

Mary Hall's Letters

Letters to close relatives

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Preface

The following are excerpts from letters written by Mary Hall to various close relatives, mostly during the 1970's and early 1980's, with some later postcards written during the 2000's, the last decade of her life. For reasons of privacy, personal details have generally been omitted...

Excerpts from Letters (1960's, 1970's, 1980's)

1967

Postcard from Iceland (July 1967)

Postcard dated 11 July 1967 from Iceland: "Borganes við Borgarfjörd. Borganes, a friendly village in Iceland."

I wonder if you remember this. Geoffrey and I saw it across the fjord, but couldn't see the very bright red house! We passed our picnic place where ... dived from a rock, and someone was camping there. Geoffrey and I have been staying in a little tiny bungalow right on the shore of a huge lake. Alas, a deep depression was over Iceland and it poured with rain, so we only caught one fish, but that was very exciting. I am just off now to Sellfoss with... and on to Langavatn...

1973

Launching HMS Herald (October 1973)

Suffice it to say now that Oct 4th was a splendid occasion. HMS Herald took the water beautifully and the ceremony surrounding this was quite something. A Royal Marine band played and we had a short service first. Then a pause while every last 'chock' was knocked away – then I had to name the ship and break a bottle of champagne on the bows (no 'push button' here and Geoffrey apparently was terrified that I might miss!). Then I had to push a lever, which actually signalled to the men below to knock out the last pin, and the ship slid slowly and most gracefully down into the water. Just as she became afloat she did a sort of curtsy and then the tugs took over. We returned to the Caledonian Hotel where there was an official reception and lunch. I thought this was going to be a bit of an ordeal because I had to make a speech, but in fact I enjoyed it and the speech seemed to go down well too. It was a great day. Lots of Navy there too, which I think the shipbuilders rather liked, and this ship had three Admirals at her christening – which was quite something!

Autumn days (October 1973)

I went to London this week and also spent 2 days at Bexhill. Lovely autumn days still, and bright sunshine with mist early and late. Iain drove me round quite a bit, and the country looked wonderful. Great beech trees with glorious colouring. I have to nip to London again tomorrow for a Royal Geographic Society meeting, but then will get back here Thursday for at least another week. Lots to do in the garden now, and as soon as I get word I shall be starting on a cushion for the church. I spent a long morning with Sylvia G in Highgate and decided that the first three of "All Saints" will be St Hugh of Lincoln, St Andrew and St Nicolas! Kittens flourish and are beginning to roam around. I shall have to find homes for them soon...

HMS Bulldog in Force 10 gale (November 1973)

I have had a busy week – quite eventful. Geoffrey and I drove over to Heswall last Sunday... It was pretty stormy on the way over, but clear and some lovely Rowland Hilder-ish landscapes. On Monday afternoon I drove Geoffrey into Liverpool to sail [HMS] Bulldog in a Force 10 gale! We arrived early, so paused and watched the tugs and ferryboats tossing like mad. Then I rushed back to Glenburn to collect... and drive them to the University for a recital where G was playing, and this was lovely. But what a maze of one-way streets Liverpool is – I should have been quite lost without a guide. I had meant to leave on Tuesday and spend the night in Huddersfield, but changed my plans and went with G and K to the Philharmonic concert – lovely, including Britten's Spring Symphony. And in the morning Geoffrey and I drove to the beach to watch the tide. I had never seen it so high and stormy – waves right over the car as we drove along – really very dramatic indeed... Just off now to choral – our last practice before the Messiah on Sunday. We had a 'cheese and wine' party here on Thursday, which everyone seemed to enjoy, and made over £90 – which is encouraging and helps pay the soloists!

Zither Carol (December 1973)

Our performance [of Messiah] had good press! I think it really went very well, and certainly it is a lovely thing to sing – I had never done it before. We are now on to the "Carols for all" evening on December 20th, mostly fairly well known ones, but Peter... is very particular about how we sing them. And last Monday we did one new to me, the Zither Carol, which is an old Czech folk song with zzing-zzing in the lower parts – great fun in the off beats. On Saturday 22nd the B's are having their carols and party at Ranby – but a little different because there are to be more grown-ups in the choir and they have asked me to join, which is nice... Unfortunately I was not too well and snowbound, the evening I was supposed to go to dinner and discuss it all. Yes we had quite a lot of snow and very, very cold winds, keeping everything white and crunchy, but then suddenly on Monday it all went and we are in a mild air-stream – for a bit! I am... down in Taunton – it's the time of winter lectures, CO's conference and general get together, so we have a party tonight. I came down by train, not really liking to risk having no petrol. This oil shortage will certainly bring problems. I can see all our rations going on meeting trains unless we can get a bit extra for that. It may make summer holiday plans difficult too, but this is too far ahead to look at just now...

Almost full moon (December 1973)

I do love singing carols. We have our Louth concert next week – some lovely ones among the ordinaries, and on 22nd the B's have their Ranby Service and have asked me to sing. I went over for a practice last night and stayed on to supper, then I had a fantastic drive back, with clear skies, an almost full moon, and the wind rising to a gale. My little car nearly took off as I crossed the bluestone ridge, and the shapes and shadows of trees were sinister indeed – a witching night! It sounds rather the same now, but I am sitting in front of a log fire – very cosy and warm, and will try and get all my letters written. I had various meetings this week. Nothing very exciting, apart from a WRVS lady in Horncastle being given a BEM [Medal?] by the Lord Lieutenant, acting for the Queen...

Christmas Eve (December 1973)

There seemed to be a lot of meals to cook! But the Aga is a good thing, and fortunately oil and electricity seem OK at the moment! We had a lovely Carols-by-Candlelight service at Ranby on Saturday, and went again this year to the Christmas Eve service in Lincoln... We had tea this time at the White Hart for a change – more Dickensian than the Eastgate [Hotel]. Hot buttered toast and a roaring log fire! But no frost or snow on the way back, just rather

damp... and on Boxing Day Geoffrey and Roger played golf at Skegness while we went to the Meet [hunting] in Louth and on to... doing quite a tour of Lincolnshire on the way. Donna Nook yesterday – no seals – but skeins of geese coming in at dusk which was a magnificent sight. Now the guests have gone...

1974

Christmas and New Year (January 1974)

Here there were six of us... and a busy time as usual. Now everyone has gone. Geoffrey and ... return tomorrow, but I have had a few days here on my own, beginning to clear up. I have taken down the cards – such pretty ones, some of them, but will leave the crib and the tree till Twelfth Night. The tree was about the same size as last year – not all that big – but a good shape, and we dressed it very simply: red candles, red, gold and silver, with a splendid dusting of artificial snow – which made up for having a rather damp and drizzly outside! We had the usual gaieties, though for me they were not very gay – and on New Year's Eve Geoffrey and I, the only ones still here, went to a fabulous party at... I almost didn't, because I felt so sad, but am glad in the end that I did, and we saw the New Year in with many friends and music and dance. I only hope that 1974 improves as it goes along...

King George's Fund for Sailors (January 1974)

Pause, while I potter round the garden a bit, helping pick up the aftermath of the latest gale, and hearing the hunt. They must be drawing Legbourne Wood – hounds and horn – all very winter-afternoon-ish. I went to London this week – by car because of the rail go-slow – and had a horrid wet drive back. But the main object was a King George's Fund for Sailors evening – a dinner and then to the Coliseum to see Offenbach's 'Orpheus in the Underworld' – I'd never seen this before, and it was absolutely delightful – very light-hearted and amusing, with some lovely music too, somewhat in the vein of Gilbert and Sullivan. And we go with... to Iolanthe next week...

Aconites and snowdrops (January 1974)

Scotland should be lovely – all family at Inverpolly, and I *may* go to the Dee for a week in July with the D's. I have been in London this week, and... took me and Barbara to Iolanthe on Thursday – great delight, and we went on to have an Italian supper afterwards. Now Geoffrey and I are having a quiet gardening weekend. Mild weather (which we fear we'll pay for later) has brought up the first aconites and snowdrops, and all the bulbs are poking through. The silver birch by the cedar is down at last – quite dead – and another planted, but I fear it will take long to grow to such a lovely height.

WRVS (January 1974)

I have been very busy doing WRVS this last week, trying to see all the village representatives in my area. I do quite a mileage seeing 3 or 4 in one expedition, and as last week took me to Saltfleet I climbed the bank with my binoculars to look for the whale. Poor thing, there it was about 3 miles away stranded right on the water's edge, and coastguards etc. were just about to go out with bulldozers etc. to dispose of it. I didn't have time to walk out, but lots of people did. We had dinner with the M's at Harrington on Saturday, and lunch with Diana on Sunday. She's just back from South Africa. Otherwise we've been busy in the garden – aconites and snowdrops all coming up. But everyone is profoundly suspicious of the mild winter and predicts cold spells to come. Political news is gloomy too, but I get so tired of

these pompous little men on TV that I would like to bang their heads together. All I can do however is to switch off!

Funeral (February 1974)

... and we have been busy in the garden too. In fact Geoffrey was so enthusiastic dealing with huge fallen branches that he has done his back again, and hobbles about – very dot and carry one. We have had such mild weather so far that aconites are nearly over and snowdrops already forming their usual carpet. Gloomy forebodings about snow in February (the great snow-up of 1947 started on February 7th!) but we shall just have to wait and see.... I had a day in London – wrote in the train, if you could read a word! And joined with... to go to Aunt Syl's funeral. Rather a bleak affair in Golder's Green Crematorium... – a very impersonal service too – what Aunt Syl herself said she wanted, but I would prefer a village church myself. I have busy with WRVS all week, trying to see all the village representatives from Harrington to Beesby, Walmsgate to the coast – quiet a mileage for one area. I must say I hope petrol does not go on a ration, but the next few weeks may well be a bit tricky here. The whole political situation is really a bit too interesting. Charmian comes next week to paint my portrait, which I do not relish – not feeling in the mood at all, and not knowing what to wear...

Spring-like perfection (February 1974)

Climate here is spring-like perfection today – extraordinarily mild and a lovely sun. The snowdrops are a wonderful carpet and we even have a few daffodils out. The willow has its first green, and all the elms that lovely pink as the buds swell. My, how the donkeys are enjoying life – and Sheba brought a baby rabbit in this morning, which Charmian nobly took by the ears and put it out to grass, where it rushed off – like a shocked rabbit! Certainly, the sun is a welcome tonic, and a change from all the rather gloomy news in the papers. Election news dominates of course, and is becoming thoroughly tedious on the box! Charmian has finished the portrait. She and Geoffrey both like it. It has to have its re-touché varnish and then I'll take it to Lincoln for framing, and it will hang in the dining room, gazing rather soulfully out of the window!

Ordnance Survey maps (March 1974)

I was in London last week. I came back on Friday, having left the car in Lincoln, so that I could pick up the framed portrait, and arrived here not long before... came on a weekend visit. They have only just left, so none of my letters were written – Alas! London was quite an amusing visit. I went to the theatre with... on Wednesday – a light and amusing play called Habeas Corpus, for which she had been given free seats. I tried unsuccessfully to do some shopping on Thursday and in the evening Geoffrey and I went to a reception in Lancaster House given to mark the New Ordnance Survey maps – these are being metric and on a different scale, slightly larger than the 1 inch (not metric yet, but ready to go!) – and a history of Ordnance Survey maps was exhibited on the way to the drinks. We met quite a few people we knew, and more we did not, so it was all quite amusing and a change from Legbourne. Having the... has meant a lot of extra cooking, but I had managed to do quite a lot (and froze it) before I went away. We went to church at Manby – sad without the RAF – and in the afternoon out to the beach. Oh my! So cold that even the birds had taken shelter. We saw a few waders and ringed plovers but no geese at all. Spring has come to a sudden stop here, with bitter north-east winds, sleet and some snow. So all the brave flowers have paused, early daffodils seem to be no further out, but do come open in the house and are lovely...

Easter service (April 1974)

I had meant to write long letters this weekend, but am struck down with a sort of 'flu/cold, and feel 'not very how' indeed, so am just penning brief lines and retiring defeated. Such a pity as there is as usual lots to do. Geoffrey and I are having a very peaceful weekend – no visitors! Alas, the East Coast cold weather is still with us, which discourages gardening, but I did manage to get on to the island again (pond still very deep, so it's a bit perilous, even in waders). A moorhen is nesting, as usual, and I disturbed her, but she has gone back I'm glad to say. Mr J and I had a go mid-week clearing brambles etc. I have now planted some iris and aubrietia etc. and will put in a honeysuckle and water mint this afternoon. Sudden thought, I might take some primroses too – they and daffodils are just lovely now, and made decorating the church quite splendid. The Easter service was well attended and the church looked beautiful – even the pulpit, which I have such a struggle with, didn't look too bad!

Matthew Flinders lunch (April 1974)

[We] had a very quiet weekend. It was mighty cold, and I had a mighty cold too! Having avoided one all winter, I went down with a stinker and finally retired to bed! Better now, but still feel a bit limp. I guess the machine runs down at my age. We've been doing the usual gardening etc. and Geoffrey canoed to the island yesterday to cut off some dead branches from the willow tree, so I shall wade out this afternoon and plant a honeysuckle to cover the stump, and hopefully to climb up the trunk. We did a day trip to London on Thursday for a 'Matthew Flinders' lunch and lecture by Admiral R, which was fascinating. But London was nearly as chilly as here. Infuriating when one hears that the rest of the country is bathed in warm spring sunshine. I am off on the road again next week – Taunton on Tuesday and Wednesday, then on to London...

Lifeboats anniversary (April 1974)

I have had quite a busy few days. Drove down to Taunton on Tuesday, the first time I have done a long drive for ages, and I rather enjoyed it, though I was tired on arrival. But there was a meeting the next day for 'Revisers' – the retired naval officers who work at home revising sailing directions etc., and for the first time we had a social for wives too – which was a good thing I think, and fun meeting old friends – some from New Zealand days! I drove to London the next morning, and in the evening went out to Crouch Hill... and on to the theatre – an evening with Edith Evans – aged but remarkable actress and two pianists who played delightfully. The next day was busy! I went in the afternoon to the Mansion House (No 15 bus all the way from Paddington to the City) to the AGM of King George's Fund for Sailors – which is always interesting, then back by tube – no quicker than the bus – and out in the evening with Geoffrey to a splendid dinner given by the Lord Mayor in the Guildhall to mark the 150th anniversary of the Lifeboats. Geoffrey in full figure with medals and CB around his neck, and we had a service car to take us and collect us too, which made all the difference. The evening was fabulous, with some wonderful paintings to look at when we arrived. Then on upstairs and past musketeers and pikemen in gorgeous 17th century dress – all presenting arms to Geoffrey (not many others in uniform, two other admirals and one RAF Trinity House etc.). The Lord Mayor in ceremonial costume with fantastic chain and diamonds, and all his entourage – City Marshall, sword bearer, mace bearer etc. – the sword bearer wearing a huge fur hat! Guests were 'received' and after glasses of champagne in the library we went in to dinner – quite gorgeous, fanfares of trumpets, band playing – amusing other guests at our table, and very interesting speeches – one by Coxswain E from Moefoe (Anglesey), who has *two* gold medals. Altogether a memorable occasion. We drove back here yesterday. Oh my! Is it cold!

Beech trees and kittens (May 1974)

I've had a very busy 'Local' week. My new WRVS District runs from Humberside to Skegness, Woodhall to the coast, and I am trying to see all the local organisers before the end of the week. Almost done now, and yesterday, having driven Geoffrey early to Market Rasen, I set off via Louth to look at a new Reservoir at Toft Newton, then on to Lincoln for a Lincoln Arts Supporters' meeting – back briefly and out to choral. Today I have been to Spilsby and Horncastle, and go to Boston tonight for a new ballet to commemorate Matthew Flinders. It'll be interesting to see how they do *that* in dance! Must rush now to my 'office' in Louth. I first heard the cuckoo today; swallows are returning, beech trees are at their enchanting first best, and Sheba has (to date) three kittens, just popping out (in the corner of the kitchen!)

Americans (May 1974)

Geoffrey and I drove in the Rover last Monday, and Tuesday and Wednesday were taken up with an influx of Americans – lots in conference for Geoffrey, one wife for me – the return of our trip to Washington last year, if you see what I mean. Luckily we had gorgeous weather – country looking lovely – and we spent the afternoon driving into Devon, to see the... They have just moved to a beautiful smallish house in the depths of the country, keeping sheep amongst other things, and... has learnt to spin and showed us how. We came up to London the next day (after an evening reception for all the Americans) and [we] took the... out to dinner and a film. I came back by train on Thursday – alas, a coach had faulty brakes and we sat for over an hour in a field while they shunted it off – maddening to be so late, and I had a taxi waiting too! WRVS work is keeping me busy, and various things happening here too – for old people – WI, Lifeboats, church funds etc. – never stops! Just back from church now, which seems to have quite a good-sized congregation each week now. Geoffrey read the Epistle – still thinking we should have Mattins!

Summer day (May 1974)

Today we have had a real and unbelievable summer day – sunshine and a light, almost warm wind – a welcome change from the perpetual grey skies and bitter north-easterly gales. I sat in the sun for quite a bit this afternoon and then have been cleaning out the summer house, and washing the garden chairs – not before time! The... came for drinks after church this morning and we sat outside – me realising how dusty everything looked! I've had a busy week as usual, going to London too, for a Challenger Society lecture, and before coming back I paid a flying early morning visit to the Chelsea Flower Show – something to be done every now and again. It must have been three or four years since I went. Fabulous, of course, but inclined to make one wish for climate and soil different from North Lincs! I go to Taunton next week staying with... actually near Chard, for King George's Fund coffee morning etc. I think I shall stay a night in Oxford on my way back to see friends and relations.

King George's Fund for Sailors (June 1974)

I have had a busy week, going down to Taunton for our annual King George's Fund for Sailors 'do'. This year we had a coffee morning... near Chard... It's a wonderful garden with huge rhododendrons and azaleas, and lovely woods and lawns. We had glorious weather too, and a very successful party at which we made £55, so that was nice. I clanked to the Bank laden with silver and copper to pay in, on my way north – very satisfactory. The country looked lovely as I drove back, spending the night in Oxford – and I had time in the morning to potter round a bit, which I enjoyed. Lots of chores to do here. Geoffrey at sea this week, so I must catch up – letters, garden etc., not to mention WRVS and S&T [Salmon & Trout Association]! Kittens flourish and are becoming mobile, so never a dull moment...

Orfe (June 1974)

It is now Sunday and we are having a colossal thunderstorm – much needed rain of course, but I feel it need not be so violent. At least it seems to be just rain this time – mid-week we had solid hail, whitening all the ground and blocking the gutters, not to mention flattening quite a few of the plants! Luckily the day before was fine, for I spent much of it in the pond! I suddenly noticed lots of teeny tiny fish... that size and almost transparent. I telephoned Mr Lawson and said could these be ORFE? And he rushed over with net and buckets. Indeed they are orfe, and he had just been to a fishery management discussion in Hampshire, where it was stated that it was nearly impossible to breed ORFE in England – running water and ideal conditions essential. Well, we waded round and he collected quite a few, for him to rear in tanks, leaving lots behind in the pond of course. But in the pond there may be lots of natural hazards – predators etc. However, I do hope some survive here as well...

I'm off to London early tomorrow – various meetings, mainly the Royal Geographical Society, and I hope to see... too, then back to prepare for a wine and cheese evening for the Lifeboats (which I fear is getting a bit out of control!). On Saturday I am to open the Village Hall Fete... next week is the Lincoln Show, at which I appear for the Salmon & Trout Association...

Fleet Air Arm VIP (June 1974)

We've had a very busy week – and it has been very summery too. But today, as we had planned to have some people here for gentle tennis – down comes the rain and washes out the beautiful white lines. I rather doubt if we'll play, which is a pity, as Roger is here all prepared. On Monday to Wednesday I was in London – RGS meeting on Monday, which was most interesting, and then, alas, I succumbed to a tummy bug and had to forego a lunch with Iain – and a party at Canada House, but I did go out to... for supper – and I had more-or-less recovered by then.

Back here, lots going on. Friday, the Lifeboats came to have a 'wine and cheese' evening here, which was crowded but quite amusing. A goodly body of the ladies' committee arrived in the afternoon and took over the kitchen, so I left them to it and went off to Binbrook to meet Geoffrey who was being flown down from Scotland by the Fleet Air Arm. I spent about ½ hour in the control tower watching the radar plot and seeing the blip of the plane – news of its coming chalked up on the board with VIP in large letters beside the number! Yesterday we had the annual Summer Fete in aid of the Village Hall – opposite in Mr S's garden. I opened it – Ha! ha! and then did the rounds, and had fascinating converse with Mr S himself, whose speech was wonderful Lincolnshire – wish I had had a tape-recorder. During the afternoon the school-children gave a display of maypole and country dancing... The children were really very good – well I remember the agony of counting and 'weaving' – all hell to pay if one went wrong and had to be unravelled!

Boston Festival (July 1974)

We had quite a naval weekend. [HMS] Beagle and Bulldog came in to Boston, and Geoffrey and I were there to greet them as they sailed through the very narrow lock. Then we had a series of functions on board, and on Sunday a service in St Botolph's, at which Geoffrey read the lesson. The Bishop preached. Naval march through the streets of Boston on the way! It was the last day of the Boston Festival week and the church looked marvellous. I've never seen such lovely flowers, and it is a very impressive building. Tony and I spent the day in Lincoln on Monday, doing 'wedding present' shopping for various people, including... Meantime I am vaguely getting ready for my week on the Dee. It will be a bit a rush this

year, and I have a horrid feeling that my waders leak. However I have bought some stuff to spray on and waterproof them, so shall just hope I can keep dry...

Yesterday the WI came and had their meeting here – 20 or 30 women crowded into this room to hear about beauty culture, and they had ‘tea and biscuits’ in the dining room – ‘Tea Ladies’ popping in and out, and we borrowed an extra kettle. The party ended, as usual, in the kitchen. We have another function here – coffee evening in aid of church funds – at the end of the month, and just hope the garden will look nice still. Roses are now out, but all a bit battered alas, and lots of small branches down. We still have two kittens left. I had hoped to find homes for them before I go away, but so far, no takers!

Fishing in the Dee (July 1974)

I was on the road all yesterday – so didn’t write any letters. What a long drive, 416 miles – and alas my car started to boil at the top of Carter Bar – most disconcerting, as nothing like that has happened before. I let it cool, and then drove slowly on – didn’t find a Renault agent till Perth and then he could find nothing wrong. Anyway, the Banchory garage is going to have a day at it tomorrow.

Busy week, last week, before leaving, and some odd happenings – a rabbit in the drawing room for one – it suddenly scuttled across the room late one evening when Tony and I were sitting there – all doors shut. I suppose Sheba must have brought it in and forgotten it! I crept down at 5:30 the next morning and opened the French window – had a huge search at 7.30, no sign – but lunch time we heard noises – and finally found it right at the back of the music cupboard behind the piano! Momma was waiting outside for it, so we hope it survives. Odd how one’s attitude to rabbits is conditional on ‘Watership Down’! The pond is full of interest now, with baby orfes and middle-sized orfes seen for the first time since last year, and Mrs L has given us two beautiful koi carp – a pure gold and silver/red/black – very handsome. We were enchanted too to see a family of swallows on the top bar of the tennis nets lined up waiting while parents swooped over the pond to get food and finally tried to help them fly!

The Dee is lovely as ever. I spent the morning wading and fishing – no luck, alas, but there are plenty of fish around, splashing about, and I have decided they have a warped sense of humour – just popping up and laughing after my beautiful fly has passed over them! Out soon to try again...

‘The ceiling came down...’ (December 1974)

I had meant to write long letters today, but Geoffrey has asked the M’s in before lunch and we rehearse the Rossini with the soloists this afternoon. Also it’s being a busy weekend removing everything from... room. The ceiling came down last week and will have to be replastered, which is an incredibly dusty business, and Geoffrey and I will soon qualify as removal men. We have done some re-bedding upstairs too, and I will have to do a bit of shifting around for the Christmas invasion. Last week in London was fun and interesting. Salmon and Trout lunch and meeting. Lovely theatre with... “Saturday Sunday Monday” – an Italian comedy, most perfectly produced and acted, then a dinner for the editor of Reed’s Almanac, where guests were very distinguished and included Sir Alec and Lady Rose (round-the-world sailor)!

1979

Manby renovations (November 1979)

You quite put me to shame with your long letter... Really Geoffrey is doing very well. It was uncomfortable for quite a time, particularly until the stitches were out, and he sees the surgeon again next week. In fact he is so nearly back to normal, but cannot lift at all just yet, or take the dogs on a lead for their long walks, so guess who does that? A very time-consuming occupation, twice a day. I am sure it will be good for my figure, but I do find I am quite tired at the end of the day, which is my normal time for letter-writing – hence the gaps in my correspondence... Here we feel winter is right with us. No snow here yet so far, but quite heavy frosts, and gales tonight so the leaves are nearly all down – we're letting the wind do most of the sweeping this year! We still have a few roses. I have a bowl beside me now, but otherwise the garden is a bit bare and I had to go to the market to buy flowers for my turn to do the church last week.

We are making a bit of progress with Manby. The builders should be starting soon with our 'Phase I' alterations, and this should be quite fun – choosing colours and wall papers for the few rooms we are redecorating. The trouble is that there is so much choice these days! Yes, the dining room is pleasant – smaller than here but will therefore be warmer, and we reckon we can use tables, sideboard etc. that we have. The heavy furniture will have to await 'Phase II' and the gallery! The whole house has a lot of good points. (I was told the other day that these RAF houses were designed by Lutzens but I am not sure that is true.) The outside is soft red brick in Georgian style, and the rooms are nicely proportioned. It was of course built for a senior RAF post, with plenty of 'staff'. We are going to use the 'staff sitting room' as a music room, and knock some sense into the kitchen, which is in several sections – pantry butler as well as cook – each with a separate sink. Can you see me dashing from one to the other? No, no – we are having it made into one, with an arch between, and one end will be our breakfast room. I have found some lovely 'Portuguese tile' wallpaper to take up the colour of the cupboards, and it should look greatly improved. The bathrooms too are having a bit of gaiety added, with some plumbing improvements. They all look very institutional, but we can alter that with colour, and again there are some beautiful wall papers. We are putting a 'colonial' balustrade up the stairs instead of a rather lump-ish solid middle there at the moment. All this should be finished in March – the builders are pleased to have a steady indoor job for the winter, and repairs to the outside fitted in as weather permits. Meantime we have had quite a reasonable offer for this house, so rather hope we can get it all settled by the end of the year, and so able to move as soon as Manby House is ready. I foresee busy, busy days ahead! It's time I stopped this rambling letter...

1981

Manby west wing construction (February 1981)

Phase II – the west wing – is now nearly finished. They should be out on Friday, and we have Briggs bringing the stuff out of store on Wednesday next. Geoffrey and I managed to get the book room more or less straight for last week's guests, and the new 'loft' really is a splendid place. We chose a 'terra cotta' emulsion for the walls – ceiling, skirting, picture rail and windows are white – and now I, as usual, have doubts! The terra cotta – officially crab-apple – is a splendid colour, but at the moment I fear it looks a little fierce. However, it is really meant to give a rich background to all those portraits, banners, trumpets, swords – not to mention the [animal] heads – if and when all are hung. The walls will be nearly invisible. We've not got curtain rails yet, but when we do (via Black & Decker drill!) I will remake the Legbourne drawing room ones – old gold with a pinkish gleam, so I am just hoping the whole

effect will be as meant... The garage doors look good. So does the wrought iron gate. We are now just longing for the completion date, and absence of builders – nice though they are!

Easter service (April 1981)

Easter here was lovely and sunny but very cold with a strong north-east wind. (Dare I say it, but snow showers are forecast for us in the ‘outlook’ period!) No visitors here this weekend so we have been quiet, peaceable and busy. Bishop Justin (Grimsby) took our Manby and Grimoldby service here at 11 am, and we decided to provide coffee afterwards, so I borrowed the Choral Society urn and made gallons – enough for 100. Geoffrey helped me put the urn in my car before he rushed into Louth to collect the organist, as it was our turn to do that too – and eventually we were all ready. I had helped with the church flowers earlier, and it all looked lovely. The church was full, well over 100 I should say, and the bishop was most impressive – a really good man as well as being delightful, and during the service he announced the appointment of Ross... as the new incumbent, which makes that all official. Ross comes to stay with us again at the end of the week and hopes to move into the rectory in a picnic/camp fashion fairly soon. His family won’t be arriving from Canberra till later – sometime in the summer, so the official induction service is delayed till then. I must say this ‘patronage’ exercise has been quite fascinating – watching from the sidelines...

Midmarsh Parish incumbent (October 1981)

Other great news is that the Team Ministry plan is off! Ross... is to be the Midmarsh Parish incumbent – so we hope all the controversy will eventually settle and a proper peaceful parish can be built. I fear there may be a few difficulties yet, but time will show. Very stormy weather – gales like mad and branches and leaves coming down...

White Christmas (December 1981)

We had a truly white Christmas here! Lots of snow earlier in the week. It turned us back twice from efforts to get to Elsie – too much drifting in the high road towards Ulceby Cross – and prevented us getting to the F’s party on 23rd. It was slithery indeed that night, so we thought discretion was the better part. However we did manage to make East Kirby on Christmas Eve, and took a box of goodies decorated with tinsel and crackers to Elsie, who I may say is getting battier than ever – and what a mess her dear little house is – I just did not have time or energy to start cleaning it up for her. Maybe I’ll get over again shortly. Christmas Day was lovely and very peaceful. We walked down Church Lane and back via the edge of the airfield, which looked for all the world like the Steppes of Russia, and the next day – or was it Sunday – there was a very heavy frost, so all the trees were rimed, holly had every tree just edged with white and it was all very still... We are having about 40 people in for a little party tomorrow and plan to have it in the ‘gallery’, so I hope it's not too cold. Thaw at the moment and all slush underfoot...

1982

Murder in the Cathedral (April 1982)

I am now trying to start catching up with all the things I neglected while... was here. WRVS for one, lots of sowing, gardening and general housework, spring cleaning and all. I am getting Briggs to come sometime and move the piano into the ‘gallery’, now that it has some heat to keep it dry. It should be fun to play there, in a room without curtains or carpet! The little music room will seem more spacious with just the clavichord. I’ll bring down the round table from upstairs I think, and another chair or two. We have our concert, Louth Choral

Society on Sunday. Mendelssohn's Hymn of Praise and Kodaly Psalms Hungaricus – great fun to sing and should be terrific with the orchestra... We went to Sea Lane yesterday; a strong easterly wind had roughened the sea, and the noise was terrific. We went in Geoffrey's new car – a Peugeot 305 in Savannah green, a bit larger than the old car, and a very pale, almost white green – Super! I'm afraid I've not left much room to tell you about "Murder in the Cathedral" which Louth Playgoers did in St James, a very impressive setting, and what a wonderful play it is. Donald... was Thomas – great authority – the sermon was splendid... there were some very moving and exciting moments: the clang of the main door when the priests tried to keep the knights out, lots of movement in the aisle. The chancel suddenly flooded with red light as the murder was done – but the words were best of all...

1984

Sail past of the Tall Ships (August 1984)

Just a note, written rather late in the evening, but I have busy days ahead and we are just back from a brief visit to Heswall, which was a lovely interlude. We set off Friday CAB [*comfortably after breakfast*] – with dogs! And went over the old way (came back on the M62 today). We've had rain recently and the very dried-up look has gone from the country and it is high summer now... through Clumber Park and the Dukeries, the peak and the old Cat and Fiddle – heather just beginning to colour. We went through Ollerton and Bolsover. Lots of police about, but no pickets!

Saturday was spent devoted to the Tall Ships! This was a tremendous Mersey occasion... Most of the tall ships were in Birkenhead's Vittoria Dock, and [we] spent a chunk of the morning there. It was fantastic. The Russians had left, but the magnificent Polish square-rigger was still there, and others: the Winston Churchill... It was fun chatting to the various crews, but we couldn't stay forever, so back to Heswall for lunch! We set off again about 3.30. Two cars this time with K 'on call' and telling the hospital he would phone in every ½ hour, and we were making for the North Wirral shore between Seacombe and Hallosey. However – not long after Thingwall we were caught in TRAFFIC. I've never seen so much, moving so slowly. All the world and his family converging on the Mersey to see the Sail Past of the Tall Ships. After ½ hour or so K opted out. No way could he have been "available" in that traffic!

G drove manfully on until we could turn off the motorway. Then splendid backseat drivers did a superb navigation with a Merseyside A to Z, and we upped over the hill, parked the car and walked ¼ mile or so to a super vantage point, with binoculars, picnic tea and all, and had a wonderful time. I gather there were 1,000,000 people or thereabouts, and it was, where we were (and I believe everywhere) a delightful light-hearted crowd – same sort of feeling as at the Coronation, Jubilee, Royal Wedding. We saw Britannia come up the river and Geoffrey, in reply to some question, made a very nautical reply about the Royal Standard at the Mizzen or some such – after which bystanders put all their technical questions to "Horatio", which made us all laugh so much! It seemed a longish wait, but eventually the tide turned, and then the ships set their sails and came down river – Winston Churchill led them (all girl crew this time) with the yards manned as they passed the Queen. Looking upriver it was a veritable forest of masts, all very 18th century. Then the separate ships sorted themselves out and of course the great square-rigged ones were unbelievably impressive. We left our spectator spot before the end, so avoided another traffic jam on the way back and were home in very reasonable time. But what a day! Quite unforgettable, and I am so glad we managed to get there. Church this morning. A bit trendy compared with the old days, but I was glad to be there again – to see the graves and of course the lovely memorial to my Papa...

'To a bird migrating' (November 1984)

“Sombre November” indeed. I feel disinclined to go out, and though I ought to be usefully sewing I shall write a few letters – sort of fireside chats – and maybe summon the energy to walk to the post with them later. I have been back here a week now from my few days in Suffolk... We had two wonderful evenings in Norwich, for the Glyndebourne Mozart's. I think Figaro will always be my favourite, and it was a wonderful production. Cosi is very much more static of course and a cruel opera, and the Fiordeligi was not so good as the others, I thought, but again it was a magical evening, and so lucky to have been able to go to both. I left Mickfield last Thursday morning for a somewhat foggy drive back here. It wasn't unduly daunting, but it made Thetford forest, which had looked all golden autumn colours on my way south, appear very mysterious in an almost sinister and Germanic way. Fortunately I was driving in daylight, but I was tired when I arrived back here. However I recovered enough to go out again that evening to our Louth Concert Society in Louth – Iain and Jennifer Partridge singing the Winterreise: this has always been a love of mine, and I doubt if I have ever heard a performance so wonderful. 'Die Post' with “the most moving silent bar in all Schubert” and the last 'organ grinder' [der Leiermann] with its strange little tinkling two-bar tune were haunting indeed, but so was the whole song cycle. I am so glad I made the effort to go. We seem to have a bit of a pause now before the Christmas rush, though I plan to go to London for a 'Salmon and Trout' dinner next week.

Also I was browsing along library shelves this week: I have picked out a book called 'Bright Morning' by Frances Margaret McGuire. She... quotes a poem by Paul McGuire (of whom she says nothing as the book stops in 1914). Here it is:

To a bird migrating

O wild, dark bird! What winds have sent you forth?
What word has blown through all the wild, dark north
that sounded, in the silence ere the snow,
like singing in the south, and filled the skies
with wings, and the beat of wings, and lonely cries?
Where do the wild flocks go?

Are there great capes that look upon the sun
and quiet waters, when the flight is done?
And stars at even, and no wind at morn?
And is it wholly glad in that strange spring,
or is it saddened with remembering
the place where you were born?

I have put this in my commonplace book, the previous entry in which is a quotation from St Francis de Sales (1567 – 1622): “Do not look forward to what might happen tomorrow – the same Everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace.” A comforting thought, but difficult sometimes to put into practice. Time to stop now, though this may have to wait till the morn's morn for posting. It is an afternoon for staying in, and tea by the fire.

Excerpts from Postcards (2000's)

2006

Sheltered accommodation (February 2006)

Here I seem to be making slow progress, which makes me despondent, but more help is on its way, and I hope to be able to cope at Manby quite soon. However... and Dr S are concerned that I should find a smaller place – ‘sheltered accommodation’ which I suppose makes sense, but the thought of moving from Manby is daunting indeed...

New Zealand recipes (April 2006)

Herewith the old NZ recipe for fudge cake that I used. I sometimes put peppermint essence with it, and used various fruits, dried peel etc. that I had handy, and sometime put a thin layer of chocolate on the top – and cut into fingers to serve. Enjoy! April day here today and rabbits on the lawn having a high old time. Rudi sometimes doesn't see them now. I must now tackle some paperwork...

RECIPE FOR FUDGE CAKE

½ lb biscuits
1 cup walnuts (not always!)
¼ lb butter
2 oz Sugar
1 egg
Tablespoon cocoa
Raisins etc.

1. Grind biscuits.
2. Beat egg, add sugar, cocoa, butter, put in saucepan, heat till melted.
3. Take off heat, add biscuit and fruit.
4. Put in square tin and press down.

RECIPE FOR 'PINK' (SUMMER FRUIT CORDIAL)

2 lb strawberries
2 lb raspberries
1 lb redcurrants
2½ oz citric acid
5 pints water

1. Dissolve citric acid in water.
2. Add fruit and steep for 24 hours.
3. Sieve fruit.
4. Add sugar – 1½ lbs for each pint.
5. Bottle when sugar is dissolved (which will not be for some days).
6. Do not cork for some time.

I hope you can read this. It can ferment and explode if corked too soon!

Rudi (September 2006)

Sad news from here. Rudi died last week. He was 14½ had been failing for some time, but had a very good life, and I think was a happy dog. His heart just gave out. Fortunately my neighbour (who for several years had been walking him) was here, and the vet came hurriedly and was marvellous. He went very peacefully and in fact has solved one of my problems: what to do with him when I move. This was so much his home. I doubt if he would settle anywhere else. But it does leave a gap. Meanwhile I am slowly going round the bend, trying to sort out 85 years and decide what to take to the bungalow. John... came to look at naval papers, and has taken a lot to go in the archives in the Hydrographic office at Taunton, and others to the Naval History museum... I am now planning to move on October 16, and my new address will be 10 The Terrace, Stewton Lane, Louth, Lincs, LN11 8RZ, Tel No 01507 607090...

My time in the WRNS (October 2006)

I am back in Stewton House for a few days! Do you have internet? A friend was 'surfing' recently and came across an account of my time in the WRNS! I think it was either c/o Mary Hall or 'Second World War Experience Centre'. If you can find it, it may amuse you all. It included a wedding photo! ... was here today and went over to the bungalow. Still a lot to be sorted and unpacked but it felt quite cosy and warm. Apologies for my writing. Not easy on my knee...

The bungalow (November 2006)

I'm afraid I am slow about writing these days. Lots of reasons – arthritis etc. The cards have been much appreciated and give a lot of pleasure, and the diary will indeed be much used. I am getting so vague about dates... I suppose I shall settle in here eventually. It is a very small bungalow – a living room, two bedrooms, one of which I am using for a 'spare' bed, my desk and files all so far in a rather confused state. (Lots of loose ends left in Manby too, which will have to be sorted out.) There is a kitchen with room for a small table, and a bathroom, electric night storage heaters – and it is very cosy as we approach winter. The bungalow is in the grounds of Stewton House Nursing Home, and room at the back for sitting out on a garden bench – weather permitting! Altogether the move makes sense, but it's a bit traumatic all the same. It has a fitted carpet throughout, a reasonably pleasant green, and curtains are liveable with. In the sitting room here and in my bedroom are muted flowers patterned in predominantly greyish pink – all harmless and a good background for the things I have brought with me from Manby – limited in size! ... have put up some pictures for me, and I have some books, radio and TV to keep me going – and friends from round Louth pop in...

Medics who are close relations (December 2006)

It may amuse you to know that there are quite a few medics who are my close relations...

My father WG Carlisle – a country GP of the old-fashioned sort

My brother Iain Carlisle – ditto

An uncle Heneage Ogilvie – a noted surgeon of Guy's Hospital and wartime RAMC

A cousin Pat Ogilvie – wartime RNVR and then a GP

Brother-in-law Keith R – consultant urologist

Nephew... – consultant in Bristol

Niece... – consultant in Cardiff

Apologies for my arthritic hand...

2007

Christmas presents and cards (January 2007)

Thank you all so much for the lovely parcel. The mat is already under G's poinsettia. The freesia's in my drawer, and the towel in use on my walking frame! My sitting room is much decorated with lovely cards and the crib will stay in place till Twelfth Night!

First snow (February 2007)

First snow of the year has just arrived! I feel a bit hemmed in here! ... has been doing mammoth work at Manby. Various things have been mislaid on the way but will doubtless turn up....

'More winter to come' (February 2007)

Lovely photographs. So impressive. Thank you so much for sending them... We're warming up a bit here but presumably we'll have more winter to come!

Daffodils (March 2007)

We've been having some marvellous weather – quite spring like, and all the bulbs, daffodils etc. are bursting out. I am still finding walking rather difficult, which is a nuisance, and I am a bit despondent! I think Manby House is sold now – subject to contract. 'The end of an old song' indeed. I shall miss it but am very cosy here...

Parkinson's (May 2007)

I hope you are all well and the weather a bit kinder. It's lovely here just now. This plane [Lancaster bomber in postcard] has just been revamped and is flying again from Coningsby in the 'Battle of Britain' flight. I'm still not walking properly and 'they' are talking about Parkinson's – which is a bore...

'Still very immobile...' (June 2007)

I'm sorry not to have been in touch, but have not been too well. Medics have taken charge and changed some pills, so I am better now, still very immobile which is a bore! Hope you are all well and not too stormy!

'Autumn coming on now...' (October 2007)

Many thanks for the card and beautiful photographs... Life quite peaceful here, but I am still limited in movement and have to have a lot done for me, which is a nuisance. Autumn coming on now. It's getting colder and we've had some gales...

2008

'Lovely chocolates...' (January 2008)

Thank you again for the lovely chocolates – a lovely surprise – delicious. F & M [Fortnum & Masons] did address the parcel wrongly, putting "10 Stewton Lane". Address should be as

above. "The Terrace" is a turning off Stewton Lane. 10 Stewton Lane is a different house altogether! Have you been having rain? Best wishes for 2008.

'Spring is on its way...' (April 2008)

Hope you are all well. I am, alas, getting very stiff, which is a nuisance. I think spring is on its way at last. April showers included!

'I had a bath recently...' (May 2008)

My main reason for writing is to thank you again for the lovely holder of bath toiletries – much appreciated. I had a bath recently – the first since 2005 when I broke my hip! A delicious difference from the strip wash, which is the fate of the elderly. I hope I shall soon be back in the bungalow; the weather is certainly improving. We had lunch in the garden yesterday and today. I shall be able to telephone when I get back 'home' again...

2009

'Able to walk a bit...' (September 2009)

Many thanks indeed for your card and all the news – so interesting and impressive... I am able to walk a bit, with a frame now, but it is slow going. I still need a wheel chair, which is certainly limiting. G and K came over for lunch the other day. Lovely to see them. Lots of news and chat. I seem to have got this card upside down – Parkinson's takes hold – alas! Best wishes from me, and love to you all, M.

Postscript

Mary Hall died peacefully at Stewton House Nursing Home, Louth, Lincolnshire, on 12 December 2010. She was nearly 90...