

Geoffrey Hall's Letters

Letters to close relatives

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Preface

The following are excerpts from letters written by Geoffrey Hall to various close relatives, mostly during the 1970's and early 1980's. For reasons of privacy, personal details have generally been omitted...

Excerpts from Letters (1970's, 1980's)

1972

Clare College Exhibition (December 1972)

[Letter from my father, written from Legbourne Abbey, dated 17th December 1972, just after getting the news that I had won an Exhibition to Clare College, Cambridge:]

The very heartiest of congratulations on making Clare College! A splendid effort and achievement which puts a crown on all your education to date. I for one never doubted that you would succeed, but I am sure it was by no means a foregone conclusion. This is so much better than having to make do with your second choice – Exeter, Durham or some other ‘provincial’ University! We are all terribly pleased and I’m sure you are too. In fact, congratulations all round – not least to ‘the beaks’ at Haileybury!

Now to commiserate about your ‘flu. Bad luck indeed – but better than going down with it a week or so later! The important thing is now to get through with it and make a complete and thorough recovery before attempting any further travelling. R-J will let us know when it is completely behind you and we will arrange your return home when we hear that.

Now I have spoken to R-J and to Dr F at Clare about whether you go up in 1973 or 1974 and we have till the end of this week to make up our minds. I have heard the arguments on both sides. Dr F favours 1974 on account of your age. Sir Eric Ashby [Master of Clare] favours 1973, as things are changing so rapidly. R-J is open-minded but says he would only favour 1974 if you had a specific, well-thought out and worthwhile project to occupy the intervening year.

Mother and I both think you should go in 1973 – for these reasons – Seize your opportunities while you’ve got them; who knows what may happen between now and 1974? A 15-month gap could be most unsettling, and you might well lose your ‘cutting edge’; your friends and contemporaries will presumably be going up to University in ’73; the sooner your formal education is behind you and you are earning your own living the better, for economic reasons – if for no other; from the beginning of 1975 I will be living on a fixed pension, whereas University fees are bound to go on rising. Therefore, the more of your degree course I can finance while earning a full salary the better. (Three years of Cambridge after I have retired will make big inroads on the family income). Having said this you will see that the factors on the whole indicate that you should go up in 1973 – but I would not insist on that if it is very much against your will and you have really strong reasons for deferring your entry by a further year.

I quite understand your wish for a substantial ‘break’ between school and university and Mother and I feel there is something to be said (if you go to Clare in 1973) for leaving Haileybury at the end of the Easter term – which would give you 6 months to do something different – e.g. fill in the gaps in your mathematical or engineering knowledge at, say, Grimsby ‘Tech’. But we needn’t decide about that till the end of these holidays (when I should have to give notice to Haileybury of your intention to leave after one more term).

Unless I hear to the contrary from you some time during this week, therefore, I propose to tell Clare that we accept the place for October 1973. We can then consider in slow time the pros and cons of your staying on at Haileybury till the end of the summer term – and it will be your choice.

I hope all this is clear and reasonably satisfactory. I don't want you to have to make a major decision of this sort while you are 'under the weather' and feeling 'below par'. That is why I have made the decision for you but will abide by any strong objection you may raise against it. Again, all the very best of congrats and good wishes – and all our fondest love and hopes for a quick recovery from the 'flu and an early return home...

1973

Arrival in Kenya (October 1973)

I'm afraid this is the first letter I have written to you since you left us for the wilds of Kenya – and my explanation is that there are no more than 24 hours in the day, all of which seem to have been crammed with other forms of activity. Moreover I know Mother had kept you well informed of all news from the home front, so I have lost little sleep on that score!

However, this is to thank you for your various letters and post-cards (which have been most interesting) and to say how pleased I am that you have finally settled down to the job of work you went out there for – after an obviously frustrating and unsatisfactory start. Frankly, it surprises me that you found things organised even to the extent that they were – but doubtless the church has a galvanising effect... I am sure you will find things much more satisfying – and perhaps even stimulating – now that you are performing a really useful function; though I have no doubt it will provide its full share of limitations. In that event it will be helpful to maintain a philosophical outlook and to remember that you are there largely for the experience – and “to broaden your horizons”! I hope the financial situation is not a cause for anxiety, and that you do not lack essentials. I heard talk of sending Christmas presents by sea-mail but frankly cannot get around to thinking of the festive season at this time of year; nor have I the remotest clue as to what would be acceptable in your present circumstances – a parasol, a solar topee or a water-bottle perhaps? So we will probably end up with a modest cheque – if you have means of cashing it?

The trip to Sweden and Norway was a huge success, but vastly expensive. Wonderful scenery and glorious weather – and I caught most of the fish! The only other news of any import is the launching of HMS Herald – a truly splendid occasion on which Mother excelled herself and which went without a hitch. It was really most gratifying, and I am delighted, not least for her sake, as it was the fulfilment of an ambition. Now we wait patiently for the ship's completion and commissioning – which will not be before early summer. After that ceremony we spent a happy sojourn with the M's in their Scottish retreat, recovering from the social whirl. The next week-end was largely taken up with the... wedding at Westminster – another giddy occasion for the 'glad rags'. Since then life has been fairly normal – though I have spent a day or two at sea and a day with R at Dover...

So that's about it – hard work is the major preoccupation, and it's full of fascination; though over the past fortnight or more life has been enlivened by the Arab-Israeli war – which has been an object lesson in military strategy and tactics. The Israelis are doughty warriors!

The Merriest of Christmases (December 1973)

I hope this will get to you before Christmas – but whether it does or not, here’s wishing you the Merriest of Christmases and the Happiest of New Years! One thing I would think you can be pretty certain of is that it won’t be a ‘white’ Christmas... You are certainly well out of this country at the present time – what with a fuel crisis, a power crisis, a coal crisis, and strikes in all the key sectors of the country’s industry; we have of course weathered worse crises in our history, but this must be the most alarming since the War. I expect we will get by, but it is very difficult to see anything on the horizon but a continuation of social strife and a steady decline of the country’s standard of living. In a way, however, it is re-invigorating to be thrown back on ourselves like this – and we are certainly not depressed.

I was sorry to hear you had been laid low at the end of the term for a day or two, but I can well appreciate the stresses you were subject to. Things do indeed sound as though they must have been very difficult for you at times – particularly on top of all the hard schoolwork – but I’m sure you will agree that this is what ‘experience’ is all about!

Next week promises to be a very difficult one for us – largely due to transport problems in all directions. Mother and I are due at Portsmouth tomorrow evening, after a visit to London, and next morning I have a conference at Feltham, followed by my mid-week visit to Taunton, then back to London on Thursday evening, and next day back here for the Christmas week – having, we hope, made contact with W when she flies in from Zambia. With the trains all on strike I think I’ll have to do the whole thing by car – despite the national shortage of petrol and the very steep increases in its price. A good fall of snow, as forecast, will just about put the lid on it... All in all, the end of this year will be a time of gloom.

It will be a great comfort to us to know that you will be spending Christmas in good company and in as traditional an atmosphere as is possible in an equatorial environment – and despite the distance separating us you will surely be much in our thoughts. If your ears start burning at lunch or dinner time you may be sure that we are drinking your health at the Feast!

I enclose a very small Christmas present which I hope you will find useful. If it is difficult to make use of where you are you can always send it to Mr L at the bank here – with your signature on the back – and it will keep till your return. *[This was a Lloyds Bank cheque for 10 pounds – when I was eventually able to cash it the extra money proved very useful after Christmas holiday travels, and while waiting for the December salary to be paid.]* I’m sorry it isn’t more exciting but quite honestly I haven’t been able to start thinking of the Festive Season till now – and of course it is too late to send parcels – and anyway with the trains stopped and most of the planes grounded they couldn’t get moved now in any case! Well... all the very best to you for a lovely warm and sunny Christmas and a bright and splendid African New Year...

1974

National crises (January 1974)

I have been remiss in not writing to thank you earlier for the beaker which you sent me for Christmas – and for which you apparently had to do some hard bargaining in the ‘native bazaar’. I am not sure what the metal is, but the decorative design looks distinctly Indian to me – no doubt the work of the Kenyan Asians. Anyway, it was very good of you to send it – and it did arrive in time for ‘the Day’ (unlike ours to you!) Well done you, climbing Mount

Kenya; it must indeed have been a memorable experience. By the time you've added Kilimanjaro I should think you'll have got it well and truly out of your system!

You seem to have had quite a good tropical Christmas, one way and another, and I'm glad you were with reasonably congenial folk. I think I've spent at least a dozen such overseas Christmases in course of my life – most of them tropical ones – and despite everything they usually do not really match up to the home-grown variety.

Not that ours this time was as good as some: no snow, fuel crisis, transport crisis, incomplete family... However, it was as good as we could make it and very cheerful and enjoyable. Having our delightful South African cousin, W, and R's RAF friend... helped enormously – and there was never a dull moment, and certainly no lack of the fleshpots. The usual round of parties, and the usual round of carol services, church etc. made it all very seasonable – and people seemed nicer than ever (which is a national trait when the country is 'up against it'). Now we are all back again with our noses to the grindstone, and wondering what 1974 holds in store – and if and when we are to have a General Election. Undoubtedly the future strength, independence and economic prosperity of the country lies in the sea and under it – and we ought to be going flat out to explore and chart it, but it is an uphill struggle to get our politicians (and the taxpayer!) to appreciate this simple truth. However, we're doing our best, and our efforts should pay off eventually.

I'm sorry the school expansion does not seem to have gone ahead as rapidly as you had expected – it will certainly present problems for you with an extra form to accommodate. However at least you should have a better headmaster this term... so perhaps things will be altogether more satisfactory than last time. I suppose you will have one more term to cope with after this one, with an Easter break between?

You talk of coming home in August. I wonder if it would be sensible (and feasible) for you to make a round of visits to some of your South African cousins before you do so – while you are more than half-way there, so to speak. I am told that internal flights in Africa are frequent, simple and not too expensive, and you might start with the Halls at Luanshya (Zambia) and go on south to the others in Swaziland, Natal, Cape Province etc. I know they'd love to see you and would put you up and give you a wonderful time – but it would take some organising. We would, of course, help with the costs (if we have any money left by then!) so perhaps you'll think about it.

I don't think there's really much news from the home front. We're all reasonably well, the winter is (so far) exceptionally mild – and exceedingly wet! – and life goes on fairly normally. Don't worry about our various 'national crises' which always get more than their fair share of publicity (particularly overseas) and which in reality affect the 'man-in-the-street' much less violently than one is led to suppose. All the same I have the feeling sometimes that the world is a much less pleasant place to live in than it used to be – and frankly I am glad I grew up when I did, and not when you are!

Zambia (May 1974)

We were most interested to hear you had been down to stay with M and E in Zambia – and that it had been such a successful trip. You certainly are lucky to have seen so much of Africa, and in particular the Victoria Falls. What a wonderful sight they must be – quite putting Gullfoss [*in Iceland*] in the shade! I believe we may be seeing M and E's other daughter when she comes over in August – and we have just heard that another set of South African cousins (G and L and family) will be arriving in July to spend a year in England –

having rented a cottage in Gloucestershire. They are a delightful couple, so I hope we will see something of them while they're over here.

So sorry to hear you have been 'below par' in health. For heaven's sake don't try to overdo it in that climate; as you say, it is far more important to conserve your health and energy for Cambridge. We are getting a lot of paper from there, and from the local Education Authority, about fees and grants etc., some of which I expect you'll be dealing with. Costs and taxes seem to be soaring higher than ever, as we caught up more and more in the vicious spiral of inflation – and in the Labour Government's ludicrously divisive 'soak-the-rich' policies, so I hope we will be able to find some money for Cambridge somehow! I will have to make the most of the agricultural value of the grazing land here, from next season onwards, if we are to survive at all. Till then it is a question of damming the flood gates and keeping our fingers crossed!

Half-way up Kilimanjaro? (July 1974)

Your birthday card could not have been better timed: it arrived here on the day and was waiting for me when I got up here that evening – after returning from Holland! Many thanks... it was much appreciated. Now where are you going to be on your birthday? I won't send a parcel, but I'll try to write, and possibly enclose something. Will you be half-way up Kilimanjaro? And when will you know your arrival date in UK? It's a bit difficult to make firm plans until this is fixed. But if you aren't here when Mother leaves for Inverpolly, on 31st August, no doubt you could travel up later with V (by train) or wait till I motor up the following weekend.

Did I tell you we have several South African Hall cousins arriving at the end of this month? G's eldest sister J for a few days *en route* to Scandinavia – but she may come up to Inverpolly with me in September. And G (her uncle) and his family, who are settling in Gloucestershire for a year. Life is very busy here – but the weather is glorious at present. The golden orfes are breeding: two of last year's young now swim round with their parents – and several of this year's hatch are now up to 2½ inches long. And we have two new carp – which seem to have 'gone to ground'. We have just got rid of Sheba's last litter of kittens – which were really sweet. Rather sad really, but no doubt there'll be more! The garden is producing masses of fruit this year – strawberries, raspberries, red, white and black currants, gooseberries etc. galore! Sorry you aren't here to help us eat them. Doubtless, however, you have your share of mangoes, passion-fruit and other delectable tropical delicacies. You do seem to be leading a busy life and I expect there'll be a crescendo of activity as the term draws to its end. I reckon the school will have got its money's worth out of you by the time you've finished! – though I've no idea what salary they pay you. Sounds to me, though, like exploitation of cheap labour!

We are going through fairly dramatic times with the Cyprus show-down. My sympathies are entirely with the Turks – but they ought to reinforce their invasion pretty massively and pretty speedily if they expect to come out on top. Meanwhile a good many people have the jitters about its wider implications and whether the Warsaw Pact powers will attempt to exploit NATO's weakness. My own view is that it will not spread.

The basic worry these days, however, is the apparently uncontrollable rate of domestic inflation, the total lack of future security, the fact that we are all getting rapidly poorer, and the total inability of the Government to arrest the process. This is undermining the morale of the whole country – to the extent that some people see the prospect of war as the only means of restoring it and re-uniting the nation. God knows what kind of a mess we'll be in by the

time you come home – but for everyone’s sake I hope it’ll not be as bad as I fear. Meanwhile make the most of life in the sunshine – and do be cautious on Kilimanjaro!

Nineteenth birthday (July 1974)

A brief line to catch you, I hope, on or before your nineteenth birthday – which I understand you are to celebrate at, or in the vicinity of, the school. Very many happy returns of this auspicious anniversary... and may this one (the first away from home) be a really joyous occasion. I enclose a small (though rather unimaginative) gift – which I hope you will find of some use, eventually. It brings much love and very best wishes for your safe and happy return within (I hope) the next month.

There was another letter from you waiting for me at the week-end – and it is clear that life progresses fully and interestingly for you. I confess, however, that I find the many people you name rather confusing – though no doubt they’ll sort themselves out one day! I expect you’ll find life in the Old Country somewhat prosaic after all your adventures in tropical Africa – though my own experience is that true appreciation of one’s homeland grows in direct proportion to one’s knowledge of foreign countries. (Hence my abiding love for England – though not for all its citizens, or for those who are pretending to govern it!)

Have a lovely end of term – which I am sure you have richly earned – and a super time on Kilimanjaro; and ‘bon voyage’ at the end of it, culminating in Happy Landings. And once again a Very Happy Birthday!

Ancestors at Clare (November 1974)

I’m so glad to hear that all is going well and that you are settling down to University life, taking part in extra-curricular activities, making friends and generally ‘participating’: also that you are managing to keep up with the course despite the handicap of your late start. Don’t overdo it, though. You are bound to feel a psychological urge to make up the lost ground, but you can do that gradually and steadily; it would be a great mistake to try to do it ‘overnight’ so to speak. The human frame can cope with just so much stress and no more – and it would be very unfair on a frame still recovering from a serious illness to impose even normal stresses on it. So take it easy, view things philosophically, and do not worry if you are a bit behind hand.

We discovered, on looking through ‘Burke’s Landed Gentry’ the other night, that even more of your Hall ancestors were at Clare College than we had thought. In fact, apart from a good many uncles, cousins etc., there is an unbroken line of them at least back to your great great-grandfather (Thomas Dickinson Hall), who was at Clare about 1826 to 29). Actually, the line is not unbroken because I broke it by going straight into the Navy – rather to my father’s surprise, but to his undisguised relief!

I certainly wish you well for your three years at Cambridge – and am sure you will live up to the best traditions of the family and make a great success of it; and in later years you’ll probably regard it as the best period of your life. Make the most of it, be true to yourself – and ‘beware of false gods’... I have only one more admonishment, and that is that you should avoid emotional involvement with the fair sex while you are a student, that you should regard marriage as totally out of the question until you are earning your own living and standing firmly on your own two feet – and that when the time does come you should choose wisely...

1975

World Tour (February 1975)

Unusually I seem to have a few minutes to spare so will dash off a line to you before the next crisis breaks! Mother told me on the phone that she'd received a letter from you recently – and I shall read that with interest next weekend. I gather you are finding life stimulating at Cambridge and are producing good work. That is indeed encouraging and a matter for congratulations. So, well done – but don't overdo it! You have plenty of time ahead and the main thing is to maintain a steady pace. Your own talents will compensate for your late start and will assuredly close any gap that may exist in your knowledge vis-à-vis that of your contemporaries. I was indeed sorry to hear about I R's back – which sounds most extraordinary, and very bad luck. People do suffer unexpected setbacks, however, and I have no doubt that he'll get over this (as you did yours) and bounce back to full activity.

I gather you'll be back for Easter – which is good. Presumably you wish to continue the driving lessons – and I wonder if you have heard anything further about the date of the test? It is all beginning to seem a trifle academic because before long no one will be able to afford to drive a car – let alone own one! You have probably heard that my World Tour (which I had been planning to take Mother on as well) has been cancelled for financial reasons. I am still hoping, however, to do part of it – to Iran, the Persian Gulf and perhaps India (and also, later, to Washington) and on this I await a decision from the Admiralty Board. No wonder the country is practically broke, with people like Foot, Benn, Healey and Wilson in power! The sooner we get Margaret Thatcher, Keith Joseph (and Edward du Cann) back to run the country the sooner we can start on the road to recovery. All for now – but so glad to know life at Clare is good. Long may it last – at least till 1977!

Short Term Commission in the Services (July 1975)

I had a talk yesterday with the Head of the Engineering Advisory Group (Mr B) in the Recruitment Executive of the Ministry of Overseas Development – about the long-term prospects for a Graduate Engineer in the field of aid to developing countries. He said that there were good prospects for anyone who was already a member of a firm of Consulting Engineers (e.g. William Halcrow & Partners, Gibb & Partners, Freeman Fox & Co etc.) and that there was considerable demand in various parts of the world for engineering projects requiring the expertise and experience of such firms – and some of the countries concerned (e.g. Iran, Malaysia, Peru) were not short of funds. Mr B said there were no careers for Engineers (or anyone else) in the ODM field on the lines of the Old Colonial Service – but there were opportunities for individuals interested in this type of work provided they were employed by the firms to which overseas contracts were awarded. Thus, your best hope is to ensure that you are taken on as a full-time employee of one of these Consulting Engineering firms. It seems to me that the sooner you obtain a firm promise of employment the better – as I should imagine there is some pretty severe competition for places in the more reputable firms. Anyway, if you want more detailed information on the prospects you can write to Mr B, Engineering Advisory Group, Recruitment Executive, Ministry of Overseas Development, Eland House, Stag Place, Victoria, London SW1 – and make an appointment to see him next time you are in London.

My real fear is that we are entering a period of recession and that when you come down from Cambridge in 1977 there may simply not be any jobs going – and that firms, far from taking on any new staff, will be actively getting rid of existing staff. I think you should recognise this possibility, and provide yourself with more than one string to your bow.

You think a lot about aiding developing countries – which is a splendidly idealistic aim; but has it ever occurred to you that you may have obligations to your own country – which has given birth to you, nurtured you, educated you and protected you for the past 20 years – and in fact made you what you are? Do you never feel any wish to repay some of this in terms of direct service to your own community? In the past this was catered for by compulsory National Service – which did the participants as much good as it did the community. Now it can only be on a voluntary basis – which is where the Short Service Commissions in the Services come in. There are thus three separate but very cogent arguments why you should keep the possibility of a Short Term Commission in the Royal Engineers (or the Engineering Branch of the Royal Navy) in mind – quite apart from the very attractive financial terms which they offer. The first is that you may not be able to find civil employment when you come down from Cambridge; the second is that a large number of engineering firms in this country have expressed a preference for graduates who have obtained the practical experience which a Short Service Commission gives them; and the third is that such a commission gives you the opportunity to discharge your debt to society. (I can think of many other arguments too – e.g. the variety of the life you'd lead, and the flexibility which 3 years of such life provides in enabling people to come to a firm decision on what they really are going to do with their lives).

I must confess that I am a little worried that you do not seem to have a very clear idea of what to aim at – or any very marked personal ambition. When you have a little time to reflect privately, I think you should try to look ahead to say the year 2000 (i.e. 25 years from now) and set yourself a target to aim at. What sort of person do you want to be at that time – when you are 45 and at the peak of your potential? (I, at the age of 84 will probably have faded out of the picture – or be close to doing so – and would like to feel that you will be a person of some stature and achievement. You are well blessed with talent and intelligence and will have the highest possible educational qualifications – as well as a family background of some worth and distinction. In fact you start off in life with almost every conceivable advantage – and therefore surely owe it to yourself (and all who have helped you thus far) to set your sights high – and aim to ‘make a name for yourself’ (so to speak) in your chosen profession, as many of your forbears have done.

By the age of 45 you should be a man not only of some achievement and respect, but also a man of some means too. As you know, I am hoping that you will be able to take on most of the family property (if there is anything left of it after the depredations of the tax collectors!), and it is quite certain that you will not be able to maintain Legbourne unless you are earning a reasonably high personal salary. (I would not have been able to do so myself when it passed to me unless I had been reasonably well paid by the Royal Navy – with a substantial pension to retire on; in fact it is debatable how long I will be able to keep the place on at the present rate of taxation and inflation). When I go, there will be precious little family money to pass on to you or other members of the family – which is why it is imperative that you ‘make good’ in life, under your own steam. In any case it is a crying waste for anyone of talent and distinction to settle for mediocrity, or to be satisfied with being just one of the crowd. No one ever got anywhere in the world without the motive force or personal ambition – without setting himself a target to work towards throughout his creative life. So take stock of your personal assets and work out (if only in general terms) the highest target which they enable you to aspire to; set your sights on that – and then ‘get cracking’!

I would like you to look into your own family history a little when you have the time – and appreciate that you are the scion of a long line (in fact of many long lines) of professional people who have achieved considerable distinction in their various fields: in business, in law, in the Church, in politics, in the Arts – and perhaps most of all in the Services. Your great grandfather commanded the Royal Engineers at Portsmouth and in Edinburgh; your grandfather was a soldier – and many of your great uncles and cousins were Naval Officers, several of whom reached Flag rank. Nothing, of course, would please your parents more than

if you were to opt for a life in the Navy – but we recognise that that must be a personal decision of your own, and that without the necessary self-motivation no good would come of it (either for yourself or for the Navy). Having had such a good life in it myself and been able to compare it so frequently and so favourably with the occupations followed by so many of my contemporaries, I personally find it difficult to understand how anyone would want to do anything else! (But perhaps I'm biased!) Anyway, there is a first-class career awaiting you as Engineer Officer in the Navy, if you want it – and the Navy wants you. But perhaps RNEC [*Royal Naval Engineering College*] Manadon will give you a better idea of what that's all about.

It may well be that the Navy is not for you (and I think it is an awful pity that the Haileybury CCF should have set you against it). But don't turn your back on the Services out of prejudice; they have always represented the most honourable means of serving the community – in peace and war. A career in the 'Sappers' (the Royal Engineers), one of the most elite Corps in the British Army, might well be more in your line – and that, too, would be of immense satisfaction to your parents (as well, no doubt, as to your deceased grand-parents and great grand-parents!) But even if a full career in one of the Services is not for you at all, that in no way invalidates a Short Service Commission – if only to start you out in civil life. So please take a hard and objective look at what they really have to offer. I have some pamphlets on this, and on Engineering in the Army, Graduate Commissions etc. – which I will send separately to Clare College. (Incidentally, your survey course there could give you an inkling of some aspects of life in the Royal Engineers – or in the Hydrographic Service of the Navy!) And don't forget, your grandfather entered the Army on a University Commission from Clare College (in 1907), so there is a good precedent! Think about it...

1976

Pakistan (July 1976)

[Excerpts from a letter dated 4th July 1976, from Legbourne Abbey – a letter written on the 200th anniversary of American Independence, two weeks before Geoffrey's sixtieth birthday, and when the dogs Rufus, an Irish Setter, and Rastall, an English Setter, were about 18 months old...]

We were delighted to hear that you'd arrived safely – but sorry the air-passage was such a bore... Perhaps the train journey to Lahore was more of a success – I should think, travelling luxury-class, it was quite an eye-opener. Anyway, I trust Pakistan is living up to your expectations. I expect it is pretty hot at this time of the year – unless you have the monsoon to cool things down.

I very much doubt, however, whether it can be any hotter than it is here (and has been for the past fortnight). We have been having a veritable heatwave, reminiscent of the Thirties, with day after day of blue cloudless skies, no wind, unbroken sunshine from dawn to dusk, and temperatures in the 90s. We started this with a day at Wimbledon – for which we had two tickets for the Centre Court – and there seems no end to it. Everything is becoming very dried-up, watering the flowers and new tree-plantings is a high priority, and there are serious fears of a nation-wide drought.

Meanwhile I have rented a chalet (or beach-hut) at Sutton-on-sea for three weeks to escape from the heat. Mother and I go over for the day, have a picnic lunch, bathe and exercise the dogs – who adore it. Rastall is a real 'sea-dog', and plunges through the waves with utter abandon; Rufus is more cautious and none too keen on being knocked down by the waves. But we all get well cooled off, and I must say it is a superb beach (which I was more or less brought up on as a child – in the First World War). We have also been playing some mixed

foursomes at tennis in the evenings – with the F's, B's and R's. The court is getting rather bumpy, though, as without rain it is impossible to roll it effectively. And it is beginning to look very brown.

We were all electrified to hear on the radio this morning the sensational news of the Israelis' dramatic rescue of the hi-jacked hostages from Entebbe airport in Uganda. How absolutely super! It restores one's faith in humanity that at least one nation has preserved its morale and self-confidence and has the sheer guts to rise to an occasion and do what is so obviously right. I wish I could think that this country of ours would have responded that way in a similar situation – which of course it would have a generation ago (and even more so in your grandparents' time). It is immensely saddening to witness the extent to which our national spirit has been sapped and our people demoralized – largely in the name of 'socialism'...

1977

Greece (July 1977)

This is just to thank you very much indeed for my birthday present – the super 'Peanuts' book – which is 'magnifique'. It is really an absolute scream, causing me to chortle with glee at almost every page – so it is certainly lightening our rather humdrum lives! The day itself was really rather fun. I'd organised a tennis party well in advance – and the garden and court were at their best. With Mother and me we were eight – four men and four women – so were able to play mixed fours, men's fours and ladies' fours. The organisation was a bit fraught because one by one our guests kept ringing up to say for one reason or another they couldn't come after all – so right up till lunchtime we had to keep replacing them with others at pretty short notice. The four people not on the court at any given time had tea and birthday cake in the 'conservatoire' till 6 pm – and thenceforward quaffed glasses of iced Pimm's till 8 pm when the last guests departed. On the whole a great success – even though one or two of the sets were interrupted by brief showers of rain.

Thank you for keeping us posted as to your movements. It all sounds most interesting and great fun – and you're certainly seeing something of Europe. I don't know much about Greece (except one or two of the Aegean islands) but I have pleasant memories of Crete – Candia, Knossos, Mt Ida etc. – and also of the Yugoslav coast, which I thought was second only to Norway – quite superb, with Dubrovnik (or Ragusa as it was then known) absolutely perfect. All this was 43 years ago, though, so I expect it has changed somewhat since then. I trust the rest of your trip will go smoothly and according to plan. We imagine you are now coming north through Italy – and with luck this letter may reach you in Paris. It will be nice if you can make contact with C while you're there, and in case you didn't get her address before you left Athens, Mother is enclosing a note of it with this letter. We look forward to seeing you back here early in August, in good time for your birthday. The K's (including James) will be here that weekend – so I hope we can have some tennis on the Saturday – and your godfather is due to arrive on the Sunday evening!

1978

Tennis Party (July 1978)

Many thanks indeed for 'Plain Tales from the Raj' – which I am enjoying immensely. Have you read it? When I saw the picture you indicated, I thought for a moment it was an actual copy of the one in the cloakroom – really an extraordinary similarity. They are practically

contemporary, I think. Anyway, it is a very acceptable birthday present, and I am most grateful. I had quite a number of cards, letters and presents, but we spent a quiet day – mostly coping with chores! In the evening, however, we decided to dine out – and tried a new place for us, the Magpies at Horncastle. This was delightful – we had a superb meal at a very modest cost, so ended the day on just the right note.

I had fixed a tennis party for yesterday – and spent several anxious days mowing and sweeping the lawns, and hoping the weather would hold (having three times had to cancel, this summer, due to rain) – and had the court in fine shape by noon. Fortunately all was well – it turned out a lovely evening and we had some splendid sets: several men's fours and several mixed doubles... It was a super occasion, punctuated by tea in the conservatory, and several rounds of Pimms to finish with.

Now it is pouring with rain again – so we were really lucky. Have just got back from Mattins at Manby (where I read the first lesson) and it is time for sherry before lunch – so I'll stop this now. Again, very many thanks for the book – a clever choice, indeed – and much appreciated. You must read it yourself if you haven't done so.

1979

Two Weddings (March 1979)

This is just to let you know that I am transferring £500 to your current account at Cambridge – and this amount will be credited to you on Thursday 29th March (due to the 7-day limitation on withdrawal from my deposit account plus 2 days for the actual transfer). If you need to take this sum out with you to Java, I'm sure your bank would agree to advance it on the above surety – but if they require to check on the transfer they can do so by phoning Lloyds Bank at Louth. It might be better to give your bank instructions to transfer the money, when received, direct to Java – where it should fetch up about the same time as you do! (That would save you having to carry a lot more travelers cheques than you need for your journey – and considering the countries you are planning to visit *en route*, I would think that would be much safer). Anyway, I trust that will adequately cover the cost of your return flight in May – and, if there is anything left over, you can regard it as an engagement present to M and yourself from me; buy something you need or want, as a memento – or keep it in cash, just as you please. I have intended to give you, in addition to some silver, a substantial cheque as a wedding present to you both – but, in view of the very heavy expenses to which we are already committed this year, it will not, I fear, be as large a sum as I had hoped. (I simply had not bargained for two weddings in one year – or budgeted for a round-trip to Australia!) The other purpose of this letter is to wish you 'God-speed' on your coming journey, and the best of good fortune in your new assignment. I think it is an excellent thing that you are at last getting out 'into the field' – and into the real world, so to speak – and we will be avid for news from you when you have time to write.

Invitation to Stay (April 1979)

Thank you so much for your kind letter of 5th April, inviting us to stay with you over... projected wedding dates. We have not heard that it is definitely fixed, but believe they were aiming at Saturday 6th October – so at present can only work on that. It would certainly be a great pleasure for us to stay with you – and a great help, too, as of course we do not have

many contacts in your part of the world! On the other hand, we could easily put ourselves up in an Adelaide hotel if there is pressure on your household from other members of the bride's family (such as we are experiencing in a big way with our daughter's impending wedding next month!) Frankly, until we have that major event out of the way, it is practically impossible to plan anything else: there are so many aspects of the occasion to be dove-tailed in – and so many guests from far and wide with individual requirements and foibles to be catered for or mollified, that it will be something of a miracle if the nuptials are properly concluded and the throng of well-wishers adequately nourished, refreshed, and eventually sent on their way!

However, we shall certainly do our best to get out to Australia for the wedding, and will let you know how we propose to do that when we have had time to draw breath and think about the autumn! I must say, it is very considerate of... to give us so much notice of their intentions; it would hardly have been possible for us to get away from here much before October! We hear that... is safely ensconced in Java, and thriving in his new job there – and we hope he'll be able to get back here by May 5th. We also very much look forward to meeting you and your wife – and trust you will favour us with a visit later that month.

Java (July 1979)

I have been meaning to write for months (or, at any rate for weeks!) but somehow there has been absolutely no let-up here since your departure. The only times I seem to pick up a pen are to write cheques, pay bills or deal with urgent crises of one sort or another – and ordinary correspondence has just had to take a back seat. Our friend H (at the cottage) has done no work in the garden since the wedding – and has not paid his rent for 5 months. So I have been more than usually busy outside – besides having to start litigation to evict the man and his family. And, of course, Manby is an added commitment – though we are very slowly making progress there – while every now and again we have people coming to look over this place, as potential buyers, or there is a 'Coffee Morning' or a 'W.I. Evening' – all of which require the place to be looking at its best; so deadline after deadline has to be met!

Anyway, your long and interesting letter of 21st June arrived this morning – and Mother pushed off to Inverpolly this afternoon – so I have been galvanized into action (to the extent of a rather brief reply). We also had an earlier letter from you, which was most welcome – and we both noted with some amusement that it had not taken you long to gravitate towards the 'Missionary Circle'! I wonder what it is that attracts you in that direction? I had rather hoped that life 'in the field', so to speak, would bring you down to earth a bit – but apparently not!

Yes, Java does sound an interesting and attractive country – and I'm glad you are enjoying it. I remember coasting along its northern shore once (in 'Bigbury Bay', 1946) and studying the countryside through binoculars, though I never felt a particular urge to set foot in it. Bali, I suppose, was a rather different matter – it exerted the same sort of fascination as Tahiti or Hawaii – but I rather think I have outgrown the romantic attractions of those places!

I expect by now that M and J will have joined you – which I'm sure was most exciting for you all, and great fun for the girls to see something of the fabulous Orient. I can well understand your feelings after 6 weeks of separation – but that needs to be put into perspective a bit: your mother and I were parted for periods of 18 months at a stretch – and your grandparents were separated, when engaged, for 2½ years (while he was in Kenya), with letters taking up to 4 months to pass between them. Yet we all managed to survive – as I have no doubt you did.

We had a telegram from the H's the other day, confirming the wedding date. I had actually started the flight-booking process without waiting for that – only to find that the flight we'd wanted was already fully booked. (We rather wanted to fly to Perth and take the 'Indian-Pacific' train to Adelaide – 2,300 miles – a 52-hour journey, and then go on to Eastern Australia after the wedding, and fly home from Sydney or Brisbane). However, we have managed to get ourselves 'Super-Apex' economy tickets on a flight leaving Heathrow on Monday 1st October and arriving Sydney on 3rd. We'll then probably fly down to Adelaide on 4th and stay on till Sunday or Monday 7th or 8th, travelling back overland (train, via Broken Hill, or bus) to Sydney – and on to Brisbane. We have cousins there, so would hope to stay 2 or 3 days with them, then back to Sydney for a couple of days (to see... and perhaps D if we can tempt him over from NZ), before returning home about mid-October. At the moment we are provisionally booked on a flight leaving Sydney on 16th – but if seats are available on earlier flights (13th, 14th or 15th) we'll probably take one of them instead.

I'm afraid your idea of our stopping off in Java *en route* is really 'not on' – attractive though it certainly sounds. There are two factors in this – firstly, that it isn't easy to abandon everything here, a fortnight being the maximum period we can really contemplate being away; and secondly, the over-riding question of finance. We have to do this trip as economically as we can – which means 'Super-Apex' direct return flights with no 'stop-overs'. As it is, this is going to cost at least £2,000 – and as money does not grow on trees that is going to need some raising! So there we are – and we'll just have to hope that Australia House will grant us visas we've had to apply for!

We are at last enjoying some decent weather here – 2 or 3 days of continuous real summer, lots of sun, little wind, and really nice and warm. I can hardly believe it – and am sure it won't last. However, I'm taking one more day off from lawn-mowing to make the most of it. Tomorrow I start the 7th mowing cycle this year (each takes about 10 days). I'm so sorry to hear that your air freight baggage had not caught up with you – I wonder what that consisted of? Infuriating to be separated from it for so long – but a typical Far East situation, as I recall (from a similar sea-freight hold-up).

Your visits to Yogyakarta and other places do seem to have been fascinating – and how lovely to be able to take all that sort of thing 'in the course of business' – rather than paying the earth for it as a tourist! I'm sure you have few regrets as to your choice of profession; I think you chose very wisely – and have been singularly fortunate so far. All these experiences will stand you in good stead later on, assuming you put them to good advantage and stick to your career through thick and thin. There undoubtedly will be rough times, and when they come just remind yourself of the good times you've had – and average the whole thing out. I know how easy it is to become depressed when things don't seem to be working out as they should – and one begins to doubt whether one really has made the right choice of career: there is then a strong temptation to chuck the whole thing overboard and start on something new – which is the biggest mistake one could possibly make. (The grass is not greener in the next valley!)

I'm afraid I am in the thick of a 'war' with the Rector of Grimoldby & Manby – which is unfortunate (to say the least!) It's rather a long story and I won't go into the details here, but it arises from the fact that, as Patron of the Manby living, I regard my first responsibility as to represent, and serve, the interests of the Manby parishioners. They are 'up in arms' against the Rector because he (and his PCC) reckon that the united benefice can no longer afford to keep both churches (Grimoldby & Manby) open – and are convinced that if the Rector has his way, it will be Manby church that will close. So I have taken up their cause and spoken out in public against the whole idea – with the result that I have received from the Rector quite the most insulting and abusive letter I have ever had in my life! (150 years ago, this would have led to 'pistols or swords' on the village green!) Since then, I have been trying, through intermediaries, to make peace – on the basis of an explanation and an apology from the

Rector – but so far he has refused to meet anyone! It is an astonishing situation – and Mr S (the Lay Reader) thinks the Rector has ‘gone off his head’! I will let you know how things develop – but meanwhile I, as Patron, have made a formal application to meet the Bishop’s Pastoral Committee, so more fur will probably fly ere long!

Propose a Toast (August 1979)

Thank you for your letter. Good to know that all goes well with the wedding plans. What a business it all is – particularly for the bride’s parents! And no doubt you’ll all be thankful when it’s safely over!

It was kind of... to suggest that I propose a toast – but if it’s a speech she’s after, please count me out! The main speech (proposing the health of the bride and groom) must surely come from an old friend of the family who’s known the bride from her cradle – with fairly short and appropriate responses from the groom and best man. So I don’t think there’s a case for me to ‘get up on my hind legs’ at all! I shall be more than happy, therefore, just to circulate unobtrusively among the guests, in the background. If, however, you really want me to ‘have a formal part in the reception arrangements’, how about a simple, straightforward toast to our host and hostess, which I would be delighted to propose (perhaps at the end of the party)?

Glad to know that spring is on its way with you (though no signs of autumn here yet!) – but sorry to hear that budget cuts are causing you headaches. Personally, I’m all for cutting back State expenditure – and paying less tax. But I know too well how one feels about this when one’s on the receiving end of the cuts (e.g. our last government’s policy on Defence)! Much looking forward to seeing you all in October.

Thanks for Everything (October 1979)

I can’t thank you enough for your very generous hospitality to us over the four days we were with you. Mary and I appreciated it enormously – and I realize what our presence must have entailed in terms of extra work for you both, on top of all the anxieties and additional burdens which the wedding and reception imposed on you. The fact that the central event of our visit took place exactly as planned, and that all the social arrangements went off so smoothly and enjoyably, reflects the greatest possible credit on all the weeks of careful behind-the-scenes thought and organization that you must both have put into making the occasion such a resounding success. I really do congratulate you – and hope that now that it’s all over you can both relax and ‘rest on your laurels’.

While saying this, however, I am aware that today you have the newly-weds descending upon you again – so will hardly be able to ‘put your feet up’ until you’ve seen them safely off to Bali and Java tomorrow! What a week it will have been for you – but one that will be truly memorable, I’m sure. It was so good of you to show us so much of Adelaide and its lovely surroundings – and to entertain us so lavishly – and I do want to impress on you how very much we both appreciated every aspect of our stay. This is a very brief and inadequate letter, but it’s the first opportunity I’ve had to write since we left you – and once we’re back home I know the chores will preclude any further correspondence for weeks! Again, many, many thanks for everything.

1980

Happy New Year (January 1980)

Happy New Year! We have V & W with us (not to mention Porter, and Spider – their black kitten) and saw the old year out with them last night, around the candle-lit Christmas tree – quaffing noggins of brandy and merrily celebrating the advent of the ‘Eighties’. W, as the youngest member of the family, struck the traditional ‘Sixteen Bells’ – and then we resumed our four-handed game of poker in front of a roaring log fire. Bed at 1:15 am, and now we are down to a rather late breakfast, and the day’s chores. A super calm frosty sunny morning – thick ice on the pond – and very cold. ‘Wintry showers’ forecast for eastern coastal districts, but no snow as yet!

Thank you both for your various letters received (together with several from M and J) shortly before Christmas – and for the Javanese tablecloth too. As for your letters, I’m not sure which of you writes the more illegibly – both require patient de-cyphering at times! Suggest important passages in block capitals in future! However, it’s good to know all goes reasonably well with you both – and I must say we envy you the sunshine and warmth of Java. We shall be interested to hear the outcome of all the deliberations and recommendations arising from the recent investigation and assessment of your current project – and I trust that the ‘pompous twit’ at the Embassy will not have put too many spanners in the works!

Is it possible to talk to you on the telephone? We don’t have your number (maybe you’re not on the ‘phone?) but you do have ours – so why not give us a ring sometime, reversing the charge if you feel impecunious? I expect Mother has mentioned the negatives I sent you some time ago? Could I have them back please, as soon as possible – to complete our set of your wedding photos, so that I can start putting them all into the second half of a new album I bought for V & W’s wedding. We should then have a rather super record of the great Hall 1979 nuptials for the edification of posterity!

All love, and all good wishes to you both from all of us here, for 1980 – and many thanks once more for letters and presents.

Newmarket (August 1980)

Many Happy Returns of the Day! And congratulations on your first quarter-century (and how does that feel?) At the same age I was off the Azores escorting a troopship which was attacked by a U-boat and sunk with much loss of life – so was not feeling too hilariously happy! But I trust your outlook is a bit brighter!

A present is by way of ‘being organized’ and I hope it materializes on time – but, if not, be patient. Am glad to hear the concert in King’s was do good – and trust you’ll have a nice birthday dinner with M, complete with ‘vino’. Will be thinking of you – and may even open a bottle ourselves! Very many thanks, incidentally, for the photos, which are excellent. I’ve sent them straight on to Maurice H and asked him to get in touch with you direct if he wants to buy or borrow the negatives (and have given him your address). I will refund all the costs if he doesn’t – so let me know. I think the ones you took of the house make it too yellow – it is really much pinker than that – but that could be the effect of the sunshine I suppose. Did you cut off the new conservatory and greenhouse on purpose – or were they still under construction?

Not much from here, really. We had a good day at the Game Fair, followed by a pleasant weekend with... here (who were glad to hear you intended to visit them in September) – and V & W are due to visit us this coming weekend – plus Spider and 3 kittens. (God knows what Ruff will make of that!)

So glad you're off to Newmarket on Friday – it was your grandfather's 'Mecca' – but regret I can't give you any useful tips. Make up your minds in advance as to how much you're prepared to lose on the day and stick to it – but within that limit I should certainly have a 'flutter' on each race. Buy a copy of 'Sporting Life' on the racecourse because it gives a tabulated statement of all the newspaper tipsters' forecasts for each race – which is as good a guide for the amateur punter as anything else. And if in doubt, back any horse that Willy Carson is riding! All the best...

1981

Australian Flag (July 1981)

What an absolutely brilliant idea for a birthday present – I am really delighted to have the Australian flag, and it will be flown from our flagstaff 'at first light' tomorrow (the Admiral's flag is flying at the moment!) Thank you both so much – and for the card too. Please also thank M and J for their words of greeting, much appreciated.

Well it's certainly quite 'something' to be an OAP [Old Age Pensioner] (or 'Senior Citizen' as we're more tactfully called in community circles) though I can't say either of us are feeling particularly aged! What concerns us more is whether we're going to get the 'P' part of it – as at present the Civic Service, which dishes it out, is on strike! They've already stopped my Naval pension – which is our main source of income – so I'll now have to start borrowing from the bank (at God knows what rate of high interest)! However – I dare say we'll survive.

Many thanks for your lovely long letter the other day (dated 4th July); so glad everything seems to be going well, both professionally and socially – not to mention domestically! All is well here too, I'm glad to say. And so far, at least, the new vicar seems to be a great success.

Yesterday there arrived a long letter from one of my South African cousins – C S (nee Hall), sister of Maurice whom you know, A – saying that she and her husband Henry (a doctor) are coming to England for the first time in their lives, in September – and can they stay with us? They live at Camps Bay near Cape Town, and I've stayed with them several times over the years – so we are really delighted to have them. They had 5 children, 2 sons and 3 daughters, mostly grown up and married – but lost their elder son M, killed in action as a fighter-pilot in A [south-western Africa] a year or two ago. C has really never got over it and still sounds rather depressed – so we must do all we can to liven things up for them. I am in the process of fixing in outline an extended tour of most of their second cousins in England (whom they don't yet know)...

Mid-Marsh Benefice (October 1981)

Many thanks for your of 6/7th Oct – and I'm glad to hear that 'Lincolnshire Life' has at last caught up with you – presumably, that was the August issue? It certainly takes its time, no doubt proceeding (in a thoroughly civilised manner) by sea! We meant to ring you on your wedding anniversary but somehow got diverted – partly by V's departure with H after her long weekend visit for F D's wedding (which, needless to say, was 'fabulous'). We had 3

very nice house guests for that occasion – one of whom (a Colonel Ferguson) turned out to be an OH [Old Haileyburian]!. However, we did ring the next morning but there was no reply – so presumably you were out. We are so glad to know that all goes reasonably well with you both – on the professional, recreational and domestic fronts... We had a splendid day down at Clay End last Sunday, for young H's christening. Lots of family and friends – for a superb lunch beforehand and a very cheerful 'champers' celebration afterwards. H behaved impeccably throughout – and looked every inch the part in her new robe and bonnet. Jake, too, was in splendid form, and very much a part of the family (I took him for a long walk after lunch, and he put up a cock-pheasant – terribly exciting!)

At the present moment Mother and a horde of WRVS ladies are preparing the commissariat for this afternoon's Royal visit to Willoughby by Princess Anne. This has been a major preoccupation for some weeks past – and I should think sighs of relief will be breathed when the whole thing is safely over! Did you, incidentally, see anything of her parents when they were in your neck of the woods recently? (I must say, my heart does warm to old Muldoon of NZ!) We are now approaching a busy period for visitors. We have the South African cousins (4 of them) for 3 days next week, followed by a 2-day dash south for a COPP dinner in Cambridge, for which we'll be staying in Clay End; then a 2-day visit by Dick and Rosemary H, then another 2-day trip to Southampton and back for a reunion of those who served in the fifth HMS Southampton given by the Captain and officers of the brand new sixth HMS Southampton. As we shall be meeting a number of Michael H's old shipmates, I'm particularly glad, at last, to have made contact with his daughter C in Brisbane. (She is now 40 years old – and already a grandmother!) For that jaunt we'll be staying with Mother's god-daughter Rowena at Stockbridge. That takes us into November, and we have a visit from Roger that month (dates not yet fixed) and, presumably, also from K and H. I hope they give us plenty of advance warning!

Two of Ross B's daughters arrived from Australia about 10 days ago – and this weekend his wife Sue is due. They'll all be coming to lunch on Sunday – and Barbara B will also be with us, arriving on Friday. (Never a dull moment, as you can see!) No doubt you've heard of my 'famous victory' on the church front? Well, after the 61% vote of the 5 Mid-Marsh Group PCCs against the Rural Dean's mischievous scheme, the Bishop tried to get me to agree to unseat Ross B on a trivial legal technicality – but I quickly (after taking legal advice) spiked the Bishop's guns, so the move collapsed. The next thing that happened was that the Rural Dean resigned (!) and this was followed by the Registrar confirming Ross B's appointment to the Mid-Marsh Benefice, the Pastoral Committee throwing out the Team Ministry / Single Parish scheme, and finally the Bishop himself reluctantly conceding defeat! Great has been the rejoicing hereabouts – but I am left with the job of 'mending a good many fences' – and Ross has, as one of his highest priorities, the daunting task of healing the divisions in these 5 parishes. Anyway, he is very happy with the outcome (as I am, too) and not the least satisfactory aspect of this long drawn-out battle is that at last we're rid of that awful man L, as Rural Dean. Some people think that John D will be the next Rural Dean, but we'll just have to wait and see. Meanwhile I am busy pouring oil on troubled waters and smoothing down the Bishop with honeyed words! If there's one lesson to be drawn from all this it is the value of Lay Patronage in forcing the Ecclesiastical 'establishment' to recognise the rights of the laity and the limitations of their own power to push through controversial pastoral measures to suit their own administrative purposes against the wished of the parishioners. Now that it is all over, we hope and pray that Ross Buckman will turn out to be a long-serving Rector fulfilling the early promise that he has indicated throughout this past summer, and that his wife and family will prove to be an all-round asset to this community – as we believe they will. Enough.

1982

Excellent News (February 1982)

What excellent news! Many congratulations to you both. I'm so glad (a) it's a boy, (b) he's got decent names, (c) mother and son are both well – and (d) that he's British!! What a relief for you all – including his Australian grandparents (with whom I'm sure we share the euphoria – and my best wishes and congratulations to them, too). Funnily enough, T arrived on James S's birthday – so I now have a godson and a grandson whose birthdays I have no excuse for forgetting in future!

So a new generation of (Dickinson) Halls has now made its *début* – 'Down Under'. That is something to celebrate, and we shall. I have already put notices in 'The Times' and 'Daily Telegraph' and am sending postcards to all 'the cousins' – while Mother has been madly ringing up all 'the siblings' with the good news.

Nothing much to tell from this end. Weather perfectly beastly – bitterly cold penetrating winds, with sleet and rain – utterly horrible. (How lucky for T to enter the world in summer!) And our fuel-bills have 'gone through the roof' in trying to keep warm. To add to the misery, my car had failed its MOT test – due to excessive corrosion underneath (why will they put salt on the roads?) so I've had to order a new one – which I can't afford! Thank you both, therefore, for the 'little ray of sunshine midst the encircling gloom' so to speak! Give him my love – and hearty good wishes for a super happy life on earth – and much the same to his mother and father! Well done, M; I'm sure the next will be easier! (Good on you, as they say in 'strine'). I wonder when we'll meet young T? How about the coming English summer? Pram, cot, playpen etc. all waiting here! Much love and again many congrats. PS Presume you are keeping summer-time, as the actual time-difference between Greenwich and Adelaide is 9 hours 16 minutes.

Spring Equinox (March 1982)

Perhaps this letter is rather overdue, but the Spring Equinox seems as good a time to write as any other! The willows are looking lovely as they begin to come into a pale-yellow leaf, and the daffodils are blooming all over the garden – so there's a certain feeling of springtime everywhere. Thank you both for your post-natal letters and all the photographs (which are now doing the rounds of the family!) T certainly looks a healthy little fellow – and I'm sure you're all delighted with him. For the life of me, however, I cannot see the faintest resemblance to anyone – other than another baby of the same age! No doubt his parents are more discerning, but that aspect should become clearer as the months progress.

As soon as we got your news, I went out and hoisted the Australian flag – and it continued to fly for a full week. (At the moment, we have St Patrick's cross waving over the daffodils – as from 17th!) I imagine you will all now be back in your own home, and settling into a new sort of domestic routine... Perhaps you'll be cogitating on plans for the christening – and the appointment of godparents; will any of them be from this side of the world? I'm glad you liked the little 'prezzy' which M & J so kindly arranged for T on my behalf. It certainly looks good in the photo, though I feel it unlikely to come fully into its own for a good few months yet.

... We have H here with us for a fortnight, while V & W make their move to Suffolk. We also have their black Labrador 'Jake' – who is quite a handful. (I call him 'our ethnic

minority'!) He's as strong as a horse, pulls like mad on the lead, and loathes being shut in the dog-run (where he barks his head off). However, fortunately he gets on pretty well with our two – though Ruff gets most of his boisterousness, Rasty regarding him with rather ill-concealed resignation and avuncular tolerance! The only real respite that anyone gets is when I take them all down to the beach, where they can run off their excess energy to their hearts' content.

Meanwhile Mother finds H a full-time occupation – and a pretty tiring one at that, as the little girl is now standing up and crawling all over the place. On the whole, however, she is extremely good and quite delightful – but the fact remains that, between us, Mother and I have our hands pretty full for a while. Last weekend we motored down to Clay End for the day, just to look at the results of all Bill's hard work on Holmes Farm House before they hand it over. The transformation is astonishing – they've really done wonders with the place – and well deserve the splendid price they're getting for it. Mother and I put up some of the original capital for its purchase, and that has proved the best investment we've ever made! So much so that on April 1st I will be able to raise enough cash to replace my car (which, at 5 years of age had failed its MOT test!)

Next weekend we have my godson James S to stay (coming up on his motor-bike). He is just 18 and has been accepted at Reading University to read Engineering. He has not yet been confirmed, so, as his godfather, I am arranging for a little informal chat between him and our Rector, Ross B! God bless you all and much love: Dad.

1989

Cranmer & the Family Connection (July 1989)

A circular letter from my father, dated 2nd July 1989, from Manby House:

I think this note may be of interest to the great-grandchildren of Thomas Dickinson Hall – who may care to pass it on to their progeny. Copies also go to my own progeny. As you doubtless know, we are now celebrating the quincentenary of Thomas Cranmer's birth – which took place at Aslockton, a small village in Nottinghamshire, exactly 500 years ago [1489]. Because, in those days, there was no church in Aslockton, Cranmer and his family regularly worshipped at St John's church in the neighbouring village of Whatton.

Cranmer was the first protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, and the right-hand man of King Henry VIII in his disputes with the Pope over Henry's divorces and marriages. He is perhaps best remembered as the author of the Book of Common Prayer (the 'cement' which binds together the Anglican Church at home and overseas – now being eroded by our trendy Bishops and others in the cause of 'relevance'). When Henry's Roman Catholic daughter, 'Bloody Mary' became Queen in 1553, she had Cranmer arrested and burnt at the stake – for what she regarded as his heresy. Two centuries later, the land round Whatton and Aslockton was acquired by Thomas Hall, a Burgess of Nottingham and the grandfather of Thomas Dickinson Hall. TDH inherited the land and, in 1838, built his mansion, Whatton Manor, on it. As Sherriff of Nottingham and Squire of Whatton, he also owned and enlarged the village (witness the many houses bearing the TDH 'shield' over their doors).

TDH also owned the Advowson of Whatton (as well as that of Manby). To Whatton he appointed as Vicar his fourth son, the Rev Thomas Kenrick Hall. TKH later began to worry about the alienation of his half-cousins in Australia and New Zealand – and, in 1889, he took a 'sabbatical' to make contact with them out there. On his way home (apparently with two of his 'nieces' – the Miss Lacey's) the ship, SS Quetta, struck an uncharted rock near the Torres

Strait, and sank – with much loss of life. One of the nieces survived – miraculously, after more than 20 hours in the water – but Thomas himself was drowned. His widowed mother, Sophia Elizabeth (now Lady of the Manor), thereupon resolved to commemorate her son by building a church at Aslockton – and dedicating it to St Thomas. Among the family heirlooms is the silver presentation trowel with which, in 1891, she laid its foundation-stone. Both Aslockton and Whatton are focal points of the quincentenary celebrations now in progress for Cranmer – heavily supported by the Prayer Book Society, of which Mary and I are both members (she a member of its Lincoln Committee). Though the ‘Family Connections’ may be tenuous, these events have certainly brought it to light. Had TKH not been drowned, would Cranmer’s birthplace still be without a church?

Mention of the silver trowel brings to mind another family connection – with Oliver Cromwell – which is perhaps less tenuous. The oldest of our family heirlooms is a two-handled lidded silver bowl dated 1662 – long referred to as ‘The Cromwell Porringer’. Recent research has shown that this piece did not belong to the ‘Lord Protector’ (who had died a few years earlier), but to his grandson, Cromwell Calypole – to whom it was given as a Christening present. Cromwell Claypole died without issue, his nearest relative being his first cousin, John Dickinson, a life-long friend – to whom he bequeathed it. From John Dickinson, through six generations, the Porringer descended to Thomas Dickinson Hall from his mother, Harriet Dickinson – so it has now been in ‘the family’ for ten generations.

Whether any of this is of interest to TDH’s descendants is for you to judge, but I thought it worthwhile to tell you...

'The Times' Obituary

Rear-Admiral Geoffrey Hall

Times of London

Rear-Admiral Geoffrey Hall, CB, DSC, Hydrographer of the Navy 1971-75, was born on July 19, 1916. He died on January 18, 2005, aged 88.

Master surveyor who won the DSC in a daring reconnaissance of Japanese defences and became Hydrographer of the Navy.

GEOFFREY HALL was the twentieth Hydrographer of the Navy since the post was established in 1795. As such, he was the leader of an organisation which has been responsible for the navigational charting of almost the entire world. The famous Admiralty Chart in all its forms was first placed on the open market in 1823 and was thereafter used worldwide by the merchant ships of many nations.

Hall's long and varied seafaring career, which included six sea commands, began in the training cruiser Frobisher in which he attended the Silver Jubilee Fleet Review of 1935 at Spithead. As a midshipman in the ancient cruiser Dragon, he helped to show the flag around South America. On his transfer to the modern cruiser Southampton, he had his first taste of action during the politically confused Spanish Civil War, when an alarming number of contrived or accidental attacks on the shipping of other nations required protective responses and the succour of many categories of refugees fleeing from the conflict, in which Franco's insurgency was openly backed by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy.

During sub-lieutenant professional courses at Portsmouth, Hall made up his mind to join the surveying service. After a period measuring the tides and the movement of sandbanks in the Thames Estuary in the survey vessel Franklin, he was appointed to the sloop Scarborough and helped to survey the coast of British Somaliland and the east coast of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Scarborough was in Singapore where Hall, with other surveyors, manned reserve fleet minesweepers and hurriedly learnt the trade. Relieved by RNVR officers, he was flown home and as a lieutenant in the Challenger, took part in a survey to equip the supposedly secure anchorage at Scapa Flow with controlled minefields and detector loops in order to prevent a recurrence of the disaster to the battleship Royal Oak, which had been sunk at anchor by the bold U-boat captain Gunther Prien.

Although Challenger, as a survey vessel, was quite unsuitable as an escort, circumstances in June 1941 required her, with two corvettes, to lead a convoy to West Africa during which a troopship, the Anselm, was torpedoed. Hall graphically described this disaster: "Although brilliantly handled, the escorts saving some 1,500 of the 2,000 soldiers on board, many broke legs jumping down to Challenger's deck and many more were sucked under as Anselm sank". Carrying more than a thousand survivors who were understandably reluctant to go below decks, Challenger's stability (she was a mere 1,140 tons displacement) was seriously affected. Challenger went on to survey the navigability of the steamy Gambia river, which was to be used as a convoy assembly point but was at that time almost uncharted. She returned home in January 1941.

Hall had requested to transfer to general service - the mainstream Navy - and was now allowed to do so. He qualified as a navigator and was appointed to the staff of a minesweeping squadron, operating, often under an air threat, against submarine-laid mines around the shallower waters off Iceland in support of Murmansk convoys.

At one point, on return to Greenock, Hall was surprised when "a dark-haired pleasant-looking lieutenant called Geoffrey Lyne" introduced himself as Hall's relief - they were to do a swap. Reluctant to move, Hall was reminded that he had volunteered for "hazardous service" some time earlier. As it happened Lyne had been in Combined Operations and had been captured by the Vichy French during a beach survey for Operation Torch, the Allied landings in North Africa. Hall thus found himself training for a 'Combined Operations Pilotage Party'.

This was based in India and was part of an innovative and enlarging capability, aimed at surveying beaches suitable for amphibious assault. Hall's first assignment, in October 1943, was the island of Akyab off the Burmese coast, which was to be approached by motor launch and canoe, equipped with "a crate of carrier pigeons and a bottle of pills inscribed 'Instantaneous Death - to be taken with discretion' ". Creeping about in the dark, Hall's team ascertained the absence of any Japanese, and carried out their reconnaissance of the defences, establishing the beach gradients, all the while acutely conscious of the threat from landmines and sharks. For this operation, Hall was awarded the DSC. He was subsequently awarded a mention in dispatches for a three-day operation on the northern coast of Sumatra in August 1944. For this he landed by canoe from the submarine Tudor.

On return to UK in early 1945, he was appointed to command the frigate Bigbury Bay, then under construction at Aberdeen. He also took the opportunity to marry his fiancée, Mary Carlisle, then a WRNS officer at Portland. While working up at Tobermory under the eagle eye of the formidable Vice-Admiral Sir Gilbert "Monkey" Stephenson, Commodore of the Western Isles - and an important contributor to winning the Battle of the Atlantic - Hall heard of the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima.

Bigbury Bay sailed to Hong Kong and was very active in the chaotic aftermath of the Pacific war. Her duties were anti-piracy patrolling and the recovery of internees from Japanese camps. After an enjoyable visit to Australia, Hall was ordered to Tokyo under American command, there to embark Japanese servicemen accused of war crimes - many of a horrific nature - and take them to Hong Kong for trial.

After two years in command, Hall returned home by troopship and applied to rejoin the naval hydrographic service. After a tour in the comparatively lowly position of second-in-command of the survey ship Seagull, working in the Bristol Channel and off the West Coast of Scotland, Hall was offered the post of second-in-command of the Royal New Zealand Navy's only survey ship, the Lachlan. Accompanied by his family, this was a happy and adventurous two years.

On his return home in 1952, Hall was appointed captain, successively, of the survey vessels Franklin and Scott, conducting surveys of the Thames Estuary and the northern Irish loughs. Promoted to commander, he was appointed superintendent of the oceanographical branch, dealing with, among other things, the amassing of data concerning the temperature structure of the sea around the world critical to the acoustic detection of submarines. He was amused by his ex-officio membership of the British national committee on the Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features - known as the NOB committee.

Command of the survey ship Owen (originally built as a frigate) followed, with surveys of the East and West coasts of Africa, in the Seychelles and off Gibraltar. In 1958 Hall worked in the Admiralty, managing the charts needed by the naval staff, and working with NATO on the standardisation of radio aids and similar matters. A second tour in command of Owen concerned oceanographic surveys of the mid-Atlantic deeps; the recovery of sediment cores; visits to St Paul's Rocks and Tristan da Cunha; and intricate and sometimes - because of the violent weather and the necessary use of the ship's boats - hair-raising surveys of South Georgia. Owen was then employed in the Indian Ocean as part of the 1962 International Geophysical Year, completing an epic voyage that included some 53,000 miles of new

oceanic soundings. For his work in furthering oceanographic exploration Hall was awarded the Royal Geographical Society's Cuthbert Peek Grant. Promoted to captain, he went to Whitehall as Assistant Hydrographer.

Then, in 1965, he was given command of the new survey ship Hecla which was mainly employed on North Atlantic surveys with their new operational focus on the position of sea-bottom contours in support of Britain's Polaris submarine force.

He was promoted rear-admiral in 1971 and appointed Hydrographer of the Navy that year. During his time in post he fought hard, and with political acumen, for the preservation of the Royal Navy's surveying capability in the desperate economic climate of those days.

In September 1975 he took the unusual step for a serving officer of airing his concerns about the effects of starvation of funds for surveying on the nation's mercantile life in a strenuously argued letter to The Times, pointing out that "the work of the Hydrographic Service represents the greatest single contribution which the Royal Navy makes to the civil community in peace time". Such temerity caused consternation in the Admiralty, and incurred "their Lordships' displeasure" - an official slap on the wrist for the Navy's chief hydrographer.

He was appointed CB in 1973 and was president of the Hydrographic Society from 1975, in which year he retired from the Navy and settled in Lincolnshire. He was a Deputy Lieutenant of the county, a supporter of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and of Lincoln Cathedral. His memoir, *Sailor's Luck*, appeared in 1999.

He is survived by his wife Mary and their two sons, their daughter Virginia having died in 1998.