses, and everything



very fresh and green. I went 7 or 8 miles altogether. Next week-end is the Whitsun holiday and I am doing the same thing again but shall have a companion, Gwen Batey, one of our staff. Youth Hostels cost 1/- per night, so it is a wonderful way of getting about.

I did the last bit of the journey back to Hexham by bus and sat next to a Naval officer and his wife who knew Arthur Mack

well, so I am meeting them for tea next week.

I have found my flatlet at last and am moving in a few days. It has a decent sized sitting room and a small bedroom. I share a kitchenette down a few stairs. I was only able to make a very cursory inspection as there were people in it – the furniture looked a bit dingy but comfortable. I daresay I'll sometimes curse the housework, but it will have the advantage that I shall be absolutely free to do whatever I like. The landlady seems good-natured, and I am getting it all for £1 a week which is reasonable as rents go in Newcastle these days. The demand for rooms and flats is great, owing to the temporary wartime inhabitants.

There has been a good contemporary art exhibition in Newcastle lately, and some excellent lectures in connection with it. One was by a man from London, Eric Newton, and I was particularly interested in it because I had just enjoyed a book by him, "European Painting and Sculpture" – by Penguin. It is written for the ordinary man and gives a clear explanation of and approach to modern art. It is the most readable history of art I have come across – some of you would enjoy it.

May 20th

I have just been round to my new establishment, into which I am moving in a few days, and was a bit staggered when the landlady announced that she didn't think she'd let me have the bed room after all – she had heard of a possible maid, and might want it! So, it seems as if I hadn't improved matters in the way of landladies! I was tempted to throw the whole thing up, but held myself back, as the big room would really make quite a decent bed sitting room and I mightn't find anything better.

I just missed the Aust. news on the wireless last night to my annoyance. I like to hear it – it gives all sorts of little up to the minute bits of news about rationing etc.

Love to you all,

Rachel

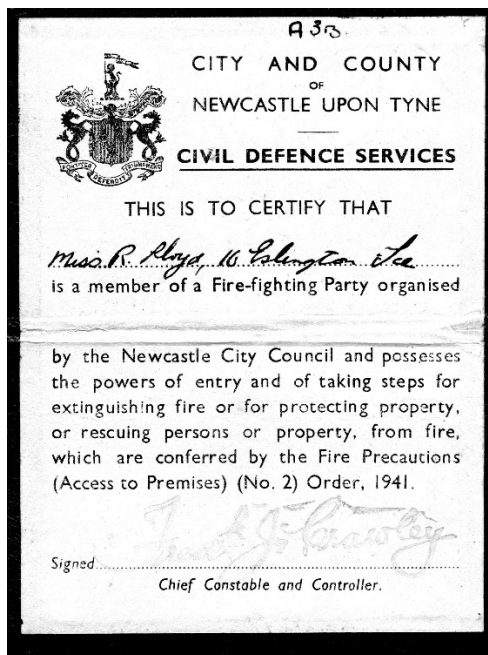
Newcastle-on Tyne

July 29th, 1942

Dear Family,

This has been an uneventful month, but I must gather up my scraps of news for you. The weather always seems to be the chief topic – waiting for the summer and registering disappointment when it doesn't come. Personally, I suspect that they never really have warm weather up here in the North, but it is not too bad so long as you don't expect to be able to put your coats and jackets away altogether. I have discovered quite a good spot in the backyard – a minute square of concrete with a high brick wall around it – but it catches a shaft of afternoon sun for several hours and I put on a sun-suit and bask in it. I am sitting there writing at present.

I am looking forward to my holidays next month – 3 weeks from Aug 22nd. I am joining Winnifred Bratt, a Sydney masseuse, for 10 days in the Lake District, and then going south to and around about London for the rest. I am probably making the Putney Roberts my headquarters. Susie and her family have now moved up to a flat in London, but they have no spare bed just now. Arthur seems permanently settled in London and the children are at school, so Susie thought she might as well be near Arthur. She is going to work in a munition factory part-time.



I have just been roped in for fireguard duty. It doesn't amount to very much, but one has one night a week on duty. That means you can go to bed unless there is an alert, in which case you have to be ready to be on duty in 2 minutes and patrol a certain section of street with several others, watching for incendiaries and dealing with them by means of a stirrup pump.

I have had some nice days in the country both bicycling and walking. I haven't got far afield yet to see much of Northumberland, as transport is a bit difficult. Buses are very crowded and it means waiting hours in queues for them and accommodation if you want to stay away for a night is heavily booked, and rather expensive for my salary. I am going to try Youth Hostels again. They also are very booked up, but I am now wise to writing ahead and am going to one next week-end (Aug bank holiday).

I have seen a couple of good films lately – "Next of Kin" was particularly well done.

The other day I saw an Aust. airman at the hospital. I found he was a Dr. from Sydney, attached to an aerodrome near Newcastle – his name is Ken Redmond, and he qualified about 1935. His wife, also from Sydney, is here too, and I had tea with them last week.

The war news isn't anything to be thrilled about, but it might be worse. Things look serious in Russia though in so vast a country no single action can be at all decisive. It is a valuable bit of country the Germans are concentrating on, though. In Libya we seem to be holding out alright and even getting a little of our own back. In the Pacific there seems to be a lull, but with some ominous rumblings underneath it.

The sun has deserted my bit of concrete, so I must go inside and eat my supper. I live like a fighting cock these days - a good midday meal at the hospital, and I rarely come home without a present

from a patient – tomatoes, gooseberries, an egg or something of the sort. Flowers too, roll up, and are very welcome. They are a nice lot, these Tyne-siders. I have a little stock of good things you have sent over – jam, cheese, dried fruit etc, which I am keeping for the winter or for scanty times ahead. The fruit is well distributed this year – last year I hardly saw any. I hope you are not lacking too many things.

Much love to you all,

Rachel

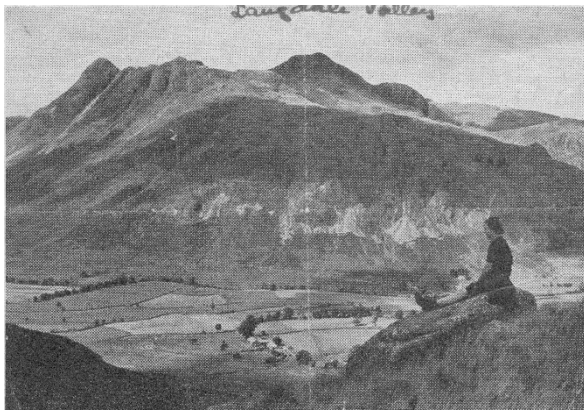
Borrowdale Hotel
Keswick

Aug 20th, 1942

Dear Family,

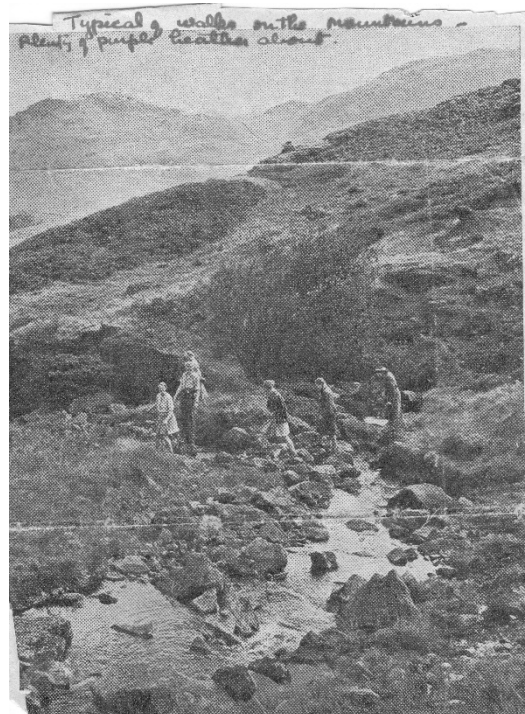
The first week of my holidays has passed and very successfully. It took me a whole day to get over to the Lake District, although you could throw a pebble across England at this part. Cross country journeys waste a lot of time, changing and waiting at junctions, and no food or drink is available on the way, you must bring it with you.

The Lake District is beyond my expectations – It is magnificent! The lakes vary from Windemere, 10 miles long by 1½ miles wide, surrounded by gentle hills, to smaller lakes surrounded by rough, craggy mountains, and to tiny tarns fringed with fir trees on the top of mountains. It is a very rainy district, so everything is dazzlingly green – even the mountains (except the very high ones) have a green skin over them. The first few days were still and warm, and the reflections in the lakes were incredible.



Win Pratt, a Sydney masseuse joined me at Windemere, and we indulged in a car to Ambleside and then to our lodgings in the rather isolated Langdale Valley. Busses only run about twice a day there and you have to queue, literally for hours, to get one, and then may not get on.

We were very lucky in our lodgings – a delightful farm taking about 10 people. We were not near a lake, but in beautiful country surroundings looking up the valley to rugged mountains and within easy reach of several lakes. We were about equal as walkers, and Win is a breezy, cheerful soul and was a very good companion. We usually took our lunch and went for gentle rambles round the foothills all day, coming home weary and with blistered feet, feeling we had achieved quite a lot and earned our dinner. But we felt very humble when the real walkers came home, with their nail studded boots and ropes slung over their shoulders, having scaled precipitous peaks, and having covered tremendous distances over rough passes into neighbouring valleys.



There is an amazing variety of scenery – you can choose what you feel like – pretty farming country, woods, wild rough fells, frowning mountains, gentle slopes, pretty little smiling lakes or wide wind-whipped expanses of water. Lots of people went swimming, but we didn't bother.

Haymaking was in progress in the valleys and is always a busy and picturesque scene. Up in the hills run untidy little slightly-built sheep – some white, some black, but mostly a bit of both. The hills are criss-crossed with stone walls and all the houses are built of the local grey stone.

The whole district swarms with hikers and cyclists – a nice type of wholesome-looking young people. It is an ideal holiday place for the young – an outlet for any amount of energy and with a great variety of adventurous and even dangerous walks and climbs if they wish. There are numerous Youth Hostels about.

One advantage of war conditions is the almost complete absence of cars on the roads and the absence of the less desirable type of tourist. Everyone travels light – a rucksack or a small suitcase – I have 2 cases as I am going on to London and I curse them all the time – struggling with busses etc.

Our week in Langdale was all too short, but we couldn't get rooms there for any longer. Win went on to Scotland and I came to Keswick for the week-end to see a different part of the lakes. This really is a show part – wonderful mountains, and Derwent Water is a beautiful lake, but it is all a bit more touristy and I don't really like it as well. I am staying in a big hotel – haven't spoken to a soul yet and feel rather flat without Win.

Sept 1st Am just leaving Keswick and enjoyed my stay here after all. Another lone woman was put at my table and we joined forces for some walks and trips on the lakes. We walked up a valley and came to a tiny mountain village of about 6 houses called Watendlath made famous by some of Horace Walpole's books of the rogue herries series. He stayed there while he was writing and made one of his heroines, Judith Paris, live in one of the houses there. Now it has a notice on it, "Judith Paris' house", and people go there to see it and believe she was a real person.

Yesterday I went off on my own and had the best walk yet, about 14 miles in all – along the Borrowdale valley (supposed to be the most beautiful in England and I'm sure it must be) to Lake Buttermere, then back along a parallel valley, crossing over a small mountain to get home. It was a glorious day.

Of course, I felt awfully fit after my 10 days in the open air with lots of exercise and have a new coat of tan.

Sept 13th Am leaving London for the North again tonight. Don't know when I'll get down again as civilian travel is to be much more restricted, but I have made good use of my time and seen a lot of people and had a grand time.

I have made my headquarters with the Putney Roberts, and they have been extremely kind to me.

I spent 2 days with Susie in her flat at Hampstead. She works ½ day in a munitions factory, starting work at 7am, and loves doing it. Rosemary was there for the holidays - she is nearly 15, very long-limbed and attractive, and a nice, fresh, unspoiled youngster. Pat is away at school.

I spent 3 days in Farnham with Cousin Jean Fowler and while there moved around Surrey and saw a lot of people I wanted to. I saw Llewyn and Joan at Aldershot. He is not very strong and has had a lot of sick leave lately, but he is pretty fit again now and was just awaiting an appointment.

I went to Pyrford and saw some of my hospital friends there and spent an afternoon with Cousin Constance at Chobham and I visited Isabel Johnson (Wright) in a new house she and her husband have bought near Guildford. She works in canteens several days a week. Another day I went down to Sussex to Ailsa Bragg's (Cullen) farm. I always enjoy going there, it is such a very pretty part of the country. She has the most adorable baby of 7 months.

I don't seem to have spent much time in London, but it is much as usual. A lot of bomb damage has been tidied up and is hardly noticeable now – you soon forget what things looked like before. The most noticeable innovation is swarms of American soldiers, and they are familiar to you too. There were thousands of them about, and they seemed very quiet and well-behaved.

I have been to a couple of theatres but found that most of the shows I had seen in London a year ago or had seen in Newcastle. We are wonderfully lucky there as so many plays are tried out there for a week. Restaurants and all entertainments are very full – queues for everything – there are so many of the forces about the town, all wanting something to do.

Sept 16th Back at work again. I travelled up on Sunday night, arriving at 8am, just in time to get on duty by 9am. I was most comfortable in a 3rd class sleeper for 7/6. They are a splendid idea – a full length bunk provided with a rug and a pillow and towel. We should have them in Aust.

My flat was very dirty, but I got to work the first evening and it looks like home again.

I didn't do much shopping in London, but there seemed to be plenty of pretty things about.

Letters from Thea and Howard gave me a pleasant surprise this morning – I hadn't heard for several months.

Love to you all, and Xmas greetings if this arrives anywhere near then.

Rachel

Newcastle-on Tyne

Oct 29th

Dearest Bunny and David,

This is meant to bring you Xmas greetings but I'm afraid it will arrive late. I hope you have, and have had, a jolly Xmas and that all goes well with you in 1943. When I think of Xmas at YOI I always imagine it like the one I spent with you in 1938, with a Xmas tree on the verandah and small boys starting to open parcels at crack of dawn. I don't know whether you still have a tree – I daresay toys are getting rather hard to get, I know they are here.

I posted a book to each of the boys yesterday – nothing exciting, but there didn't seem to be much choice. I find it hard to imagine just what stage their minds are at and what they would like. You might tell me when you write what are the particular interests of each one and what sort of books they like as a guide for next time I get some. I think they are the best things to send – in fact, they are the only things possible.

I was delighted to get letters from John and Tom last week – such nice letters. I was impressed with John's plan of his school, so neatly and accurately drawn. Tom's letter was very good for his age. I don't imagine lessons trouble him much.

I don't seem to have much news for you; what there is, is in my family letter which you see. I am well and cheerful and lead a quiet but quite pleasant life at present. The days are busy and the evenings pass like lightning. I have an occasional game of bridge, go to the pictures sometimes, read a good bit and spend quite a lot of off time cleaning my room and getting meals. I still like being on my own and doing what I like.

I bicycled about quite a lot in the summer, but it is getting rather cold now and the damp slippery roads are unpleasant, so I expect I will soon be putting the bike away for the winter. I remember your sending me a snap of the boys with a bike. Is it Tom's, and have they each got one? Perhaps John prefers horses. What does he ride now? Is Piebald's second foal broken yet? How are the plants in your shrubbery getting on? I was interested to note that Tom is taking after his mother as a keen gardener.

I hope you weren't too hard hit by the drought and that you have had all the rain you want now.

I had a letter from Ethel Stuckey last week and was pleased to hear she had arrived safely.

I wear the cardigan you sent me a lot – it is very warm and nice. How do you like coupons? They make you think, don't they? I hope they give you a generous number for growing boys. I hope you are all fit. Did John's mumps spread round the family? I hope Bun is able to get some help. What about a letter sometime, Davo? It's about 2 years since I have heard from you, but of course one may have gone down.

Well good-bye, Bless you all – Much love Rachel.

Newcastle-on Tyne

Nov 25th, 1942

Dear Family,

I seem to have lost track of when I wrote last. I know it was after I came back from my holiday.

Haven't any exciting news - the weeks slide by very quickly.

Last month I had a fortnight off work with a nasty cold which I couldn't shake off quickly. I don't think I was as sick as a fortnight's rest indicates, but my doctor was very kind and obliging and said I might as well get quite fit before going back, which I did, and now feel splendid. Like all working people over here I pay compulsory insurance and belong to a panel. It means, long visits in a crowded waiting room, and the Dr. has to get through a lot of patients in a short time, but I have been very well satisfied with the attention I have had. You are at liberty to choose your own doctor, and I think I made a lucky choice.

The trees are bare now and black-out is about 5pm, but we have had no really cold weather yet.

The effort being made by everyone to save fuel has been satisfactory, and it is hoped that we shall avoid being rationed.

I go out several evenings a week, and feel justified in using the gas-fire the days I am in.

One night a week I sleep at the hospital on fire-watching duty. It is no great hardship as we can make ourselves pretty comfortable in the familiar surroundings, but one is glad to get out into the air again after a day and a night and another day in the dingy, over heated germ-ridden atmosphere of an out-patients department. We have quite jolly evenings there and the one thing we never think about is a raid, as we haven't had one yet since we've been on.

A couple of evenings a week I go to some lectures got up by the W.E.A. (Workers Education Association). They are given by university lecturers to outside students and are not at all serious – no exams or anything – and are quite interesting. They had a guide selection to choose from – literature, politics, religion and all sorts of things, but one can't go to all, so I chose psychology and 'appreciation of art'. At the latter we do some practical work to help us to understand the composition of pictures. As you know I never had the foggiest idea of drawing, but lots of the others haven't either, so I daub away quite happily and enjoy it. I daresay my enthusiasm will wane when the real winter evenings are here and my chesterfield by the stove looks cosy.

Newcastle is a very live town, there is always a lot going on.

We have just had a Shakespearian season, when I saw 'Hamlet' and this week we have Noel Coward acting in several new plays of his own before they open in London. I am going to one tomorrow. 'Gone with the Wind' is here now and the seats are as rushed as ever. I have twice gone to book them, but the queue at the booking office has frightened me away each time. I never would go to it in London, where it has been running for ages, as the prices were so high, 6/-, 7/-, 8/-.

I saw 'Young Mr Pitt' last week – very good. I wonder how you fare for pictures now. I should think the number being brought from overseas would be considerably diminished.

We follow the news at present with bated breath, hardly able to believe that things seem to be swinging our way at last.

Work goes on much as usual only rather busier, as our senior batch of students has just finished, and the junior ones are not yet doing electrical work, so at present I have no assistants. I have just changed to the diathermy room, which I quite like, but it's a bit like being a monkey in a cage as the

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machines have all been crowded together inside a wire enclosure which prevents their waves from interfering with the wireless reception of the planes.

Well, I must go to bed. Much love to you all.

Rachel

Stocksfield near Newcastle

Dec 25th, 1942

Dear Family,

I wonder what you are all doing today.

I am having a nice little break in the country with Cousin Catherine Hodgkin, with whom I spent last Christmas – she has been very ill with her heart for the last few months and still has a nurse, so I did not expect an invitation this year, but she did ask me though she is more or less an invalid now. It is quiet, of course, but she is an interesting old lady and very kind, and it is a nice place to be. Like most large homes just now, the garden is neglected owing to the difficulty of getting men to work. I came here last night and had a luxurious lie-in this morning till I was roused with tea and a stocking full of little presents as last year. We have just had a very nice dinner, in spite of restrictions. The pudding was made with many substitutes for the proper things, but it is remarkable what can be done with them.

I am going back to Newcastle this afternoon and going to dinner tonight with a Mr and Mrs Hill – they are friends of Jessie Wishart, who wrote to them to look me up and I like them very much. They are a cheerful couple, very easy to get on with. He is witty and full of amusing anecdotes. I have only met them lately but have been there several times. She is very kind.

Dec 29th

We have had a quite extraordinarily mild December - Misty weather such as you usually get in November, but quite warm, and through Xmas we have had a very fine full moon. The nights have been particularly beautiful with the bare trees against the moon.

I really had a very nice time during the holidays – we usually only get the one day off, but as Xmas day fell on a Friday they decided to give us Boxing Day as well, as it was only a half working-day, so we had a good spell. On Boxing Day, I went for a picnic with Mrs Barfelt and her 2 daughters (she is a member of our staff I told you is kind to me, and I often spend Sunday at her flat). We went by train for some distance along the Tyne valley, and it was very foggy and rather chill. Then we struck up into some higher country and, to our amazement, came out into bright sunshine so warm that we sat for an hour and basked in it in perfect comfort! Surprising for Boxing Day! We walked a long way and had a nice day.

Jan 4th. I have just returned from a glorious week-end in the country at Welton's cottage. The weather has broken at last, and it was snowing hard as we went there in the bus. The next day the country looked like fairy-land. We spent our time alternately going for walks and toasting ourselves by the fire playing a game called "Crazy Running". In the course of a walk, we saw some very well-preserved human remains, and crossed the Tyne in a little ferry boat which has been plying back and forth for 800 years. You waggle a rope stretched across the river and it rings a bell and a man pulls a fat little boat across hand over hand along the rope. Another day we went to the old market town of Hexham and spent some time looking over the old Abbey Church there. Quite a lot of it dates back to Saxon times and was built with stone taken from Roman settlements. The Weltons had a few friends in for New Year's Eve and we drank to Absent Friends, among other things, with a bottle of sherry – vary rare these days.

When I got back to Newcastle yesterday, I was greeted by a lovely batch of letters from Aust. – 12 in all! Quite a well-timed Xmas mail, considering the distance and the difficulties. I was so absorbed in enjoying them that I forgot to go on fire watching duty until 9:30, when I should have been there at 7.

I have been very lucky lately as I have had 3 long-weekends running. The one before Xmas was my Sat. morning off, so I went to a little place called Wooler up near the Border and on the edge of the Cheviot Hills. There was nice walking among the hills and moors there and I stayed in a comfortable little pub. It would be a bitter place in really cold weather, but it was fortunately mild. An ex-patient of mine lived there, and she took me for walks and showed me the district.

Altogether, my activities lately have not been very war-like. The nights have been peaceful, and the news has been good, so we have been going on very comfortably. In the south of England, I believe there have been fairly constant hit-and-run raids, but we have been lucky up here.

The fuel shortage is not troubling us unduly so far. We are being careful, but I can't say we are really denying ourselves any comfort. I have the gas fire on more or less whenever I want it, but of course I am out a lot.

Marabel Lloyd (Constance and Godfrey's daughter) has just become engaged to an Irishman, one of her patients (she is a VAD in a military hospital) and I believe something of a cripple. She is a very nice girl.

Went to 'Mrs McIver' the other night and enjoyed it. Haven't been to any other theatres for some time, there's nothing on here at present – but a couple of pantomimes.

My mantelpiece looks gay with Xmas cards at present, to my surprise. I thought there were to be no more printed, but there seem to be plenty about.

I really did no Xmas shopping this year. The shops were seething with people drifting round from shop to shop looking for something to buy, unsuccessfully. There are plenty of necessities utility, of course, but all rationed which is as it should be. Books are the only solution.

Much love, Rachel

Jan 10th

It seems to have been a formidable armada that has been trying to land reinforcements in New Guinea for the Japs, but the air force seems to have done marvels in dispersing it.

It is still very cold, and everything is white with the funniest snow, about 4 inches deep of tiny pellets of ice. It is like walking through thick pebbles on a beach. The gas fire only takes the edge off the cold in my room, but I keep warm and comfortable by means of many clothes. It is very simple when you live alone and don't have to consider appearances. I put on a couple of coats, a rug around my knees, and, if necessary, a hat and am quite happy.

