Stray Leaves from the Diary
Of a Digger’s Wife
1916 – 1919

Frances Good

Editor: Lucy Sullivan

Windrush Press
Stray Leaves

from the

Diary of a Diggers Wife

By Frances M. Good
That dreaded day has come and gone. The transport Argyllshire left Fremantle with two thousand troops aboard, including Charlie. At last! I feel sure he said this to himself as the ship drifted away from the wharf, because from the day war broke out he has itched to get overseas. But the farm had first to be sold, which seemed an impossibility. Try as we did to get rid of it, months drifted almost into years before a purchaser came along. I must admit this fact did not worry me over much, although I knew exactly how Charlie felt: after all said and done he ought to go, were I in his shoes I know I would. Thank goodness I came of soldiering stock, and my mother and grandmother passed things so I hope shall I. My first taste of it was when leaving our home, the house we built, the garden we planted, the horses, the cow, the dog, the cat, everything, to enable Charlie to volunteer. At the garden gate, as we walked out, a stifled sob escaped me, and Charlie, in a voice strangely unlike his own, said: "Don't, don't break down, if you do I shall". Maybe an inherent fortitude, developed by my unfortunate ancestors under similar circumstances, enabled me to recover after marshalling all the will power I possessed. Then followed the luncheon hour recruiting meeting in St. George's Terrace; then all I had, stepped forward with twenty odd other volunteers and marched off to the drill hall to the strains of "Tipperary". The hectic days on final leave, the little "final flutters" when unexpected evening of duty, the day he sailed. That wonderful crowd on the wharf, consisting mostly of wives and mothers, all feeling as I did and equally determined not to break down. The distraction and amusement caused then a man, holding the end of a ball of string, threw it ahead to the troops, packed on the decks like swarms of bees. Grabbing the twin, a soldier returned the ball, the ends were quickly tied together, which created a circular method of transport for every unfortunate article. Was a sheet of toffo to a little girl who
Introduction

*Stray Leaves* is the diary of the wife of a World War I Australian soldier who followed her husband to England in order to be at hand during his leaves or if he was wounded. It gives a vivid picture of an aspect of World War I that I had not encountered before and might therefore be of historical as well as general interest. It is not a day by day journal, but at intervals of usually several weeks fills in the events of that period that have been of most significance to the writer.

After a short period in north-west England with relatives, she found work in London, first managing a hostel for the British Army and then in the post office for the Australian Army, tracking down the whereabouts of enlisted addressees. She gives a vivid picture of life in London at the time – rationing, wages and prices, the (surprising) amount of bombing, encounters with officials and the natives, and also the stress and growing anxiety for her husband as the fighting intensified in the final months of the war.

Particularly interesting, I think, is the picture of an Australian character that comes through the writing, her total identification with being Australian, but at the same time a confident appropriation of Australia’s English cultural heritage. She frequently describes the mutual thrill of encounters between Australians in a foreign land, and what it meant to Australian soldiers to encounter an Australian woman (this was not flirtation – she was a firmly married woman, in her thirties I would guess); and she is a great cultural tourist, walking and riding on buses about and out of London, with a warm appreciation of English history and literature, but with an odd, almost patronizing way of recording her knowledge. Her language has a pleasant period flavour, some of which I can just remember from my youth.

Most poignant are her accounts of dealing with letters to Australians killed in action and to POWs, who, she says, tended to be forgotten by their families after years of imprisonment and
with some of whom she established a correspondence to fill the gap. She also comments unfavourably on the far from universal franchise in England and reveals that her mother was one of the leaders in the movement for women’s suffrage in Australia.

My deceased husband, as a child in the late 1940s or early 1950s, used to visit an elderly couple, retired at Forster, NSW, and the manuscript was given to him by the wife, whose diary it is. It is a typed carbon copy in a manilla folder, entitled “Stray Leaves from the Diary of a Digger’s Wife”, though in fact it is almost certainly the whole diary. It runs to some 90 single-space foolscap pages. The diarist is Frances M. Good, and her husband was Charles or Carl.

In re-typing (word processing) the diary, I have maintaining her original format as far as possible, and her somewhat erratic spelling and punctuation, which is part of the charm of her manuscript. I have only corrected what are obviously unintended typographic errors.

In the first decade of the 21st century I made several long visits to England, and took the opportunity to visit many of the places described in the diary, kept my own diary of these visits, and took some photographs. Sometimes it took a bit of detective work (e.g. using old maps), or several attempts after following false leads, to identify the buildings or places she describes. Some of her haunts are now razed to the ground and under new developments, but others, astonishingly, are virtually unchanged almost a hundred years later. My diary of these searches is reproduced on the Windrush Press website in association with the notification of this publication.

In the course of reading her journal I became very fond of Frances Good, with her modesty and unassuming independence
and principles and warm heart, and on this count too I think her
diary is worthy of publication, as well, that is, as for her unique
women’s angle on and experience of the First World War.

Lucy Sullivan
Windsor, NSW
30th November, 1916

That dreaded day has come and gone. The transport Argyleshire left Fremantle with two thousand troops aboard, including Charlie. At last! I feel sure he said that to himself as the ship drifted away from the wharf, because from the day war broke out he has itched to get overseas. But the farm had first to be sold, which seemed an impossibility. Try as we did to get rid of it, months drifted into almost two years before a purchaser came along. I must admit this fact did not worry me over much, although I knew exactly how Charlie felt: after all said and done he ought to go, were I in his shoes I know I would. Thank goodness I come of soldiering stock, and as my mother and grandmother faced things, so I hope shall I. My first taste of it was when leaving our home, the house we built, the garden we planted, the horse, the cow, the dog, the cat, everything, to enable Charlie to volunteer. At the garden gate, as we walked out, a stifled sob escaped me, and Charlie, in a voice strangely unlike his own, said, “Don’t, don’t break down, if you do I shall.” Maybe an inherent fortitude, developed by my unfortunate ancestors under similar circumstances, enabled me to recover after marshalling all the will power I possess. Then followed the luncheon hour recruiting meeting in St. George’s Terrace, when all I had, stepped forward with twenty odd other volunteers and marched off to the Drill Hall to the strains of “Tipperary”. The hectic days on final leave, the little “final flutters” upon unexpected evenings off duty,
the day he sailed. That wonderful crowd on the wharf, consisting mostly of wives and mothers, all feeling as I did and equally determined not to break down. The distraction and amusement caused when a man, holding the end of a ball of string, threw it aboard to the troops, packed on the decks like swarms of bees. Grabbing the twine, a soldier returned the ball, the ends were quickly tied together, which created a circular method of transport for every conceivable article, from a stick of toffee to a bottle of ale, tied on while the string was kept in continual motion by many willing hands, both on board and ashore; Charlie waving a piece of gay coloured material and my returning the salute with part of the same, enabling us to locate one another. Too far apart for ordinary conversation, resorting to a pastime of early youth, the dumb alphabet, sending messages backwards and forwards for others as well as ourselves. My deciding to leave before that almost unbearable moment when the ship would move away from the wharf, waving as cheerful farewell as I could before pushing my way out of the crowd. All that is over now and one does not dare look too far into the future. It is marvellous how one can set one’s teeth and go through such events, but I agree with Ginger Mick “Blast the flamin’ War”. Here I am without a home for the first time in my life, the loneliness since Charlie left is insufferable, with no further leave to look forward to. In spite of all opposition met with from my friends and relations, I am determined to go to England and take up some War work. I lie awake at night in a cold sweat of fear, but the horrors of being torpedoed en route, starving in the United Kingdom, or blown up in a Zepp raid, seem nothing compared with being homeless out here so far.
away from Charlie. Therefore I have booked my passage, obtained a passport, and providing I miss a watery grave, ought to land in London in the New Year.

00000000000000000000

R. M. S. “Kashgar”

(at sea)
January 17th 1917

Left Fremantle on 29th at midnight. A doleful hour to set out upon such a hazardous journey. A number of friends came to see me go on board. Of course they were not allowed up the gangway, so I said “Good-bye” on the wharf.

Walking aboard I felt lonesome to a degree, and decidedly wretched, but determined to face up to whatever came.

Have quite settled down now. The passengers are the usual mixed lot one meets on any voyage. Quite a number are leaving at Colombo, including some Missionaries. I’m sorry for the blacks that one depressing looking lady tries to convert.

She came up and spoke to me this morning, enquired if I had plenty to read. I hastily assured her I had more than enough, as I foresaw missionary literature being produced. At table I sit between a bearded gentleman that would not be too dusty, were he not obsessed with mission work, hadn’t a beard, and wasn’t deaf in the ear next me – these are certainly drawbacks –
On my other side is a dreadful creature to whom I haven’t even condescended to pass the salt. He eats in a fearful manner, mixes his food in an unheard of way.

Last night he had a Japanese plum with his fish, manipulating each in turn with his knife and fork.

Beyond the bearded gentleman is a High Church clergyman who seems very pleasant. Opposite, are three very “genteel” females, who purse their lips and hold their knives and forks or cups most gingerly, with as many fingers as possible sticking up daintily in the air. They are going to Calcutta to become Nuns. Beyond them are a married couple with prospects of a family in the near future. My cabin mates appear to be the pick of the single women, both from Sydney, both going home on war work, one a trained nurse.

There are about half a dozen Nuns. Some really sweet looking women, all very young and on their way to Rome.

The Purser is a nice chap. He gave me my violin the first morning I saw him. I had arranged for it to be put in his care at Sydney. He’s frightfully fat, looks as if he’d burst, and I noticed a button on the deck where he had been standing this morning. It had shot off taking a piece of material with it.

So far no practice for the Lifeboats. A notice stuck up tells passengers to always have their life belts at hand day and night while in the danger zone – Port Said to London -.

There is also a plan of the boat showing the lifeboats and says:-Berths 120 to 142  Boat No.8. That’s where I come in, the first boat on
the upper 1st Class deck. At Colombo I shall make a tour of inspection as to the various ways of reaching it when pressed for time. It is amusing to watch the preparations for possible attack by submarines. Several people are making American cloth bags to hang around their neck, and one has a tiny tube to stick down her stocking. I wear a flannel belt around my waist with ≠3-10-0 in gold sewn between the folds.

February 2nd.
Sitting on deck this morning watching the various passengers, I suddenly felt a wonderful respect and affection for the old Union Jack. Realising what it means and signifies to we Britishers now. There were just the usual board ships crew, children playing, babies asleep in prams, mothers sewing. Three lads in Khaki learning the morse code from an Anglo Indian who tapped the dots and dashes on a small boys wheel barrow. Several people were clubbing together for a sweep on the days run. Except for the lads in uniform the War might not be. Talk to any of them, and it crops up at once. Many, like myself are going to England to take up War work while their husband is at the front. Others are going to relations with their children, babies, whose fathers left for active service before they were born. At the mast head flies the flag that gives us a feeling of comparative safety and confidence.
The bearded gentleman came along to me just now and we had quite an interesting conversation upon India. He has lent me some books that seem readable, but I got rather alarmed when he warmed up to his subject once or twice, “Faith in God” “Against Deadly Sin” and such like terms he uttered frequently and with such unpleasant emphasis. His eyes nearly popped out of his head, while he looked at me as if I were a whole congregation. However I evidently behaved quite nicely because he invited me to visit some mission station in India.

I forgot to mention before, sixteen soldier boys, wireless men bound for Basra (?) – we are led to believe – They are quartered in the same part of the ship as the lasgars, much to their disgust, but have their meals in the 2nd saloon just before us. At 9 O’clock they have supper so several other passengers and myself go down and talk to them and sometimes play the piano while they have a sing song.

One, quite a boy, a nice laddie, born in Woolloomooloo, but has quite an eye for beauty remarking on the lovely sunsets we have seen lately. He is always quite cheery but convinced he won’t come through the War – I wonder! poor lad!

A Mrs. Hughes on board plays the violin beautifully, we had a delightful hour or so today playing duets, while one of my cabin mates accompanied us.
February 4th Sunday

The High Church clergyman, who is really quite a charming man, asked me if I would play second fiddle with Mrs. Hughes at the service this morning. I did, but it was a dismal failure, I never in my life heard anything worse, I wished myself well out of it before two bars had been struck, but had to see it through. Four hymns!!! I know now, and should have realized it before that they do not lend themselves to being turned into duets. The soldier boy at the piano could not find the music for “God Save the King” and I did not know which note to start on. Fortunately Mrs. H struck up and I followed to the bitter end. The whole event, combined with the worry of feeling a fool, gave me a headache, but the excitement later on hunted it away.

I went to bed about ten O’clock, soon afterwards one of my cabin mates got undressed and then went off to see some girls in their cabin. She left our light “on”. I was peacefully dozing when a commanding voice sounded along the passage “All lights out by order” and the steward rushed in and turned ours out. The flannel belt with my gold I had locked up in my suitcase, thinking it unnecessary to wear until the Danger Zone. Up I got to put it on, groping in the dark for my keys, I also dug out a pair of pyjamas as I had a “nightie” on, and not knowing what was ahead thought a change over advisable.

During my hunt in the dark, back came my cabin mates, one fully dressed who promptly went up on deck. The other commenced a hunt for valuables and pyjamas only finding the coat after making no end of a muddle in her trunk. I had a further rummage in mine and produced a pair of legs minus the string.
She rigged herself up in them and we decided to go on deck too. I wasn’t going to be left alone.
We groped about in pitch darkness and eventually arrived on deck to find all the men wandering about.
It was a perfect night, calm as a mill pond. A lovely moon, shining on the water, not a cloud in the sky.
I lent on the rail and gossiped to the Rev. Young for a while. He is really awfully nice, has read most of the books I have, spent six years in India, talks about Tatts, Tickets, and betting, and many other topics one usually avoids when conversing with the clergy.
He is Irish, and has a delightful humour, I’m quite sorry he leaves at Colombo.

As it was nearly midnight and no enemy raider had attacked us I suggested to my cabin mates that we go below. They agreed it would be the wisest thing to do, but made no attempt to budge, so I groped my way down in the darkness, stumbling over various things in the darkness in the cabin, got into my top bunk and finally went to sleep.
Mentioning Colombo reminds me that “they” say we’ll have to stay ashore to get any comfort. Have decided to stick to Mrs. Hughes, who in turn is following the depressing lady who’s business in life is to convert the heathen, so no doubt we’ll finish up in a Home for Missionaries. Anyway it will be painfully respectable. The other party who asked me to join them includes a flushed faced lady who smokes cigarettes all day and the three soldier boys so I guess my funds would soon run out with them.
February 9th 1917.

Kandy! Fancy my being in Kandy! I pinch myself to see if it is really F.G.

No one knows what it is to be alive until they come to Ceylon. If I scribbled all day I couldn’t put down the half of what I have seen. Anyway words fail me. All the lovely pictures of Eastern life fail in showing the real beauty and interest. Here goes for an attempt to describe it. We landed yesterday, taking fond farewells of those leaving the ship, including the nicest clergyman it has ever been my lot to meet, he never once showed by a word of conversation that he was one. The doleful one, who always addressed us as “friends”, took Mrs. Hughes and myself under his wing. We drove in a garry to the Mission Home. A beautiful house, wide verandah, pot plants everywhere. Black servants flitted about the house and grounds.

We had a second breakfast there at 11 o’clock consisting of porridge, curry and rice, bread & jam and water. How we longed for tea!! After the meal Mrs. H. went straight to her room to put her small son Maurice to bed – lucky beggar! I, in a weak moment followed the crowd and behold: Hymns and Prayers. A special one for President Wilson to “give him wisdom, special wisdom on account of the present state of affairs”.

Later Mrs. H. and I rickshawed about 2 miles to the railway station, the road passing through native quarters, tiny funny shops, all such small gaily coloured places. Chiefly fruit shops with great bunches of bananas and tropical fruit. The streets were crowded with the most marvellous variety of darkies, clothed in the gayest colours down to
some with only a loin cloth. Children swarm everywhere, a tiny mite ran along next to us singing “Tipperary” and “Yip-i-addy-i-a” in the quaintest way.

Men carried their wares on trays, balanced on their heads – buns, ironware, toffee. Another had a bamboo stick hung with dozens of rat traps ready baited. Quaint carts drawn by oxen, and weird looking ones at that, with a hump on their back and long horns. The carts are long and narrow with a palm leaf covering over them.

Buddhist priests in shades of yellow muslin one sees everywhere. Afghan money lenders in long baggy trousers and gathered into a hoop shaped thing at the bottoms, and gay coloured waistcoats. Another tribe wore gay coloured basket hats.

On a patch of grass by the roadside a native lay on the ground while his mate hunted through his head – like a pair of monkeys –

Every moment of the train journey was interesting, through rice fields and tea plantations up into the hills. At every station crowds of natives swarmed the platform selling fruit, buns, drinks, and even roast chickens – their chief customers of course were black like themselves.

We had an amusing time when we arrived at Kandy. The Mission Home sent a man to meet us. He was black of course, had a beard, and was dressed in a wild and wonderful garb of some pink material, and wore a red fez. He was extremely agile, picked up our belongings and set off at a run. We hurried through the crowd after him, the faster we followed the quicker he went. We finally pulled up at a sort of governess cart drawn by one of those queer animals.
We scrambled in amid the luggage and away we jolted. The queer little man shouted and grunted at the strange looking animal between the shafts, while we indulged in an uncontrollable fit of the giggles. Thus, we jogged along through the famous old city of Kandy, one of the prettiest places on earth. Everywhere one saw the most beautiful flowering trees and shrubs. Hibiscus, erithrina, cannas and palms, all seem to grow wild. First we passed the chief buildings, swell Hotels, Clubs. Then the market, some big European looking shops, while opposite were small native ones with their wares all displayed in the open – such a variety and riot of colour. The beautiful lake with its ornamental wall around, the noted Buddhist Temple over 600 years old. Bungalows roofed with full red tiles like small drain pipes and built either of white plaster or a pale shade of blue, all with pillared verandahs, a mass of pot plants and hanging bamboo baskets of maiden hair and other ferns. After that we passed here and there groups of natives houses, very small and low. Hens and chickens surround them. It appears to be the breeding season for poultry in Kandy.

The road became so steep we finished our journey on foot up a zig zag track through thick jungle of date palms, cocoa trees, bananas and gorgeous red leafed shrub. Up and up, then steps and a garden path, beautiful flowers everywhere. At last! the Mission Rest Home, a flat bungalow. Every room opening out onto a stone verandah but oh! the view!!

Next morning, off we trundled in a garry to the Paryadinia Gardens – a four mile drive – the scenery on route beggars description. There, we
saw nutmegs, cloves and allspice growing besides hundreds of other interesting and beautiful trees and shrubs. After that we paid our respects to the famous Buddist Temple. To see the stone carvings there was worth the visit. Its history and age was awe inspiring but in one part where there was a solid gold image of the Great Buddhar himself, there sat beside it a man, busily engaged sewing a white garment on a hand machine, while next him reclined another native wrapped in a sheet.

Hardly a suitable place to carry on a tailoring business!

We had afternoon tea at the Queen’s Hotel, the swagger place, where one saw Army men on furlough, tea planters and fashionably dressed women. Here we secured rickshaws and went three miles to see some elephants of note. Two females and a baby, a year old, every evening they come to this spot to swim after their days work. Of course the usual crowd of children all begging for money. The native with the elephants also on the beg because we looked at the animals drinking. Eventually we gave him a few cents because he made them bow and walk on three legs. Alas! that gave the collection of black urchins fresh encouragement. They followed us like a pack of hungry wolves, as we rickshawed away. My rickshaw “boy” spoke English very well, and when we stopped to admire something he was really quite interesting and intelligent to talk to. His kit consisted of a while singlet and a piece of while calico draped around like a short skirt.

“Lots of people come before, none since the war,” he told me.

“Lots of German ladies stop at the Hotel, none now.”

Many more from England, none come now. That place Buddhist School, teach Singalee, teach read and write English.

I not go to school, born Kandy, my father from India, we no Cingalee, me Kandy boy, me little boy no school, can’t read, 20 year rickshaw boy.

Before the war lots of German planters, a 100 in Kandy, all Government prisoners now, gone away. Rickshaw cost 125 rupee, rubber tyre 24 rupee in Colombo.”

He was rather nice looking and spoke with a very pleasant accent.

When it came to paying them, there was the usual fierce argument and they looked as if they would murder us if we didn’t give what they asked. I’ll admit I had the “wind up” so we finally gave them 1 rupee 30 cents for a six mile run.

It seemed little enough to me but the mission people said we had over paid them and that one of their servants had heard them congratulating themselves upon their “fares”.

February 19th off Persia

I didn’t go ashore at Aden, we only stayed for a few hours and there was endless interest watching the different ships in the harbour, which is larger than I anticipated.

Apart from another P & O and a man o’war showing signs of having been in an engagement there were endless smaller craft. The most
picturesque Arab sailing boats kept coming and going. They have a crew of 16 and trade along the coast of the Persian Gulf. As they are apt to sneak things to the Turks a very strict inspection is made on every boat.

At night I saw one with the search light trained full on it, while the police launch went over to investigate. This same search light is I hear the strongest in existence. We took aboard a Thundering swell. Colonel His Highness Maharajah of Bikaner. He is going to England to attend the War Council.

He has a huge suite in attendance. Brought all his belongings too, from the look of things, even to his kitchen stove and chimney pot, a bed, very ordinary looking chairs and wooden cases galore, with a retinue of native servants in various gay coloured picturesque dresses to attend to his wants.

The tales that go around about Boat Drill are numerous and amusing. One is that they line up the “ladies” opposite the men and whoever faces you is the man who looks after you in the event of being torpedoed. I’m making quiet enquiries as to the males in N. 8 and the only decent ones appear to be, a fat man from Yorkshire, an elderly man, and an officer off the “Salsetti”. I was talking to him this morning about the rumour and he politely told me he had already summed up the ladies and had selected me, so when boat drill begins it will be like a game of drop the handkerchief. Alas: I fancy the uniform will be rushed and I shall fare second best.

He plays the banjo and I lent him mine so I may score.
Our three soldier lads are in mufti today and not to appear in Khaki until further orders, so as to prevent the Germans having that excuse for torpedoing us.

Our first Boat Drill created no end of excitement.

Three blasts from the funnel and we all trotted off to our respective boats. No. 8 has quite the nicest lot of men I’m glad to say. I asked “Salsetti” if he was still prepared to be my “drowning partner” as we assisted one another into our life belts.

One doesn’t look ones best in the beastly things and they are not exactly comfortable.

We stood in a row for about half an hour, until the Captain came and inspected us all and then dismissed us like soldiers.

This voyage is intensely interesting. I wouldn’t have missed it for worlds. Of course there are the usual flirtation, cricket, music etc, true to ordinary board ship life, but so much more as well. Cricket this afternoon was exciting, especially as I made six runs and bowled the curate.

Boardship life “par excellence”, about five men to every woman, and such a selection, from a charming old French Aristocrat to an Italian fettler, the gap filled by navel and military, Oxford and Cambridge representatives.

While I write someone is playing soft sweet music on the piano, the sort that would induce one to say Yes! to a chinaman, were he to propose.

Part of our deck is railed off in anticipation of a gun we take on board at Suez.
From then on we steam at night with no lights showing. I feel thrilled at the thought of seeing the Canal.

February 23rd 1917.

For days Mrs. H and I have practised semaphore signaling with a wild idea that it might prove useful. Yesterday as our ship dropped anchor off Suez a launch came towards us with a number of Australian Light Horsemen onboard.

In a mad moment I hoped Frank might be one of them, so signaled “Are you Queenslanders?” They replied but we weren’t clever enough to read it.

Before the launch touched our gangway three of the lads jumped aboard and came towards us at the double.

Talk, how we all talked. alas: they didn’t know anyone we did, but what matter?

We loaded them up with Australian newspapers, cigarettes, and I gave one a dozen eggs I had brought for Frank, in case I had the luck to see him. They were laid the day I left Fremantle, carefully buttered and packed in bran, so should be still quite fresh. When they had to reluctantly bid us farewell we waved to one another until out of sight.

At 10 o’clock we entered the Canal – a perfect night – we glided silently past the town, sentries and stray soldiers here and there. A shadowry figure on the bank called out “Where are you from?” “Australia” came the reply from a dozen throats. On, on we crept. “Who are you?” someone called to a man on guard.

“South Staffordshire, Sir”.

23
Still on and on we went in what seemed an uncanny silence except when calling to stray soldiers along the way.

Finally I decided to go to bed. As I entered the cabin a voice from the deck called out “What are you?” “Anzac” came the reply. With one bound I was on the top bunk and my head out of the porthole.

There on the bank stood an Australian soldier.

Everyone on board seemed to be shouting greetings. Looking along the side of the ship every porthole seemed to have a head protruding from it. Mrs. X. with her peroxided hair blowing in the breeze waved a comb and coo-eed.

“God Bless Him” I thought. How fond one is of ones fellow countrymen when they’ll face death for their country’s sake.

This morning I was on deck at sunrise, we passed old sand bagged trenches, beside one were a couple of graves, marked with a cross of white stones. Men with camels, more uninhabited trenches, more men who looked as if they had walked out of some Biblical picture except that their robes were filthy looking not snowy white.

Then Port Said, a horrible place.

We left there as the sun was setting, a nasty cold wind sprang up, the sea looked angry. Three blasts!!! All standing in rows beside our lifeboats while a naval officer inspected us, tugged at our life belts to see if they were secure and made pertinent remarks if the belt sagged at all.

A naval captain with a gun crew, is in charge of our ship now, the gun installed and manned in a business like way. Then our old captain spoke to us, told us what to do in the event of a submarine attack and
ended his oration by saying he felt confident that the ship would go down on an even keel if torpedoed. This bit of news we gathered was meant as a cheerful possibility in such an event. I have secretly decided to dive overboard without waiting for any boat business if we are hit. Having read many accounts of torpedoed ships it always seemed to be those who jumped into the sea straight away that got saved. Too often the lifeboats got stuck, or tipped their occupants out in the process of being launched. I can swim, and I’ll chance being picked up.

March 3rd 1917 Hotel Continental. Le Harve.

Where shall I be next? All my experiences since leaving Port Said must be related here, however badly. The ships engines stopped at daybreak on 27th ulto, woke me with a start. Looking out of the porthole I saw what gave me a feeling of awe. Nothing that I have ever seen before effected me in quite the same way. “Etna” smoking, while the fires below the earth’s crest burnt fiercely!

In the grey of early morning, with tinges of pink appearing as the first rays of sunlight caught the tops of the low lying clouds. I watched the outline of that great volcano grow clearer and clearer and more and more terrifying. I literally flung on my clothes, and hurried up on deck to gaze at the most beautiful scene. Sicily on our port side and the toe of Italy on the other.
Slowly, very slowly we seemed to squeeze through the Straits of Messina. The ruins caused by the awful earthquake of 1908 were still to be seen.

How I’d hate to live near a smoking nightmare however beautiful the country.

We hugged the coast of Italy all day seeing town after town as we passed along. My 6d Atlas, which I always included in my luggage when travelling, was borrowed continuously by all and sundry to refresh their geographical knowledge.

The next afternoon as we zig zagged along the coast of France, I as usual was leaning upon the ships rail talking to a naval man – I seem to spend most of my time thus occupied, changing my companion as fancy takes me - A sailing ship attracted our attention. She seemed to be almost stationary. “Before now, a ship like that has proved to be a “feeder” for enemy submarines”, my associate remarked, proceeding to tell me of some personal experience relating to one, when, suddenly, everybodies attention became centered upon a movement on the water some little distance astern.

The sea, which was dead calm, seemed at this spot to break as if over a sharp rock.

“Looks exactly like the sea breaking over the Sow and Pigs in Sydney Harbour” said I. The end of my remark was drowned by the loud report from our gun and a column of water shot up as the shell fell on the exact spot.

A moment of suspense – then, not a ripple upon the surface of the sea. An enemy submarine and its crew had met their fate.
Instantaneously the deck was crowded with passengers many rushing up from below, firmly convinced we had been torpedoed.

Mrs. X was the last to appear, she having gone to the help of an old Spanish lady who was sick in her cabin. She told me afterwards that when half way up she remembered the old dame and went back for her. – One of those unselfish acts that pass unnoticed. The old French priest who was having his after lunch snooze arose from his deck chair with one bound and sprinted along the deck to secure the most precious possession at the moment – his lifebelt -.

Being close to the coast, some of us proceeded to amuse ourselves selecting what appeared to be convenient spots to swim if our gunners had not been successful.

We had a further thrilling adventure that night when at dinner. The dessert and coffee stage was in full swing, everybody exceptionally jovial, chaff and light hearted banter being fired from one table to another.

Inspite of our lifebelts reposing at our feet or hanging over the back of our chair the “danger zone” was forgotten.

Suddenly the old ship shook from bow to stern everything rattled. She seemed to kick and stagger making no end of a noise as her engines raced. No doubt all longed as I did, to fly on deck and see what was happening. Instead we stuck to our seats and continued to laugh and joke as if nothing unusual was happening.

“Salsetti” with several naval men left the saloon quietly, the rest of the men swallowed their coffee and tried to look unconcerned.
After what seemed an eternity we arose in a body. I, like many others went straight to the cabin, hurriedly collecting odd valuables, put on my warmest coat, stuffing a woollen scarf, knitted gloves, a few spare “hankies” and my passport into its pockets.

All lights were out by this time, on my way up to the deck in the dark a figure near me whispered “submarine”. We all had our lifebelts handy some even had them on. I bumped into a Jack Tar coming from the bathroom with a sponge bag in his hand. “Has the order been given to Take to the boats” he asked.

On deck one of the gunners was giving orders, the gun covering was off, and it was going around as if it meant business. Every moment we expected a torpedo to hit the ship, and strange to say I felt absolutely no fear. I doubt if my pulse beat a fraction quicker. Everyone behaved splendidly walking up and down the deck cracking jokes as if everything was perfectly normal.

What happened – we heard later - A submarine appeared on our starboard bow, her covering tower above water. The officer on watch thinking it was one of ours (British or an Allies) sent out a wireless message which was not answered. Instead, the submarine suddenly submerged and fired a torpedo, which, thanks to the prompt action of those on our bridge was avoided by turning the ship as quickly as possible.

That was what caused the violent shaking and noise. For the rest of the night we raced along at full steam ahead.

I heard it said our Captain should have rammed it, but there are always wiseacres. We were quite near the coast, steep cliffs were silhouetted
against the sky, a perfect moonlight night. A man lit a cigar, was ordered by a sailor to put it out. He did not do so. An officer then came and ordered him up before the Captain. We heard nothing of the interview – an unpleasant one I’d warrant!! Needless to say I slept with most of my clothes on that night.

Arrived at Marseilles the next day – a bitterly cold one inspite of the sunshine. Had a long wait on board before being interviewed by the French Police and British Consul to satisfy them that I wasn’t a spy and that my passport was correct. Several of my fellow passengers kindly offered to see me safely as far as the railway station, so we all packed into a horse drawn carriage of very ancient pattern, set off upon a long drive to our destination.

France is certainly armed to the teeth, soldiers standing with fixed bayonets were to be seen everywhere. People in mourning filled the streets, young widows seem to predominate, and they are unmistakeable as they wear a huge covering of black crepe which falls from their headgear over their shoulders to the hem of their skirt.

The French soldier is dressed in a pale blue uniform, such a pretty shade, and has endless stripes and pipings with interesting looking badges denoting his regiment.

Before leaving Australia people said to me “Oh! you needn’t worry about not speaking French you’ll find plenty of people who know English”. Well, I very soon found out that wasn’t the case.

Arriving at the station a porter rushed my luggage, jabbering ceaselessly while we unsuccessfully tried to explain I wanted to leave my belongings in the cloakroom.
Miss P. who proposed to know some French tried it out on him to no avail. The wretched man never stopped talking, not one word of which did we understand. Finally he gave us best, stacked my suitcase, roll of rugs and violin in a heap and left us.

I hunted around, discovered a cloakroom. The man in charge bombarded me in native language. At last, after various dumb shows on my part and repeating the word “English” he grasped the situation. Bursting into a hearty laugh he rushed away to return with a porter who knew enough English to save the situation. He limped badly, and I gathered that he’d been badly wounded in 1914, had mixed with English soldiers and learnt what English he knew from them. When I told him I came from Australia, he put down my goods and chattles and insisted upon shaking hands with me bursting forth into a torrent of French.

The train didn’t leave until 7-10p.m. so I bid my friends farewell and a sad and sorry person I felt as I retraced my footsteps to the station as darkness came on.

Pangs of hunger forced me to the Railway Café where my English fell on deaf ears belonging to the smallest of small boys in a very tight buttons uniform, so making a noise that faintly resembled “pain et beurre et café en lait” he fortunately understood. At least he reappeared with two lovely French rolls of sadly diminutive proportions and a tiny cup of delicious coffee – but how I longed for a good square meal. The stuffiness of the place made me feel faint so I once more ventured out into the chilly evening and paraded the station.
Soldiers, Soldiers, everywhere, fixed bayonets beside the Ticket Office, fixed bayonets in the waiting room, even fixed bayonets at the Ladies Lavatory.

Wandering around outside I saw a Labour Corps of Chinamen, in blue baggy trousers and loose coat – true chows, pigtail and all complete.

Then I ran into Mrs. X, who’s flushed complexion had made me wonder as to its cause several times on the ship. We fairly fell upon one others necks, she, after soothing her ruffled temper after a stormy interview with the Consul over her passport was affability personified but “any port in a storm” and one thing she could speak French in a sort of way when “tanked”. What did I care as long as I crossed France safely.

We finally got into the train, a corridor carriage with two men off the ship. The train was full to bursting and the longest passenger train I am likely to see. Practically all the passengers were soldiers returning after leave.

How I wished I could speak French.

In our compartment was an Algerian who ate a hearty supper of ham, bread and butter, oranges and garlic – they all ate garlic. Two other soldiers, one in Khaki, the other a handsome flying man in his saxe blue uniform. The passage way had soldiers packed like sardines lying about everywhere.

One lavatory did for both sexes, one simply lined up in a queue and waited patiently after walking over sleeping soldiers the entire length of the corridor.
Sleep was out of the question, - so was air. As Mrs. X said “Air my dear: what is air?”
Along we travelled for miles and miles without a stop and without anything to eat except a couple of buns that had taken me about half an hour to bargain for from a street stall in Marseilles.
The soldiers, poor fellows all smoked and that made the atmosphere stuffier than ever.
Letting my thought drift back over the previous hours, soldiers seemed to be the one object fixed upon my brain. The poor chaps have a look of grim determination blended with intense sadness. None of the free and easy look of our British, Tommy or Australian.

My heart ached to see them walking arm in arm with their wives and sweethearts before entraining. In trench stained uniform and often battered helmet their kits on their backs. It gave one a perfectly rotten feeling somewhere inside.
When I saw an old Frenchman I wondered why Australia hadn’t passed conscription. We might so easily be in the same plight as France. I felt glad C. was doing his bit. I could not have stood travelling across France had he not been. It is all so sad, so difficult to grasp, to understand, to realize.

Somewhere about midnight we stopped at a big station. Mrs. X again felt the need of some brandy and soda, declaring that brandy neat was too strong and no water obtainable on the train to dilute it, we ventured forth. Crossed umpteen rows of rails (the train didn’t come into any platform) to get to the station and try and find a Refreshment Room.
Never shall I forget Mrs. X tearing about that station. Rushing up to every soldier – and there were dozens of them on guard – she called out “Buffet! Buffet!” then aside to me who followed in hot pursuit, “My dear! my petticoat’s torn to shreds and my bloomers are falling off”.

“Buffet! where can I get water?”

The torn frill of her petticoat dragged on the ground. She clung to a flask of Three Star which she waved when demanding water. Her peroxided hair was all dishevelled, infact she looked more or less like an escaped lunatic.

Alas! the Buffet was closed – small wonder at that hour – and I left Mrs. X rushing off to where they were filling the engine.

I wasn’t going to risk missing the train through some diluted brandy.

All along the railway stood blue grey clad men with fixed bayonets, and every station we passed through had a mob awaiting to entrain.

We arrived at Paris at 9-30a.m. starving. A cup of cocoa – all we could get at a wayside station about 8 O’clock had about a pound of sugar in it and only made me sick.

Paris! – and a frightful headache, what damnable luck!

All the porters women, few taxis and as cold as charity!

After securing a room at the Hotel on the Gare de Nore we sallied forth in search of a cheap café.

As we had no idea how long we might be obliged to remain in Paris and were neither of us over flush of funds we decided to be economical as regards meals.
Mrs. X. did the ordering – steak, which turned out to be horse. I cannot say I enjoyed it. It is a peculiar shade of pink and close grained flesh. My headache became unbearable and maddened beyond words at being “out of action” I spent the remainder of my stay in bed.

March 4th 1917    Midland Grand Hotel    London.

Heavens! what a thirty-six hours I have had including the embarrassing experience of having a letter I’d written censored before my very eyes to see I was not conveying news to the enemy.

We left Paris for Le Harve after an early breakfast yesterday morning. Mrs. X was down first and when I appeared said “My dear: I’ve ordered ham and eggs. It took ages to make the waiter understand by describing hens and cocks and chickens, flapping my arms and cackling, but he knows now”.

After waiting in pleasant anticipation for about ten minutes, our breakfast was placed before us – coffee and toast. There was no time to try again to explain so we fell to and ate in silence.

The train journey was intensely interesting, soldiers of course on guard all along the line and double banked on every bridge. We passed a Camp of Canadian and at another we saw a lot of Australians. What a wonderful river the Seine is, quite large steamers on it and dozens, say, hundreds of barges. The railway ran for miles along its bank and every inch was interesting.

At last Le Harve, cold – bitterly cold!
We were told that a soldier had been frozen to death the previous night while on guard near the waterfront.

A café we went to for lunch appeared to be a questionable sort of establishment judging by a bit of by play on the part of a French officer with one of the pretty girls in attendance. I found it in my heart to forgive the soldiers. All the French girls we saw were most lovely and tempting looking. They “make up” to perfection. We found we had to wait until 8.30p.m. before being allowed onto the Channel boat, so counted our cash and decided on a room at the Continental Hotel for 3 francs.

There we had a good hot wash and a lie down. Mrs. X cheered her drooping spirits with whisky and sodas until about 4 o’clock when we wandered once more out around the Docks.

At the sight of a small restaurant she decided we needed refreshment. I had a cup of coffee, but that failed to satisfy my companion who topped hers with a liquer.

By this time she was decidedly cheerful, and taking my arm affectionately we once more set off to explore the neighbourhood.

Suddenly out of the misty clouds appeared a small airship – called I believe a Blimp. Then two Batteries of Artillery trotted past us as we walked towards the shopping centre.

The sight of a Milliners shop effected Mrs. X to the extent that she insisted upon going in and trying on every hat.

Feeling decidedly uncomfortable and not daring to desert her I resolved to play the role of ladies maid. Held her hat and attended to her wants with as expressionless a face as I could. Standing at a respectful
distance and wondering how long it would be before she was either satisfied and saddled up with a band box, or bowed herself out.

Thankful I was when she decided that none suited her and we departed only to enter the next hat shop and repeat the programme.

To distract her mind from headgear, I suggested that as the Contintental charged seven francs for dinner and our funds wouldn’t run to that, secondly the Café experience not proving all that it might be, that we buy something and eat it in our bedroom at the Hotel.

A Ham and Beef Shop supplied two pork chops and a third rate eating house near the docks some buttered bread. Whereupon we returned to our rooms to “brouse”.

We had just commenced upon our feast, when in answer to an order for another whisky and soda, a maid, by some misunderstanding appeared with a large bottle of whiskey on a tray.

I hurriedly hid my chops under my chair while Mrs. X. disposed of hers beneath the counterpane.

She refused flatly to accept the unopened bottle. The maid gave a long excited oration which for all either of us got out of it might as well have been in Greek. They carried on an animated conversation for sometime.

Mrs. X sitting on the bed holding the counterpane up off the greasy chop and waving her other arm as she screamed.

“Take it away! I don’t want a whole bottle full. Take it away!”

Appealing to me she said “Tell her to take it away, they’ll charge me heaven knows what: for a whole bottle.”

A lot of use asking me to make the girl understand: Finally I seized a piece of paper and wrote “Do not want bottle”.

36
That satisfied her and with endless “Mercee” she smilingly bowed herself out.

“What a life” remarked Mrs. X as we recovered our chops and ate them in our fingers.

Poor Mrs. X she was really awfully amusing and kind hearted to a degree.

After a rest we wandered down to the Customs Office where all the passengers had collected. When we were all lined up, had a guard of Tommies, fine big men too. They stood shoulder to shoulder and were armed to the teeth.

We were then herded into a sort of race. Strange and unpleasant were the rumours that went around. One was that each person was stripped and painted with some stuff warranted to show up any writing that might be on our skin. Later on the painting part was scoffed at but the stripping seemed inevitable.

Several officials in uniform appeared, followed by some women who looked like office cleaners. “Those are the women who strip you” whispered someone.

I can assure you none of us looked forward to the experience with the thermometer below zero, apart from the indignity of the procedure.

Some more soldiers were marched in and put on guard outside a sort of L10 room. They carried huge revolvers on their equipment and looked most forbidding.

We were told to go one at a time to this room. Mrs. X went first while I waited for what seemed like half an hour. As Mrs.X passed me coming out I smiled at her (grinned might be more correct) in a silly
fashion with it still implanted on my face I came before a rather severe looking gentleman in a uniform which seemed to consist chiefly of gold braid. He was I understood high up in the French police.

“What are you laughing at” he demanded. I had sheepishly to admit that I really didn’t know. Whereupon he became quite pleasant. Inquiring whether I had any gold on me, I owned to my L3-10-0 and asked if he wanted it fearing being stripped there and then. No! he didn’t but “was I a British subject? Had I my passport?” “That will do thanks” and he presented me with a ticket which he wrote something on, passed me along to the next room. Soldiers and police everywhere.

Six men sat at a table, here I was asked, Where I was going to and why? My future address, and my Australian one? Once more I was passed along. Two more men looked at my passport and signed it. While waiting for further interviews I noticed a woman being delayed at a table for sometime. When I got up to the man next to the one interviewing her I noticed he was just putting the finishing touches to a likeness he had drawn of her as she stood talking. She was apparently a suspected spy, and we had a funnier experience with her later.

Then began the job with the Customs officials.

When I presented the ticket the gold braided gentleman gave me, my luggage was handed to me without even being questioned, while Mrs. X had her trunk burst open, the locks broken and a strap lost. In fact everyones luggage seemed to be opened and tossed about. Finally we got on board the Channel boat, Mrs. X losing no time in precuring a
whiskey and soda to help her recover from the trying business over her belongings.

It was a general cabin for all women passengers. Fortunately very few.
The “spy” hurried in and got into a top end bunk, pulling all the curtains around her.
A rather nice English girl chummed up with us. She told us many of her experiences having been in France since before the war was declared.
Taking off just our outer garments we lay on our bunks talking – our lifebelts beside us as ordered. Suddenly, “shut up” shouted the lady concealed behind the curtains.
It was only just 9 o’clock and Mrs. X who had indulged in yet another “refresher” was in no mood to oblige and told her so.
She then proceeded to abuse us in very bad French – so the English girl told us - The whole episode was screamingly funny. Volumns of abuse from the irate lady hidden from view. Then “My dear woman, I cannot understand a word you say, you might as well be talking Greek, and anyway, you are very rude.” Shouted Mrs. X from her bunk beneath mine.

Just then a woman with a very young baby which was not in the happiest of moods, appeared upon the scene. Much to our joy as it disturbed the “spy” still more and kept her grumbling all night. At last I fell asleep to awake as we glided past the Isle of Wight.

Landed at Southampton about 8 am.
England at last! and jolly glad too:
Once more custom officials and police with fresh forms to fill in. Being questioned alone, by rather a nice looking official he added to all the cut and dried queries,

“Are you carrying any letters?”

It so happened a cousin of C’s aunt, had for some sentimental reason, given me a letter to carry to her instead of posting the wretched thing. There was nothing to do but own up to having it, he apologised but said he would be obliged to read it, so I proceeded to hunt through my handbag for it, tipping its contents out on the table finally, as it didn’t seem to be there. Alas! he spied a letter I had written to L – at Le Harve giving the very fullest details of my experiences with unvarnished truth. He pounced upon it and proceeded to read it, while my face grew warmer and warmer as I saw the corners of his mouth pucker up into a suppressed smile. When he finally returned it to me the other letter was still undiscovered and had to be accounted for so I “suddenly remembered” that I had posted it on board the steamer before leaving it, a tale he fortunately swallowed, and passed me on to another individual who held me up with “Where was that violin made.”

I had no idea, all I knew was I had bought it fifteen years ago in Sydney.

“Come this way please.”

I was taken before a man and asked dozens of questions about my harmless old fiddle. Just then an Australian soldier drifted in with a mandolin. He was a Sydneyite, and we soon got into conversation, between bursts of which we filled in forms and answered questions. The poor man had been on leave at one of the Channel Islands, and a
friend asked him to bring the instrument across to a relation in England. Beyond that he knew no more than Adam about it.

At last the official gentleman went in search of fresh forms so we seized the opportunity to escape into the train. While sitting in the carriage waiting for it to start a sudden commotion attracted everyones attention. Being forceable led away between two heafty men was our disgruntled fellow passenger. “There goes a spy” said someone.

Then I saw a young man of decent appearance led forth and made to unload bottle after bottle of scent, from all sorts of concealed pockets about his clothing. Beautiful cut glass bottles were arranged upon a small table on the wharf, the man being hustled away by police. Up came a railway man, a sweeper judging by the broom he carried. Opening each bottle he first smelt it and then sprinkled it upon his manly bosom. – What his wife thought when he arrived home makes one wonder –

Through to London! Away we sped, through English countryside, past towns and villages. Soldiers everywhere, but not so many on duty as in France. What looked so funny, Tennis Courts, Golf Links every available spot cut up into plots where Brussel Sprouts and other vegetables flourished. Even along the banks of the railway line “greens” were growing.

Arriving at Waterloo there seemed to be only either quite children in porters uniforms or lame men and precious few of either. I humped my suitcase, violin, and roll of rugs as best I could. Officers in Khaki trundled their goods and chattles on the trolleys themselves.
Taxis were few and far between. I asked a small porter who looked about ten, to get me one. He got about half way to the taxi rank and became interested in a broken down car leaving me waiting patiently – Fancy London!! “C’est la guerre” as they say in France.

As previously arranged Euston Hotel was to be my destination when I reached London. Alas! I arrived there to find it full up. Awful moment!! What was I to do? Where to go? Smiling as sweetly as I knew how, upon an austere looking hall porter, I begged to leave my goods and chattles in his care while I went off in search, first of food and then somewhere to sleep.

Not being over burdened with cash, the 3rd class Refreshment Room on Euston Station supplied me with a ham sandwich and cup of tea. After which I sallied forth to see what I could find in the way of lodgings.

My memory of London returned, plus my admiration and love for the ancient city, despite the intense cold and the fog and smoke mixture for air.

The Midland Grand Hotel was not far distant where mother and I stayed in 1901. There I managed to get a room on the top storey for 4/6, cosy and warm with all the luxurious comforts, big coal fires, lounge, orchestra etc.etc. associated with such places. All the windows had extra heavy dark curtains to prevent any ray of light showing out, Zepps!!

In the Danger Zone again: Table d’hote dinner being 2/6 and funds not running to such extravagance I invested in 2 more ham sandwiches costing 8d. and a couple of small cakes 1 1/2d ea. Supplemented by a 1d stick of chocolate
all of which I ate in the seclusion of my bedroom. I’m feeling as fit as a fiddle and getting quite fat.

March 8th 1917. Moorholm, Neston, Cheshire.

Dear Me: What a lot has been crammed into my life during the last four days.
When I came down to breakfast at the Midland Grand on Monday morning, it was snowing hard, so I made the most of my comfortable surroundings and had a delicious fried sole and coffee and watched the flakes of snow drifting past the window while I enjoyed it.

Then I ventured out and managed to find the Bank, also the Agent Generals office in the Strand where I got a loan of L5 as my draft had not arrived.

On Tuesday Carl being unable to get leave and cash – or the want of it – a problem, I left Euston by the 12.5 train.

Had to change at Crewe where I missed the connection and had an hours wait, then another change at Chester with another hours wait, followed by a further change and wait at Hooton.

I finally arrived at Parkgate about 7 oclock

   The prospects of getting a taxi seemed so remote, I left my luggage and set off on foot in the darkness – no lights being allowed. After making several enquiries en route, I found Aunties at last. She greeted me with open arms, duly showed me all over the big house, even the kitchen, where the cook, I was told had looked forward to seeing me as she remembered other members of C’s family in the years gone by. A much appreciated dinner followed, including wine, and much formality.

Then I was taken to see Grannie, who was in bed. She’s a truly wonderful old lady 92 but as bright, and interesting as one could wish. Unfortunately she’s nearly stone deaf and waves an ear trumpet arrangement whenever you go near her.
This comfortable existence with servants to wait on one all day, and up till the late hours at night is decidedly pleasant, but as C seems unlikely to get leave I’ve decided to go to him at Salisbury Plain. Catching the early train tomorrow if possible.

March 11th (Sunday) The New Inn, Amesbury Wilt.

Feeling absolutely deadly. Here I am in a funny old Hotel with a thatched roof spending my time in a tiny wee room minus a fire. Waiting, waiting. Can’t think why C- doesn’t come along. Left Parkgate yesterday enveloped in a huge fur lined cape arrangement of Aunties, with a huge fur collar like a bearskin.
The train journey commenced at a quarter to nine and I didn’t land at Amesbury until 11-30. It snowed most of the journey – icicles hung in all the railway cuttings.

Changes and waits at Bristol and Salisbury but all the way I cheered myself up with the prospects of seeing C- on Amesbury Station.

It was dark when the train crawled alongside the platform. Soldiers – shadowy figures crowded everywhere – no lights and I knew it was hopeless trying to pick C- out of such a mob, so waited cheerfully until the train steamed away and the soldiers disappeared into the darkness.

Every moment I expected to feel once more C’s arms around me, but nothing happened except that I found myself standing alone. At the station office I enquired if a taxi was obtainable to take me to a hotel. The porter was decidedly short and to the point. The one and only taxi had gone. It was about a mile to the village of Amesbury and I hadn’t the ghost of a hope of finding a room anywhere. My spirits decidedly damped but still hopeful I deposited all my luggage except my roll of rugs at the office and wandered out into the darkness.

Hearing a woman’s voice with a welcome Australian accent I ventured to ask her if she could help me.

It so happened that she and her sister had booked the taxi to return and take them to some Military Hospital some miles away, where a brother lay dangerously ill. She kindly offered to drop me at Amesbury on the way.

So far so good and we chatted cheerfully, or as cheerfully as one could under the circumstances until the taxi arrived.
In answer to enquires from the driver I got even less promising replies than from the porter. Perhaps due to prospects of an extra fare, he told me after persistent requests for names of likely hotels where I might obtain a room that the only possible one was the Georges Hotel, but apparently that wasn’t the least likely. “The Police Station is about the only place” he grunted, as if I was a public nuisance.

He deposited me at Amesbury in the middle of a very muddy, very narrow street, blocked – or almost so with Australian and New Zealand soldiers. It was pitch dark except for a thin ray of light from a half open door which I took to be the entrance to the Georges Hotel. Bidding my kind friends goodnight I pushed my way down a narrow passageway thronged with soldiers and the air thick with tobacco smoke into a room with a very low ceiling. It was chock a block full of members of the A.I.F. and N.Z. forces. When used to the haze of tobacco smoke I spied an old man seated on a high stool. Not knowing what else to say I inquired if this was the office. “There aint no hoffice, this is the Bar,” snorted the old fellow and disdained to offer me any further help. I suppose I looked rather stranded as I certainly felt, when a nice looking soldier said “I tell you what, I can show you the kitchen door.” What a relief! Gladly I followed him outside and down a passageway which led into a sort of cobble stoned court yard. It was too dark to see anything properly but we stopped by a door upon which he knocked. Facing me he saluted, wished me luck and vanished.
A small girl opened the door a few inches and I explained the situation and begged for a room. She made no comment, but closing the door left me once more in the dark with the most miserable feelings for company.

After about five minutes she reopened the door and briefly stated that they had no room. As she was on the point of closing it I put my foot in to prevent her. Asked her to send some older person, that I simply must see someone else.

She promised, to do so if I let her shut the door, which I did in no pleasant mood. A housemaid next appeared upon the scene to whom I explained that I knew no one, was a complete stranger to Amesbury. With so many men about I couldn’t possibly wander around aimlessly. Would they even let me sit up all night in the kitchen, anywhere providing I had a roof over my head. She made no comment and shutting the door left me to ponder still further upon the miserable situation. Oh! what a relief when she returned and invited me into the kitchen.

Before a huge stove stood a woman cooking numberless eggs in the most enormous frying pan I have ever seen, it must have been about a yard in diameter.

Two Australian soldiers were sitting beside the fire talking to her. When I mentioned I was just fresh from Australia they simply showered me with questions, and we were soon like old friends.

One knew W.A. the other from N.S.W.
The cook I fear disapproved of me, thought me not all I might be probably, but that worried me not at all. The housemaid offered to show me my room. – So I was to get one at last:-
I followed her up a narrow winding stairway to the tiniest of bedrooms with a window some eighteen inches square on ground level. No fireplace, but a comfortable little bed.
She promised to bring me a “tray of tea” as there was no place she said where I could have a meal as the “soldiers were everywhere.” The welcome tray arrived and I was just about to pour out the tea when the small child knocked upon the door.
“Please the soldiers in the kitchen said they come from where you do and would you mind having your tea in the kitchen and talk to them.” How gladly I returned to the warm kitchen. Of course I told of C’s non appearance, and one of the lads suggested my going up to the camp tomorrow – which means today – I am to meet him if C doesn’t turn up, and he will show me the way to the 44th Battalion. With that I bid them goodnight.

After breakfast in bed I dressed and hurried up to the railway station to get my suitcase.
A nice clerk in the office there, after hearing my tale of woe, rang up C’s orderly room and asked them to tell Private Good that his wife was at the New Inn – A discovery I made when awakeing and looking out of my window to see the Georges Hotel opposite.
The New Inn I might mention is I should imagine the oldest hostel in Amesbury, dating back to the bye gone ages of coaching days. It is very
low, has a thatched roof and altogether has a decidedly antique appearance.

Returning to my room I paced the floor to try and keep from freezing. Three steps from door to the window, about turn, three back. I swung my arms and touched my toes and indulged in many and varied methods to get warm.
After a lonely dinner, like a prisoner in a condemned cell, I went out for a walk, met McIntyre – my acquaintance of last night. As I expected C any moment I declined his offer to escort me to the camp. Returning to my “cell” I spent the rest of the day waiting. No sign of C. Never have I felt more lonely, more depressed or colder in my life. My only amusement was watching the crowds of soldiers pass my window, a splendid view of the top of their hats. Despatch riders tore past on motor cycles, Artillery occasionally cantered by or a squad of mounted men.
Darkness set in about 4 o’clock, and from then on I had either the feeble light of a candle or blew it out and once more studied the endless stream of khaki.

When nine o’clock drew near the street gradually cleared, a few drunken soldiers helped by sober or less drunken comrades staggered by on their way back to camp.

A peculiar silence fell upon Amesbury, then the tramp, tramp of feet, the military police walked past. The Sergeant giving kindly advice to a staggering soldier, to hurry back to camp.

The door bangs, someone calls out “Goodnight”.

The picquet passed on out of hearing – and silence.

I lighted my candle feeling the most forgotten creature in Amesbury.

What has become of C? Has he been called overseas?

I creep into bed hoping tomorrow may solve this mystery.

March 12th

It is costing me 10/- a day to stay at this Inn so decided to find other lodgings.

After endless inquiries, I finally pulled up at 121 Earlscourt Rd. What a name for such a spot!! It is a sort of laneway leading to open fields, past small low thatched roof cottages. 121 is a hideous modern red brick erection, semi-detached – An eyesore:

Mrs. Cox my landlady, a buxom, pleasant woman took me to her heart in a marvelous way. Was most sympathetic when I poured out my tale of woe, and advised me to go up to the Camp.
Cheered by her advice and feeling well nigh desperate, off I started upon a five mile walk to Lark Hill. Turning off the road into a cinder track of railway lines I came upon a working party of German prisoners of War. The sight of a woman in those parts was apparently so unusual they one and all “downed tools” and stared their hardest. The snow had melted and soft rain was falling, but I trudged on through the most awful mud and slush, when coming to a collection of huts I suddenly beheld an officer of exalted rank followed by a whole retinue of Red Tabs. Observing me, he called to a Sergeant and nodding in my direction sent the man over.

“Excuse me, but General – sent me to ask you what authority you have to be in the Camp?” “Tell General … he is just the man I want to see,”
I replied, and told of my arrival from Australia and the non appearance of C-.

Just what the Sergeant really told the General I suppose I shall never know, but he returned and announced that he had been told to escort me to C’s orderly room for which I was decidedly grateful.

Coming in sight of it he bid me good-bye, saying he had to return to the General so I knocked upon the door and was shouted at to “Come in.”

Never shall I forget the faces of the men when they beheld a woman upon the threshold. Once more retailing my story – I was pretty good at it by then – The Corporal ushered me into the Adjudant who likewise suffered a shock at the sight of my “petticoats” in his sanctum. He was very charming never the less, and after listening to my tale he smilingly told me C. had applied for leave, but added, “You’d hardly believe the number of men who suddenly find they have a wife, a mother or some lesser relative in England as an excuse to apply for a few days away from camp.” “Well! now that you have seen me in the flesh, it is up to you to give my husband the leave he asks for,” I retorted.

He then introduced me to the Lieutenant of C’s Company and told him to take me along to the Officer’s Mess for afternoon tea. A kindness I shall never forget, especially as C is only a private. When the battalion, which was out for a route march was about to return, we stood near the roadway waiting. I began to wonder if I would recognize Charlie when I saw him. A horrible doubt overwhelmed me. I felt sure I would not. I could not recall what he was like and began to feel a most
frightful fool – On, on came the long long line of Khaki-clad men. Then suddenly I spied C. Seeing me he rushed over exclaiming “What are you doing here?” “Never mind, I’ve got you 48 hours leave and it commences from tomorrow, but you have the rest of the day off to escort me out of the camp”, I replied.

The cause of all my anxiety was due, so C tells me, to a bad stew. Most of the men “went sick” but he kept on duty but failed to shave and received seven days C.B. He gave a taxi driver a shilling to deliver a letter to me, which he failed to do so that ends that.

We’re off to London in the morning for “a flutter.”

March 15th 1917

Back again after two perfect days with C. that will live in my memory as long as I have one.

Off we went to London on 13th by the first train. Booked a room at the Midland Grand, and then explored the wonderful old city, for the rest of the day.

We walked everywhere until our legs refused to carry us any further without a spell. Then, hopping onto the first ‘bus that came along we climbed up on top, where we rested and gazed down at the most fascinating crowds on the footpaths.

Now all that joy is over. Chas returned to the camp and I’ve dug in at 121.

My landlady, is kindness itself, can’t do enough for me.

Another Lodger, Mrs. Nolan, a Welsh girl married to an Australian soldier, told me that several people had inquired for the room the day I
came but I was the only one Mrs. Cox would contemplate letting it to –
Was it my grin again!!
I pay 17/6 a week for a large double room with the use of sitting room. English fashion I buy any food supplies, but my landlady cooks my meals.

25th March (Sunday)

The days have slipped by all too fast. Every night C has stayed with me – A.W.L. most times. Usually returning to camp early in the morning, but having wangled a pass for this afternoon he risked not going, but for safety sake kept away from the village and possible M.P’s.
About 11 o’clock rather startling news drifted to the Cox establishment, to the effect that all troops were recalled from leave, all leave cancelled and the whole camp mobilizing.
Not believing it, we went for a walk in a field nearby where C picked me some quaint tassel flowers off a tree, like wee lambs tails – Bo Peeps! surely?

A wet bedraggled Australian soldier – a mere boy – came up to us and asked us to direct him to the road to London. C asked him if it was true about the mobilization. “True enough” he said, “thats why I cleared out and swam the river.”
Thereupon he hurried away and C. decided to return immediately to Lark Hill and face the music. The rumour is that the Germans have landed in the north of England.
C was frightfully excited at prospects of defending England on English soil and even I felt thrilled to think of his being able to. The story goes that the troops have been issued with ammunition and are in full fighting order.
A deathly silence seems to reign over the village of Amesbury. The cold is intense – What a winter!!

27th March (Tuesday)

C turned up this evening with the news that when he got to the camp on Sunday all the men were being called out. His lot got the order a few minutes after his arrival – What luck!-
He confirmed all the rumours about ammunition etc. After standing for about two hours and dismissed. They knew nothing more.

April 5th (Thursday) 1917

Last Sunday was our last day together after four glorious weeks, Alas: they slipped by all too quickly.
It was a freezingly cold day so we spent it sitting over the fire in our bedroom and eating most of the time to keep our spirits up. He had a very bad cold and his feet were very swollen from marching so much in wet boots.
I tried to induce him to report sick but he flatly refused, saying it would look like showing the white feather.

At six o’clock next morning he set off for Larks Hill for the last time. I watched him from my window, the snow falling upon his big waterproof cape as he stood for a moment looking up at me. Then, with
a smile and a salute he turned and walked away through the snow, down that narrow English lane with its clipped hedges on either side, and our good-bye was over.

Last night he sent a note saying he was due to leave almost at once. Mr. & Mrs. Cox dear souls, offered to go with me to see the draft entrain. Off we went about 9 o’clock through the almost deserted village to the cross roads.

It was a bright moonlight night, the snow lay thick upon the ground. Away in the distance we could hear the soldiers singing “Australia will be there” as they marched away from the camp.

It seemed an eternity waiting and listening but their voices became clear as they drew nearer, and the words:-

There’s a long long night of waiting
Until my dreams come true;
Till the day when I’ll be going down
That long long trail with you.

reached us distinctly as the dim outline of a column of men on the march appeared.

Their puttied legs showing up from the faint rays of a hurricane lamp carried in front.

On they came, a steady stream of Australians – While I, the one woman from their own country stood waiting for them to pass.

As they swung around the corner I called out “I’m an Australian, What is your battalion?” Ever so many broke ranks to shake my hand and then pass on to the station.

Still no sign of Charlie’s reinforcement.
Some of the men seemed glad to hear news direct from Australia, and I walked up the road with a Corporal from Victoria. He had been wounded at Gallipoli, then again in France, at Pozieres and after six months on home service was now going out again. During a halt, we had quite a long conversation. He was wonderfully cheerful, the only thing that worried him was having no letters from home owing to being so much on the move. He hoped however, to get them all when once more with his battalion. “I’m expecting a photograph of my wife and baby,” he said, “It will be two years in May since I left. I want to get that photo because I’ll forget what they are like if I don’t.”

Just then a general move was made; we shook hands and he called his men together, dark objects squatted about in the snow. More reinforcements came along, the same goodbyes, the same eagerness to shake my hand and ask hurried questions such as “Do you know Adelaide?” “What part of Sydney do you come from?” “I’m from Perth, have you been there?” but still no 44th battalion.

Midnight, and although I longed to stay on the chance of seeing him once again I had not the heart to keep my good landlady and her husband any longer out in the freezing cold, so as there seemed to be no sign of further drafts, we toddled back to bed.

This morning I decided to go up to the camp concocting some excuse to see him, but on the way I looked behind a big tree near a wood, where we arranged to leave notes, and alas: there it was a small piece of paper with the tragic news that he left last night after all.
April 6th

Having packed my belongings and arranged to go back to Neston tomorrow I went for a walk and wandered into the old church, a picturesque old building with a square tower.

It dates back to 544 A.D. Queen Elfreda built the Abbey in 980, and a weird looking patchy window was put in a few years later to celebrate the event. I don’t fancy it is glass – funny looking stuff and certainly not a thing of beauty. I was almost afraid to breathe for fear it might be shattered. The Chancel Screen is a fine piece of old carving done in 1420, while a small chapel that took my fancy was built in 1280.

The main door is about 800 years old and a wretched American “pinched” its quaint bobbin lock a few years ago, Mrs. Cox tells me. She also informed me that all the Cox family, for endless generations I understand have been christened at the ancient Font, which the Roundheads broke up into small pieces, but it was later stuck together again and is there once more intact.

I must admit the building compares favourable with Methodist erection opposite the New Inn.

April 7th 1917

My most miserable day so far.

Never shall I forget leaving Amesbury, Mrs. Nolan kindly came to the station with me, but when seated in the taxi about to leave 121, and to be farewelled by the Cox family, I never felt nearer to breaking down. I simply couldn’t speak, and it took all my reserve will power to pull
myself together. What lovely days C and I had together, what scenes I had witnessed. Here I am so much alone, and the future !!!!

Well: one dares not look ahead one single hour.

**April 27th 1917** (Neston)

Life here, with Auntie and Grannie is a lazy sort of existance, but while the wretched winter weather continues – and I have been indulging in neuralgia – it is very pleasant. Not the pain but the comfort under the circumstances.

Visits to the local Red Cross Depot where the elite of Parkgate and Neston make swobs, bandages and gossip, taking the dog for a walk, knitting socks, and making up parcels for C seems to be all there is to do.

One day I went with Auntie to Chester, a delightful old city full of interesting places. One of the many, being an old Roman bath, which to inspect one has to go down some breakneck steps beneath a small shop. It was discovered in 1700 – probably when they built the shop. It is cut out of stone and steps down into it quite plain still, also a cluster of small stone pillars, which I was informed was where the Romans heated the water. Not having sufficient imagination, I could not quite see how the heating method worked.

When I said so to Grannie upon my return, she looked quite surprised and said “Oh: didn’t you, couldn’t you understand?” Thinking I must be displaying some gross ignorance I hastily told her we also saw an awfully interesting old house built in 1591. With a look of pitying contempt she said.
“But my dear, that is not half so interesting, it is quite modern.”

Anyway, quite ancient enough for F.G. and the old Roman bath is too chilly an affair to my liking, certainly for this climate. They must have been a hardy race those old bucks and their fancy ladies. As for the old Stanley Place, it was undoubtly a wonderful example of old time architecture.
The big fireplace, and oak carvings were the real thing too – It was here that the Earl of Derby hid for sixteen weeks and was then betrayed by his servant, and later beheaded at Bolton on 15\textsuperscript{th} Oct. 1652. Charles I held a council here, and it thrilled me to walk about the room and try to picture the splendour of the Royalists sitting about in their gay coloured clothes. A narrow stairway ran down into the kitchen where I probed about into every hole and corner. The great open fireplace and spit, where I could picture the huge roast, and the boy told off to turn it.
I investigated all the funny old cooking utensils. Amongst which a basting spoon that would hold about a quart of melted fat.

No doubt cooking a sheep, or an ox at a time, is somewhat different to 2 lbs loin or small round.

I often have a giggle to myself in the seclusion of my own room, sometimes smothering my face into the feather pillows for fear the spasm gets out of control and noisy.

The other day Grannie went investigating a few books of mine and discovered the “Sentimental Bloke”. “My dear!” she said. “that is a strange book. I might as well try and read Greek. Why do they talk like that? Is it so that the blacks will understand? What are you smiling at dear?”

Poor old Grannie, I have to answer some funny questions about Australia and the Australians at times.

Every Sunday morning – Church.

I plan to dodge it, but my courage fails and politeness carried the day. Thank goodness: the clergyman is an educated man a brother I believe of the Editor of the “Morning Post” It is a treat to listen to his sermons, he quotes Huxley, grand opera, and any number of queer things. Is remarkably broadminded for a parson and most amusing sometimes. I do not always agree with him, but none the less, it is a treat to hear one speak in favour of science and own that there is a legitimate criticism necessary as far as the Bible is concerned. My sympathy and understanding are expressed in the “Confessions of a Clergyman” “Pray that we may have the strength of mind and common sense to do the right thing, but not to pray to get all we want.”
Which reminds me, During each service they set apart a few minutes for prayer for soldiers at the front, and if you wish you can give the name of a relation serving, to the clergyman. He will then read it out each time. “William Smith, John Atkins, Tom Snooks etc. etc.”

A few days ago Auntie asked me if I would like to have C’s included!!!

A long silence, during which I struggled to find the politest excuse. Finally I told her I felt sure C would sooner not.

It all seems so hopeless, the poor lads get killed just the same as those not mentioned, and to me it seems as if it must only shake the poor comfort their relatives try to find in religion.

I hope and pray that C can “stick it” and do what he can to help win the War, and find some comfort in doing what he considers he should.

The weather is the last thing in awfulness, how people stand it winter after winter I cant imagine. Goodness knows: I shouldn’t grumble, living in comfort with servants to wait on me.

A delightful bedroom, everything I want and Grannie and Aunties kindness itself, but it is so lonely without C-

People who have never done any work in a house are certainly amusing. The other evening all the servants were out. The table was left laid for tea, the kitchen fire was alight, plenty of boiling water, even the saucepan ready. Auntie, who only had to boil an egg seemed to think it a terrific undertaking and made no end of a fuss over the job.

Grannies intellect is remarkable active for her 92 years. She takes the greatest interest in all social problems. “I shocked my family years ago with my views, they called me a Radical” she told me the other day with a chuckle.
She also reads piles of literature upon the subject of “Life after Death” and is greatly taken with the idea of a spirit world where we wander around before going on to the next. Tells me she finds this idea “very comforting.”

I’m glad she does, It leaves me cold. By way of contrast, Auntie favours reincarnation and has many volumes upon the subject. Some of which I have read with interest.

Have a wretched headache today, worrying about C- as I suppose thousands of other wives do these days about their husbands.

May 6th 1917

My time lately has been spent gardening, otherwise sowing rows and rows of vegetable seeds and weeding paths, occasional long walks around the countryside or paying polite visits to the local gentry with Auntie. Everytime I mention wanting to take up some definite war work, she begs me to wait awhile longer. The weather being still so miserably cold with no sign yet of spring I wearily succumb.

Another visit to Chester found me poking my nose into further places of interest including an old Saxon Church. A decidedly ancient looking erection with a ruin at each end. Inside were huge pillars at least six feet in diameter, supporting the roof - I suppose) Great solid things rather inclined to lean at different angles and braced together at the tops with long iron bars.

Unfortunately the original altar fell out with the tower in 1883. – Sounds as if they had quarreled but I mean the tower fell down and is now only a heap of stones overgrown with ivy, the Altar beneath it all.
One pillar had, what to my uneducated eye looked like mildew from the general dampness, but by the greatest good luck I passed no remarks on it as Auntie lead me to it and explained at length upon it being the finest and most perfect specimen of - - I forget what – in the British Isles. To me it looked exactly like a damp patch on a white Kalsomined wall, but when I investigated it closer I found I could distinguish what might with a big stretch of imagination, represent trees - In uncouth terms a sort of painting. I only hope I looked sufficiently over awed and intelligent at the sight of such ancient art.

Not far from the ruins of the tower, upon the banks of the River Dee was the dearest wee stone house, so very old looking and interesting. Harold is supposed to have fled to it after the Battle of Hastings and lived there with his wife in peace and quiet until his death. I always thought he had been killed, but perhaps the arrow only blinded him, and as far as history went he no longer worried William, so I like to picture him ending his days happily with his Queen in this pretty place.

The wall around the city is of course one of the sights of Chester. Originally built by the Romans but fortunately it has never been allowed to get into disrepair, so is still very fine to see. One can walk along the top, a pathway some four feet wide, and have a good view from it. At one spot a castle, like one of those in Chessmen. You can enter and look through a slit where Charles I watched his army defeated at the Battle of Rowton Moor.
Now one looks out upon acres of smoking chimneys and back yards and finds it difficult to picture the Royalists and Roundheads having a “ding dong go in” in the same spot. Of course we visited the Cathedral. Auntie being just about knocked up subsided into a pew to rest while I wandered around like a gaping tourist.

It is a beautiful building, to see it properly one would have to go again and again but one thing that interested me was all the old old standards, carried by Cheshire Regiments in the Bye gone days. They all hang there, and what is more, every Cheshire soldier who has fallen for his country has his name engraved on the wall. A noble and fine idea.

Of more modern interest was the huge Union Jack that flew from the mast of the H.M.S. Chester at the Battle of Jutland last year. It hangs over the aisle and looks very grand.

Leaving the sacred edifice we headed for the famous Crumpet Shop and on the way passed women mending the roadway, middle aged and of heft appearance. One was hoseing on asphalt while the rest threw on a sort of shale. Calling at the aforesaid Crumpet Shop we were informed they had used up all their flour and the law of the land now forbids further crumpet making as flour is getting very scarce.

Hunting up another Roman ruin.

A nice woman in a paper shop took me down to her cellar where there were a row of big pillars, one having been broken off lies half into the next door cellar.
The remains of a building of some importance when Julius Caesars men paraded in Chester.

The Food question is becoming a very serious problem. So far the “Powers that be” have only appealed to the peoples honour. – a perfectly hopeless method as few have the quality sufficiently developed to withstand the temptation to buy the food offered for sale. This morning at church the vicar preached a splendid sermon bringing in as a final the Proclamation issued by the King in these words:- “Men have died cheerfully, lost their legs, their arms, their sight, their reason, Women have given their sons, wives their husbands, and all we here are asked to do is to withstrain our appetites. To make a further appeal to you bretheren, would be to insult you.”

He then read the Proclamation from the Altar.

I was glad I had gone to church, I would have been sorry to have missed such a soul stirring appeal, apart from it being an historical event. We were requested to use as little flour as possible, to abstain from making pastry, from feeding horses on oats – unless it was necessary for breeding--------

Much more in the same strain, more or less in lawyers language.

June 2nd 1917

Have been enjoying an English Spring to my heart’s content the last few weeks.

Words fail when I try and describe the beauty of the flowers, the song of the birds – the whole atmosphere –
One afternoon I walked to Burtin, one of the prettiest places about these parts.

The Gladstone family practically own the whole village I understand, and see that it is kept in perfect order.

All the cottages, though very old, are in good repair, and have the most lovely gardens. Lilac was in full bloom – huge hedges of it. A number of gardens were built up, or rather a sort of sunken roadway, no fence so violets, pansies, tulips all flowers on a level with ones waist. While on the wall which banks up the garden, flowered rock plants and wall flowers in abundance.

The ancient church contained rather a quaint tablet on the wall. Stating that ……….”Nathanial Wilson and his wife had issue…. Then eight names and the date 1700. The amusing thing was the tablet was at least two yards long and the “issue” only took up about a foot and a half, the remainder being blank.

I wondered if they contemplated a family like the Fetherstonhaughs – or was it they forgot to inscribe their names.

Anyhow, it stated that one little “issue” developed into a Bishop Wilson of note. Not that I know anything about him I regret to say. My ignorance as usual.

History claims that Burton held many Quakers and Roundheads in those far off troublesome days, when Charles was flying about the neighbourhood, and I stood and looked down the roadway trying to picture either Cromwells men or the gay cavaliers riding through the village.
It gives one a queer feeling to realize ones eyes are looking at what those old time Johnnies saw.

Auntie proposes to go for a rest cure in Wales, after the “spring cleaning”, and I am to be left in charge here. The fly in the ointment is that I have to look after her pet poodle, a beastly Pekinese with neither manners nor sense.

The only compensation is that she has promised to “shout” me a holiday later.

Alas: I am to travel with the poodle which rather spoils the prospect.

June 19th 1917 Llangollen North Wales

Here I am! Tiger – the wretched poodle and I survived the journey with one another. The departure from Grannies would have convulsed my Australian friends.

An ancient horse drawn carriage, evidently dug up owing to the petrol shortage, arrived to take me to the station.

The coachman, couldn’t have been more attentive had I been the local Duchess.

Surrounded by my luggage, including a small case of Tigers, which contained his brush and comb, hair oil, various medicines and a collection of toys – a woollie dog and a rag doll, both of which I had duly washed following Aunties instructions.

I sat the little brute on my knee feeling the most awful ass.

I had fondly imagined he would travel to Wales in the dog box, but when I voiced the idea poor Auntie nearly expired, and assured me everyone would “love him in the railway carriage.” True enough no one
complained, as I had fully expected, and instead they admired his beauty, one woman offering him a biscuit which he hadn’t the manners to eat.

Changing trains was tiresome, especially when I discovered I was yards behind the platform at one station. I got fearfully fussed and blessed Tiger, he was so heavy while I rushed from one side of the carriage to the other with the little beast under my arm. After frantic signaling on my part the train eventually pulled up alongside and I descended, somewhat disheveled and covered with Tiger’s yellow hair. Arriving at Llangollen at last, I heard Auntie’s voice exclaiming “Oh Yes! I’ve come to meet my doggy wog and niece.”

If I am forced to live in the U.K. for the rest of my life, North Wales will do me. This “darling wee house” as Auntie calls it has about ten rooms, but they are all small and the ceilings low with quaint
windows. The stairs are very narrow and twisting, dinkey porches to every doorway, with roses creeping over them, and Oh: the view!! Lovely wooded hills and narrow winding roads.
Endless delightful looking places to explore.

When unpacking Tigers case Auntie was most frightfully put out at my having forgotten his sponge.
To try and make peace I hastily visited the town and bought a small sponge at a toy shop but alas: upon presenting it to her she informed me that it would not do at all, her “Doggies always had a babies sponge bought at a Chemists”

Before leaving Neston I decided to volunteer in the Woman’s Auxiliary Army Corps and wrote breaking it gently to Auntie.
The poor old soul was really awfully nice about it and said “I could have cried my dear: when I got your letter, it is only selfish of me, I know how you feel and from your point of view you are quite right still I can’t tell you how Grannie and I shall miss you. But you must always remember dear, our home is your home. I dread telling Grannie, she will feel it very much.”
As far as the W.A.A.C. if they approve of me I shall be called up within thirty days, paid L26 (or thereabouts) per annum, uniform and keep, and I shall knock a bit more fun out of life, and be of more use waiting on soldiers or peeling potatoes – if there are any – cutting a dash in a uniform of sorts as an off sider to a cook, than idling my days away as I have been the last few months.
June 25th

Some cousins have appeared upon the scene, one, a very intelligent woman has taken me sightseeing nearly every day. One afternoon she took me to her home for tea, to meet her father aged 80. He was a regular old Tory, with early Victorian ideas. An upright handsome old man with a Duke of Wellington nose. He looked just like an old miniature. I was told he ruled his whole family with a rod of iron. However, we had a long talk together which was at times so amusing I could only with difficulty refrain from laughing.

He asked lots of questions about Australia. “I’d never care to go to either N.S.W. or Victoria,” he said. “All convicts.” “Do they still rob everyone eh?” “Do their descendants all steal from one another? Oh: the lower classes, absurd! monstrus! The very idea of being ruled by them – impossible!” “You got the vote? Good gracious!!…..And didn’t vote for the same man as your husband, What!! “Don’t you do what your husband tells you to, in Australia, What!…..Well I never.”

Helen told me later that he was quite taken with me and wants me to go again adding “She’s the sort that would get on anywhere.”

Another day Auntie took me to see a delightful old place called Plas Newydd, and informed me it was where the Old Ladies of Llangollen once lived – A blank look on my face, then I bravely inquired as to “Who were the old Ladies?” “What!” said Auntie in a surprised and horrified tone. “never heard of the old Ladies of Llangollen!”
I discovered later that they died about the year 1778, and were a queer old pair. Apparently they lived in great style being “charitable to the poor and in fear of the Lord” with some advanced views thrown in. Decidedly ahead of their time from what I can hear. Wandering about the grounds attached to their late abode I came upon a maze, made of growing hedges. Depositing a basket I had with the days provisions at the starting point, I ran in and out of the narrow laneways until I found my way out again. It really wasn’t a bit of difficulty as the hedge had no leaves worth mentioning and I peered through each, to see if the next was a dead end or not.

Plas Newydd  2007

The same day Helen and I visited an old ruined Abbey – Valle Crucis – built about 1200. The ruins are very lovely and it was quite easy to imagine what the place looked like in its prime. I walked up
what was once the Aisle, remains of the old pillars each side all the way, the side walls overgrown with ivy rock plants and wall flowers. On one side of the main ruin was a section more or less till intact with the roof made of flat stones, and a lepers window. – One reads of such places – Up a narrow stone stairway one comes to where the monks of old slept. There were numerous graves in front of the Altar some dating back to the fourteenth century. Also two Crusaders buried there, Maltese Cross and swords being carved on the flag stones. A stone coffin above ground – minus its inmate – resembled nothing so much as a bath. I quite wished the resurrection could come off to enable me to say “Good day” to the interesting folk especially the Crusaders. It was the most fascinating place but Oh! if only my knowledge of history wasn’t so rusty as regards Wales.

My final excursion was to a very old Welsh Inn tucked away in the hills. Helen knew the landlady, and told her she wanted a friend from Australia to see the Bar parlour. It happened to be closed at the moment – D.O.R.A. – but the good lady very kindly took us in. We had our afternoon tea in a typical old Welsh Inn Bar – dating back to goodness knows when. It reminded me of old paintings I had seen of the coaching days. We sat at a beautifully carved old oak table, surrounded with interesting old things. The big open fireplace, overmantle and cosy corners of polished wood. An exquisite ancient inlaid sideboard dresser combination with no end of old willow patterned china and queer old pewter pots arrayed on it.
While hanging beside the fireplace was a beautifully polished warming pan.
To complete the picture in came a dear old sheep dog and sat at our feet, but he looked surprised and not altogether as if he approved of ladies in the bar – No doubt afternoon tea had a foreign odour in such surroundings.

June 26th 1917 – Moorholm Neston

Bid “goodbye” to Llangollen this afternoon. So sorry to leave my delightful bedroom, the view from my window, the lovely scenery everywhere.
Auntie’s packing is a fearsome undertaking. She travels with such unheard of things considering it was only a short holiday. Family portraits in silver frames, her own cutlery and silverware. About half a dozen umbrellas and sticks. Clothes for all seasons of the year. Having done her best she finally requested me to pack up the following into a basket:-

Hot water, bottle,          New cloth coat
Tigers toys                Bottle of ink
Tin of Nerve Tonic         Tin of Biscuits
Tigers rug and cushion,    Hair brushes, comb and towel and
bedspread.
Her knitting.
Some sugar she had over,    a pot of jam, writing pad and
few books.
A devil of a job!
This morning I was medically examined and got a certificate “in perfect health” put at the bottom, which I promptly posted to the Womans Army Auxilliary Corps.

July 4th 1917

Today I paid Liverpool a visit. Auntie going to Scotland for a change, after seeing her off in a Perth bound train I wandered here, there and everywhere on my “lonesome” The city part reminded me very much of Sydney, perhaps because it is said to be “Americanised.” At least Grannie gives that as a reason for not liking it. The chief street, representing our George St. is not quite as fine as the best parts of the Sydney thoroughfare, but it twists and turns like George and Pitt Streets do. To add to the resemblance the distance from their main Railway Station to the Quay – or whatever they call where their ferry steamers lie, that cross the Mercy, is about the same as with us. Their ferry boats don’t come up to ours, nor their jetties, nor their trams, which have 1st and 2nd class compartments if you please!! Above all, the dirt of the town is something horrible!!

None the less Liverpool has some very noble buildings. Some being a vastly more magnificent style than anything we possess. Nothing in Melbourne or Sydney comes up to St.Georges Hall, and its big “front”, with some fine bronze lions, nearly equal to Landseers in Trafalgar Square.
Studying the crowds in the streets, and the shops was of great amusement to me, especially the fantastic mixture of people. Some Russian sailors, an Anzac or two, swarms of “middies”, Invalid Soldiers, New Zealanders, Naval men of all ranks, a sailor with mine sweeper on his capband.

Women in all sorts of different uniforms. One looked bonzer in Khaki, short skirt a tunic coat with a “sambrown”, an Australian cock sided hat with an Aussie rising sun badge on her shoulder strap – dinky to the extreme – .

At the Art Gallery I discovered pictures I have always longed to see, having hitherto had to satisfy myself with coloured prints. Several of Rossettis, that disappointed me – the colouring I mean – and in Dante and Elizabeth – it would be nice without the figures. How pleased poor Rossetti would be at my criticism. Poynters “Faithful into Death”- the Roman Soldier standing in the doorway when Pompii was destroyed – absolutely lovly. The colouring marvelous. I liked a Romney and a study of a head by Sir Thomas Lawrence also a wonderful painting by Hamilton Hay “The falling Star”. Millars “The Martyr of Solway” also the original of “When did you last see your father?”. How often I’ve seen reproductions and prints of all there. The Museum is the most marvellous place, one could cheerfully spend a weeks wandering about it.

On the way to Liverpool by the way, we passed through Port Sunlight, Lever Bros. soapworks and model village.
How often I have quoted it in my Socialistic Arguments – The Ideal –
Well! Is is that all right, a perfect looking suburb.

In the centre, the huge soap works covering acres of ground. The residential part such quaintly pretty houses, all with gardens in front. Everywhere beautifully clean. No dirty terrace houses opening onto the street, with filthy looking backyards and evil looking laneways as at Rock Ferry, a busy munition manufacturing place a few miles distant.

I wish I could have got out at Port Sunlight and studied it at closer quarters. People tell me that the employees of the Soapworks dont appreciate the conveniences. They refuse to use the bathrooms except to store rubbish in, that Lever holme got so disgusted at the way they neglected the surroundings to their homes, that he eventually paid men to put in gardens and keep them in order.

It may be true enough because some strange remarks were made to me recently. When at the Red Cross work rooms the other day I noticed they only had hand sewing machines. Remarking on this to Auntie she put on a superior air and replied. “We prefer hand machines”. Her maid remarked once to me. “I know nothing about a sewing machine, I never use the things.”

I haven’t seen a set-in tub since I came to England and they still use nothing but those barbarous old flat irons.
July 7th

Feeling very put out and depressed at hearing that all the Australian mail matter dated 22nd to 27th May, has been torpedoed – gone to the bottom of the sea – and I shall never perhaps hear the news letters to me contained.

Worse still, the soldier lads wont get theirs. Its cruel hard and does not bear thinking about.

Found I was getting nervy, and worried more than usual so invested in a tonic. A filthy concoction that tastes like a dirty dishcloth smells, with a dash of Blood and bone added. Still! It seems to be doing its job.

Went today to see a charming and pretty woman who lives near here.

Poor thing! She’s dying of consumption, her husband is at the front, her only son a “middy” on active service. She recently lost a brother – killed in action – but she is so wonderfully cheerful I came away feeling ashamed to think how I have “grizzled” at times. In today’s paper I see Hubert Harvey-Kelly of the R.F.C. has been killed – poor Boy – my first cousin.

When I last saw him he was a nice little boy. Years ago at Bedford. He was 26 and won his D.S.O. for raiding the Kiel Canal – The youngest of the Harvey-Kelley’s.

July 11th.

A service card from C dated 29th June “Am quite well, received your letter dated 19th June”. That is better than nothing, but I sometimes
wish I could hear he was in hospital with a bullet in his leg or big toe, or some harmless part.

This waiting and expecting the fatal telegram gets on ones nerves in spite of my filthy tonic!

On the 7th Anniversary of our wedding day (9th) I went for a long walk to Raby Mere, a good eight mile jaunt. Oh! the beauty of the English cottage gardens full of Foxgloves, Hollyhocks and Canterbury bells. How I did wish C was with me. I watched old men cutting the meadows, and women stacking the hay.

Poor old chaps of 70 and over are busy mending the road near here, poor old things!! I’ve watched them on the job for over a week and they seem pretty good at each advising the other what to do next. Hearing a girl playing the violin in a house nearby, makes me long for the old Kellywood days and Lucy!

July 15th 1917  Silverdale  Sydenham  London.

Three days ago I received my calling up paper as follows-

Woman’s Army Auxiliary Corps
Cookery Section (Woman’s Legion)

July 11th 1917.

Dear Madam,

There is an immediate vacancy for a Military House Matron at £40 a year at Sydenham. Kindly proceed there on the 14th July. Packing some necessary undergarments and a few odds and ends, wearing a blue serge coat and skirt with the neatest hat I possess on my head, I set
off from Neston yesterday after a rather depressing farewell from Grannie.
She was much perturbed when weeping over me, because I had so little luggage asking in surprised tones “but where’s your hat box dear?” Poor old soul: She completely failed to realize I was “on active service” so to speak and would be shortly indistinguishable from hundreds of other women in a Khaki one piece frock, army overcoat and the plainest of Khaki hats, with a kit bag probably to hold the remainder of my belongings.

Arriving at Sydenham station, and making inquiries from an extremely youthful porter as to the way, he remarked after studying me somewhat critically.
“You’re another of them women soldiers I spose.”
This is an A.S.C. Depot, where men pass through on their way over seas. A certain number of officers as well as a good sprinkling of the rank and file permanent. Superintending to the drafts going to France and elsewhere. As a suburb, it somewhat resembles Strathfield, Leaderville or South Yarra with street after street of houses previously occupied by the well to do. Now, they shelter either lads or lassies in Khaki for the most part.

The once comfortable homes are now in sad disrepair, empty, some for the bare necessities of soldiers, but most of them have the remains of a garden, in some cases beautiful trees and shrubs.

Our Headquarters office is over what had in the good old days of Peace, been a skating rink, but is now used to accommodate some 2,500 men within the 24 hours at meals.

A delightful old place called Horner Grange on West Hill is the abode for Officers, while the Sergeants occupy another equally lovely old home nearby.

The W.A.A.C. cook and wait on both, but live in hostels as they are pleased to call them, some distance away.

Silverdale, which is really No.34 in the thoroughfare by that name, is where seventy girls and six N.C.O’s plus our chief or Superintendent sleep and eat.

The floors are bare, neither curtains nor blinds to the windows, while the rooms contain four to eight stretchers according to size, with hard mattresses, harder pillows, sheets and grey blankets with a chest of drawers to every two to three girls.

The “girls” mess room has long trestle tables and forms. Ours being
luxuriously furnished with six hard seated chairs, two easy cane ones and a table, covered with a grey blanket.

Our Chief, aptly described as “spinster” answers to the name of Robertson – Scotch - She is given to being too affable or too severe in alternate spasms, for no apparent reason. Which is trying, to say the least of it, especially when one has to suffer everything from ones superior officer.

In our Mess are five beside myself, ranging in age from twenty to fifty, all Head Cooks, who talk incessantly of the rations allowed, and tell gruesome tales, such as how they collect the crusts of bread left by the soldiers, sift them from the tobacco ash, cigarette butts and bacon rind, and make up into bread puddings.
I happened to be eating some at the time as our menu is the same although cooked by our own cooks on the premises, still, I had to swallow it quickly and not allow my thoughts to dwell upon what the soldiers were devouring.

Such drastic economy is caused through grim necessity, as it is against D.O.R.A. otherwise the Defence of the Realm Act to throw away any bread, or even feed stray birds on crumbs – don’t I know it!

Grannie presented me with some sandwiches to eat in the train, and stupidly not finishing them while eatable I was confronted with the problem of disposing of the stale remains.

The Law forbids them to be thrown into any of the four rubbish receptacles at the back kitchen door, each being designated for a special
breed of refuse. Tea leaves (supposed to make Khaki dye), bones and waste meat (used for munitions), dust and sweepings and the swill tub, chiefly vegetable peelings.

My first duty with a new girl is to introduce her to these four tins and impress upon her that something bordering upon a Court martial will result if anything other than stated is thrown into them, nor must tea leaves find their way into the swill tub, or dust amongst the bones.
But to return to my stale sandwiches. After keeping them under lock and key for some days I confided to an elderly Head Cook, who in whispered tones confessed to having the hard crust of a pork pie concealed in her room for a week, until visiting her daughter, where she incinerated it in the kitchen stove. Not daring to let the Cook here see me dispose of my hard dry crusts, I was reduced to making a small parcel and throwing it over a garden fence one evening, hurrying along, afraid to look back and feeling as if I had committed some heinous crime.

So far my chief occupation has been going about with the “Super” from one empty house to another, to see how many girls can be accommodated as Volunteers are arriving daily.
Seeing so many vacant homes sets one wondering where are the people who lived in them before the War? Those of fighting age at the front, their womenfolk on War work of some kind I suppose, but the old people and the children, Where are they?

July 22nd 1917  Sunday    44 West Hill

Moved into this billet on the 18th inst. with five new girls and another N.C.O. – Nancy Gray – Headwaitress at the Officers Mess. Picture a big three storied house standing in a fair sized “has been” garden. A flight of stone steps to a porch, a large front door, big hall. On the right the “girls “ mess room, straight ahead a huge room we are pleased to call the Recreation Room. At present it is empty except for two cane chairs and a small table. Above, are three rooms, a small one, mine, the others have sleeping accommodation for four and six respectively. Likewise ditto the floor above that, where Grey is stabled right over my head. Below stairs is the kitchen and the N.C.O’s Mess room which opens out onto the garden at the back.

It was the fun of Cork, suplimented by a considerable amount of frazzle and worry getting “fixed.”

Some W.D. (War Dept) lorries with a detachment of the A.S.G. men arrived with our furniture (?) In they marched, a steady stream of soldiers with stretchers, bedding, chests of drawers, tables, cases of crockery, dixies, chairs and what not on their backs. For all the world
like human ants. Being in charge they looked to me to give all the orders. Gee! What a time I had!!!

The girls were all strangers to one another, new to me and like me, new to the whole business of Army life.
The sight of the establishment when those twenty odd men departed after dumping things in every room, is beyond my powers of description. Yesterday more girls arrived and the same thing repeated at two other houses further up the hill Nos. 68 and 70.

We are still having our meals at Silverdale owing to want of fuel – The powers that be forgot to ration us with coal –

At breakfast this morning, hearing guns we all rushed to the window to see what looked like tiny white clouds suddenly appear here and there in the sky – London way - Apparently shells bursting from anti aircraft guns.

We soon tired of watching, and, as the raider didn’t seem to be coming our way we returned to our breakfast and the never failing topic of conversation – The days rations –

1st August.

Everyday means a full days work for me. All the houses have their full quota of new girls now.

A Headcook billited at 68 created a bit of excitement the other day. Some of the girls complained to me that she came back one night “half seas over” and was in the habit of having a few bottles of ale in her room. As all liquor is prohibited in the camp I reported the episode to the Chief. She got “the order of the boot” and promptly blamed me.
We had a few minor disagreements when I refused to let her boss our mess, and sit at the head of the table – 44 is entirely my department so I held my ground.

Anyway, while walking up West Hill from the office Gray came running after me with a message from the Chief to “return to Silverdale until her ladyship had taken her departure from 68” as she threatened to hit me “over the head with a bottle.”

Not wanting to be assassinated by that Surrey Hills method when more interesting forms of annihilation were offering, I willingly retraced my steps and dined at the old mess.

A Mrs. Jones another Headcook, a little bit of a woman, but the greatest talker ever born came along one evening when Hetty and I were trying to play Patience. She wouldn’t stop “nagging” even after we told her to “shut up”, so lifting her up bodily we shot her outside the back door and shut it.

She begged of us to give her gloves she’d left on the table, but we told her tomorrow would do just as well, so she finally departed in the best of good humours strange to say.

She is known to all of us as the woman who’s men folk were all “blown up.”

Her husband was killed by a shell bursting on him early in the war, an adopted son was blown to bits in the Folkestone Air Raid and having got engaged to be married to another soldier she recently heard he’d been blown up with a munitions dump.

I’m afraid one’s sense of humour is somewhat elastic in Wartime. Just as well perhaps!
Experienced my first air raid the other night. – Don’t count the other morning as one – Everyone had retired, I was reading in bed when hearing the girls talking in low voices in the adjoining room, and catching snatches of their conversation, such as “There goes another”, Look: its coming nearer” I suddenly realized the fact a Zepp raid was on. Hastily switching out the light, I too lent out of the window to see what was happening.

Gray, looking down from above, suggested I go up to her room as the view was better. The silence seemed uncanny, as in a Zepp raid they appear to be afraid of bringing the beastly thing down over a thickly populated area, therefore one hears no guns. I didn’t feel a bit frightened mentally, but talk about shaking knees: My knee caps had the “jiggers.” Never before have I known such a physical state of idiocy, or was it a state of physical idiocy.

When I finally negotiated the stairs I had to hold them to keep them from jumping out of place – It felt as if they might anyway, and I was angry with myself for being such a fool. We could only see what looked like flares being dropped from the sky, soon after each came the dull thud and rumble of an explosion. We tried to speculate as to what part of the old city had been hit, and felt a sickening sensation in ones stomach when thinking of the damage done and possible loss of life. It only last about an hour, when we all returned to bed and strange to say slept.
August 9th 44 West Hill

Up at 5 am. to see the new staff go off to commence work at Horner Grange.
My usual daily routine commences at 7 o’clock when Letty Green, my pet housemaid brings me a morning cup of tea.
Breakfast follows, and after seeing that everything is in order here, I walk up West Hill to No.s 68 & 70 to inspect the rooms and interview the housemaid in charge.
(68 & 70 are just sleeping quarters for 36 girls and 4 N.C.O’s)
Then, a half mile walk to Silverdale, where I poke my nose into every hole and corner.
Investigate any cases of sickness and listen to complaints from the staff.
The cooks so persistently greeted me with grumbles about sweepings from the bedrooms being thrown into the swill tub, or amongst the bones that I decided to stop the offence once and for all. Knowing the guilty party must be in the billet I ordered all the girls down to the yard.

Making the unhappy looking crowd of about 15 stand in a semi circle around the offending article, which was far from savoury, with the usual odour attached to rubbish tins, plus the evil appearance of dust and fluff, wisps of hair and bits of cotton floating around amidst stale soup, cabbage stalks and scrapings from saucepans, I expounded for the umpteenth time upon the importance of not mixing the different breeds of rubbish.
Pointing to the evil looking concoction I said “Who put that dust in there?” Dead silence.
“You see for yourself” I continued, “What an odious job is in store for someone to sift out the dust and stuff from the rest. So unpleasant in fact that I would not ask anyone innocent of the offence to do it. I shall have to do it myself if the guilty one hasn’t the decency to own up.”

Out stepped a country girl from the North of England with a dialect once heard never forgotten, and confessed to having committed the offence.

I put out my hand and shook hers, congratulated her upon her honesty, and hoped that all the others would act as honourably in the event of any further trouble.

Then comes my daily “Report” to the Chief. She seems to make a point of keeping one standing for perhaps 10 minutes, while she sits and fiddles with things on the writing desk. All she has to do is ask if all is in order and if so, let one go off to continue the daily routine.

More often than not she sends me upon some quite superfluous errand, such as counting the chest of drawers at 68 or the beds at Silverdale. Each N.C.O at different times has been told off to count those beastly bedsteads. Once some idiot made the number too many and that got all the rest of us into a row. Personally, I’ve done it twice, the third time, finding a convenient spot where I could see if her ladyship turned up unexpectedly, I just yawned to the girls until it was about time to report the “correct number.” It has become a camp joke, only yesterday an A.S.C. Sergeant passing me in the street, remarked by way of a friendly salutation, “Off to count the beds at Silverdale?”
Back at 44 for dinner, after which the whole establishment has to be given a look over in case the O.C. of the Camp Major Hanley happens to be making a tour of inspection. Woe betide me if everything isn’t in applepie order when he appears upon the scene. Seeing the girls changing from one billet to another, settling tin pot disputes and that the rations are all delivered, fills in the rest of the day. If the chance occurs I dodge off, A.W.L. to the first house at Penge Theatre with Gray, or perhaps Pearl comes up to our mess and tells us amusing stories from the cookhouse. Thus the days slip past while the War goes gaily on..

August 12th 1917  (Sunday)

This diary gets neglected sadly while the days fly past. Sunday is much the same as the others, if anything busier as a rule, because the powers that be, for some unknown reason generally decide a sudden move or alteration in our routine upon the Sabbath morn. Yesterday from 2p.m. till 8 o’clock I was at the office doing up laundry lists and Insurance cards, as well as dozens of tiddly winking jobs such as going up the street to buy a photo frame for the Super. I hate this form of occupation, done in what the Chief calls “my spare time.”

As the matter of fact I have no spare time. The five houses full time keep me busy, seeing that they are kept in order. Straffing the girls from throwing rubbish out of the window, leaving their aprons in the Recreation rooms and seeing all meals are in order. The laundry days are nightmares, first seeing to all the dirty sheets, towels, and aprons
etc. being counted, and when returned having been washed by some Military Dept. better fitted to make concrete – sorting out the articles in said disrepair.

They are a fine lot of girls, and I get on tip top with them all, half are grown women, several married, their husbands at the front. Still, they are all “girls” to me, and when naughty I “Straff” the lot, irrespective of age. Mrs. Y’s husband has been in France for 9 months, Mrs. Murry’s is a prisoner of War – taken in 1914 – anothers only son was killed recently while Letty, the prettiest thing in Khaki said “goodbye” to her “boy” on Monday last and he is already back in hospital wounded in the thigh. Gray’s beloved has been in Egypt for nearly three years, another girls only brother went down in the Queen Mary.

What a lot I know shared his fate – And yet, they all sing and laugh and keep working these long hours “doing their bit”, Always smiling – It gives one a queer feeling in ones throat to stop and think of just how they must really feel.

I’ve learnt to admire them all so much they are fine girls and splendid workers. One, a ripping worker told me she went to service at 14 and got L4 a year. After a couple of years it was increased to L5, and after seven years with the same people she was paid the handsome wage of L16 a year.

Aeroplanes are flying overhead while I write, and news has leaked out from Horner Grange – The Officers mess – that a big battle is going on in France. The search lights have been very brilliant the last few nights and there is talk of an expected raid.
Do hope they prefer daylight, but I would rather like to see a Zepp.

Strange to say one never thinks about these things although everything is far from normal around me. It all seems to be part and parcel of our daily routine. Just sometimes a fleeting vision of the peaceful days of long ago crosses my brain, and I see C- working in the orchard, and our little bush home. Then – tramp, tramp, tramp of hundreds of feet, or the noise as dispatch riders tear past. Officers shout orders, and the vision vanishes to be replaced by Khaki clad figures marching past, an observation balloon floats about up in the sky. An Ambulance glides along and I wonder if ever things will be normal again. Will we settle down once more to a hum drum existence struggling to make ends meet. I wonder!!

If I ever get back to Australia will the memories of the 3rd Battalion of the W.A.A.C. fade into the distant past and all the tragic and amusing things be forgotten!!! I was up late last night bathing a girls foot and ankle. She sprained it at the cookhouse. Previously I had a very faint idea of the girl, beyond the fact that she was a trifle untidy, fat and rather shapeless and answered to the name of Whitworth. Now, the poor kid can’t thank me enough for the little I could do for her and I see a different girl altogether when I look at her. Strange isn’t it? Unless one comes in direct contact one misses half the charm of ones fellow creatures.

A bold sort of “Arriet” type a Mrs. Robson I find to be really a wit and one of the best and cleanest girls in this billet. Looking past the
coarseness one sees a really handsome woman. Her husband – no doubt a typical Pearlie – was killed not long ago. All these girls in West Hill are to me an endless study, interesting to a degree. With 700 men and 90 Sergeants in the camp needless to say then never lack a male escort – a fresh one every night if they choose.

**August 14th**

I see in the paper that sure enough there was an air raid over London yesterday. I never noticed it here, although I was told by one of the A.S.C. Sergeants one was on. – I must be getting deaf surely – too busy I expect.

Last night by some bungle there was a shortage of dinner at the Officers mess and the hub-bub ever since has been too dreadful for words. The waitresses abusing the cooks and the cooks blaming the Ration men who no doubt in turn blame someone else.

Just got a letter from C. His lot had a rotten spin in the line, but he adds “did good work”. A shell burst right amongst his gun crew wounding all except C and one other. Anyway he is alive and well and out for a spell poor old chap. Alas! very few of the lot went over with him are left now. The Super is a perfect bother.

Last night she gave orders for all the girls to be in the Mess Room, she wished particularly to speak to them.

At 10.30 she rushed in and said “Oh! I haven’t time to speak to them tonight” and vanished. Leaving me the job of telling them. The
wretched girls had been penned up in the mess room like sheep for about two hours with absolutely nothing to do.

I didn’t get to bed until 11.30 after hearing all the woes about the Officers mess from the Head Cooks, and seeing that all the girls were in bed.

This morning they made such a clatter going on duty I couldn’t sleep so shall “straff” them later – at least when I can collect the girls from Room 10 – the culprits -.

August 18th 1917

Our billet cook suffered miserably with toothache all yesterday and kept saying she’d feel better if only she could get out of doors for awhile.

That is not the easiest thing to accomplish as she cannot go without a pass. However, as I am allowed to preamble around the immediate neighbourhood at a reasonable hour I suggested she come for a walk with me in the evening.

It was a bit late when we got underway. Mrs. Murry with her head enveloped in a knitted scarf mumbled something about “it will be shut” and set off at a terrific pace. Pondering on what “it” might be I hurried along beside her.

From a fast walk she broke into a jog trot. I dared not let her out of my sight so I too, jog trotted, begging to know why such haste.

Without replying she suddenly rushed across the street with me in pursuit to pull up outside the corner “pub”. Seeing me hesitate she begged me to “come on in” adding “they’ll be shut in a minute.”

99
“Never mind me I’ll wait here” said I.
“Well, let me bring you a glass to the door” she pleaded.
I implored her not to bother about me, but to go on in herself and to hurry up.

The street of course was in darkness owing to likely air raids. For an instant a dull glimmer of a light showed as she opened the door into the Bar Parlour.
I stood outside and held my sides which ached with suppressed laughter. Me! Having a drink at the Pub door!! The vision was too utterly funny – It was quite funny enough to be standing outside waiting for her to reappear. If only my friends and relatives could see me now!! I thought.

It is only fair to explain that in the U.K. quite decent working women go into the “pubs” and have their glass of ale. More often than not accompanied by their husband or sweetheart. I have been told, that until recently, the whole family could go into such places, even to the baby in arms, but now the law prohibits children being admitted, with the result it is no uncommon sight to see a perambulator and wee toddlers waiting outside while Mum and Dad “refresh” themselves. It seems rather awful unless one knows the whole circumstances, and I have heard quite good arguments against preventing the children from going into the warm Bar parlour instead of being forced to remain outside, often in the snow or fog.

Another episode this week, also connected with Mrs. M. was the burying of some half dozen loaves of bread. Our issue one day proved to be absolutely uneatable. The loaves were green with mould. We made “do” somehow without them, and were
then faced with the colossal problem of how to get rid of the beastly things.
For days I felt as if a corpse was hidden in the cupboard.
Making secret investigation in the back garden I discovered a water worn drain in the far corner. The only implement to enlarge it was a broken shovel minus a handle.
Discreet silence regarding the event was observed as disobeying D.O.R.A. is a dangerous pastime.

Mrs. Murry and I waited until the girls were asleep, then in the dead of night, feeling like a pair of criminals we set out upon this law breaking business.
Silently we carried the basket full of the darned things, down to the spot.
Placing the loaves – hard as rocks by now – into the drain, we scratched the earth over them and hid the “grave” by covering it with dead leaves. It sounds all so silly, and yet we were honestly scared, having good reason to be.
Visions of being “on the mat”, the Supers rage, the O.C’s disapproval, and above all that awe inspiring D.O.R.A. haunted us for quite a while.

August 27th
44 West Hill Sydenham.

A girl with “livestock” in her head by putting her hat on top of others in the cloak room at the Rink infected the whole of Silverdale.
A frightful hue and cry went up, and one afternoon recently I visited the billet to discover a single file of girls lined up on the first floor with
their hair hanging down, being ushered into the bathroom for inspection.

One of the Head Cooks, a Miss Bates, who looks like the Matron of a Young Woman’s Rescue Home, was in attendance armed with tooth comb and ointment. Some of the girls were reduced to tears, assuring me they hadn’t any. “The indignity of it” wailed one poor lady of middle age. A wit amongst them called it “the latest “Air raid.”

I hastily retired from the scene of action for fear of being “nabbed” for inspection and before returning to West Hill bought several shampoo’s at the Chemist guaranteed to kill obnoxious insects on sight. I offered them to all and sundry under my care. Poor things! they were scared stiff for fear Miss Bates might be sent up to continue her research work in our billet.

One night when just as I was getting into bed at 11.30 loud knocks at the front door made me hurriedly turn my light out, thinking an Air raid was on the police patrol had spied it. Going down in the dark to investigate I found a soldier and a new girl. It appears, she had come from the country. Had been told to report at a billet near Woolwich. Upon arrival there about 7 o’clock she found it empty. She tried to get a room for the night but failed, so went to the police. They, after some considerable time managed to get into touch with Headquarters. She was told to report to our Super.
After travelling in several ‘buses, and I might add it was a
teaming wet night she got out and asked the way. No one knew, but
billet and the officer sent her along to me. Finally a soldier came to the
rescue and brought her to his officer’s
Poor unfortunate girl, she was in a state of fright, and relieved beyond
words when I welcomed her with some supper unearthed in our mess.
It was long past twelve by the time she was finally settled in one of our
spare beds. And so to bed!

September 8th 1917

We’ve had quite a number of Air Raids lately. The Hun
generally makes his appearance about nightfall and continues his
straffing in relays, sometimes until nearly midnight.
One raid started somewhat suddenly and to make sure all the girls were
down stairs I ran from room to room to see none were asleep or just not
bothering to come down. The house rattled and shook while the noise
of the guns was awful as I raced up and down the stairs. Above the din I
could hear loud protests from the girls in the basement “Never mind
looking up there Mrs. Good, come down! For goodness sake! Come
down!
An absentee, somewhat dishevelled and breathless suddenly appeared
at the front door, accompanied by a rather fine looking soldier boy.
They had been out for a walk and ran back here for shelter.

The laws that be, prohibit the presence of the male sex in our
billetts, but one could not turn the lad out again into the barrage. Much
to his joy, I invited him in to join the girls upon the back stairs. There
they sat in tiers, our only seating accommodation. Some overflowed
into the kitchen to sit on the table.
We Sergeants sat in our mess room adjoining.
Where we tried to play Patience by the faint flicker from the fire in the
grate.

   It, with the fire in the kitchen stove and the glow from
cigarettes, gave us our only lighting. We were a merry throng none the
less, singing songs to the accompanyment of the guns and indulging in
supper consisting of cocoa and wartime cakes. The Tommy was a great
acquisition as he had a very good baritone voice and a smart repartee.
He was therefore a great favourite with the lassies. One following
evening Fritz arrived as usual this time two soldiers (one our friend
mentioned above) and a sailor sought refuge with a girl each – Further
addition to our concert party!
I’ve been told that they hang around near the billet each evening now
hoping for a raid.

   To confess the truth it is rather pleasant having the lads with us,
so I risk the awful consequence of it ever being discovered. There is
little to fear as they all know there would be the devil to pay were the
“Heads” to get wind of it. Hence a discreet silence upon the subject
except amongst the rank and file.

   Several lads with “girls” at Silverdale tried it on there. The
Super put them in the far corner of the cellar away from the girls until
the “all clear.”
Their comments were no doubt unrepeatable but there was great hilarity amongst our crowd when they heard about it. Last evening being bored with life, six of us decided upon a “bus ride”. Halls and Hillman led the way and we clambered on top of the first that came along. It was bound for Woolwich.

As a raid was likely, I raised a protest only to be told to “Shut up.”

Of all horrible places to be in under such circumstances, densely populated and the Arsenal there, a target the Germans were always trying to hit.

I attempted to suggest an alternative route but again the good humoured chorus roared “Shut up! for goodness sake, Shut up!” Resigned to whatever fate had in store we buzzed along through dismal dark streets seeing nothing of interest except an odd “special” awaiting an air raid warning.

Fritz apparently had the night off, but I still can’t think why they chose Woolwich when we could have gone countrywards!

September 11th

We are kept hard at it all day, but I love being in the thick of things. It is strange to walk amongst a few hundred Khaki clad men and know one is classed with them in a way, as an N.C.O. in the Womens Army Auxiliary Corps.

An air raid last night damaged the Embankment, and Cleopatra’s Needle, and the Charing Cross Hospital had a close shave. The Strand too came in for a few bombs.
It commenced after we’d gone to bed, so we broke all rules and watched it from our windows. They are becoming such an everyday event that I continue my work unless the noise gets too close. Last night they came back three times but I slept though the last visitation.

On Sunday feeling rather miserable one of the billet cooks joined me in a walk. Getting tired we hopped on the top of a ‘bus bound for Shoreditch. Along we went through Peckam Rye, down the Old Kent Road across the Tower Bridge to suddenly realise we were out of bounds – without a London pass – There was nothing to do but chance it so on we went.

Dear me! I cannot realise I am really in Blighty I seem to be half stunned unable to take things into my brain properly. Every now and again I get a sort of vision of a previous existance at Budgerie as if it was another life, another F.G. cannot realise it is still the same person. Oh! for good old peaceful days! I guess even C’s ardour for fighting the Hun has somewhat cooled by now.

And this is London!!!
Here I am my mind so taken up with the trivial everyday events I dont seem to be able to realise it properly.

Certainly I have been thrilled at the sight of the Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, Whitehall, but Oh! for less anxiety!!

Tomorrow I’m off to see my two “Kashgar” friends providing they haven’t been blown skywards in last nights raid.
October 2\textsuperscript{nd} 1917

Air raids nearly every night last week!
The usual procedure, all migrate to the basement. Amuse ourselves, sometimes for hours, as best we can sing songs and spin yarns. Anything to keep the girls from listening to the noise. Supper is always a cheering episode.

One acts strangely at times during an air raid. The desire not to alarm one another seems to be uppermost in ones sub-conscious mind. An instance recently is a good example.
Having to leave on 24\textsuperscript{th} ult. I went to see my Adelaide friend, Miss Pollitt. She has a sort of Bed-sitting room, use of gas ring abode in Pimlico, near Victoria Station.
She was putting the finishing touches to the evening meal when I heard guns going off. I guessed what it meant but said nothing. We sat down and proceeded to enjoy our tea. The noise grew louder. We talked upon various topics. The windows rattled from the concussion as each gun was fired.

We continued to eat and make the most of our opportunity of exchanging our latest news from Australia.
A nearby gun made a terrific “bang”.
“Is that an air raid?” quietly remarked my hostess in the tone of voice one might inquire “Is that a knock at the door?”
“It sounds a bit like it” I replied, as if I wasn’t quite sure. Which we both were.
At that moment a very agitated landlady knocked on the door, begged us not to stay there any longer but join the other inhabitants of the establishment “down below”.

It was bout 7 o’clock when we deposited ourselves on the bottom step of a flight leading to a sort of narrow cellar kind of place. Total darkness of course. There were a collection of old ladies comfortably installed in easy chairs with cushions and rugs. We made the best of it, but conversation was heavy going, and it was by far the longest and nastiness air raid I have sat through so far.

Near midnight the “All clear” went and Miss P. and I lost no time in rushing out of doors to see what, if any damage had been done nearby.

Between the Abbey and Parliament House we found police and firemen barricading around an unexploded aerial torpedo. As we were the only lunatics about they kindly let us go quite close and look down the hole in the roadway. A surprisingly small one, appeared to be only about 6 to 8 inches in diameter.

By the greatest good luck I caught a tram going to Forest Hill. After a long unpleasant walk through dark deserted streets at some unearthly hour I finally arrived back at 44.

Gray and Mrs. Murray, very worried about my safety, were waiting up, which I thought awfully decent. Especially as they had kept some fish and chips for me and I was very uncomfortably hungry.

October 2nd continued.

My orders this morning were to escort Whipp, one of the Head Cooks, to her home, somewhere near Golders Green. She’s been on the
sick list with an abscess in her ear. Being a bit of a gay-bird she wasn’t too pleased with my company I fancy. It was a devil of a long way, we changed buses three times. Whipp remarked several times “You needn’t come any further I’ll be all right.” Orders are orders however, and I stuck to her like the proverbial leech although I hadn’t the faintest idea where we were or where her home was.

For some unknown reason she decided to get off one ‘bus en route, we’d hardly reached the pavement when there was an air raid warning. People ran in all directions for home or shelter. It was an unsatisfactory spot for either where we were concerned. A long low wall one side of the road, on the other a terrace of houses with their front doors opening slap onto the street. Whipp said she had a slight acquaintance with people who lived in one so we rushed across the road and rang the door bell – By this time the guns were getting noisy and most people seemed to have succeeded in finding cover.

Giving up hope of arousing Whipps friends we hurried along in search of some hole or corner to hide in. A little girl about 11 years of age ran towards us in a frightened state inquiring, “Where can I go? I’m all alone”. I heard myself replying in a most reassuring tone, “Come along with us, you’ll be all right,” I wasn’t exactly feeling that way myself, but the youngster cheered up at once and joined us in a jog trot towards some shops. Most of them had shut their doors but we pulled up at a lady Hairdresser’s establishment.

The lady and her assistants were standing at the door as we three hurtled in.
What interior there was seemed to begin and end almost, at the entrance with plate glass windows each side. There were a couple of cane chairs while curtains hanging around enclosed a space that barely held us all. Behind one curtain I discovered a cupboard under an invisible stairway. We cleared it of brooms and mops to deposit the small child there on a box. She completely filled it up. I advocated this because I repeatedly notice that houses practically demolished in a raid have the staircase left standing.

The rest of us stood shoulder to shoulder in the small space usually occupied by a waiting customer. Fortunately the raid only lasted about 20 minutes – long enough for me to discover that, except for the roof just over our heads the rest was made of glass.

What a place for a raid!!!

Whipp decided to go straight home after that for which I was thankful.

October 10th  44 West Hill Sydenham

The “Super” came up here a few nights ago to inform us all we would have to decide about signing on or not, with the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps, which has absorbed the Womens Legion within its ranks. She read out yards of Rules and Regulations which told us that once one signed on there was no way out “for ten years or the duration, whichever the greater.” Desertion meant six months or a fine of L100.

When she asked if any were not signing on, three of us stepped forward. Mrs. Murry, Hilman and myself.
Hilman who had been “on the mat” a few days previously for going gay with the Despatch riders wasn’t asked why, but Murry and I were put through our facings. Murry excused herself on account of her three children while I refused because I was told in the event of Charles being wounded, “leave” for longer than a day or two could not be promised. No good to me after coming over 12,000 miles to be near if I was wanted.

However, she asked me to remain on until the W.A.A.C. is in full swing and all the new girls settled down.

“I hear some of the “girls” aren’t signing on” said an A.S.C. Sergeant to Gray next day. When told who they were he exclaimed “ ______ she’s (the Super) losing the three best”. This amused me muchly as I’ve never seen the man, but so much for camp gossip, the men have us all ticked up.

Now I am on the look out for some other War work. Last Tuesday saw me in London with Pearl who knows the ropes re cook jobs on the Y.M.C.A. canteens. We called at one near Victoria Station and I was interviewed by a fashionable dame as a prospective cook for night work. Hours midnight till 9am. at L1 a week. I kept a straight face with difficulty, the poor lady being very nice but obviously puzzled, as I no doubt did not resemble what she imagined a cook should. My duties were simple enough, simply to fry eggs and bacon and sausages for any soldiers wandering in at those unearthly hours. Make milk puddings and cakes for the next day. I would have chanced everything but cakes! – Wartime ones at that minus eggs, sugar and
butter!!! No thanks! However, I backed out gracefully saying I was still in the Legion.

On the way back in the ‘bus, an Australian gave me his seat, so I promptly introduced myself as a fellow countryman. He was a Victorian, and told me C’s Division (3rd) was in action. He had only just left Ypres and said it was mud to his knees. What a treat to talk to another Australian.

Investing in some fried fish and chips on the way to 44, Gray and I sat up until midnight feasting and yarning in the Mess room.

One of our middle aged “girls” a weird person who has been cook to a titled family for umpteen years told me today about her “young man” The poor chap was killed early in the War by the way, but she was enlarging upon his good qualities saying “He was so kind in wet weather. It would be a ‘bus here and a ‘bus there”.

Such attention indeed, hard luck he was killed.

As she was forever talking of her late employer Lady Beecham, I used to refer to her in our mess by that name, never dreaming the nickname would go further. Imagine my horror when she came complaining to me one day that not only did the whole cook house staff call her lady Beecham but when getting onto a ‘bus in London she overheard a soldier saying “Here comes Lady Beecham”.

I looked as innocent as I could and remarked “However did they come to call you that, most extraordinary”.

Fortunately she never guessed I was the guilty party, as I certainly was and felt it.
Oct 21st (Sunday) 59 Coombe Rd. Upper Sydenham.

Yesterday I said goodbye to my life in the Woman’s Legion. On Friday night there was an awful air raid, a Zepp floated silently overhead dropping incendiary bombs and devilish aerial torpedoes. It being my last night at 44 we put blankets over the window in our Messroom and kept the light burning while we sergeants indulged in a special supper.

A knock upon the door and the house staff appeared led by Letty, they begged me to change my mind and sign on and then presented me with the prettiest little brooch as a keepsake, thanking me for being “so good” to them all – Don’t know what I ever did – They asked me to go to the kitchen where the whole mob were collected, dark figures against the walls, the only light being the fire in the stove. The waitresses gave me a lovely handbag, silver pencil and real lace handkerchief made in Buckinghamshire by an old lady of 82 Grandmother of one of them.

They sang songs and several made short speeches. When I stood up to thank them, Peggy Preston a runt of a Welshgirl struck up “For she’s a jolly good woman”. The air raid was well and truly forgotten until in the middle of my feeble attempt to thank them all, there came a terrific thud and bang that shook the house and was followed by a nasty rumble not far distant – an aerial torpedo had made a nasty mess not far distant. But it didn’t prevent the girls making an apple pie of my bed, sewing up my night garments and roping my suitcase to the bannisters.
In the morning a few of the staff from Silverdale came up, gave me a nice silver shoe horn and buttonhook, wept over me and made me feel nearer tears than I have been for a long while. Poor girls, all I had done was to try and make life a little more bearable and boss them as fairly as I knew how. I was awfully sorry to say goodbye. It was a melancholy business altogether.

I took quite a tender farewell of the dapper little old A.S.C. Sergeant and his offsider that left the Laundry. He shook my hand most affectionately and abused the W.A.A.C. for not making special allowance for married women.
When it came to my final departure, the girls that were in the house lined the steps and nearly broke down completely. Standing there they all looked the picture of misery and I admit I felt that way myself. Just after I left 25 new girls marched in in full uniform with their packs, an officer in charge – my successor – I hear they now have three women to do my job and each being paid the same as I was getting.

Well! here I am very lonely and feeling very unsettled. Am going off job hunting tomorrow. Have a nice bedroom over a shoemenders shop, his wife has been very nice and kind but it seems strange after the clatter of 44. I get my meals any old where until I see what turns up.
I am hoping to get put on at the Australian Army Base P.O. as I answered an advertisement for clerks – experience not necessary – which suited me – It certainly seemed a mad idea as I was several days late in applying. The mess at 44 all laughed at me for even contemplating it, but one never knows one’s luck. I’ve answered two more ads. one as help in an Officers Convalescent Hospital and another at some Canteen.

I wonder what fate has in store?!

No news from Charles lately, when he last wrote he was very “blue” because the battalion had gone into action and he had been left behind in the nuclens.

October 26\(^{th}\) 1917  Upper Sydenham

Air raids pretty frequent lately.

On 22\(^{nd}\) I went up to London to see about the A.B.P.O. job. The ‘bus conductor suggested I stay on top until we passed Piccadilly Circus to see where a bomb was dropped near Swan and Edgars the previous night.

A huge hole right in the middle of the roadway.

Of course the Postal people had obtained all the clerks they required. I quite expected to hear that, but I pushed my claim as an Australian and was finally promised a position when one fell vacant.

That satisfied me. I’ve developed into a most happy-go-lucky sort of person lately.
“Put in time until the War is over” is my motto. Thinking a little occupation while awaiting the P.O. job might not go amiss, I toddled off to the Y.M.C.A. Headquarters.

There I offered my services for any sort of duty they considered I was capable of performing.

First I must fill in a lengthy form, amongst the many queries was “Are you prepared to give Religious Instruction to the Troops?”. I presume those in authority framed that application form to find out everything there was to know about any humble person, Anxious to do their small bit to help. I wish I had asked for a copy as a souvenir – they omitted nothing that I could think of – I nearly gave it best, but curiosity made me persevere and complete the task.

They then informed me that owing to air raids being so bad of late it was difficult to get helpers at Canteens. “Would you go to one at London Bridge from 6 p.m. till 11.30 o’clock?” They asked me, adding that I had better go early and be interviewed by the Lady in Charge first.

I duly arrived about 5.30 armed with the overall and headgear I use to wear at the Red X at Neston.

The lady was at first very gushing but showed decided annoyance at my overall not being the prescribed colour.

“Haven’t you got a mauve one?” she said when I happened to tell her it was white. For awhile I thought that was going to debar me from the honourary job of waiting upon soldiers for a few hours. However, she decided finally in a very condescending manner that “perhaps it doesn’t matter for once in a while”.

117
I was then ushered upstairs where about a dozen girls – all well to do type with “quite the best people” air about them, were changing into mauve overalls and chatting to one another. I slunk into a corner and put on my white garment which seemed to brand me as a rank outsider. They all ignored me except one who came late. She seemed rather shy, but kindly inclined. Asked me if I was new on the job – Pretty obvious if I looked like I felt – she told me odd things connected with the work and also where they took refuge, during air raids – The Fishmongers Hall –

Dolled up like mauve V.A.D.’s they all trailed off down stairs to a big room where soldiers from all parts of the Empire sat at small tables eating meals of sorts. The Lady in charge came up to me and in that voice denoting “intense culture” one hears amongst a certain type of Englishwoman, said “Can you make toast?” To reply in like manner I thought “I might be able to” if shown where and how. She led me up to a gas toaster at the far end of the room and there I stood toasting bread for five hours, except for a quarter of an hours spell while I had some supper.

The “kindly one” told me that we were expected to pay for any meal the same way as the soldiers, by getting a ticket outside to the amount you wished to spend on food. Retiring to a table with 4d worth of food and drink the Lady followed me and demanded “Have you paid for that?” I assured her I had, but it seemed to me a meanness on the part of those in charge to grudge a paltry cup of cocoa and scone to anyone willing
to give hours of service. I felt as if I was being accused of stealing the wretched meal.

However, her ladyship gushed again before I departed so feeling I might as well continue with the work the next night I asked her would it be in order if I came along.

“Ah!…….I cannot say” she babbled. “You see I only have Tuesday nights. Tomorrow Lady……….is here, and of course she had her own helpers. You would have of course to see her first. Sorry! But I really would not care to say. You had better call and see her yourself as I shall not be here again until next Tuesday”.

“Thanks!” said I.

“The Y.M.C.A. and Lady Fuzleum can find someone else willing to risk air raids” I mumbled to myself as I walked across London Bridge at midnight to catch a train back to my small room.

Pathway From Wells Road down to now abandoned Upper Sydenham Station
Today I wandered up to the Great City and had tea with my cousin Florrie Mears and was jolly glad it was her “shout” as it came to 4/6 each a devilish queer tea too, for a fashionable shop in Oxford St. Scrambled eggs, oatcake and maize flour rock cakes at 4 p.m. One gets used to queer eating arrangements when in the Army and Florrie belongs to some branch or other.

*Tunnel under West Hill where abandoned line emerges at abandoned Upper Sydenham Station*

On my way I called in at Victoria Station and saw a lot of soldiers arrive, straight from the trenches in France. Australians, muddy, dirty unshaven, carrying their full packs on their backs to their battered tin hats. It is a sight one cannot describe, nor can one describe the look on the men’s faces – not happy, but thankful to be in Blighty and “on leave”.
Oh! were it but Australia.
I felt like speaking to them but feared I’d blubber like a kid.

Air raids have been bad but strange to say one gets used to them in a way.
Tonight when the moon showed so clearly everyone in London was bent on getting out of it, and the crush getting a ‘bus beggars description.
I gave up being polite after missing two and simply fought my way, not minding if I did push an older woman off the step.

London grows on one, to look down the Thames through the mist of a winters evening makes one feel proud to be a tiny wee spec of a part owner of the Great City, because every British subject must feel like that.
To go down Whitehall on top of a ‘bus cross Westminster Bridge and pass beneath Big Ben gives one a feeling impossible to describe. Now, it is all extra interesting as one sees every sort, kind and description of soldier from every corner of the Empire, as well as our Various Allies. Americans abound now, both Soldiers and Sailors.

I don’t like the few privates I have seen at close quarters but the American officers look fine. They seem strangely built men and their uniform is queer looking, makes them so long in the back, minus any waistline. One sees any number of Belgiums and French and lately men from South Africa and Newfoundland, Still Australians and New Zealanders predominate.

I never cease to be thankful I was strong minded enough to come to England, and lucky enough to get here.
Funny, and perhaps lonely in a way as my life has been I have had experiences I wouldn’t have missed for anything.

My only trouble is that so many thing happen I fear my brain will never retain one half and my diary is a poor old thing as diaries go but will be something to remind me of these wonderful days.

Auntie wrote a frantic letter bemoaning my being alone in London and enlarging up on the various unpleasant part I seemed to frequent, such as London Bridge! Poor old Auntie she’d like to hear I kept to Park Gate and Regent St.

She wants me to return to Moorholm, but as long as I can knock out a living London carries the day.

November 4th 1917 59 Coombe Rd.

Air raid every night lately. They usually commence about 11 p.m. just as everyone has got comfortably asleep, and they last until about 2 or 3 o’clock.

I generally get up and join my landlady and her four small children in the tiny kitchen her husband being a “special” is always called out for duty upon such occasions.

It is pretty dull and we all yawn a good deal but listening to Fritz flying overhead and the noise of our barrage keeps us awake. I thought a neighbour had a small puppy shut up one night but discovered it was the whine of the shells from the gun at Bechenham passing overhead.

A letter from C yesterday, he has been in the fighting and tells me Jock Young has been killed – the nice officer who gave me afternoon tea at Larks Hill –
I also received a notice from the Aust. Army Base P.O. telling me to report tomorrow – That’s good news –

November 10th 1917

Up bright and early on the 5th inst. and off to the A.B.P.O. There was a fog over London. I lost my way near the Bank and walked miles out of my way, got completely lost and have no idea where I went, but by good luck managed to get to Mount Pleasant just before 9 o’clock.

I was put on sorting letters returned from France, dirty and much readdressed including some marked “Killed in Action” other “wounded” “In hoop” “Unknown in A.S.C.” and so on written on them. I noticed one marked “Deserter”.

It rather gave me the “pip” to see youngsters Xmas cards with “Killed in Action” scratched on the envelope, but these days one has just to swallow hard and force oneself not to dwell upon horrors or we would all be stark staring mad. On letter was covered with dried blood.

The working hours are from 9 till 1 o’clock 2 till 5.30 and I get 25/- week with a chance of a rise if good at the job. I think I’ll be that as “my hearts right there”, hurrying letters off to the boys overseas.

The system is wonderfully interesting and considering the difficulties to be overcome marvelously easy.

On F’s today I noticed a Robert Fetherstonhaugh “Killed in Action” – a relation of mine no doubt. A few days ago some for the Dalrymple Hay boys passed through my hands also young Pittocks from Auburn. Thus I gather news of the whereabouts of many lads I know. The soldiers working there are mostly men who were at Gallipoli, been badly
wounded but still fit to do some work other than active service. The Corporal in charge of our room Billy Quantrill by name, is a real decent sort, and all the girls have a soft spot for him. His cheery “Righto girls carry on” is like pleasant music to me after working with the English A.S.C. and their varied assortment of dialects.

I missed seeing the Lord mayor’s Show being at work but saw the Mansion House bedecked with flags. Goodness! The crowds are awful in London I tried the Tube the other morning after giving up the fight for a ‘bus – having missed three then – Never again!

Down underground, the passageway to the station at London Bridge was crammed to bursting at least 100 yds from the platform. Quite four trains left before I was anywhere near the platform. We were so packed together that I had to push the man ahead with my small case lean back as hard as I could against the on coming crowd to prevent being squashed like a piece of ham in a sandwich.

I remembered fathers advice always keep your arms up in a crowd. In the midst of this hidious “squash” a portly middle aged cheery looking female came along saying “Excuse me, please let me pass I have to catch a Boat Train at Euston”.

She carried the inevitable “hold all” with umbrellas sticking out and was followed by a sour faced woman – presumably her maid – with a deck chair. Picture a deck chair of all beastly things in a crowded tube. It was really very funny and I could imagine the witty and amusing remarks an Australian crowd would have made. Alas! there were no Aussies and the only man who made any remark mumbled “Perfectly
ridiculous absolutely absurd, the very idea” which with a look of injured dignity on his face when poked between the legs with the “hold all” only made the incident all the funnier.

Wherever there is a cellar one sees notices “Anyone can take cover here during air raids. At their own risk.” It doesn’t sound too inviting but my one dread is being caught in a Tube during a raid because the police won’t let you above ground again until the raid is over and the “All Clear” goes, which is generally about an hour after the last gun is fired.

I always feel that the Germans must send a polite wireless saying they have reached home safely and that we can go to bed again. Why I hate Tubes so is they are so stuffy, never seem to have enough air to breath.

The other day I was walking to a new job at the P.O. with a Corporal when a whistle blew and he called out “Fall in girls”. I followed the crowd not knowing exactly how to go about this falling in business, but with a lot of pushing and jostling we were finally in two long lines.
More orders shouted, and we swung around into twos like the animals going into the Ark.
The soldiers were suddenly very busy with yards and yards of hose – Fire Drill, not an air raid as everyone thought.
Life is full of surprises these days, one never knows what will happen next.

An amusing tendency I notice in England is to wheel children about in prams, quite big ones six years and over. Then one sees people
of about 35 or so in bathchairs being pulled along by an elderly man generally not because they are invalids but it appears to be a mode of transport for those who don't like walking. One meets them shopping in the suburbs with the inevitable pet dog either reposing in his mistresses lap or tied to the handle bar. He always yelps when they start off after a port of call. Now-a-days, the lady having to carry back most of her purchases unwrapped – paper being scarce – she is laden up with quite an interesting assortment. I saw one the other day with a pk. of Quaker Oats, loaf of bread, a cauliflower and some apples, all deposited around her in the chair.

England in Wartime is a mixture of Comedy.
Tragedy and noble Grandness.

Last night as I walked across London Bridge with the endless crowd we met a group of Sailors marching from the station, led by a band – the few remaining men off a battleship after an engagement. Not the merry looking sailors we are used to seeing but men who looked as if the sight of London was almost more than they could stand after what they had been through. They looked as if they were on the point of breaking down.

It was dark, the tide going out and barges going down the Thames, Searchlights played about in the sky on the look out for Zepps – London 1917 –

Just heard from Charles, He’s had a pretty rotten time, has been ill with Trench fever and says “gas” didn’t do his throat any good. He was dull and lonely in hospital, no chance for stripes, nor Blighty
where he was and says a number of his “pals” were killed in the last “go”.

Dec.23rd 1917  59 Coombe Rd. Sydenham

I’ve neglected my diary frightfully and alas! the letters I have written to Aussie I fear have all been torpedoed, 14 big steamers I hear have been sunk, including the incoming Australian Xmas mail, the thought breaks my heart.

Air raids, snow, heavy frosts, fogs, with all the accompanying details of crowds and unpleasantness has made life lately more like the scenery in a well staged melodrama than anything else I can think of. The only item missing, being the villain, but the Hun aviator fills that position I suppose.

It is sunday morning and I am doing a slow freeze in bed while scribbling this and awaiting my breakfast. Then I must get up and clean my room and prepare for a birthday party. It was mine yesterday and Hetty Pearls today so we have joined forces and got the loan of the sitting room below for the feast.

Last weekend Gray having it off we spent it together, went to London on the Saturday and just hit off seeing the “Old Contemptables” going to a big function at the Albert Hall. Hundreds of motor cars full, the Ambulance Wagons in the lead, alas! how few men compared with the number who saved England in 1914. I cant stand such sights without being churned up. The huge crowd watching them pass, practically all women and soldiers “on leave” or in hospital blue.

That uncanny screech – a womans cheer. God! It was rotten!
I had to stick it as I was wedged in the crowd beneath Nelson’s Column. I nearly broke up and many of those around me had a look of agony on their faces – many men – perhaps fathers who had had an only son amongst those gallant fellows.

However, I am glad I saw them, although had I known what I was in for wild horses wouldn’t have dragged me there.

After our evening meal at an A.B.C. we ‘bused to the Lewisham Hypodrome where we nearly expired from the cold. I have had a double rise at the Base P.O. first into the Despatch room where Billy Quantrill the nice sergeant took four of us up and handed us over to Pte Hill (an Adelaide lad) who instructed us in the Art of Despatch – no mugs game either – The best make mistakes and no wonder as there are thousands of things to remember. I determined to learn it after Billy sending me up ahead of my turn, He’s a rattling good sort and my only regret is I no longer work under him but under a severe sergeant who is a fair devil if you make a mistake.

So far he had been very nice to me but I shake in my shoes when I see him coming down our line.

Only two of us survived the “test” the others being put back to the dull job.

Before sending out any letter one looks up the man’s record to see where he is. Some of the letters have already been to half a dozen addresses and one has to study the date of each. Then there are lots of Camps and Depots that no longer exist, battalions wiped off for need of men to reinforce them – none from 60 on now. Letters marked “Killed in Action” “Missing” “Wounded” or “Returned to Australia” All have
to be placed in different piles. The joy of putting perhaps 20 odd letters into a large official envelope and address to a man in hospital is more than I can express in words – it gives one a bonzer satisfied feeling that ones job is well worth while.

Last pay day I got a 2/6 week rise, and yesterday morning we were all busy helping pack up to move the Aust. B.P.O. from Mount Pleasant to Kings Cross. The lads screwed down the lids on the cases as we filled them with letters. The noise, the dust, the excitement added to the thought of being “off duty” until Thursday was too much for the girls. Even the Sergeant did not attempt to stop the clatter of tongues. When all was finished the O.C. – Captain Tyler came along and spoke awfully nicely. He spoke of Xmas Days out Wagga way with a temperature of 120deg. Then he thanked us all for the way in which we had responded when extra work came in and a call was made for overtime workers. After the usual Xmas wishes the girls raised a cheer – the funny sound that always gives me a rotten feeling because it seems to bring home more than anything else the absence of men. We were let off at 11 o’clock so being a lonely creature having no relations or friends to fly off to I decided to toddle about London. – Some toddler!!

I went away down the East End and was interested in Whitechapel, the Xmas shopping in full swing. The contrast between the East and West is remarkable – like a different country, Jews everywhere, notices in
shops and stuck up here and there in the streets all printed in Hebrew. Dirt, smells and a weird crowd of people.

Then I wandered around the outside of the famous Tower of London, a noble building. Nearby I came to Seething Lane where old Pepys lived – of course it is horribly modern now the Cork Steam Pk.Co. having a brazen new building where I imagined poor old Pepys house once stood.

It was rebuilt in the 15th century, the pulpit a lovely bit of carved oak being brought from some still older church no longer in existance. One amusing old monument to a Sir Richard Haddon and his two wives, beautifully carved with all their funny looking little family, for all the world like dolls heads all in a row.
Sir Richard was Lord Mayor of London I might add, and died in 1506. My thoughts turned to Pepys and how he must have often sat there and listened to “dull sermons”.

At the far end of the laneway I came upon an old stone gateway with three skulls carved over the arch – leading into an old old cemetery – It was beside this gate that Joe in “Bleak House” dies. I recalled to mind a picture of it in a first edition of Dickens I read many years ago.

Nearby is the ancient Church of St Olave, into which I went. Like most old churches in London it was so dark inside I nearly blinded myself trying to see things.
One tablet amused me too. Some old chap died in 1600 odd and left in his will that so much Newcastle coal was to be given to the poor of the parish, and three sermons a year preached at his expense for EVER. After an exciting War luncheon consisting of a poached egg on potatoes and tea with tinned milk I caught the underground at Mark Lane for Charing Cross, intending to go to the National Art Gallery, but found it was a day one had to pay 6d. entrance so I shied off and went to a Museum in Whitehall, once the Banqueting Hall from which Charles I stepped out onto the scaffold to be beheaded.

There were some wonderfully interesting things, the saddle that “Bleecher rode in at Waterloo, the bridle that was on Captain Nolans Charger, when he rode off with the order for the Charge of the Light Brigade. Napoleons razor and shaving brush found in his carriage at Waterloo. The skeleton of “Marengo” his Arab Steed that was his charger at Egypt, and was captured by the English at Waterloo, sold to Lord someone who bred from him in England, where he ended his days in comfort at St. James Palace.

A rough note written by Lord Kitchener on August 10th 1914, to copy for his request asking Parliament how many Territorial Forces were prepared to go overseas and how many to serve on home defence? The compass Captain Cook used to find Australia which was afterwards I learnt on the “Bounty”. Drums used at the coronation of William IV. The hat worn by Nelson at Trafalgar and just hundreds of interesting letters. The despatch from Lucknow and a Commonwealth flag (Cromwells) mentioned in Pepys diary.
By 4 o’clock I was nearly dead from the cold, so came back to my digs and lighted a fire.
I witnessed an amusing sight near St.Pauls an old black cat wanted to cross the road, he looked up and down, walked to the center of the road during a lull in the traffic, sat there while three ‘buses passed and then continued across as calm as you please.
I feel sad in a way at leaving the old Mt.Pleasant surroundings, awful and all as they were. The P.O. Canteen was great! And such an experience. Ones manners certainly rather suffer and I found myself quite in keeping with it. The sort of place one could pick ones teeth at table and no one would think it odd.

The other day I indulged in pea soup and chips an unheard of mixture in polite society no doubt, and fearing “sweets” might be “off” I hollowed down the table to Edie the waitress. “Is apple pie off Edie?” “No dearie! It was never on, its gooseberry” came the reply.
While I ate my gooseberry pie I wondered what Aunties face would be like could she see me in such surroundings. Judged at her standards.
One sees more and more women on mens jobs every day. Dozens of horse drawn mail vans are driven by women, I see them every morning going into the London G.P.O. which by the way is all sand Bagged and netted with iron mesh netting, guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets.

One sees strange things in the news at times. A woman recently died and left £400 a year for “keep” for a pet dog – To think there are humans in need of food!!
Another woman was fined for using a taxi to take a dogs body in a coffin – termed a “joy ride”.
The food queues are awful, I saw one near the Monument about 200yds long, three deep at 8 o’clock in the morning. Margarine is certainly difficult to get now, I tried lard, frying an onion in it and letting it set again to give it a less dull flavour. The other evening I had an amusing experience I was in the grocers shop. overjoyed at being able to get 2 oz. of tea for 6d, and ¼ lb lard in place of butter when the blast from a policeman’s whistle warned everyone to “Take Cover”.

It had been snowing all day and then it froze hard. I fled out of the shop making a bee line for my “digs” a good ½ mile run. It was dark except for the whiteness of the snow on the ground showing up dark muffled up figures of people running all directions. They did look funny, and were mostly laughing and joking.

Running enveloped in two pair of warm bloomers, flannel petti, 2 woollen vests, knitted jacket affair, a big overcoat, a few yards of knitted scarf, gaiters as well as all my usual clothing was no easy job. I overtook a tired over laden cityman. For awhile we ran side by side like the last two in the final lap of a marathon race. I burst out laughing, I simply couldn’t help it, and remarked “some life this” but he only snorted in reply.
As the poor chap was pretty well “blown” I easily gained on him and only just got in as the guns started booming.

The next day I saw where a bomb had dropped on a Warehouse near the Base P.O. and the smoking ruins had icicles hanging from the burning rafters while firemen were still hosing the ruins. I fairly froze
myself, standing looking at it and saw a poor old mother cat wandering about the hose pipes looking at her once happy home.

**Xmas Day 1917**

Feeling rather “blue” and have tried to amuse myself by drawing designs, but having tired of that I turn to my diary. Yesterday I went up to London, doing a shiver on top of a ‘bus to Camden Town, and from there hunted up our new B.P.O. abode, which is situated in a rotten part of St.Pancras an old Brewery, surrounded by the poorest of houses and near a workhouse.

For contrast I set off for Regent St. to see the West End shops and when going into a very swagger sweet shop in a small street just off the famous thoroughfare a beautiful closed car pulled up and a much befurred lady got out and stood next to me with her arm linked in an officers – Sir Douglas Haig no less. The hero of the day is shorter than I expected but otherwise exactly like his pictures only a wee bit older looking.

The West End isn’t half as interesting as the City and the huge houses in Great Portland St. and around Regents Park, with their imposing looking hall doors, give one the “pip” to see with all the blinds down as if everyone in the street was dead. Apparently they only inhabit them during the season, and as the War has knocked the bottom out of “seasons” they remain in this gloomy state from one year to another evidently.
I quite forgot to make a note of the arrival of my Sugar Ration Card, but it does not come into force until the New Year, in the meantime margarine is running short and they are talking of adding it to the rations. So they should, this queue business is awful.

Got a card from Charles from Rover saying he was on his way to join the battalion once more, so hope he got with them for Xmas as he was looking forward to.

I am awfully worried about him, he says he is very short in the wind since the “gas” and doesn’t look forward to humping his pack or facing the winter poor Charles. Anyway he will get my letters more regularly when with the battalion.

Oh! our birthday party was rather good fun. Corporals Farrand and Denton came along, the latter has rather a decent tenor voice. We had our “tea” about 5.30 after which Cpt.F had to return to the Officers mess to superintend the “drinks”, but he returned about 9 o’clock with his overcoat pockets full of potatoes baked in their skins and ¼ lb. butter purloined from the mess at Horners Grange, so we ate them for supper – a great success – .

January 6th 1918 – Day of Prayer for Peace

Why should a special day be set aside for the praying business when we’ve been to all intense and purposes praying for Peace since August 1914. I saw rather an amusing thing in the London Mail saying that the United Kingdom set aside the 6th, what would happen if Germany also set aside the same day to pray for Victory? However that is wasting paper, when I have simply dozens of things to put here.
We have moved into the new A.B.P.O.Hdqrts. It is in a beastly part, not the least bit interesting and costs me 4/- week fares instead of 2/- as formally – so much for my rise!!!! All goes in fares which grieve me mightily. Even I can’t find interesting or amusing things about the neighbourhood, it is not like any part of Sydney, I know of unless Pyrmont near Blackwattle Bay, without even the dirty part of the harbour to cheer one up. It is nothing but muddy streets, big warehouses, trains going over endless overhead bridges, cheap eating houses and pubs, a dirty sootie square, with of course, leafless trees. Not a single clean shop within ½ mile.

However the huge floor of the P.O. which is the top of Bass & Co’s old store for beer, covers they say 2 ½ acres, and is gradually being knocked into shape for quite a model Base P.O. To have even such a small finger in it makes me feel proud, like a digger’s pride in his Battalion.

Oh well! I think I do my bit, at least I try, and I certainly don’t idle my time there.

I must try and describe the place.

We first go up two long flights of stone steps outside the building and then turn in and up two flights of narrow dirty wooden stairs, as old as old, like steps up a loft. At the trap door at the top there always stands one of the M.P.s (Military Police) Inside, here and there small office sort of places, are being built by the Pioneers, there are stove heaters every 30 or 40 yards, where all day one sees little groups of lassies and soldiers trying to get warm.
Just as you go in, is the Staff Office where the O.P. presides, and then the Registered parcels guarded by a Soldier boy.

Mailbags are stacked up like wheat, there are hundreds of pillars and the roof is low, the atmosphere hazy – smoke, breath and dust combined, you can hardly see the far end of the place.

One dodges in and out of huge baskets full of parcels, trucks of letters and parcels, and bags hung on poles for sorting them into.

Away down near our end are two long rows of tables from where letters are finally sent to France. Then at one corner is the Primary sorting for returned unclaimed mail, then the final sorting of same and later my dept. Despatch. In another corner are Returned Parcels, and a smaller room for Returned packets.

Then there are long rows of cabinets with cards – each man’s record –

I work on W’s 2200 to 4999, so I have over 2799 letters to do as there are often 2 and 3 men with the same number.

It is fearfully cold, we all wear our overcoats even the Sergeant was reduced to putting his on the other day, and the girls are let off every couple of hours to skip to warm up, I hate skipping so suffer the cold and continue with my despatch.

We have had Air Raid and Fire Drill.

The first time we were all called up and stood in four long rows, the officer (A.C.Tyler) addressed us, and a bugler was called upon to blow the Fire Alarm, to let us know it, then “Rear Ranks right Turn!” girls are the limit they turn all ways, however after a second attempt “March to the basement!”, and off we went. Some march! and talk about a “Long long trail”. There must be quite 400 girls. The lads
all lined up to watch us and called out Left! Left, left, right left” and other amusing remarks.

Tyler told us not to laugh or treat it as a joke. It was he said “most serious” and there was to be silence, no talking – poor man!! Talk, my goodness the noise and cackle of tongues and the tramp tramp of our feet over the wooden floors, down the four flights of stairs, away along the ground floor – we took that at the double, and finally crawled in single file down two more flights of stairs to the basement, a dark dirty musty place where we lined up and sat on sand bags. Tyler, standing on top of a heap of sand in desperation clapped his hands to obtain the desired silence. He had the great sense not to remark upon his order having been disobeyed but said that was how he wanted us to come down in the event of an Air Raid “nice and quietly and in order” “Now girls you can return in the same way and carry on.”

A couple of days later the bugle blew and we all fell in under our N.C.O. Alas! no longer Billy Quantrill but Sergeant Hannagan a huge big burly Irish Australian, who shouted at us and tore down to where I was standing in a huddled mass of girls not knowing exactly where to line up. “Here! fall in! you should all be in line by now” he evidently thought he was drilling a new unruly squad. I got a push that sent me banging into another group, but he certainly knew the art of drilling because before you could count 10 we were in perfect line, standing equal distance apart, assisted by more bangs and pushes as he rushed down the line.
Then Tyler in parade “turn out” appeared and walked along the line inspecting us. He then spoke, telling us the very welcome news that a staircase was being added to the building for cases of fire.

New Years Day is no holiday in England, we worked just as usual, but any girl having a day due to her for overtime could have it off. I had only ½ day so took it yesterday instead, it being a Saturday and meant a “lie in” in the morning.

The canteen isn’t a patch on the old one, we line up in a queue – English people spend half their lives in queues – and get 6d or 2d tickets and then go to a counter and get your tucker grabbing weapons to eat it with out of a box as you file past and retire to eat it at a bare table.

The food isn’t so bad, but I hate eating cold pudding and it is always “Stoney” by the time I’ve finished my meat.

I tried a cheap eating house nearby the other day, a man in shirt sleeves waited on us and the customers were chiefly soldiers and ‘bus drivers, the food good and certainly inexpensive, but I didn’t like going alone and my two “pals” at the office both bring their dinner with them, so I once more resort to the canteen.

Yesterday I toddled up to London for a poke around, and visited the Inns of Court, which are absolutely fascinating, the old Gatehouse in Fleet St. leading to the Inner Temple escaped the Great Fire, so I was able to poke my nose into its ancient holes and corners and try and picture what it was like in the days of the Stuarts in all their fine raiment. Then I crossed over into Bell yard and up along past an ancient Inn with a sign board 7 Star Inn 1602.
When you get off the main thoroughfares in the city it is so peaceful and quiet, and one feels a very great respect for the old Johnnies who built such beautiful places. Lincoln Inn Fields is worth

Bell Yard Inns of Court 2007

Seven Star Inn – 2007
many visits, one finds endless gateways leading in and out of various interesting looking places.

The Chapel there is up off the ground, raised on stone archways – sort of crypt. It was rather spoilt by having an uninteresting lot of rubbish scattered around such as empty packing cases and wire netting on the stone floor. One only expects to see monks with peakie hoods and petticoats wandering around such places, not office boys smoking cigarettes and F.Gs with a look of irreverent curiosity. However, while staring at the building a woman chewing gum or toffee came up and asked me where the “damage was” –

![Inns of Court Chapel (Lincoln’s Inn Old Hall) open undercroft 2007](image_url)
I fancy she was an American, she certainly wasn’t English; Not knowing anything about any damage I asked her what the place was I was looking at – she didn’t know, so we parted probably with an equally poor opinion of one another. Later I discovered “the damage” near by. A bomb fell in the road in New Square evidently in the last raid smashing every window for hundreds of yards twisting up the lamp posts and great pieces chopped out of the old buildings around by flying pieces of shell. I just missed the chap by about 20 yds.

From there I wandered through another narrow stone archway to hit upon the quaintest old garden, or rockery with ponds and a fountain exactly like Stones pictures – Marcus Stone, I think it is who paints ladies with dresses tied up under their busts and gentlemen in
tri-cornered hats, sitting in gardens making love. Well! I struck the garden but the men and women of those days are no more.

Many visits, one finds endless gateways leading in and out of various interesting looking places.

I stood quite five minutes looking at it to carry away a lasting memory of Staples Inn. The fountain bubbled away but broken ice lay on the pond, an old wall went down one side with stone archways into the garden and a quaint old clock on a wall nearby had the date 1753. From there I wandered into Holborn and turning down a side street came upon an old church hidden away by big modern shops. A gate in the wall had St.Andrews over it, the Church was back from the road, a huge heavy door kept open by a carpenter and bag. Like all these old churches it seemed to be pitch dark. This one really was for it had a
second big baze door. I said to myself as I looked in “rather a cut throat place if it wasn’t a church I’d shy off it”.

![Staples Inn through archway from Holborn](image)

However I felt my way in and walked up the aisle, it was a bit lighter inside and when I got used to it I sat in a pew and studied the stained glass which was rather fine. I read in a guide book that it was one of the few churches to escape being destroyed by the Great Fire – I lived to wish it hadn’t –

While sitting there a man walked down from the organ loft and went out – the carpenter I learnt later – Having got bored and feeling rested I pushed the first door open to get into a pitch dark region and discover the carpenters bag was gone and holy horrors!!! the door locked. Of all the awful feelings it was absolutely “pitch” and I hadn’t
even my torch light that I generally carry about in case of fogs. I felt everywhere up and down to try and find if a bolt had slipped, I pulled and worried that door, pulling it to me with the fierce strength of a semi

lunatic I stopped to listen, imagining someone might hear the noise and a crowd collect. I only heard the noise of London traffic in the distance I banged and hammered – no luck! I strode back up the aisle in search
of church notices to see if there was an evening service. No such notice could I find. I was thankful it was a Saturday there would at least be a service the next morning. Back I went to the door I could at least keep myself warm trying to smash it. I pulled and banged as hard as I could. If only I had a match I might light the alter candles when it got dark – no matches –

*St Andrew’s stairs passage from passageway 2007*
I pictured myself rolled up in the carpet stuff on the seats trying to keep warm I contemplated trying the organ but guessed there being no one to blow it it wouldn’t sound. I swore aloud, language unfit for such an establishment no doubt. I can’t tell how long I worried that door but I was like someone in a “Movie” picture shut in a “safe deposit”. I thought then of trying to find some other outlet. The windows were skied up, no hope of sticking my head out and yelling thinking of the cold night ahead and my hunger didn’t cheer me. It was only about 2.30 – the next service at 8 next morning, I wandered around and off the vestry found a sort of panel that had a yale lock, after several fierce bangs it opened and I found myself in a sort of hole filled up with lillies
and greenery – over from the New Years decorations, out of that I struck a winding stone passageway “at least I shall have places to explore” I told myself and promptly perked up and hurried on up some stairs. When it began to get lighter and opening a door I came face to face with a small boy about 8 standing in a nicely furnished hall.

I told him how I had got shut in the church and he very politely opened the front door and let me out. But my desire to go further sight seeing had cooled and I came back to my “digs”. On the way to the ‘bus I passed a shop full of silver wattle, so feeling it meant a glimpse of “home” I went in and asked the girl where it came from. She told me France, saying it grows wild there, seems strange doesn’t it?

The cold mornings in the train are indescribable and everyone “sniffs” I could have laughed out the other morning everyone sniffed one after the other, and then two or three together.
I wrote to Granny to send along some of my winter clothing and in the parcel she included some of her own a queer knitted waistcoat made I should think in the year 1 BC knitted bedsocks and knee caps and a leather jacket.

Last night the N.C.O.s came down from 44 and one (the cook at the Officers Mess) brought me a small box of dainties – Mum’s the word!!! a bit of plum pudding, two mince pies, some real butter – such joy!! – and a nice bit of ham.

Shopping now is a fearsome business. Meat is added to the things “off” but we jog along. Fancy there will be riots soon if something isn’t done to ration the food out.

People are sick of standing in queues for 2 oz. of tea and seeing where Lady someone has been found to leave nearly 200 lbs. And Marie Corelli fined L50 for hoarding sugar. I’ve been fairly fortunate so far and last week I “stuck oil” at my grocers, got ¼ lb. margerine ½ lb. sugar and 2 boxes of matches, but last evening when I asked for cheese he had none, no bacon, no margerine but cheerfully offered me ¼ lb. lard which I declined as I had had my ration of margarine for the week really.

My landlady for the first time in her life has not had a joint for Sundays dinner. There was none to be had but she got a bit of liver and paid 3/8 for a pound of ham. There must have been joints to be a liver but she evidently was at the end of the queue. It is a very serious problem, and only a few days ago a girl at the P.O. boasted that her people hadn’t given rationing a thought yet – such people deserve to die of starvation.
I only eat my ration and manage well enough.

Got a service card from Charles, so guess he is going into action again. I have an unpleasant feeling that he won’t come through the next time scot free, but hope and pray he gets a Blighty wound that will occupy the attention of the hospital Authorities until peace is proclaimed.

The anxiety is telling on me fearfully I feel years and years older. Seeing the funny side has carried me along so far but there are days when all the world seems black, when it is only cold and muddy and it’s a struggle to keep the tears back when marking letters with a green K or D.

Got some jolly pictures for Lucette, a series but to prevent “loss by enemy action” I shall send them out singly.

20th January 1917

This day 18 years ago Father left Sydney in the old Aberdeen Liner “Moravian” for the South African War. How little I thought then of the far worse War I would live to see. This one seems to have become a “standing dish” everyone seems to have settled down to it. The food problem seems to becoming serious, within the last few months England seems to be feeling the shortage. Thank Goodness! we are to be Rationed by the middle of February they say. A decidedly unpleasant way no doubt but the right one all the same.

Some peoples utter disregard of the necessity for care as regards waste, has made my blood boil more than once. I was lucky to get ¼ lb. sugar this week and bacon – if you can find a shop with any in
is 2/6 lb. The weather has been simply wretched. One morning I set off in a blizzard and by the time I got to the station I looked like a “snow man”. It was so cold at the A.B.P.O. that the O.C. let us off at 3.30. Went to Penge Theatre one night and brought back fish and chips for supper – “a slap up treat” – Yesterday I got the morning off, I asked Star-Playdle our W.O. as I wanted to go to the Prisoners of War place to arrange for parcels to be sent to our lads in Germany. I took boy Bishop aged 7 with me, his first visit to London except to pass through and he seemed to thoroughly enjoy it, we went to Selfridges where I got a lovely lot of tinned food for parcels to Charles and others.

I’m thrilled to the very marrow bones because his leave is due and he may walk in any day. I’m dying to see the old chap again, it is nearly ten months since the morning he walked off to the show at Amesbury.

February 3rd

Our Canteen is now being run by an Australian and is absolutely “tip top”. She worked wonders with pretty curtains and screens and a few easy chairs and a few pot plants and the food too is much better.

Several Americans and “Andy” Fisher, with a dose of Staff Officers visited the P.O. last Monday. On the Tuesday night Miss Peart came in to have a yarn and about 8 p.m. an air raid commenced. My landlady was a bit nervous so we all crowded into the tiny kitchen, somehow I don’t know why, but I never feel the least bit nervous, not
since the first when at 44 West Hill and my knees shook horribly, but even then I didn’t feel mentally frightened.

At 10.30 the guns ceased and the aeroplane that was flying backward and forwards overhead was no longer heard – escaped I suppose – Miss P. left although the “all clear” hadn’t sounded. I went to bed then but about 12 heard the guns again, too sleepy to worry so pulled the pillows over my head and rolled across to the far side of the bed, thinking in a sleepy way that if the window blew in I’d be away from falling glass, but I could feel the bed tremble when the big gun near here fired and the shells made a noise like the whine of a dog.

My landlady came into my room at 2am. to tell me the all clear had just gone and my conscience pricked me to think I’d left the poor soul by herself with the children. The next night the Hun paid us another visit – at least I awoke to realise a raid was in full swing so crawled out of bed and went down to the family in the kitchen to be greeted with the news that it had been on for an hour, but an aeroplane had just flown low overhead and the direct fire onto it had evidently awakened me. The following day was foggy, if I dread anything it is a London fog, that walking into oblivion, the only way of describing the sensation, to step out to cross a street when one cannot see the other side, and people suddenly appear in front not visible until within a yard or so – its absolutely horrible – The fight for the few trains running is beyond a joke and when 12 people sit and 10 stand in a railway compartment it is about time to offer up a prayer of thankfulness for having a return ticket to Australia.
Yesterday afternoon Miss P. and I went to a Food economy Exhibition in the West End – a lady doctor lectured upon “The Woman War Worker and her Food”, suggested a little porridge with cream for breakfast – Then suddenly remembered cream is forbidden by the Food Control so said “milk” As I can only get ¼ pt. a day that too is off as far as it goes. Then she suggested fruit, toast and marmalade, apples 10d a pound and bad ones at that, grapes 1/6 to 2/6 lb. oranges 3d each – they also failed to attract. Marmalade is almost unprocurable – I gave my old grocer the glad eye, or I’d be without myself. As a substitute for margarine she suggested cod liver oil and maltine – a nice expensive breakfast – or nasty!!! Cheese loomed large in her suggested Bill of Fare, but as there was a queue at Crystal Palace for 2 oz. per person the other day, that too sounded a bit hopeless. My breakfast this morning consisted of an egg and dry toast and two cups of tea.

Poor old Charles has been sent back to the battalion, his leave delayed in consequence, I’m bitterly disappointed and very anxious because sheet upon sheet of casualties have come into the P.O. – a big battle is on – If all goes well he hopes to be over on the 11th. The mail from Aussie is in and stacked up to the ceiling like miles of bagged wheat so we have heaps of work ahead.

Feb. 10th (Lords Day)

Here I am in bed suffering what I imagine to be mumps, to be on the safe side I am isolating myself while awaiting further developments.
The week has been one of hard work at the A.B.P.O. and add to our woes, the powers that be decided to fix up hot water pipes over our heads as the stoves dotted about failed to warm us, then owing to the stack of mail matter dozens of new girls have been taken on and two consigned to me to teach the art of despatch, as if the hammering upon iron pipes wasn’t distracting enough, our corner of the P.O. was selected to make trollies, so sawing and hammering goes on continuously while we endeavour to send out letters and also instruct new girls.

On Tuesday despite these trials I despatched some 800 odd letters myself – Some job, looking up each mans record, putting A.W.Ls, Hosp, Wounded, Killed, Missing etc. etc. all in different piles as well as readdressing those with proper recorded address. The poor new girls struggled along bravely but one said to me “I’ll never learn this business, its frightfully difficult” and it certainly is to anyone new to military terms.

The “mumps” developed on Friday, but I managed to get out to buy my ½ lb. ration of sugar which the family use here at the weekend – on Saturday – Generally by Saturday morning their ration has all been used so I never buy mine until the weekend to tide them over until the Monday morning.

The rest of the day I spent sitting over the fire in my room feeling wretched to a degree. I tried “design” but it failed to interest me, so did reading and sewing so I finally just “sat” in the dark to save gas, and heartily wished the D—ned War over and done with, and thought of poor Charles out there, an extra big “go” predicted and he ought to
be on leave – He sent a Service Card a few days ago which means he is in the fighting usually, so life at the moment is up to “putty”. A letter from “Auntie” some days ago amused me, she impressed upon me to “apply for a ration form dear, or you wont be able to obtain any food” – I wonder how she thought I managed to buy my ticket to London or remember to apply for a passport!!

Feb. 23rd 1918

Just as I had finished scribbling on the 10th inst. I heard a familiar voice on the stairs, my door opened and in walked great big C. nearly 14 stone in weight now. My mumps were forgotten!!! Instead we embarked upon a wonderful 14 days of “flutter”.

Next morning I got 14 days leave granted without a moments hesitation and we set off upon a “poke” around London. Visited St. Olives an old dame showing us Pepys’ pew and various old prints in the vestry connected with the immortal Sam. A quiet evening over the fire when C. talked, poor old chap he did just let it go, and it was all so interesting to hear 3.am. before we retired to bed.

Next morning breakfast at 11, and off again to London. Wandered around Lincoln Inn Fields, into various model shops in Oxford St. an ever ceaseless ammusement to C. A matinee at the Hippodrome followed, where I realised I had a headache (visions of mumps again) but after a rest in a tea shop in Piccadilly, assisted by phenanctin we continued our wanderings. Carl who had spent the day
trying to buy a box of matches in every shop we passed and having failed spotted at jet of light in a Tobacconist just off the Strand, for the use of his customers for pipe and cigarette lighting. In he went to make use of it while I strolled on. Behold, I lost him, and then due to the fog and no proper lighting in the streets I took the wrong turning when trying to get back to the shop and landed away down in Whitehall. After scrutinising every Australian soldier I came to he appeared at last, assuring me that he would have walked up and down the street all night because he hadn’t the faintest idea where he was.

On Wednesday we had a bonzer day at Harrow on the Hill with Uncle George and Waldermar. Thursday we intended visiting Cambridge but C. who I noticed loved to make plans and then capsize them decided in favour of a lazy morning in bed, followed by a search for food supplies and Maskelyns Hall of Mysteries later in the afternoon where we saw some marvelous slight of hand and spook effects, also the famous illusionist Oswald Williams.

Friday night saw us at the “first house” at Penge with Hetty Peart. C. afterwards going with her for an hour to a dance at the Rink, while I hopped off in search of some supper for us to partake of later.

On Saturday we caught the 10.30am. train from Paddington to Leamington where Uncle William hangs out. He is smaller than C’s father and rather a pessimistic sort of person not cheery like Uncle G. They have – he and his 3\textsuperscript{rd} wife – a very nice house overlooking a park.

Aunt “Thingimee Bob” talked “hard” to me, in fact never drew breath the whole time I was there, still, she was very kind and we were muchly
tickled by her presenting me with 1lb. of tea and huge pot of jam. The fact was she was nervous at having so much in the house as the Govt. are on the lookout for food hoarders. I didn’t refuse it, as the tea ration is to be pretty feeble I hear. We left there at 3.30 for Chester, passing en route two long train loads of American Soldiers and one of Tanks – about 15 – Another sight to cheer one up! Arriving at Parkgate about 8, we walked to Moorholm, much to Aunties displeasure as she had sent a taxi for us which we saw waiting but never thought it for we two humble people with a war on.

Next morning we braved a fearful cold wind and walked along the old onesided front of Parkgate by the Muddy banks of the River Dee of Jolly Miller fame. Thank goodness I am not in Cheshire still, it is ever so much colder than Kent. Dinner at night in evening rig after which I endeavoured to carry on a conversation with poor old Grannie through an ear trumpet affair like a huge brown snake. I remarked upon it being new “Oh! no dear. ‘This belonged to my mother,” So I suggested to Carl as it seemed to be a family heirloom he might put in for it in case he or I required it in our old age. He didn’t cotton to the idea!

On Tuesday we set off for a day in Liverpool crossing the river Mercy from Birkenhead. We then took the overhead train down past the famous docks. There were a fair number of big steamers in, all camouflaged in wonderful uneven and odd coloured patterns, funnells and all, some were armed
with guns. One huge steamer in dry dock had been torpedoed. After dinner in a swank café we spent hours in the Museum.

Wednesday morning we took our departure, poor Grannie having wept over Carl the night before as she would not be visible to male eyes at 8 am. Auntie came to the station to see us off – of course with Tiger – Strange to say the poodle seemed overjoyed at my return, condescended to wag his tail once or twice. That evening Peart and Mallion of the W.A.A.C. with Cpl. Kidd came around and had supper with us. As they had 12 o’clock passes C. escorted the lassies back to Silverdale.

Thursday saw us once more shopping in London going to Cheapside and Ludgate Hill. After that we met Uncle G. at Victoria and went to the Kensington Museum. Talk about a Museum!!! Its some place.

If it hadn’t been for Uncle G. I would never have got C. out of it. All sorts, kinds and descriptions of models – all working – I spent my time pressing buttons to “see the wheels go round”, Model trains, ships engines, aeroplanes, farm machinery, bridges, docks – everything that works –

My poor feet!! C. of course was in Heaven.

We were finally turned out at closing time and seeing Uncle G. safely into a ‘bus C. suggested Penge Theatre, where we saw “The White Slaves of London”. On Friday C tried to get his kit at Horseferry Rd. to bring out here and so not have to catch such an early train on Saturday, but they would not let him take his rifle – no Aust. is allowed to carry his rifle in London, but every other soldier can – Damnable cheek!!
Anyway, we cheered up after lunch and visited the Abbey. The old Abbey is certainly the most noble edifice I have ever seen. It grows more and more upon one, its great tall pillars and beautiful gothic arches. There is nothing cheap and flimsy to offend the eye, it is absolutely perfect in every detail. You don’t run into a beastly cheap wooden table behind the altar or stray wooden stairways in dark corners as one often does in some churches. Invariably the Roman Catholics are guilty of this. One feels a very healthy respect for the old fellows who designed and built such lovely places to stand for hundreds of years for poor worms such as I to visit and appreciate.

Of course it was full of soldiers – mostly Australians although a good sprinkling of Americans are everywhere now.

The Americans remind me more of N.Z. lads than any other soldier. Big, solid blocks of men seem all to be the same size, and go around with a “seeking after knowledge with caution” sort of expression. Not so the Aussie, he saunters down Piccadilly and the Strand just as he’d walk around Wagin, Werris Creek of Sydney where he knows every hole and corner, and looks just as much at home. After that we went in search of my ration card. I saw where it took Admiral Jellicco two days trying to find the Food Controller, well I am still trying to get my card and tomorrow we are on rations, so I’d starve if I don’t get it soon.

Going through a poor part of lower Sydenham we found an old chap indulging in a heart attack. C. propped him up on a doorstep and a woman brought a glass of water. Crowds of children collected and as there was no policeman I acted the role “Move off there” Off you go home, go on run off!!” – with gentle pushing I gradually got them back.
about 4 yds. The person was an old soldier and had various much soiled ribbons on his coat – a regular with the huge pension of 6d a day – He was trying to walk to Poplar, heaven knows how many miles, so C put him into a ‘bus with enough to pay his fare and some over. Poor old chap!!

A nice little dinner with Eric Whiteman who turned up, the room full of lovely flowers C bought me including wattle from France. It did seem strange, the last time we three sat together at a meal was three years ago at Budgerie.

Up at 4.45am. on Saturday, that rotten Return to Duty for C. Poor old chap he felt going back pretty badly but his sporting spirit carried him through.

Only the night before, after wishing he hadn’t to go to France again, he went on to expound upon an idea he had suddenly got, of swimming some river near the Hun lines to find some hidden bridge – a one man’s job, and honestly I believe he contemplated trying it if possible. “Let some other dare devil with no wife take it on” says I. It leaked out that he went over the top once to bring in a wounded German. “Let wounded Huns lie” I begged.

There was hardly anyone seeing the lads off and I got right on the platform next the carriage.

500 Australians and over 2000 including all regiments. Train after train load steamed out, Poor lads; wonderfully cheerful considering, but no singing, no cheers, just those thousands of men moving slowly and quietly around – Sore at heart! The long train packed to overflowing
moved out without a murmur from either the men or the few people on
the platform bidding them goodbye.

Such a contrast to the departures I had seen hitherto, C. told me
that some of the men can hardly keep the tears back when they get their
kit at Horseferry Road and start for Victoria Station on the return
journey. When I went C. loaded up with his kit, tin hat, and rifle he had
an expression on his face I never want to see again. Poor old chap!
It is all jolly rotten and takes a deuce of an effort to keep up sometimes,
I can assure all and sundry.

Life is a Big Blank now but tomorrow I start off again at the
A.B.P.O. thank goodness! and “hope on” as usual.
One reads about poisoned sweets being given to the girl ‘bus
conductors, well! the other day a man in uniform called at the local
Sunday School with a huge bag of biscuits – an unusual kind – and said
he had been a pupil there once and wanted each boy not the girls – to
have a biscuit. He then hurried off not giving his name or going in to
see the boys. The teacher gave out the biscuits but fortunately someone
thought of the sweet business and made each child part up. Young
Ernest had eaten some of his so was promptly given medicine, and
beyond breaking all out in sores, which is unusual for him he seems
none the worse. Still it sounds strange.
C. tells me that the Germans drop small packets containing custard
powders and soup tablets from aeroplanes over Calais, for unsuspecting
people to pick up. Whether poisoned or got disease microbes history
doesn’t relate.
In villages they have to retreat from, they leave fountain pens and other articles lying about with a sudden death bomb attached for anyone who picks the object up.

I hear the Midland Grand Hotel suffered in the last Air Raid, so I shall see the damage done tomorrow. Nineteen soldiers were killed and several civilians. Kings Cross always comes in for a share of bombs. We missed three raids being away in Cheshire.

10th March (Sunday)

On Thursday we were let out early to shop, forgetting the fact all London shops are closed then, so I toddles off to see the Tank at Trafalgar Square, where War Bonds are being sold. “Egbert” looked very rusty, war worn and evil, he has two shell holes in him and is not as big as I expected. Also on view, was a gondola belonging to an airship, the aeroplane that the Italian flew from Italy to London in a little over seven hours, a traveling military kitchen and model men o’war floating in the water around the fountains.

A huge observation balloon floated overhead and the famous Square looked quite gay with red striped awnings and many flags. Crowds of people pouring into buy Bonds, an Australian Military Band in full blast with the usual soldiers on guard everywhere with fixed bayonets. Vendors galore selling post cards and model tanks. Small boys playing hide and seek in amongst the crowd. The happy way they have the whole world over Tanks or no Tanks. War or no war.
Not having £5 to invest I got a 6d model of a tank as I pushed my lonely self through the dense throng up to the Strand to an A.B.C. to indulge in poached egg on dry toast for my evening meal.

Sitting at the same table were a couple of women with several children. I gathered they had come from some distant suburb of London. “I’d ‘ave been before if ‘e ‘adn’t ‘ad the mumps” one remarked, as she jagged the arm of the small boy in question. I then noticed he had yards of woollen shawl around him and he clutched in his small hand his War Bond.

It is surprising the number of poorer people investing in them.

Yesterday I had intended going to the Grafton Galleries to see the War Photographs but I felt “off” the war business, so decided upon a train journey to Holborn and a peep into the shops, walking to Ludgate Hill, past St.Pauls into Paternoster Row where Pepys used to buy “petticoats” for his misses and silk hose for his Valentine.

In Cheapside, I happened to look up and saw overhead a huge airship, ever so low and not a bit of noise. She looked “great” with flags flying. As a woman near me said “Shes grand aint she, and not a bit of noise neither”. It looked like a huge silverfish, with a red, white and blue eye. I could see the people in it waving their hands to us below quite plainly.

March 17th St.Patrick’s Day

The sun is actually shining today!

Great excitement at the A.B.P.O. on Wednesday (13th) Rumour got around that we Aust. women were to be presented with a Christmas box
each (better late than never) Later a Corporal whispered to me to slip off down stairs quietly at 10.15. On the tick, ten of us tripped away and joined the lads. Unfortunately I dont know the names of all the ten. One, a name like Husband from N.S.W. later lived at Perth and Broome, a girl from Kalgoorlie, two from Queensland, two named Moore from N.S.W. also Mrs. Askin another from Bathurst and one I don’t know at all.

We were all made line up in front of the mob of lads and have our photograph taken with them.

One of our crowd said “Aren’t we glad we’re what we are!”

The lads kept making amusing remarks, keeping a straight face was out of the question, finally we all men and women burst out laughing as the camera snapped.

Then a lady hidden in a mountain of furs presented each of us with our small box. Mine from the Lady Mayoress of Melbourne’s Fund. How my eyes sparkled to see a tin of Feather cheese tins of coffee and milk, honey, lemon cheese and lovely toffee – All being kept for some special occasion. Two pretty hankies and a toothbrush. No address of the sender worst luck as I would so much have liked to let her know how much I appreciated it.

Mrs. Husband’s was a little girl at Camperdown Sydney, a real kiddies parcel with peppiments and a postcard of Clifton Gardens included with an assortment of tinned food.

After that delightful break with many a laugh we returned to work. Piles of letters that would break anyones heart to see. We cannot cope with them. I worked like blazes the whole day never taking my
eyes off them and in the evening the Primary sorters carried up armfuls more for me to do.

As I left the canteen after a meal of sorts as I intended working back, Sergeant Hannagan took me by the arm and told me to go over and do checking, Surprise of F.G.!!! It is one of the select jobs only girls who have been there for years get put at it. It’s a real Red Cap job and I dont care much about it.

On Thursday H.Dunn of 20th Bn. came to see me. Cpl Briggs brought him along, a regular Q’lander, tall, thin, and that slow quiet way of talking. One of the first to volunteer, wounded at Gallipoli sent back to Australia. Volunteered again and is still going strong, not the least upset going back to France – reckons he is a conscientious objector which made me laugh.

I missed Tickle, he came to see me last week.

Yesterday being Saturday, after a meal at an A.B.C. consisting of Vegetable Hot Pot – which was obtainable minus a dogs ear off my ration coupon – I caught the Tube to Old Street. A very East endy neighbourhood!!

Thereabouts I struck Charter House. Like so many of Londons interesting historical places the surroundings are perfectly vile. One should be blindfolded and lead to them. I was mightily disappointed because “only soldiers, sailors, and nurses in uniform admitted free”. Being none too flush of funds, I resorted to peering through the iron railings, and watching volunteers for Home Defence drilling on the ground which some old Johnny generously donated as a burial place for those who died during the Great plague of London.
In those “good old days” it was a lonely country district. Lor!! to see the neighbourhood now. Nothing in any Australian town that I have ever seen compares with it – for which I am devoutly thankful. Hidious small houses falling to pieces, weighed down with the filth and dampness of years. Dirty people muffled up in clothes easily recognised as once having clothed the affluent, probably picked up cheap in Petticoat Lane or Church Jumble Sales. Now, they seem to harmonise with the dirty people they envelope. Nearly every woman looks a 10th rate prostitute, sore eyes and disease visible to the naked eye. It is the miles and miles of this sort of thing in poorer London that nauseates me at times. As I picked my way along the loathsome thoroughfare I thought “something could surely be done, Sanitary laws enforced, buildings proclaimed uninhabitable, children forced by law to be washed – a hot bath before school everyday”.
Anything to prevent the rising and unborn generation living like vermin.
Robie called in and we went together to do my weekly shopping in the evening. Preserved Apricots 3/- tin, my ¼ lb. margarine ½ lb. sugar.
My old grocer let me have a pork pie without a snip off my meat coupon so I had quite a “blow out”. Succeeded in getting one box of matches, but no cheese or lard was obtainable.

31st March 1918
I’m having a rottenly anxious time of it at the moment. This “big push” at the front looks far from O.K. and in Cs last letter he said he was to go to an N.C.O. school for a fortnight which made me feel
content for a short while until yesterday I received a service card, meaning he is once more up the line. A Lewis gunners job is simply suicidal in a big German attack, it is either killed or prisoner as far as I can see. Anyway, things cannot last for very long at the rate they are going, sooner or later “something” will happen.

Twenty lads were drafted from the B.P.O. last Wednesday and more the next day. They came and took “farewell of us” girls as we sat working back at night being instructed to clear the tables of letters, send them anywhere we thought best but get them pushed off, as they fear everyman being called on to go overseas. I never felt prouder of the Australians than when those lads bid us “goodbye”. They were all men who had fought at Gallipoli or the Somme and were badly wounded and still they showed a most wonderful spirit, several said to me that they needless to say didnt like going back but England needed men now and they were glad to be able to help the others. Their different little remarks have slipped my memory but that was the general tone.

Often, in past months they had said “no more fighting for me, no more volunteering”, but the German “push” found them as ready to as in 1914. I was honestly surprised I must admit but it shows what some Australians are like, men that the country ought to be jolly well proud of. I worked back three nights, and on Saturday afternoon and felt quite ready for a rest.

On Friday morning (Good Friday minus X cross buns) being restless and unable to settle to anything in spite of imagining there would be nothing more lovely than a spell and a “loaf” I went for a long walk hoping to become so weary that I’d sleep better. I tramped for
miles, got dog tired but my brain was as active as ever. Fortunately, Gray and Halls from Horner Grange Mess came in late in the afternoon, armed with provisions for “tea”, so we sat over my fire and “pigged” a meal of sorts there, which we all enjoyed.

A letter from Auntie poor soul, written to cheer me up ended with “Be brave and of good cheer”. Reminded me of Cranmer and Ridley and I for the first time wondered what Ridleys unrecorded reply was to the calm and collected Cranmer. She also said she wrote to let me know that they were thinking of me and praying, that Grannie was always in tears but she (Auntie) was quite certain all would be well with England. Without a doubt things are pretty bad at the front.

21st April 1918

It is Sunday morning, have just finished my breakfast in bed consisting of a bit of bacon, bread and margarine and some marmalade to say nothing of a cup of tea. I mention these details to show England isn’t at starvation point as some people try and make out. My fingers are stiff from the cold, vile weather, worse than in mid winter, blowing a gale rain and snow and everything horrid.

We are going through a perfect hell of a time, I could not settle to write a scrap, the general anxiety is too awful for words and wonderful to relate it doesn’t seem to affect the city outwardly and the only difference I notice at the office is the girls talk less. Certainly we’ve had a fearfully busy time, two Australian mails in together.

About twenty-five men were taken from the Office – called up for active service once more, due to the big German push, and 150 were
taken from Horseferry Rd. HdQts, at only 24 hours notice. I’ve worked back a lot, even last Sunday morning but by Monday evening the mail was cleared right out and all those back got time off. I got 2 ½ days and bad and all as the weather was I determined to stick out of doors as I’m heartily sick of electric light all day, as well as travelling to and fro underground, I never seem to see daylight. So inspite of snow and drizzling rain I toddled around the world above ground for a change.

One day I went to see the War Photographs at the Grafton Gallery, they are simply splended. I wonder if they will send any to Australia. Not while the submarines are active I suppose! They are the real thing so needless to say some are rather horrid. One almost life size of dead Germans in a trench after a bayonet charge. Our wounded being carried in across No man’s land. A beautiful photo about 20ft x 12 of our Artillery galloping up into action with a Battery in the foreground, the lads stripped to the waist working it.

By way of contrast I then went to the Hippodrome to see the Revue “A Box of Tricks” taking my landladys small daughter. The audience as usual consisted almost entirely of soldiers, spick and span naval and military officers, some in the pink of condition, others minus arms or legs and physical wrecks. I couldn’t help thinking when a group of handsome, well set up aviators full of life and fun came in and sat not far from me. “Is it any wonder women lose their heads and hearts and go the whole hog, for perhaps tomorrow they are cripples. Who is there who could condemn them?!”

Have another rise in my pay, now get 32/6 a week and at present am on Records while there is no checking to be done. The work
is pretty solid now while the fighting is so heavy. I got a shock the other day to see Carls pal Westie marked “Killed in Action”. C. was in hospital when he last wrote – Trench fever – I’m overjoyed as that means he is out of it for awhile. He had six days in the Big Push and seems wonderfully cheerful and full of confidence, just like all the lads one speaks to here. I can plainly see how England will never be beaten, everyone now, even the most ardent optimist is prepared for the War to continue well into the next generation. People who have been asleep for the last 3 ½ years have awakened to the fact that there is a War on and contemplating doing their bit. I was amused the other day a young girl who teaches my landladys children the art of performing on the piano said to me that she was seriously thinking of going into the W.A.A.C. because “If the war was over tomorrow, and it has been on nearly four years, and someone said to me, what have you done for your country or the soldiers I’d have to say Nothing!” I have met girls who say they know no one at the front, and do nothing for the lads, nor seemed anxious to either but some of them are now waking up a bit.

Wandering around Lincoln Inn Fields one day I came upon the Sloan Museum, discovered that the deceased gentleman planned the Bank of England and saw his drawing as well as other interesting things. Hogarths original drawing are there, but stored away safe from Air Raids. After that I went to the old Curiosity Shop, and being open I went inside and bought a couple of post cards. It is just as Dickens describes it, the tiny wee fireplace in the smallest room full of allsorts of curios, the tiny narrow steep twisting staircase
up to Little Nells bedroom. I have recently bought a pair of walking shoes, and the wretched things cost me 32/6 but they may be the last I get with leather soles as the law forbids them being made with leather now, wood I believe is to be the substitute for soles anyway.

Being fed up with houses and shops, and seeing there were green patches on my map of London which represents country or parks – about Barking; I took a train to this never never land one afternoon, upon arrival I saw beside the station an American Red Cross train most beautifully fitted up. It was sometime before I found what one could call a country road but at last I came to men ploughing and women sowing potatoes and simply acres and acres of rhubarb which seems rather useless with so little sugar to be had. It was perfectly flat country and no time before I again struck terraces and shops, trams and people galore, but for a brief space of time I had seen hawthorne hedges in flower and heard skylarks and breathed pure air for a change. At Seven Kings I mounted a ‘bus and had an hours run to the Bank for 4d. going through the East End which smelt like a mixture of stale beer and sweat.

It snowed while I was on the ‘bus but I stuck it. What Whitechaple odour is like in hot weather goodness knows!

Friday saw me back at the office on Records again. I like it better now but I live in terror of making a mistake and sending the lads letters to an old address. It isn’t the easiest thing to be sure just where a man is. How funny noise is, at Silverdale the noise and conversation in the mess room was something never to be forgotten; here, at another branch of this far reaching Military operations the whole time the noise
is deafening. Mail bags being trundled along and men shouting out their numbers, “2506 Sydney,” 954 Hobart, 385 Adelaide etc.” Their voices differ and vary from a man who apparently read the lessons in church to a “Bottleo” or late Newspaper boy.

Men near by the girls voices calling out from a record “2954 Smith J.E. – Right!” A.I.B.D. 19/4 “Authority LB740” “Brown 2984 record shows Heyterbury – alter – A.G.B.D.” and so on and so on. At first I thought I’d never remember the meaning of A.L.R.O.C. and A.M.T.M.bty. but I am now as good as the majority.

Yesterday being Saturday after a cold salad consisting of potatoes, beetroot and egg, and bread and butter (real butter) a cup of tea – 8d. – I took a train to Hampstead and wandered about until I struck the Heath. It came onto snow so I squeezed into the shelter of a big oak tree’s trunk until it stopped, then as it was so foggy I didn’t like risking the scrubby part of the Heath so stuck to the roads. It is awfully pretty and such a treat to see nice fresh modern houses, not dirty terraces. I walked to Golders Green where I happened to strike the Home Defence Volunteers, about 500 out on parade, so I stood and watched them. Standing next to me was an Indian in Khaki, turban and all with one pip on his shoulder. I wondered what costly palaces he possessed in India and if he was a Prince of Royal blood and thought what a strange thing this War is to bring such people shoulder to shoulder united in the one common cause. I’d have given something to know what his thoughts were as we watched those old men, city men, old greybeards – holding themselves in martial style and stepping out to
the sound of the drum. I’m a hopeless fool, but I can’t help an odd tear trickling down at such sights.

At Golders Green I got a bus to the Marble Arch for 4d a good hours run, sat on top and admired the view, houses and people, more people, shops more houses. When we got to London it was so dark I foresaw snow or fog and although I wanted to see the Woman’s Land Army in Hyde Park I turned tail and got the tube to London Bridge. There is talk of us being put into uniform so I may yet sport a cock sided hat and puttees.

I feel more cheerful now than awhile back when C. was in the heavy fighting, then I was irritable with everyone, fortunately I had plenty of working back, checking, at night about 10 sergeants joined us five women folk on the job. The charming Billy Quantrel is now a sergeant also Briggs with the stutter and Hannagan sports a crown, Great fuss and congratulations the day the promotions came out.

April 1918

To begin with we have been working every day for 12 hours, from 8.30 to 8.30, and I’m what you might call tired, but like Johnny Walker “still going strong”. The heavy work has fogged my memory as to dates, but sometime last week a heavy mail arrived, and on Monday night Hannagan called us together and said that it simply must be got out and we were to work the aforesaid hours.

Sergeant Cherry, who is rather a “bitter pill” spoke really very nicely, said he knew the hours were long, and the work was suddenly sprung on us but under the existing circumstances (meaning the heavy fighting
on the front at present and men being killed off so dreadfully) he felt
the girls would rise to the occasion and we would get time off when the
rush was over, either in a lump – say 3 or 4 days or as they preferred –
Alas! howls of discontent. Tuesday arrived, a lot didn’t turn up till 9, all
day they got together in groups like angry bees, a petition was sent
around to sign – which needless to say I ignored – demanding Captain
Tyler to speak to us and say “Why we were asked to work back and
how long we were expected to –“ Sgt. Hannagan has said about 8 days,
less if we worked hard) The rigmarole ended with the remark that
they’d work if they knew why, but they didn’t believe in Sweated War
Work (well underlined). Needless to say I was not sympathetic, nor the
other Australian girls or a few of the others I knew well. The thought
that these girls grudged giving a little more time to cheer up our lads
who were giving their lives, made me feel absolutely sick. I’ve never
been in a rabble and a strike before and I don’t want to be again.

The ringleader was sent up to the O.C. and after a time we were
called together and the Warrant Officer spoke repeating the request and
put the reason in plainer language said that it was necessary to get the
mail out as quickly as possible as otherwise many of the letters would
never be delivered. He said we’d have to work on Saturday till 5 and
Sunday till 12 if it wasn’t out before. (Fearful howls of annoyance) girls
screaming out “What time have I got to shop?” “I can’t get here on
Sunday”, “perfectly disgraceful expecting anyone to work till 8.30” The
noise was deafening. Staff Officer Playdle tried all he could to restore
peace, promised them tea in the Canteen free, and repeated about them
being given time off later – Still, they howled, but we all went back to work, some stayed late but many left before 8.30.

The next day we were all called together and told that we’d get 9d hour overtime instead of the time off which to my mind was really better as one needs a spell after extra hard work and long hours. “Oh! we don’t mind working now” I heard all around me, and that the feeling of a certain type. – The sufferings of the soldiers doesn’t concern her as long as she gets a few pence more.

On Wednesday I got a letter from Miss Pollitt enclosing a ticket for the Anzac Day Concert, and as we were still working back until sometimes 9 or 10 o’clock, I didn’t know what to do, but finally plucked up courage and asked Hannagan for the evening off, showing the ticket and explaining. My absence was granted at once and being presented with a pass I departed at 5.30 to meet Miss Pollitt outside Parliament House.

The Concert was at the Central Hall, Westminster. Of course it was all “Aussies”. Poor wounded lads filled the body of the Hall, it made ones eyes misty to see them, still they seemed to thoroughly enjoy the Show – some of the songs bordered on the broad side but were very funny none the less. Marie Lloyd sang “I dillied I dallied” which I believe is one of her “best”, and certainly she is good if vulgar. Arthur Mason played the organ and altogether it was a huge success.

5th May 1918

The women I most admire in England are the ‘bus conductors, railway officers, lift women and the Police. All these are absolutely
topping and I must include the Land Army but I’m dashed! if I’d walk down Piccadilly in mens riding breeches and smock with an Aussie cock sided hat for all the Governments under the sun. Still they have to work too. I must jot this down about womens vote in England. I cannot vote because I rent a furnished room. Auntie can’t because she neither owns a house nor has a University degree. Grannie can’t because she’s over 70. Did any one ever hear of such silly idiotic reasons!
The Social conditions here strike one like a cold shower, Still, it is a pity to let the East end swamp the beauties of the West completely, although I cannot forget the sights of St.Pancras back streets when wandering through St.James Park, it sickens one.

Yesterday I met Miss Gray at Nelsons Column and we sat in St. James Park where Charles II used to feed the ducks, just by the self same pond which now is drained dry on account of air raids, the water being such a good guide to the Hun to bomb Buckingham Palace. Jimcrack weatherboard temporary buildings connected with the War Office have been built where the pond ought to be. I sincerely hope the day will come again when the ducks once more paddle about but alas! I fear “not – in our time O Lord”.

We had the standing dish of poached eggs and potatoes at 4.30 at a shop in Whitehall and then wandered into the grand old Abbey. I never tire of poking about there and find some amusing old tombs with the funniest carvings at times, not a bit what one would expect to find in such a holy edifice. After that we went to Chelsea and struck the Hospital, Nell Gwymms establishment – or rather erected thanks to her. The bonnie actress asked Charles for no small order. It is ever so big a
piece of ground and so pretty now with spring buds everywhere, and the old soldiers – fine old chaps, real pictures in their quaint uniforms with string of medals one sees them everywhere. Alas! I guess in another forty years many of the gallant lads now in France will be wandering around in that blue uniform and silver buttons. It is a noble place no mean Poorhouse or Old Mens Home look about it. It is well worthy of an old soldier.

12th May Sunday

This week has passed quite quickly and now we start work at 8.30 and leave off at 5 which is far better as we have longer evenings, and at last! the warmer weather is with us thank goodness.

Yesterday as I wanted some cash from the bank to pay for my soldier lad’s parcels I asked Sergt. Hannagan to let me off at 11, telling him I had worked the extra time as I had commenced work at 8 every morning. So he willingly granted it so I duly arrived at the exit armed with my pass to present to the M.P. on guard. I had arranged to meet Dodo McGregor at Trafalgar Square and was in hopes of seeing the Americans who were marching through London supposed to pass there at 12.25 – the exact moment I arrived there, but no sign of them. No sign of Dodo either and as the pangs of hunger got almost unbearable – breakfast at 6.30 and nothing since – I dived into an A.B.C. in Pall Mall and had a hurried roll – “and butter” asks the waitress now. I suppose ultra patriotic people eat them dry. Anyway I didn’t feel like doing penance so had butter, and a cup of coffee. Still no Americans, but Dodo turned up, her ‘bus having been blocked somewhere by the
procession. We again tackled food, Rice and cheese this time but the cheese was conspicuous by its absence. One eats funny concoctions these days. After that we set off for Buckingham Palace, arriving when the fun was over. I asked a policeman what happened and he said “they passed all right but before time” so like Americans? The first procession I ever heard of doing that, they are generally behind time.

We then decided upon a trip to Hampton Court and got a ‘bus to Hammersmith and a good run for 6d, through Twickenham right to the Palace gate. At first glance I was horribly disappointed. It didn’t look a bit the sort of place fit for Kings to have lived in, but it certainly improved on acquaintance. The front entrance – as a matter of fact it has four fronts. I don’t know how they smuggled the dustman’s cart away or where the tradesmen called, perhaps they disguised themselves as courtiers – any way it is rather fine – the one we went in at, Cardinal Wolsey sort of laid the foundation stone in 1515 and lived there in great style for 15 years entertaining Henry VIII, and a French Ambassador who is said to have had a retinue of 400 gentlemen - a few hangers on I guess!

Wolsey then presented it to King Hal who enjoyed life there with his six wives in succession. It doesn’t sound as if they had enjoyed life there very much because Catherine Howard and ghost haunts one room now, where she was arrested and dragged away in a faint by the guard ordered by Henry for the purpose. Also Edward VI was born there and his mother departed her life soon after the event. One cannot realise what it was like then, now the walls are covered with pictures, the rooms large with very high ceilings but very dark, the tapestries are
really wonderful, most beautifully worked, the shading perfect, but they
must have been beastly things to always have before one.

One huge wall, most beautiful ceiling, with shields and coats of
arms, oak pannelling and tapestries and stained glass windows and
denoting the family tree of each of Henry’s wives. A notable thing
being that the whole six trace their descent from Edward I. Like all old
palaces, different generations had different ideas and added to the
building as their fancy took them. All the Kings had a shot at it as far as
I could gather. Charles I spent most of his peaceful days there with Mrs.
Charles and his children. Charles II spent his honeymoon there with
Catherine of Brayanza – a dull time I should imagine as she couldn’t
speak English, and later William and Mary seem to have lived there
quite a lot. In fact William built a lot more onto it and we wandered
through his bedroom and dressing room and Marys. There are no
passages all the rooms open into one another and the beds are the
funniest things. Williams is all red with a great top and heavy curtains.

Charles’ taste again shows out in his additions, outside, He
certainly had an eye for beauty, he had a long lake cut like a blind alley
of a canal about a chain wide with lovely trees on either side, which
reflect in the water and waterfowl swim about, descendants no doubt of
the self same birds Charles used to feed.

Dodo and I walked along the bank of the Thames. The bonniest
part of Blighty I have seen so far, the glory of an English spring, a
green we never see in Australia and hawthorne in flower, to say nothing
of all the gardens one mass of spring blooms. I saw an Aussie rowing a
girl and I wondered if he was thinking of the Swan, Yarra and
Parramatta River. My word it was “spiffing”. If it was always like that England would do me, but alas! it is of such short duration and the winters far too long thanks!

At Kingston we got a tram to Tooting where we had a meal of sorts and then got a tram to Victoria, Dodo getting out at Stockwell where she works in a hospital and I travelled on to Vauxhall getting a tram there to Forrest Hill.

The youngest member of the family here broke her Jap doll today and I couldn’t help remarking upon the material it is made of resembling wartime bread. How funny it would seem now to eat white bread. If one is ill they can apply with a doctors certificate to get white bread I have heard, and it may be so because the other day I saw a woman with a loaf and my eyes nearly fell out with shock it looked so very white, everyone in the street turned and gazed after it.

The other evening when walking across London Bridge near the Monument an Ambulance drew up opposite a hospital for Officers and before you could say “knife” about 500 people or so collected around. I was quite close and saw a poor lad carried in on a stretcher, just as he had left France, his uniform still on, when the crowd saluted him he smiled and tried to return it lying there. It was one of the sights that make one feel chokey, but at the same time worth seeing.

Carl wrote such a bonzer long letter last week, he is having a high old “flutter” at the hospital but says he must get away and not swing the lead any longer, so like him! As long as he is there I feel at rest but I dread his going back to the fighting, the losses lately have been awful but my word! the Australians have done well.
Next week we are to despatch a torpedoed mail, the letters were sopping wet and are being dried on the roof at the P.O. reading the addresses will be some game and I bet no prisoners will be taken for a few days after it reaches our lads. Ever since the strike, the men simply hate the English girls and everyday now there are fearsome rules read out. Three mistakes and you get the order of the boot, so I may get yet have to join the Land Army. They have been calling for volunteers to go to France and work in the Military P.O. to release Australians, Oh don’t I wish I could go wouldn’t it be absolutely the job, but one must join the W.A.A.C. and be attached to the A.I.F. so as Carl is there they wouldn’t take me. Otherwise I’d have a shot at it. 35/- week keep and uniform.

May 26th 1918

Last Sunday night just as I had got nicely to sleep the wretched air raid warning went, some warning enough to wake the dead. I stayed in bed but my landlady and family got dressed and retired to the kitchen below, all except the baby who slept peacefully in her cot. Poor Mrs. B in a fearful state to know what to do, wake the baby and go down, or stay upstairs with her. As she couldn’t make up her mind she spent the time coming in and out of my room while the bang! bang! bang! went on outside. Of course sleeping for me was impossible so I looked out of the window at the flashes over London, at last Mrs. B couldn’t stand it any longer, she bundled the baby up in a blanket and begged of me to come down so I draped myself in my “kim” – joined the family in the kitchen, such a silly idea really because it is no safer than any where
else. As a matter of fact I prefer upstairs and a bed, with a barricade of clothes and pillows to keep falling glass and bricks off one's face, if a bomb smashes the house you are on top of the rubbish anyway not buried beneath it all. Strange to say I never get a bit windy – I can’t understand why either.

To see if I could see anything I ventured into the scullery and was looking out of the door into the yard hoping to see a Hun plane as we could hear one ever so plainly overhead when a fearful bang and even I who would risk a good bit, thought it about time to come indoors. The baby who had been awake but had said nothing before asked “Who was knocking?” so I said “Mr. Hun”. Little did I think that a bomb had dropped in lower Sydenham and 25 people killed.

At 1.30 I was sick of sitting there listening to the noise so came to bed bringing up the small son with me, we went to sleep and never heard the “all clear”. About 3 a.m. a special came around for Mr. B to go on duty where the bomb had fallen. I have not heard where the other bombs fell but it was one of the worst raids. I was so frightfully sorry to hear of Jim Hannas being killed, his people will be so upset, only 18 and the pet of the family. Will just returned a wreck from Shellshock and Lindsay a prisoner in Germany, poor Mrs. Hanna. Yesterday as we got off at 12 a Miss Redmond and I wandered up Euston Rd. and seeing a tram got on it and paid 4 ½ d for the through journey to Finchley. At the Terminus we walked down a rather pretty road like parts of Chatswood, some new houses built on an estate evidently recently been cut up, there were fields and cows and some sheep – I counted six – lovely big chestnut trees in flower and pink and while hawthorne
everywhere. It was a bonzer day and really when the spring comes I believe the odious winter is almost worth putting up with.

If it was not for the War, and the evilness of the poor parts of London always in one's mind one could almost imagine oneself in Heaven. I ask for nothing more beautiful, the buttercups and daisies, and the variety of greens. We sat in a park which had belonged to a private residence and had been donated to the people by some old pot, several huge aeroplanes flew overhead like a flock of birds. We caught a tram back to Moorgate St. coming through Islington, a perfectly beastly part that suffers from raids no end and even private houses are sand bagged up at the bottom windows. Filthy people and evil smells such a contrast!

Lately I’ve arrived at London Bridge station at 7.15 which gives me time to walk to Mark Lane to catch the underground to Kings Cross. The walk never fails to interest me, first I pass carts lined up close together filled with fish from Billingsgate Market, then I get into Pepy’s neighbourhood crossing Mincing Lane, where old Mills and many of his friends lived, he often mentions it in his Diary, then Seething Lane where the funny old fellow resided. Mark Lane Station is within a stone’s throw of where his house once stood – alas! all so different now, but the same trees are in the square near the Tower of London which is close by, and I try and picture old Pepys and his missis out early upon a spring morning as he was fond of being. I suppose he saw this young spring leaves on the same old trees as I stood and looked at yesterday – Funny isn’t it? I stood and looked at the ancient church opposite, and a statue of a saint – or is that term only
applied to a less worthy individual? Anyway some gentleman it was Luke or John perhaps, well anyway sparrows had built a nest in the bend of his arms, and I wondered if they were descendents of sparrows who probably built there and hatched their eggs while Pepys strutted into Church with his wig on for the first time, or how disappointed he was when no one remarked upon it.

I recently invested in a lovely inlaid table to write on near my window, very much second hand but I wish I could bring it back with me – only cost 7/6. Today it has been borrowed for use in the church as the Mayor is to attend in full rig and his whatever you call – staff of office – has to be disposed of during the service so my table being just the right size I lent it.

Eric Whiteman told me today about a chap that left Sydney on the troopship with him, he thought him the most wooden hearted fellow he’d ever met, he didn’t mind leaving his people in Australia, he never bothered about girls at any of the ports en route, nor when in camp at Salisbury, was over in France for two months without seeing a woman, was wounded and he told Eric that after that he couldn’t keep the tears back the first time he heard a woman’s voice – poor lads!! Poor Eric Munro was killed at the Midland Hotel where five bombs dropped, a number of other soldiers too, the signs are still there, big pieces chipped out of the stonework.

Glad to hear we are to be allowed another ounce of margarine, I always had a job to make the 4 oz. hang out the week. I never eat beef for fear I indulge in horse, which isn’t nice, neither the flavour nor the thought. Just heard of poor old Frank being killed.
June 9th 1918

Last Monday week (27th May) went to Windsor by train from Waterloo. All the way the country very flat, chiefly suburbs then orchards and ploughed ground, the former had trees all sizes and shapes, look as if they had never been pruned, very close together and the branches all meeting at the top and underneath small fruits growing – must be a devil of a job to work. As a matter of a fact it looks as if picking the fruit was all that was done, so different from Budgerie and the orchard and vineyard at Wagin. German prisoners by way of working in the fields, I saw groups of a dozen or so here and there but only one actually working, no guard and they looked fat and well cared for – wish our poor lads fared half as well in Germany.

Windsor, a lovely place, the railway station runs almost to the foot of the Castle.

I decided to cross a bridge over the Thames and explore the other side first to find I was in Eton, being hopelessly ignorant I didn’t know they were “bang next” to one another only the narrow river between. At Eton no one could tell me anything about Windsor nor the shops sell me a guide book for that historic spot. The main street in Eton is very narrow but a very interesting thoroughfare. Old houses and here and there narrow byeways and quaint old cottages. The old colleges are fine but being unable to go inside I made the most of my time poking into every hole and corner outside. Top hatted youths and small boys everywhere, hundreds of them, bar the hat I’d rather like to be an Eton boy but I couldn’t stomach the headgear. I wandered over the celebrated playing fields – all butter cups and daisies, and felt
thrilled through and through at the thought of the men who as boys had played there. Those noble old buildings must impress youth, isn’t it Kipling who wrote of the man away in India who was tempted to commit suicide and happened to see a picture of Eton and decided he couldn’t disgrace the old school.

Then I proceeded to investigate Windsor castle. Were I George V I’d say I was an invalid suffering from War nerves after seeing so many factories and munition places – and retire to Windsor for a rest cure – It is absolutely beautiful!

I was half afraid I might be stopped by the sentry when I walked boldly in under Henry VIII gateway, inside there is a wide drive to the right, in front St. George’s Chapel (I couldn’t get in) but I got into the Dean’s Cloisters and poked in and out of sort of Court Yards. Returning to the drive I went off towards the round tower one knows so well from pictures. It isn’t really round after all but flat on oneside, it is also very much bigger than one gathers from pictures, to the left I went out onto a lovely Terrace, that looked down over Eton and for miles across country. I read in my guide book that in Elizabeth’s reign or thereabouts they thought coal was running short in England so stored any amount in huge cellars beneath where I stood – some hoarding!!

I couldn’t get into the State Apartments not being an Army Nurse nor a wounded soldier – nearly wept when I saw a little mob of lads in blue and a few sisters pass through, while I had to content myself with wandering around outside.

I walked to Old Windsor a distance of 2 ½ miles through the park, a lovely drive with huge trees on either side and came back along
by the river and next the Castle grounds, beautiful fields full of nice cows and sheep and the dearest wee lambs. How I longed for some of the old Kellyville crowd to be with me – but alas! I’d never see anything were I to wait for a companion.

Everywhere one saw Tommies in hospital blue, they looked happy and certainly they are in ideal surroundings. Old William I knew what he was doing when he settled here and I fancy old George III, who spent all his mad days here wasn’t so mad after all – or at least as queer as we are led to believe.

I came back to Paddington Station on a different line to see all I could but it wasn’t much of a trip I prefer the Waterloo line. A woman in the train amused me she was talking to a friend of the dreadful temptation put in the way of young officers, how others led them onto the wrong tracks “When those Australians get hold of them….they’re a fast…..lot of men”. She looked to me as if she herself had led a few astray in her youth if not in more recent times. Here endeth my trip to Windsor.

Back at the office and another mail in last evening so all next week we shall be working back and then some more time off I hope. All last week I went through the lower regions, no letter from Carl for over a week and nothing in the papers except details of horrors about air raids and bombs being dropped on hospitals in France – but no mention as to what hospitals.

By Tuesday I felt awful! Horseferry Rd. knew nothing, I wrote and got no answer from C. I even wrote to a Chaplin who came over from the Canadian Hospital that was destroyed and asked him if he
could tell me how the Liverpool merchants where Carl was had fared in the raids.

His sister, an old dame who lives in Upper Sydenham replied and asked me to call and see her.

As a matter of fact I gained the knowledge about the Chaplain from listening to a conversation over the fence between my landlady and Mrs. next door who’s daughter is in service at the dames. They were full of details of Chaplin Andrews escape, loosing all he had so I sent a note by the daughter in truly Australian fashion hence the invitation to call. I arrived at 36 Langton Avenue and rang the front door bell but the girl seeing me beckoned me to the back door where I talked to her in the kitchen for awhile, then a message being sent per the parlour maid to the mistress I was taken up to the back drawing room.

By this time I was tickled to death as both the housemaid and the old dame were hopelessly at sea as to my social position, a fact that worries these English folk to such an extent. Enter the mistress, she was quite the English blue blooded elderly lady. She talked steadily about her brother the Chaplin and all the awful horrors, of the destroyed hospitals, did a weep poor soul. Then I thanked her for sending on the note to her brother and for the reply (I had in the meantime received a letter from Carl). Then I stood up to depart, but by now she’d begun to get interested in me I fancy, I can just imagine her bewildered feelings expecting a sort of Tommies wife, we got onto the subject of Womans Sufferage, the lady’s pet hobby so I soon got into her good graces after relating the experiences in Australia
and the fact that my mother had been one of the prime movers in that direction in N.S.W. Her change of manner when I was accepted as an equal was too funny, finally the maid was rung for to show me out by the front door, with a bundle of “The Common Cause” under my arm I departed, with difficulty not laughed out in her face and giggled to myself the whole way back to my room, alas! no one to enjoy the joke.

Carl tells me they have had a perfect Hell of a time, two hospitals destroyed in raids and fire and Etaples was being evacuated as quickly as possible. He was going to a Convalescent Camp close by and then to Le Harve, so guess it means the Aust. Infantry Base Depot, and will soon be back with his Battalion and more misery for me.
Last Thursday I went to tea with Miss Pollitt and had some bonzer tea she had got a parcel of food from Australia. There is food in England but our allowances of meat and margarine, especially the latter always runs short before the week is out, and now I am in the unpleasant state of being without my ration card. Mrs. Bishop took it to get the supplies and when she got to the shop found my card missing and has no idea where she last had it except in a crowded fish shop. Fortunately my grocer let me have my ¼ lb. margarine, otherwise a pretty kettle of fish because we can’t get decent jam or marmalade.

Anyway, I have been so stunned with worry that such trifles have seemed nothing. Still I guess the sight of some cheese would cheer me up, haven’t seen the sight of any for over two months.

Still, I’d eat dry crusts of war bread if it would only help to end the War. Sometimes my thoughts go back to the sight of long ago of puffpastry and tarts, white bread, steak and onions and all sorts of nice things of that description.

When I hear from Australia of people going motor trips and pleasure seeking it seems wrong somehow and it them comes home how different things are here in England. I often long I admit, for Aussie tea and cheese, sugar doesn’t worry me but the whole Bishop family are minus it today my ticket being lost. Rough on the kiddies as children need sugar.

Still as a nation, England isn’t starving, far from it. We have enough to feed us, but must eat what there is and not pick and choose. I always could eat anything, but I have to shut my eyes and think hard of something else to swallow some of the tucker even in the best
Refreshment places now. I tackled a meat pie once and got the war pastry with a bit of wind pipe in gravy. I haven’t yet felt the pangs of hunger to the extent of tackling “wind pipe” but one never knows I may live to wish I had. Some fearful judgment may befall me for leaving it on my plate. I may live to wish I had it to eat. I certainly ate the pastry and gravy, in prewar days I feel I would have left that too.

My room is all repapered and with my various photos out on the mantle piece and my new cretonne curtains I am as happy and comfortable as is possible in these trying times.

A nice long letter from Gambrell yesterday also Job, another of my prisoner of war lads, my correspondence is enormous now, I write to dozens of lads one way and another. Alas! they are dropping off one by one. Poor Jimmy Hanna, now Frank, both gone, and Gordon Anderson missing. Those old days can never return, Frank, the light and soul of those Kellywood times gone west. I wonder if Carl or I shall ever see Australia again. I’m scribbling this in bed, I love my Sunday morning lie in. Six O’clock every morning is all very well but I am glad the Day of Rest was instituted. Had a letter from Eric Whiteman, he expects to be returning to Australia any day now. Lucky devil.

22nd June 1918

Am indulging in a dose of the ‘flu”, there is a big outbreak in London. So many hands are away that some firms have had to close down for a few days. Alas! I developed it just as my days off for overtime fell due.
Last Sunday (16\textsuperscript{th}) I met miss Pollitt at Victoria where we caught a ‘bus to Golders Green fare 6d, over an hours run, then a tram to Finchley 2d, then another tram 2½d fare to Barnet. By then we were almost in what might be called country suburbs, a three hours run for 10½d not bad for Wartime fares! From there we walked to Hadley a most interesting old place. In the churchyard we came upon Thackrerys grave and also Anthony Throllop, which recalled to my mind the days when I was thrilled reading “Dr. Thorne”. The church was closed, for which we were very sorry as it dates back to the year one or thereabouts.

Possibly part of Hadley Common – not quite the site of the last battle of the Wars of the Roses 2008

Not far from there we came to a huge stone erected on the ground where the last Battle of the Roses was fought. I’m not up in history of that date but learnt from the inscription that Edward IVs
crowd killed the Earl of Warwick there on 14\textsuperscript{th} April 1471. I could wish our Wars were of that simple nature now and ended. Although I have a glimmer of memory that the old chaps wearing red and white roses carried it on for a fair time. I wonder how the roses lasted, or if they had paper ones.

I got frightfully annoyed as we neared Hadley Wood, three German Officers – prisoners – loomed in sight, smoking cigars and carrying swagger sticks, walking along as if they were in Berlin. A warrant Officer and an N.C.O. of sorts were with them. They were drilling. One German looked the typical Uhan, one a Saxon I should think and the third was very dark and wore such a wierd uniform, Navy blue with a big scarlet circle halfway down his right trouser leg another
in the centre of his back and a third on his left coat sleeve. The why and wherefore I have no idea.

Hadley Wood is lovely like all English country parts in spring, it is beyond description. There stands the dead remains of an old elm tree where tradition has it Latimer used to stand under and expound – a la Sydney Domain on Sunday afternoon – Livingstone also lived at Hadley once, I bought a post card with a picture of his house. After a good wander around we had our evening “tea” in a pretty Tea Garden with thatched bush houses where they served their customers.

[Image: Monken Hadley village houses from churchyard 2008]

Back at work on Monday, hard at it till 6 p.m. getting the mail to the lads.

On Tuesday I saw Robbie off from Kings Cross. We had a meal together and I helped her find a seat and pack her in, off on 14 days leave to her beloved Highlands. How often I’ve heard of the
Flying Scotchman, it did seem strange to really see it steam out of the station loaded up with Khaki of all kinds, heaps of Canadians and Aussies, then Americans, but chiefly Kilties, and last but not least W.A.A.C.

Yesterday as I came through the same station a very different sight met my eye, crowds of children from the slums off to the country for a week. I’m bothered if I can write about it without doing a snifflie at the recollection. Such tiny wee thin little mites some of them, washed and cleaned up for the great event, their little eyes all asparkle as they sat in rows clutching their weird and wonderful luggage, chiefly brown paper parcels. Poor little bits of humans, what a treat for them, but how awful to think it is necessary for a Charity to be for that. I’m off these thickly populated places, why this mad idea of always increasing the population!!!!

While I think of it I must make this note. On every railway station one sees dozens of 1d in the slot machines for every conceivable thing matches, biscuits, cigarettes, chocolates, toffee scent etc.etc. Now they have the most dejected appearance – all empty – except the scent, it doesn’t speak well for the brand.

Alas! poor old Carl is back with his battalion again and moving up once more into the fighting. Have had several letters from my various lads, Lindsay Hanna begs of me to write often as he longs to hear from outside Germany. Tickner writes regularly also Bishop. I’m glad to say Gordon Anderson is a prisoner – he was reported missing for some time – On Monday I called at the Red X to see he has all he wants sent to him. Billy Quantrill is now a Sergeant, told me his brother
has broken up completely, the carrying of ammunition day and night for about a week during the big March offensive was too much for him, he is now in Hospital and booked for Aussie.

30th June 1918

Thank goodness! the ‘flu has departed but left neuralgia in my knee that has all but driven me mad. When in the Red X arranging about parcels to be sent to prisoners with some money Maud sent, the girl there told me she had just discovered four men who had been overlooked, and have been prisoners in Germany since 1916. I promptly paid L2 to have parcels sent, as hitherto they have not received anything poor lads. I have since written to two and must write to the others as soon as I find time. The other day I went to Australia House hoping to get a copy I wanted of a photo in the Grafton Galleries, but they’d muddled all the numbers so asked me to try and find the one I wanted which meant my looking through over 2000 official photos of Aussies in France. I did have a time, but couldn’t find that particular one. After a lunch of sorts I decided upon a trip to Golders Green, then got another ‘bus to St.Albans fare 1/- a two hours run, and most beautiful real country, past fields of crop with scarlet poppies, others all haycocks, then quaint old villages. While all the way one came upon groups of wounded men. Lots of Aussie boys near Napsbury which made me feel like getting off the ‘bus and talking to them as they lay on the banks at the side of the road in small groups. Aeroplanes flew overhead and three came ever so low over the ‘bus.
At last we got to St.Albans about 4 o’clock so I hadn’t time for much sight seeing. I dodged about through an old gateway erected in 1361, which was besieged by the Insurgents during the Peasants Revolt in 1381. Made a Liberty Prison in 1553. Occupied by French prisoners in the Napoleonic War and goodness knows to what other uses it has been put. It was awfully pretty too and near by was the Abbey Church a huge place.

I wandered into it, but half way up it was shut off and a sleeping man sat at a small door, it meant passing him and what with being afraid of being shut in (a dread I always have now in churches) and wondering if I’d have to tip him to go past, I decided to come out and admire the exterior.

The greater part of the old place was rebuilt in 1077 – 1235 and looks extremely interesting. An old Clock tower in the middle of the town, with a Curfew Bell, was new to me, but again I didn’t venture inside as I hadn’t really time but walked up a funny old street with overhanging houses. One being where some ancient French King hid in 1346. Then came a broad Avenue, seats full of wounded lads, more Aussies, the sight of two battles of the Roses. I could not help wondering if those Aussies were descended from some of the bold soldiers of old who fought on that spot where they sat resting after doing their bit for the same old Blighty – and an ideal.

The usual stain on the picture, German soldiers driving farm carts and lolling in the bottom smoking and enjoying themselves looking healthy and contented, it sickens me. I hunted up the station and caught a train back to St.Pancras, so ended my “day off”. Now a
2000 bag is in and we’ll be working back until 6 every evening again and Saturday afternoon.

During the week a letter from C said he’d not be able to write for awhile they were going up into the fighting again, I see in yesterdays paper that the Australians have done good work, taken a lot of prisoners etc. Really the agony of mind one goes through is awful. Every big German push I feel as if I couldn’t live through another. Fortunately I can generally sleep, which is strange as I am a poor hand as a rule, then we are nearly always busy when there is something doing at the front and helps to get through the time.

St Giles in the Fields - the Pendrell church  2005
Yesterday I worked through most of the lunch hour and so got off at 4 o’clock as Carl asked me to get him another watch, his third having gone bung, his watches have sudden ends out there. I had a job to find a shop open it being Saturday afternoon but found one near Euston Road. They only had expensive ones but after hearing it was for a soldier at the front the man produced a second hand one he recommended for 15/- which I got. I then wandered down Tottenham Court Rd. and in and out of streets I had not found before. I struck an old church, and an old churchyard with trees and a plot of grass, a welcome sight in the middle of London. There was a funny old grave where Pendrell is buried –
some old chap who saved Charles II. I am dull as regards his history but my conscience tells me I ought to know all about him. There is a long rigmarole which begins “Hold passenger, here’s shrouded in this hearse, unparalleled Pendrell thro’ the universe” Someday I’ll visit the spot again but it is far from savoury. On the seats were rows of women low degraded types of prostitutes, poor creatures all were asleep in the sun and I shuddered to think the little girls playing on the grass nearby would most likely in 10 years time be like those wretched creatures.

From that I got into the street where evidently they live, and I was glad to get out of it I can tell you. Still it was only a stones throw from Piccadilly. From there I struck Drury Lane, another evil looking part now but how different in Sweet Nells time. Then I came along Kingsway and Fleet St. got a ‘bus to St. Pauls for London Bridge Station and so home.

St Giles churchyard with green patch 2005
When writing to C last evening I suggested to him to get a pass to Edinburgh when he gets his next leave, then after studying the map I decided it wasn’t far enough north and suggested Inverness. I couldn’t help laughing as it reminded me of the song “Take me back to dear old Blighty, drop me anywhere Liverpool, Leeds or Manchester I don’t care!” If all goes well he ought to get leave before the summer is over but there is always that dreadful feeling in ones brain, afraid to make plans or look ahead.

I can’t say much for the summer, I’ve worn my coat and skirt all the time and done a shiver in that nine days out of ten.

My goodness fruit is a solid price here now. I paid 5d for a banana the other day and miserable cherries sold for 3/- lb. Tomatoes 2/6 lb and peaches we give 4d dozen in Australia 8d each.

I’m afraid the war will last for years yet and have quite given up hope of seeing Peace proclaimed in London. My only hope is we will get out of it before too many years have passed.

July 7th

Another week, we have been so busy at the office and so many girls away with Spanish ‘flu that there hasn’t been time for much else except work. This ‘flu is no joke, the girls come to work and in a few hours are suddenly taken ill, fearful headache and sore throat, some are sick and one by one they have to report to the new “boss” lady we call “The Major” and be packed off home.

Fifty odd are away now out of 400 on our shift and that is noticeable when we are so busy as they are chiefly redirection girls.
Well! we cleared up the mail (a huge one) on Friday and I got from 5 O’clock that evening until Tuesday morning off – My goodness! I felt like a spell too. On Thursday they had a competition at checking and Hannagan chose three Captains, a Mrs. Hammond, a decent sort, Mrs. Ranger a fool of a woman and F.G. I won the toss and had first pick. We each took 5 girls and as ill luck had it for me I got one a Miss Porter, an old girl and one who when she likes can work, but she didn’t like and let us down to say nothing of disheartening the others. Three of them and myself worked like mad but Porter left the table six times to gossip and didn’t work hard until it was too late. The sixth girl was a complete dud, left us at lunch time with ‘flu, her successor only worked till tea time and left us short handed for ½ hour when a third was put in who checked about one letter to my six.

Anyway Mrs.H won, she got her seventh tank full of letters in when the second table rolled up their sixth while we scrambled to fill our sixth by 5 O’clock. A tank is about half the size of a double bed and three feet deep so we checked a few letters. I heard that the men were surprised, they never dreamed so many could be done in the time. Average over a tank each, quite 1500 letters per head. When one realises it entails looking at name, number and unit on each letter and adding or altering address on outside envelope it means hard work. They gave the winning team an extra ½ day off.

They are batty on competitions lately, in one the other day on Despatch a girl broke all records by getting out over 3000. I want to watch her working because it seems to me impossible.
On Friday I blew around to 68 West Hill and saw Gray she has applied for leave for Monday and we propose to go to Dorking per ‘bus. I studied my map and thought of all sorts of places, to go in the wildest most inconsistent way. Margate one second, Southend next, then suggested a day at Brighton or Rochester but after digesting several guide books and measuring with a pencil the distance “as the crow flies” we decided upon Dorking. It is 23½ miles from Westminster Bridge but we get the ‘bus at Clapham Common.

Yesterday I took the small boy of the household to London as I was obliged to call at the Agent General for W.A. to get L2 to carry me over my leave and get Carl a few things. I timed it nicely, arriving there in time to see the King & Queen and all the Royal Family drive past to St.Pauls for their Silver Wedding Thanksgiving Service. The Queen really is charming, not a scrap like her photos. She has an awfully nice smile and doesn’t look an atom stodgy like her photos make her. King George is tiny, and very dull of him he was looking away from me, but I got an “eye full” of Mary and the second son a nice looking lad. The one who won my heart completely was the youngest Prince a dear little Naval Cadet who beamed upon everyone and saluted as if he enjoyed the fun. Princess Mary too is better looking than her photos, has a very intelligent face and a glorious complexion. In the excitement of looking at the youngest Prince I missed seeing Queen Alexandria who was in the following carriage. The wonderful Royal Carriage and Postillions in scarlet coats and oceans of Life Guards – in Khaki – then gentlemen with battleaxes – decidedly unpleasant looking weapons.
Like all interesting processions it was over in two ticks and so much to see and miss worst luck! Then we had lunch and later got a ‘bus to the Zoo. The first time the youngster had been and he did enjoy it “Oh! the elephant isn’t half big” he exclaimed, he was very disappointed to hear the Kangaroos were all dead, poor things! the keeper told me they always die. Domestic pigs now frequent the part alloted to our national pet.

No one can imagine the brain rest it was to gaze at animals and forget the War for awhile. The boy had a ride on the camel – a 1d treat and I’m bothered if he hadn’t a line up in a queue to await his turn. I sat and had my tea and regulation 2½ oz. of scone (which wasn’t the full weight I feel sure) and watched the kiddies in a long queue for a ride on the elephant and another for a trip around in a sort of cart drawn by a llama, to say nothing of the long procession for the joy of a ride on a camel. After “doing” the Zoo we walked along the banks of the lake in Regents Park and my heart ached at the sight of blind Aussie lads sitting nearby, it is quite close to St.Dunstans. We got another ‘bus to London Bridge and so home.

One remark of the boys amused me and brought home the times we are living in. He said “That cake I had was sweet and you had real butter when we had our tea” Two unusual items these days.

The other day feeling tired of the scarceness of my evening meals I decided to “go a bust” and have a tomato, which cost me 6d and not very big one I might add. Poor old Carl, for the first time he writes in a “fed up” tone which worries me. I don’t like to picture him “jumpy” and not caring about the sound of shells, he says he thinks it is
since the air raids on the Hospitals, he is in charge of an anti aircraft gun now, and they are having far worse fighting than the papers say judging by his letters.

I have four more prisoners of War now to write to and what with Dunn, Kenny, Tickner, Bishop, Quantrell, Gordon, Lindsay and the others I am kept pretty busy, still judging by the promptness of their replies they like getting my letters and I know full well how letters do cheer one up.

14th July 1918 Sunday

I’m writing this sitting up in bed, having just had my breakfast, and it is pouring with rain, has been for a week with the exception of yesterday which was very kind and thoughtful of the Clerk of Weather because my beastly umbrella handle had swollen and I couldn’t open the thing and left it behind me when going off in the morning and trusted to my usual luck, which was in fortunately as I went to Enfield so see Lucys Aunt.

Anyway to return to earlier in the week and our trip to Dorking. Well! we ‘bused to Brixton, then a second to Clapham Common to the Common to be met with the unpleasant sight of a long queue lined up which we reluctantly joined, and being determined to go on “top” we had to see two buses fill up finally scrambling on top of the third at 11 o’clock.

It was well worth the wait, fare 1/6 and the most glorious run through beautiful country. We pulled up at Epsom to let the engine cool where were numbers of lads in hospital blue. All the gardens we passed
were simply “bursting” with flowers, one just sees a blaze of colours, a patch of scarlet, another of blue, white yellow so on and so on, the leaves about lost to sight.

On we went through Leatherhead, up and down hills and past farms, noble looking residences with imposing gates, wayside Inns with the quaintest names. One called “The Leg of Mutton & Cauliflower” made my mouth water, and I’d forgotten my coupon for meat!! For two hours we passed these interesting looking places until Box Hill and then Dorking itself – on a Fair Day too – Narrow lanes, one cannot call them streets – then the wide market place with sheep and calves and fowls all penned up into tiny square runs but all so nice and clean. Quaint notice boards hanging out from various Inns, and quite nice shops – the usual English village so vastly different from anything with us in Australia.

*Dorking High Street  December 2010*
We were mighty hungry and glad to find a pleasant Refreshment place where we had savoury egg and salad, fruit pie and tea 1/9 each. After enjoying that we wandered about aimlessly, I bought a guide book for 2d which told me all about Leatherhead and Wooten, and pleasant walks 2 to 5 miles from Dorking and finally said “Dorking is happy in possessing no history” – Still it is none the less beautiful and I could well do with a week there to explore the surroundings and neighbourhood.

Evelyn lived not far away at Wooton, and anyway its history dates back to the Conqueror – or before – It then belonged to the Crown, Queen Edith, wife of the Confessor. An old Roman road ran through it in the dark ages which in later days – so my guide says – was used by the Canterbury Pilgrims.

Dorking from the hilltop green (perhaps the market square)
- late evening December 2008
We wandered by a running brook with trees overhanging the water and two swans swam about with a baby, the first cygnet I have ever seen, such a cumbersome baby. Gardens ran down to the waters edge, bushes of raspberries and red currants, an old mill nearby and such a pretty old house covered with climbing roses in full bloom. Then we walked over what in prewar days had been a common but was now all cultivated allotments with vegetables, some few acres of wheat and wonderful to relate some corn.

I sat on a tumbled down wall near an old cottage like Mrs. Allingham’s paintings in the Sydney Art Gallery the garden a mass of blooms, and current bushes, Gray took a snap – Oh! the beauty of an English Summer. Last year I raved about Llangollen now its Dorking.

I long with a sickening longing sometimes for dear old Aussie, but full well I know that back there again days will come when I shall have a quiet craving to see these English homes again. Fancy sitting

_Cottage below Dorking 2008_
there surrounded by such peace and beauty we could hear ever so plainly the guns in Flanders. All the men we met were either in hospital blue or khaki except a few real old grey beards. Wherever one goes the War follows one!

After tea we walked towards Box Hill and sat in a field sniffing new mown hay until the 7.10 train back. I’d love to climb Box Hill and see the view from the top. I read somewhere that an old eccentric called Major Peter Labelliere selected a spot on the hill for his burial place and requested to be buried head downwards in order he said that “as the world turned topsy turvey, it was fit that he should be buried so that he might be right at last”. The trip back in the train was “bonzer”, passing by fields full of scarlet poppies – Of course I must finish the day with a headache and went straight to bed when I got back.

Well, yesterday I toddled off to see Lucys Aunt at Enfield, it is a sabbath days journey and no mistake. I lined up in a long queue for my ticket at Liverpool St. Station, then I got afraid that 1/- would not cover the fare so got out another, moved up a few yards and began thinking what a fool I was not to have looked up the fare before and I didn’t like the thought of losing my place in the queue so I got another shilling, moved slowly up another yard – Miss Barker had enlarged upon the distance – I had better get out still another shilling then I got in a panic having a vision of the single ticket taking all my money and having to borrow the return fare – Only one in front now, a lad in hospital blue, then I faced the ticket office man, and with a feeling of dread I inquired “How much is the return fare to Bruce Grove?” – 9d
grunted the official. I could have laughed out in his face, the relief was so great.

Then after asking dozens of people the way and details about the trains I set off for my destination. Goodness, Liverpool St. Station is gigantic, it seemed to me like Sydney, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, - Hobarts all rolled into one with thousands of people and Refreshment rooms all over the place. At Bruce Grove I caught a tram and sat in it until I thought I was there for life – fare 4d – passing shops and people then uninteresting flat country. When we got away from houses it was all allotments then miles and miles of glass houses full of tomato plants.

Flying machines looped the loop overhead, a common sight these days at last we came to Totteridge Rd. and Miss Barkers house. It was nice to feel I was sitting where Billy and Syd had, and gaze upon the same garden as I sat and talked to the old lady. If Lucy lives to be 70 I guess she will resemble her Aunt to a nicety. She was awfully nice and talked and talked and showed me family photographs including a beastly likeness of Nell and asked me if it was a good one. Whatever made Nell send such a vile thing I can’t imagine.

After a delightful afternoon and loaded with a beautiful bunch of roses I took my departure returning by ‘bus to the Bank and walked to London Bridge Station to get the train home – otherwise my room –

On Friday night I had a lovely letter from Carl full of interest, I am thankful to say he seems to have cheered up again, but is slightly wounded – alas! not badly enough to be sent to Blighty. – He wrote on July 8th and says “We have had a wild time since I last wrote and I don’t think any of the boys are likely to forget the 4th July or the next
two days. We came out of the stunt yesterday for a few days rest, it was some stunt too. In the early hours of the morning of the 4th we lay out in front of our line and down came our barrage, such a barrage too, you can’t imagine what one is like, some of our shots fell short inflicting some casualties, including my No.1 on the gun. I got a small piece about the knee+ – no Blighty though – I didn’t even bandage it at the time but could +(a piece of shrapnel worked out of his knee in August 1936)+ feel the blood trickling down, got another piece through the knee of my pants putties, field glasses, mess tin and radiator of the gun, so was fairly lucky in only getting what I did. As soon as the barrage lifted we were straight into Fritz’s line and there were little groups of prisoners going back about 10 minutes after the ball started rolling, then we went on past the village mentioned in the papers, and on up a rise, then dug in, my company was a support one, the others going on over the top again into an old French line that was being used by Fritz. This time we had the Tanks to help us and they will do me everytime, they are just it for mopping up machine gun nests. At daybreak our planes were busy keeping us supplied with ammunition, dropping cases attached to small parachutes.

We captured together about 100 machine guns. I had one which I used a good bit and left our gun with the two boys left in my crew. After we got dug in Fritz pelted us like one thing…… He made a bit of a splash next morning early and captured a few of our chaps but with the exception of 3 or 4 we got them back after a real ding dong bombing stunt. We had to go up from the support line to give a hand and then remained in the front line till we were releived. We had a fair
number of casualties included Padding Northway wounded. Several Yanks were in the stunt and seemed to enjoy it no end, those wounded were as proud as punch of their wounds…..To-day I have had a pretty easy time of it as I went to the Doctor to get this piece of metal out, but after probing away at it and nothing able to get hold of it (it is about an inch in) he is treating it with hot foments to try and loosen it a bit, so today I have been up 3 or 4 times – Don’t go worrying its not a bit sore or even stiff.”

A letter so like the old chap. I only hope the knee is bad enough to keep him out of the fighting for awhile. How glad I am I was strong minded enough to come to England. I have never regretted it for a moment, not even when I could have cried with the pain of frozen toes on the way to the station in the morning. Goodness me! I dread the winter especially the fogs they are perfectly odious, hideously so.

21st July 1918

Very worried about Carl, the last I heard was the doctor had kept probing unsuccessfully into his knee in search of the piece of shrapnel and he had finally been ordered back into the line, rotten!! sending him back with an injured leg. Anyway, thinking about it wont mend matters so enough of that, but the weather has been vile rain and stuffiness for the last week and ever since the ‘flu I’ve had a wretched headache hanging about.

Yesterday in spite of pouring rain I met Miss Pollit at Camden Town Station near our office, we lunched together and got on top of a ‘bus for Caterham, by then it had cleared a bit and kept fairly fine for
the rest of the day. I have been through Purley, past Croyden before but Caterham is further into Surrey. It is a small country town, called in England a village but to say a village to an Australian they would imagine something too minute. It is in a valley and the walk we went directed and recommended by the local “Bobby” was really lovely, he was certainly a man of good taste as regards scenery. We climbed up a steep winding road with lovely trees on either side and past some grandees property that had a huge gate in a wall – fortunately open, so we looked in and it looked like a beautiful scene in the theatre come to life.

The ground was all moss and tall beech trees with pale green barrels and limbs so closely planted that there was no sign of the sky overhead except above the winding avenue. Where one got a vista of lawn and hedges and a beautifully kept garden. I simply cannot describe its
beauty, the moss and pale green effect took my eye. Then we came upon a funny old church, now used as a sunday school, the other new erection being close by. The old building dated back to the reign of King John. I took a snap of it so hope it is a success. The policeman told us to keep to the left until we came to the Arrow Inn. I might add we kept going to the left and got into various blind country

![The Harrow Inn – the implement forgotten 2010](image)

lanes, so seeing a lady with her children we inquired the way which she kindly showed us the right road and behold “The Harrow Inn” loomed in sight with a noble sign board to that effect displaying the farming impliment on it. Nearby was the most lovely view I have ever seen in England. All the funny ill shapen fields of different shades of green, and outlined with the dark green of the hedges, hill and hollows and here and there a church spire stand up, the only thing to show there were villages dotted about.
Not far from this a funny old square tower in a field attracted us but a woman we asked said that altho she had read the history of Caterham she could find no mention of it. Then the road narrowed down and the trees – huge beauties – on either side made quite a tunnel, it was ever so pretty looking down the valley and turning down a very steep path with a notice to the effect that it was dangerous to all traffic, we came across
the sweetest small houses, fairly new, but built in an old fashioned style, the gardens absolutely lovely, full of every flower in the seedmans catalogue with pink and scarlet roses galore.

I should just love to live in one for the summer. Then we came to the quaintest of quaint shops – a mixed business if ever there was one, and not much further on we were back in Caterham itself to find a beastly long queue at the end of which we stood to catch the ‘bus back.
The village was full of soldiers, such fine looking men and no wonder, they were Grenadier Guards – their camp is close by. I was delighted to see that England still had such men left to put into the fighting, all young, mostly under 20 I should imagine, this is their final camp before being drafted overseas, and I bet the Germans have nothing better. It reminded me that I heard Major Bean was told by an English Officer who had some Aussies under him for awhile that they were the finest soldiers he had fought with, with the exception of the Guards – well I think I can understand it. Having the huge population they can pick a regiment – only the best – while we have not the numbers. The old 1st Aust.Light Horse ought to have run them mighty close, near a tie I guess. Still the Aussie need not be ashamed of being
beaten by such men they even put the Scotch regiments I have seen in the shade and I have a very great admiration for the Scot, he is a fine fellow, I see a lot on Kings Cross Station every day and I have often wondered how England beat Scotland, and the lads I see are I suppose the great great great grandsons of the chaps in history, Godbless them!

I got off at the “Red Deer Inn” (I love these quaint names) and got another ‘bus to Sydenham. Miss Pollit going on to London. I had a bonzer headache when I got back, so to bed.

Our ‘Arrow Inn- episode reminds me of a little scene I witnessed in a shop the other day. Two women came in, one carrying a baby evidently just beginning to talk, the other woman picked up an egg and holding it up to the baby said “Look dear, whats this?” “Say Hegg” said the mother. I laughed out simply couldn’t keep it and only hope they thought me a harmless lunatic.

4th August 1918

Fifth year of the War, England is certainly wonderful and Germany is a very very long way off beating her. Still, the nerve racking business is pretty awful. I feel 10 years older and it dawned on me the other day that I never laugh now, even if others around me do and laughter is so jolly infectious as a rule. Strange thing too was that when Carl was on leave I noticed he’d learnt to laugh, a thing I never remember noticing him do years ago. It isn’t that I fail to see the funny side but I’m too war weary.

Yesterday having the whole day off I went to High Barnet and walked from there to Hatfield. It rained most of the time but the road
was good, no mud whatever. Past Hadley Stone where the last battle of the Wars of the roses was fought saw many lovely homes with imposing gate lodges, then fields of corn (wheat I believe) miles and miles of hedges, little villages, the lovely cottage gardens a treat to gaze upon. Roses climbing everywhere, tall hollyhocks, daises, pansies, and larkspurs in thick clumps, no plan just a blaze of colour.

Through Potters Bar where I saw numbers of German prisoners sauntering about alone evidently going to their dinner after working on the farms. They had big round patches of blue and red on their clothes. On and on I walked through pretty wooded country then old cottages and fields with hay cocked in them.

Arrived at Hatfield about one o’clock and hunted up a refreshment room answering to the name of The Wind Mill Tearooms where I indulged in a boiled egg, bread and margarine. A Land Army girl came in and I had a long yarn with her. She was a frail looking Welsh girl but fearfully keen on her work. Told me she was glad she’d got in “this Branch of the service” and talked of wearing “The Kings Uniform”. The badge around her arm had crossed axes and a cross cut saw – the Forestry Branch – She told me that 20 girls in her batch had cut down 1064 trees in a week but had 6000 to get down within the next six weeks, trimming off the branches as well. She was off on her weekend leave and in good humour, When we parted and I wandered up to inspect the Parish church later poking my nose into the gateway of Hatfield Park. Where Queen Elizabeth happened to be when the news that she was Queen reached her. An old chap at the lodge came out and told me the place was only open to the public on Public
Holidays. After a barney when I told him I’d come all the way from Australia he let me in with strict instructions not to go too near the main house but escorted me through a courtyard and two private and ancient gateways so I managed to see quite a lot including the remains of the celebrated oak under which Elizabeth was sitting according to history when she received the news.

There is the most beautiful long drive up to the house, huge trees on either side, and such quaint lamp posts around the house.

Coming back in the train an American lad sat next me, and tried to talk but it was hopeless, I couldn’t understand him, which was most annoying as I longed to have a yarn with a Yank. He seemed a nice boy too.

I hear Hetty Peart is on draft for Italy, the first detachment of V.A.Ds to go there from Britain.

18th August, 1918

Lovely big Australian mail this week, and Oh! the joy of seeing Aussie newspapers, I read them from the first page to the last never missing a single advertisement even.

B- has been over on leave, and with Hetty idle, waiting to be sent overseas I’ve spent all my spare time with them. On Thursday evening B- took us to dine at some swankie place, the menu in French and we hadn’t our coupons with us so had to ask the waitress what was to be had minus those important scraps of paper. We ate a wierd assortment of food which took about two hours to get through including lengthy waits between each course. I met the two again on Saturday B-
having arranged a luncheon party with Major and Mrs. Crozier his late O.C. Mrs C. took command (she was that type) of the proceedings at a place in Piccadilly where Bertie had reserved a table and once again the menu in French – all I wish when I see one is, that I wasn’t there or that there was no food in the country.

Anyway, I got out of it by having the same as Mrs. C. Hetty too, thought after due consideration that there was nothing nicer either so that problem was solved, but I longed to giggle and didn’t dare look at Hetty. Mrs. C. was a nuisance because she wouldn’t go to see the War Pictures because of the crowds always on a Saturday afternoon, and as B- had planned to take us I was doubly vexed, so we ended by walking to Hyde Park and sitting on 1d chairs until the Croziers thought fit to depart. The Major was quite a pleasant fellow but she amused me by saying “I suppose you commence your work about 10 o’clock” When I told her I worked from 8.30 till 5, she just gasped. I wonder how she imagines Army Post Offices are run.

After bidding them goodbye we wandered about Hyde Park and Kensington gardens in Peter Pan land, and after tea at a shop in Knightsbridge we left B- , Hetty coming back with me for the night.

On Sunday I again dined with B – I had no meat coupons left but Bertie supplied me with one of his and I had a nice dinner, except for crabs claws which to eat in polite society are rather an undertaking. I was afraid all the time of sending the red legs flying onto the floor so made a great “to do” with the mayonnaise and lettuce. After that we went to Kew Gardens having tea by the river. B – is a fearful stick, he is what one might call “dull company” and is like a wet blanket to me. I
believe I’d make more headway with King George. B – had recently had 20 minutes of His Majestys Company, taking him over the big Ordnance Depot at Calais, he said he seemed very bored – my sympathy is with the King – “Even the W.A.A.C. failed to interest him” B- said but he added that he wasn’t surprised as they have all bobbed their hair and never brush it and look like a lot of Zulus. They have a lot of the roughest type at Calais doing the heavy storeroom work, I believe.

My landlady and family have all departed to the sea side – “south-end on mud” as it is rudely called near the mouth of the Thames, so as I am alone in my glory I asked Robie to come and help me eat a dinner which we cooked between us – a fearful “blow out”, Rump steak which took my whole weeks coupons, onions at 8d lb, tomatoes 1/3 lb. beans of my landlords allotment also some of his potatoes. It was a great feast I can tell you with coffee to finish it up – round it off so to speak.

Two Aust. mails running has kept us busy at the Office apart from dozens of new rules and regulations to remember. Now a rumour is going around that any girl not getting out 1000 letters a day is to get the sack, so at that rate I’ll be looking for another job shortly and not the only one, as I got a mere 700 yesterday and 781 the day before I never miss any mans letters, the girls who make a splash in numbers throw aside every letter that is the least difficult to locate – I mean the person to whom it is sent. I’d sooner get the “Kick out” than throw a letter aside into primary, where it lies for days, and most likely gets the same treatment there.
The other night I saw a fine sight but common enough these days. Crossing London Bridge looking towards the Tower a big Observation balloon went up – a huge thing – I stood and watched it
drift across the sky. Another night I saw the search lights pick up an aeroplane. It was a very dark night and our planes were up as usual, I heard the noise and got out of bed to see if I could see it. About 7 o’clock the other evening we heard an aeroplane overhead which sounded like a German, I quite thought we were in for a daylight raid and before you could say “knife” people were pouring out of the Park nearby and making for home. Everyone gazing skyward, for an English sky it was fairly clear but it was too high up, then suddenly a puff of smoke appeared like bursting shrapnel, then another and another, we expected an explosion every moment but nothing happened after all the excitement I fancy it was one of our new planes.

Poor old C is in the thick of things now. I had a card dated 10th saying he was well. No one is getting letters from France now. Tickner has been wounded and wrote from hospital saying as he came out of the line he saw the 44th moving in on the 8th. There is a nice Kalgoorlie girl at the Office – Miss Howgate – two Miss Moores from N.S.W. and several others whos names I havent yet discovered.

25th August 1918

I feel very scattered brained this morning and don’t quite know where to make a start at writing up my doings. I met B- and lunched with him at the Hotel in Buckingham Palace Rd. on Sunday, a ‘bus strike being in full swing I walked to Forrest Hill for a tram to London.

After lunch we went to Kew Gardens and wandered through the hot houses where all the old Aussie Scrub is growing and felt quite homesick, the plants all looked rather sad as if a little real sunshine
would cheer them up better than a hot water pipe and glass. We came back early owing to the difficulties of travel and I had visions of being killed in the huge crowds.

This ‘bus strike is due to the powers that be giving the men conductors a 5/- a week rise but not the women who do exactly the same work. I do not as a rule side with strikers but they have everyones sympathy. All the daily papers I have seen had leaders on their side. London was absolutely without a ‘bus from Sunday until Friday, fortunately it was fine weather.

I happened to get Monday off, so lunched with B- at his pet Piccadilly Circus place, very much “IT”. One melts into the carpet, tables for two, walls all festooned in gold with little cherubs, very high ceiling and handsome pillars, everything quite “so so”. Naval and military officers galore and their “lady friends” with beastly pet dogs. This time I had my new dress and hat and new shoes so did not feel like a worm in disgrace. After that we went to the Coliseum.

Hetty left for Italy last Wednesday week, I had a card from Paris where she spent a few days and had a lovely time, quite lost her heart to the French who she says couldn’t do enough for the party of V.A.D.s bound for Italy, the first lot to go to that front. This is the Age to live in alright but one wants to be cut into bits. I envied her going to Italy and I wish I could go overseas to France and yet I want to stop in London. One is never satisfied, thank goodness I came to England anyway.
Heard from Tickner last week, he is wounded in the arm and in the 3rd Aux. Hosp at Dartford, my various lads make life very bearable writing to them, and trying to make their lot a little better.

Now we are in the middle of a Tube strike, the ‘bus affair was a joke to the Tube one. My first intimation was a Munition girl yesterday morning shouting to a “pal” at London Bridge Station. “Hi! Lizz! they’re all on strike down below, Ha!Ha! I ain’t going to walk I know”. London is like a big ants nest when you have run a stick over the top. I never realized how many people travel underground till the trains stopped running. The queues for every ‘bus are beyond a joke and the streets absolutely packed to bursting point. Over the same thing equal pay for equal work and I again sympathise with the women.

The girls on these jobs are the very best I never cease to admire them. I have never seen finer women anywhere nor wish to. I may as well mention here some signs one sees in the streets here. Very often one sees a card in a window of a house stating the number of men “fighting for their King and Country from this House”, also another often stuck up to the effect that the people are in “Honour Bound to keep to the War Rations”, of course this is now out of date on account of the coupons, it is now a case of Hobsons Choice.

Everywhere in streets one sees arrows pointing to show the way to Air Raid Shelters, or a notice saying “50 people may take shelter here during air raids at their own risk”. For a long time a card with C.P. stuck in the front room windows puzzled me but I found out it is to let the general Carrier Carter Paterson know to call.
Yesterday I heard from Ernest White, he is at Heyterbury at a signal school, funnily enough I came across letters from him at the office while in final sorting so was able to forward them before the main lot. The War news is brighter, but everyone in England seems to have so become part and parcel of the War that it is impossible to realize it might be over this year.

One is afraid to hope, that is the real truth and a grim determination to see it through has got hold of the nation. There is only one thought in my poor feeble brain “will Carl come through” Victory of course will come, I know that, even if it takes another 10 years, the Allies can carry on quite well, the food problem has been mastered, the Americans fill the want for men, so the old country can plod along for years. The new generation coming along like rabbits from what I see the Englishman gets leave once a year, 9 months later there is an infant in the household, three months to recover and another leave, or if he is killed another man. Amounts to the same thing as regards population, the huge population is something possible. Coombe Rd, of an evening the children run and crawl out of the houses like young rabbits out of holes, or bees out of a hive.

I heard a funny story from Bertie the other day, Some Tommies took a German officer prisoner and he wouldn’t do as he was ordered to, to carry a stretcher but began to give cheek, said he was an officer and how the English were making a lot of mistakes, they thought they were going to win the War but they weren’t etc. etc. and they thought he was going to carry the stretcher but he wasn’t. So an Aussie who turned up remarked that the Germans were making a few mistakes too,
he for instance thought he was going back to the rear to the wire cage but he wasn’t – and B. added “and he didn’t”. I hear that the Aussies think the Americans too rough at fighting and even C. said they were worse than our men so I hope Fritz likes his newest enemy.

Heard from Mrs.B – today who regretted not having written sooner but added “I had to line up in a long queue for a stamp” Oh! This population!! And I saw where a Magistrate congratulated a woman upon being the mother of 16 children.

1st September, 1918

My brain seems to be in a hopeless state, the heavy fighting at the front when the Australians are in it day after day and week after week as it has been lately and only a few odd service cards from C. it simply plays Old Harry with me. I don’t exactly realize I am worrying but I cannot settle to anything and my old head lately has been beyond a joke it aches and aches.

I’d like a weeks holiday but dread having no work to occupy me because I get lonely enough now. I envy the girls who doll up and “get off” they at least get someone to talk to. When I see a lonely Aussie wandering about I long to go up to him. Sometimes do launch out. I was at Horseferry Rd. seeing about my seperation allowance and he certainly spoke first, a feeble remark about waiting. He came from Sydney and looked so cheerful when I announced the fact that I did too, it was good to speak to someone who knew the dear old place.

He was far from a thrilling specimen, hailed from Newtown,
and knew Yass, but we yarnd for about half an hour while waiting to be attended to at a crowded counter.

There is a Police Strike now and the other day I saw Armies of specials going out on duty. It was funny to watch the dense traffic taking care of itself at busy parts such as the Bank. I don’t blame the “Bobbies” they are miserably paid 35/- a week or some such feeble amount for a married man and 3 children, Absolute starvation. I get 32/6 and spend it all and am far from wasteful.

Yesterday I decided headache or no headache I’d go somewhere so got a ‘bus to Lewisham 2d and there got on a Sidcup one 4d, a bonzer run into semi country, past quaint villages. Had an egg and bread and margarine and tea 1 / 4 at Sidcup then setting out to walk to Chislehurst along a country road past wayside cottages with lovely gardens, nothing comes up to an English cottage garden this side of
Heaven. On a perfect day such as it was, the smell of the flowers and a quaint old thatched cottage was a perfect sight. No garden in Australia can ever come up to it.

*Sidcup bus 1920s*

*Sidcup-Chislehurst road  2005*
At Chislehurst I wandered into an ancient church with interesting tombs. Over the church door a tablet runs.

John Rands
“Lies at the church dore, he left six pounds a year forever, two houses, and land to be given to the poor of the parish by Mrs. Mary Farington with whom he lived.
He died in 1714.”
St Nicholas Chislehurst 2005
Another amused me some old girl left a certain amount invested the interest to be paid “for ever” to who ever undertook to look after her grave and paint the tombstone every three years “in a business and workmanlike manner”. I walked about 9 miles along a country road to Bromley, far from signs of khaki apparently and I forgot the exisance of the War for a short while.
When “tut tut” and a huge Red Cross Waggon drives carefully past, three men rolled up in blankets and an A.M.C. man sitting with them. Cot cases from France. Then I met a few of the least distorted cases from Frognall Facial Hosp. Oh! it is awful to see men with half their faces shot away, t gave me a great dread and fear thinking C. might come back like that.

*House of Sydney family near Sidcup 2005*

*formerly Frognal Facial Hospital, now a nursing home*

*Chislehurst Volunteer Training Corps 1915*
Grounds of former Frognal Hospital from the terrace

When I got back to Lower Sydenham I passed where the bomb dropped during the last Air raid. I had never had the curiosity to go and see it before. It certainly did a lot of damage, three huge houses knocked down flat, and seven big shops opposite all the windows broken and the ceilings all down and for yards up the street the houses more or less damaged. 16 people were killed.

The bomb fell just as I looked out of the back door to see if I could see the machine overhead.

8th September 1918

All the starch seems to have gone out of me lately and I cannot battle against depression like I used to more or less successfully. Must be developing nerves or some evil thing as everything irritates me and I have taken to worrying about my work and half the night I dream about
it. O! for someone to talk to upon interesting subjects, the most intelligent woman I have struck around these parts is the owner of a small sweet shop at Forrest Hill, she is English but went to Canada for a few years and says she is ashamed of England for groveling along in their narrow way, but added “I was just the same until I went to Canada and saw more which made me think more”.

I have thought out all sorts of schemes to get a change but I’d hate to leave my work at the base P.O. Still the thought of the winter, the snowy mornings when one could cry with the pain in ones fingers and toes and worst still the fogs. It all looms up to dreadful proportions. Still I can’t join the swallows and clear out so I’ve got to put up with it. So it is a case of toddle off to the station at 6.45 arrive at the office at 20 past 8, work hard till ¼ past 12, have a meal of sorts at the Canteen, then more work from 1.15 till 3, a ¼ hour for tea which consists of a penny bun about the size of a “genteel” scone washed down with a washy cup of tea, after that work again until 5, home to my lodgings where I sit on the doorstep until ¼ to 8 on the off chance of a letter from C. The cheery postwoman bustles past more often than not with “none this evening” when I crawl to bed feeling lonely to a degree.

22nd September 1918

My usual good luck! Our Superintendant came along the other day and asked if I’d go on evening shift from 4.30 till 11p.m. working on Records. I jumped at the chance, the joy of being out all morning and breathing fresh air and seeing the sky and not being suffocated in a dim lighted – or electric lighted place from 8.30 till 5. Last Monday I
stayed in bed until 10am then sat in Well’s Park and enjoyed the fresh air until 1am. Later getting a ‘bus to London a good blow on top – arrived at the office for work at 4.30. I have to do a sprint to catch the ¼ to 12 train at London Bridge, finally to bed by 1 in the morning after a meal of sorts.

I like the hours awfully much and believe I’d gladly go on for good. The Records are an important part of the business in the P.O. but fortunately I always try my hand at everything if I get the chance and one afternoon some weeks ago managed to be put on so when I arrived on Monday that small amount of experience helped me quite a lot. About 8.30 one of the Sergeants makes tea for us and we have 20 minutes “off duty” so the hours are just all right.

A letter from C. at last, he was out for a spell. Said that the other day in a shell torn village not far from the front line he saw three Aussie Nurses and added “It did us all good to just see them”. Strangely enough he also saw a Jack Tar off the “Yarra” too, how on earth did he get there.

How I envy the women able to get “right there” and yet I often think as I handle the pencil written records “from the field” I too may be doing my wee microscopical “bit”. Strange it seemed the other day I happened to be on “Gs” when Carl’s promotion passed through my hands. Poor old C’s letter ended in the minor key with the names of some of his friends who had been killed.

Last Sunday I took the Bishop kids blackberry picking at Christlehurst, only getting a small basket full and plenty of pricks and scratches.
Before I forget – the other day I made a pencil note of the soldiers I passed when going down Whitehall on top of a ‘bus, between Parliament House and Charing Cross.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>A.I.F.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Canadian</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Tommy</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A.I.F.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>wounded</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>nurses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eng. officers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eng. officer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>V.A.Ds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>wounded officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>W.A.A.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Portugese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>nurse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tommies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A.I.F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>sailors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>scotties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A.I.F.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>wounded</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>nurse</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>tommies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>naval officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>French officer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>W.A.A.C.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Americans</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Belgiams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one side of the street of course and not at a busy hour.

Bought material for a warm coat and skirt cost 12/11 yard but the thought of the coming winter and the shortage of coal alarms me. Times seem to be improving I don’t fancy the U boats will get our Xmas mail from Aussie this year. Air raids are quite “off” none since Whit Monday. Have almost forgotten what they are like.

I’ve noticed about the letters for the soldiers that the fresh reinforcement men get the big mail, while men who have been fighting for years seem forgotten. It seems such a shame, if only their people in Australia could see the way they seem to scent a mail and crowd to the office for letters. The girl on the door comes along to get their letters and if there is only one, or worse still none it makes me feel so miserable. Flying corps men get the most, I suppose their relations think it so risky that they never put off writing.
A middle-aged “girl” on the counter job is too soft hearted altogether for the job. The other day two brothers came, and she managed to find two letters for one man but none for the other and had us opening up fresh unsorted bundles and hunting in vain for one for the other chap because she hadn’t the heart to hand 2 to one man and leave his brother without any. The other day she was having a weep on her own and started all of us blowing our noses, because a blind lad came up asking for letters, said he hadn’t heard from home for some months and she couldn’t find any for him. Several of the prisoners of War that I have adopted I write to regularly because I notice they often go a mail without a letter and then perhaps only one.

I wouldn’t be surprised if I adopted a small boy of 7. He declares he will come back to Aussie with me, the family try to draw pictures of the “long journey” to put him off but he says he doesn’t care he’d go.

28th September 1918

The winter is creeping on, leaves falling off the trees, each night colder than predecessor, bitter cold winds but lovely sunshine although no warmth in it, still it was very bright and pleasant none the less. How I dread the winter and fogs especially, still, like the fighting it has to be faced but the combination isn’t exactly what one would choose. Anyway, news from France is decidedly more cheerful, how we lived through those awful days when the Big German Push was going strong goodness knows. The thought of further reverses or a long winter of fighting without success in the end would drive me into
Coney Hatch, so I only hope that Huns are feeling as miserable as humans can feel. It is a beastly cold wet day today, I long for a fire but suppose as coal is a scarce commodity now, I must keep off them as long as I can, and anyway I have no wood, which is not very easy to get either.

I lunched with Miss Pollitt on Friday, meeting her at the main entrance at Horseferry Rd. Hqts. Where there were crowds and crowds of Aussies, the conversation, the accent in fact the whole atmosphere was “Australia” and my ten minutes waiting made me very homesick. We had one of the usual Wartime weird meals, consisting of egg and bacon and potatoes, then fruit and jam tart, which was rhubarb stewed without sugar and some strawberry jam of sorts on it to make it eatable, one eats any old thing these days.

After seeing Miss P back to the office I wandered to Selfridges huge store in Oxford St. to invest in a couple of Aussie Union Jacks to stick into my lads parcels, and tried about a dozen shops for a note book for Westie. C. wrote and asked me to get one and never mind the cost, but these days it is a case of “are there any?” not the price. I came back with a collection of oddities in the note book line hoping Carl can select one from them and give the balance to other lads.

At an A.B.C. the other day, I saw a notice that the ½ order is withdrawn. One way to make people eat less was to forbid more than ½ worth of food being sold to one person. Things to eat just for the pleasure of the flavour is a thing of the past for the large majority. No doubt the Ritz and Carlton can dish up inviting meals but the cheaper refreshment places have a dull variety.
Last night I dreampt I was back in Aussie, all I could recall clearly when I awoke was “rushing” some white bread. How awfully funny all this will seem to people away in Australia where I suppose they still have pastry and scones and puff creams and plum cake. I’d love to see the expression on the faces of the inhabitants of Coombe Rd. if I produced a puff cream. I bet the houses would empty into the street to see it. Half the children have never seen one at all. It was so amusing the other evening telling the youngest child here all about shops full of nice cakes and streets all brightly lighted up with coloured lights in chemists windows and a hundred and one pre war things. Had I embarked upon a Fairytale she couldn’t have looked more intent with her eyes popping out of her head, we laughed, and she said it was a story and refused to believe such things.

Weird thoughts go through my head at times, the other day when seeing an old Tom cat, very dirty and dejected looking, snoozing on a wall near some tenements not far from Kings Cross, I thought of Mr.Krook, and pictured the two meeting and comparing their experiences and exchanging opinions. Krook the clean, supple limbed sharp far travelled Aussie, with all the hunting instincts developed to the utmost, sharp as a needle to hear the last sound, quick as a streak of lightning when alarmed or after his prey. And the old Cockney cat slow dirty dejected, used to noise, crowds and foul smells his only pleasure probably visiting various rubbish tins at night or stealing something from the neighbours. He most likely looked like his owners, sullen, used to being down trodden and under someone’s heel would suffer being ridden rough shod over sooner than show fight.
You could kick that cat and I bet he’d crawl away not so Krook, he’d scratch if possible, certainly swear and anyway hate you and show it for ever after. The two old cats are not unlike their counter parts in humans of the same type in the two countries. That is how it struck me, but a nice time I’d get if an Englishman thought I’d compared him to a Tom Cat.

Poor old Blighty, and there are somethings I admire so much about its people. Their love of flowers and gardening and their kindness to animals is most marked. Even the poor old Tom looked well fed, and probably he could not keep himself clean in such horrible surroundings.

29th

I can hear a lot of bombing going on somewhere. At first I thought it was an explosion but it is a regular sound of big guns, the atmosphere is heavy so sound travels – perhaps a naval engagement, it is getting louder and louder. My window rattles sometimes now.

Oct. 6th 1918

Sunday, pouring with rain and cold. Being on night work still I spend my mornings sitting in Well’s Park nearby and invested in a 6d guide book to amuse myself studying. The pond, where I watch small kids sail their boats and where the small boy belonging to the household has several times fallen into and been in horrible disgrace for weeks afterwards, in George III reign was looked upon as having medicinal qualities. George himself spent a day in the Park to “drink the water” and Evelyn mentions it in his Diary. All sorts of interesting
people have lived in Sydenham. Mrs Siddons, Liszt, later times Lord Roberts, and every morning I see Sir Ernest Shackleton’s father, taking the air, escorted by a dull looking female in nurses attire.

Pond in Wells Park  2005

Shackleton’s house, West Hill 2005
Every inch of England is interesting, it makes one want to live for a hundred years and be energetic enough up to that ripe age to sight see and poke into holes and corners.

The greatest excitement in the office is the return of the 1914 men to Aussie, worst luck the nicest Sergeants are amongst them Billy Quantrill and Briggs and the Bunberry lad.

Have left off writing my diary for a moment or so to inspect the young members of the household, rigged up in their new winter attire. My special favourite the small boy blossoms out in a nice white jersey and green velvet pants, he’s such a great kid the nicest little boy I’ve ever come across, I’d bring him back with me if I only had the chance.

There are bags upon bags of Australian mail at the office now, stacked up like wheat on the wharf at Fremantle before I left. It gives one a funny feeling to pass along by those stacks of letters and parcels and think of the feelings of those who sent them and the lads at this end waiting for us to hurry up and re-direct them. I am so very very glad I drifted into the Army Base P.O.

Poor old Carl, he is in all this horrible fighting I had a service card dated 26th Sep that is the last I have heard, and Sergeants with a Lewis Gun is not the safest job.

Have just read the morning paper with Germanys Peace terms. It is good news, but I hope we go on a bit longer, much as I hate the War and in spite of the agonies of mind I endure I don’t want to see Peace until Germany has had a bigger dose – now that we are giving it to her for a change.
It is remarkable the way England is taking the news, people are pleased needless to say but there is a certain wet blanket atmosphere probably the result of years of anxiety and dread the sight of all the armless, legless soldiers everywhere, men who have lost their speech and are blind. No wonder we feel the Hun must be squashed completely.

13th October 1918

My chief feeling is intense anxiety about Carl from whom I have not heard since 26th Sep. Everyday at the office I work on long lists of killed and wounded, expecting every minute to see the name of C.L.Good.

The news that Germany has accepted the United States peace Terms has just been published, but that means nothing as they simply have to. I’ve got so settled into a groove of miserable anxiety that I can’t imagine being free from it. Once I expressed a desire to see Peace declared in London – now I feel I don’t care a jot, just when it seems possible too. All the spirit seems to be squashed out of me somehow.

I met Tickner by appointment at London Bridge on Friday at 8 o’clock. We walked down Lidgate Hill to Staples Inn and sat in that quaint courtyard and yarnd. He, poor lad, looks very pulled down from his wound, hugs his arm to his side all the time. He’s a nice boy, only looks about 20, but showed me a picture of his wife, a girl about 18. She is in Aussie, up Moss Vale way. He hopes now to be sent back home as his arm is useless. It was a joy talking to someone who knows
both town and country, can drive, ride, milk a cow, knows the tonnage of a steamer, understands and has views on political subjects.

The relief to ones brain is marvelous, after the tittle tattle of the girls at the office. Even my landlord has no idea of the workings of a common rifle, has asked me the most common simple questions about a cow. As for steamers, he has never seen a mail boat let alone a man o’ war, and so it seems to be with more than half the population of London. And yet Mr.B is intelligent and the cleverist man I have struck at his trade. His wife hasn’t yet succeeded in forming any idea of what the Front is like. She tries in a blind way to form a “picture in her mind” so she told me, but never having seen anything but Coombe Rd. and the surrounding neighbourhood it is difficult no doubt.

My room has become a sort of Inquiry Bureau “Please, have you any boric acid? K’s got a sore eye and I don’t know what to do”. “Some sticking plaster for the boy’s knee?” Anxious inquiries if I have a book on the Tower of London as one of the girls has an essay to write. The boy brings me a picture of the inside workings of a motor and asks for details of ball bearings. So and so on nearly every weekend. This morning being restless and it actually being a nice fine day I took two of the girls and the boy for a ‘bus trip to London. An hours run from the Crystal Palace to Trafalgar Square where I showed them the Ruined French Village with guns and sand bagged trenches, erected for “Feed the Guns Campaign” (War Bonds)

Nearby was a long queue lined up to go to a service at St Martins in Fields – the last thing in frightfulness – a church queue.
From there we scrambled into a ‘bus that took us past the Bank towards the Monument. I showed the boy Pudding Lane, he seemed slightly disappointed in my failure to supply the Bakers Shop where the oven got overheated and started the famous Fire. To aid the essay we passed by the Tower – or rather walked around the outside – not being allowed in on Sunday.

A bus back via the Tower Bridge and along the Old Kent Rd. – Historic spots!!!

I forgot to note before that last week Robie and I bought a War Certificate each (15/6) and investigated the Ruined Village. It was a dismal wet day and we filed into a room full to bursting of investors, old Grannies and children being in the majority. I signed my name with the vilest pen I’ve ever struck, my elbow being bumped by the passing crowd, I am afraid in five years time they won’t believe it is my signature and I see trouble getting my quid out of the Govt.

We then passed out along a sand bagged trench, with Hell Fire Corner, and various other such names stuck up until we got to the guns. I chose an 8” Howitzer for stamping my certificate handing it to the gunner who put it where the Shell ought to go and some weird mechanism did the job. We stood then in a queue for about five minutes to see a dugout fitted with wireless where the message from Haig saying our Troops “are now in Cambri” had just been received. I’m still on nightshift and long may I remain at it. I love having the morning and early afternoon off, but don’t mention fogs. I absolutely dread the thought even, of fogs!
I wish to goodness I could hear from C. I’m fed up with the anxiety and worry of the War. Had I stayed in Aussie I would have been in Claremont long before this. One gets to the pitch of not being able to sit still, think on one subject for longer than three seconds. All food tastes beastly, and reading is out of the question. I flip over the pages and haven’t the least idea of what I have been reading.

14th October

Am feeling greatly relieved, two letters from C. this morning. He was “out” after having been in that terrific fighting from 26th Sep. to 6th October. Seems to have rather enjoyed it, judging by his letters, except that so many good 44th men were killed including Paddy Northway, one of the 5/44. C. had just spent three days in hospital with Trench Fever, but was back with his unit with a “no duty” order, so was evidently still on the sick list.

October 26th 1918

Here I am indulging in a general “break up” It doesn’t suit me a little bit, I hate playing the invalid or interesting convalescent. For weeks now I felt well on the last lap in the final heat for something of the sort, but what is one to do? Idleness these days means suicide, and work – which gets to overwork – means general “smash up”. So it is a case of the devil or the deep. Last Saturday afternoon I was told to report to Cpt. Davis for duty on records at 8.30am. on Monday. Well! I have never done so and goodness knows when I shall. I toddles back on Saturday feeling O.K. but later developed a slight sore throat and
headache. Took quinine and retired to bed on Sunday a bit off colour, when suddenly felt awful. Had a perfectly abominable night, thought the bed was covered in “lists from the field” and all night – when I wasn’t painfully wide awake – I was looking up mens records.

In the morning I thought one days spell would fix me up, so sat and dozed all day over the fire. Next day decided to go to the doctor who attended me years ago when in England with mother. I sort of “perked up” when finally in the surgery and felt a perfect fraud. Dr.Beaumont was awfully nice and I recalled the ancient cousin of mine disapprovingly of him calling him “a great ladies man”. He well remembered my illness in Palace Rd. and after a confab about the past and general outline of events during the last 17 years we eventually arrived at the immediate present.

I simply described my disease as feeling as if I had been in bed for a month and it was my first day out. After the usual examination he told me I was suffering from the after effects (?) of ‘flu, was very weak, must take ten days rest and swallow a tonic. Here I am now following directions and trying to eat as much as I can. Eggs at 7d each, Wine I tried to get to be told there may be some obtainable in November. Cheapest was 5/6 a bottle but goodness knows what it will be in a months time.

I’m feeling better already and actually toddled down the street to buy a hat because I’ve arranged to meet Westie in London on Monday and have tea with him. He has got the chance of a commission, and coming over to a school, bringing something for me from Carl. I
cancelled my engagement for afternoon tea at the Overseas Club, didn’t feel equal to doing the polite.

Just feel as if the old “pine trees” at Kellywood would do me, away in the quiet where there is no fog no dampness, no crowds, no noise except an odd goods train puffing past or the Melbourne Express dashing through Saddleback cutting.

I wonder sometimes if I shall ever see the dear old place again. A cold on one’s chest in the end of October in this rotten climate does not tend to cheer one. I dread the winter almost to a state of panic within. Can’t describe the dread and fear. Prospects of a parcel from Lucy is cheering, one from Maud arrived a few days ago, bonzer tea, sugar and tinner butter, all stowed away for C’s proposed leave which is nearly due.
I sit in Wells Park when the weather is anything decent feeling rottenly lonely. Otherwise I have a nice fire in my room (burning more than my ration of coal I fear) while the family of children all suffering more or less from the ‘flu are with me most of the time. I adore the small boy but don't seem to get on “no how” with the youngest girl aged 3½. I couldn’t help laughing last evening, she, in girl like fashion would not stop talking and making idiotic conversation. Being too polite to say “shut up” I resorted to sarcastic retorts. The boy having a boo hoo over some trifle, she said “Isn’t he a cry baby?” “Nothing to what you are” says I. A long pause on the infants part and then she said “Oh! you’re an awful person”. I thought it the wisest thing she had ever said as no doubt from her point of view I am a bit of a terror.

This influenza is the limit, I don't believe it is influenza at all. People leave home quite well, feel a bit off and suddenly tremble all over and fall down unconscious. I have seen several at the office and even in the street. A great number die of pneumonia two days after the first symptoms. So altogether life is an uncertainty. Mrs. Bishop and I decided we prefer air raids to the influenza any day. Really those old raids weren’t so bad, they always had a comic touch and I’m damned if the ‘flu has. So the climax has been reached, I knew a month ago I was in for this, used to wonder if my physical strength would “go” or my brain, and could only wait, and hang on day after day.

Next Friday at 6 a.m. I ought to be up and about getting ready to go to work. If it wasn’t that I adore the work I’d chuck it, but I love working for and with the lads. I’m fed up to the end of my long hair with this life. It is one long long trail of anxiety and weariness and
sorrow. What the dickens! is the use of it all? I only exist now on the breath of Aussie air out of the envelopes from that dear old land.

All my soldier boys are scattering, a number have returned to Australia, Tickner hugging his wounded arm at Hurdcott. Bishop at a Canvalescent Camp. The prisoners of war poor lads still hoping to be sent to Holland. I write letters nearly every week to Job, and Gambrell, and always get cards in reply requesting me not to stop writing, now I have another prisoner, a Victorian lad added to the number of my correspondents.

Nov. 3rd 1918

My ten days up but I didn’t feel equal to going off at 6.30am sitting until 5 o’clock in the stuffy office, then home through fog. So I went to the doctor, stuck out my tongue, looked how I felt, got more tonic and a further weeks leave. This beastly influenza or whatever it is, is a fair knock out. None the less I met Westie at the Bank on Monday. We sat and yarned in the British Art Gallery for awhile and then had tea in the Strand.

On Wednesday I went to Horseferry Rd. to pay some money into C’s pay book, after which in spite of feeling shaky and horrible, my curiosity made me go and have a look at No.10 Dowling St. I got the shock of my life!! A dirty old house with a dirty lamp over the door!!

Westie came in the evening and took the whole family by storm, played with the children strummed on the piano and sang, making himself quite at home. Mrs. B. asked him to stay the night. He
reckons C wont be sent back to Australia for at least a year after the war!!

The prospects of another beastly winter – and English winter!!
I cant be commonly polite about. How I hate them! With all my misery
I often have a smile to myself.

The other day some dame was talking to my landlady about the
horror of this plague and later Mrs. B. said to me “After all it isn’t all
influenza, the bell for the one before the last two was dropsy”. The
church bell seems to toll all day long, the deaths are awful around here
and we are supposed to be fairly free from the scourge in Sydenham.

Four died in the next street, three in another nearby. Coffins
cannot be made quickly enough. A man who died four days ago in a
house up the street still lies there, no coffin yet. At Portsmouth they are
burying people sewn up in canvas. It knocks the bottom out of all air
raids, food problems and other evils.
They spray all soldiers, and the W.A.A.C. with some preventative why
not the civilian population? “There goes the bell again!”

November 12th 1918

Yesterday, a Day of Days!!

When I met Gray as arranged at ¼ to 11 o’clock she greeted me with
the news got from the Officers Mess at Horner Grange that the
Armistice was signed. I refused to believe it, being “fed up” with
previous rumours. Suddenly great bangs went off all around, and then I
knew it was true.
We hurried along to a ‘bus at the Crystal Palace – for London – an hours run, and had the luck to get on top. Our luck throughout the day was simply marvellous. All the way along people were awakening to the fact that the War was over. Here and there a flag was being put out. The nearer we got to London the more were to be seen. People stood looking out of their windows – a most unusual happening in this part of the world, they are generally tightly shut.

I bet there were windows opened yesterday that haven’t been open for years. At a Belgium School we passed the poor little youngsters, mostly refugees, were perfectly mad with excitement, shouting and waving little Belgium flags and Union Jacks.

Crossing Westminster Bridge by the Houses of Parliament the real “thrill” seized us.

The sight as we turned into Whitehall I shall never never forget.

For a second the awful fear of bursting into tears possessed me but putting an iron grip on myself it vanished and I was the next moment laughing loudly, and waving frantically at a collection of French, staff officers clinging wildly to the roof of a taxi, another woman, or perhaps a ‘bus driver, anybody and everybody. Progress up the wide street was slow, in fact we stopped for quite ten minutes opposite Whitehall itself. All sorts and conditions of vehicles in a colossal traffic jam. Motor bikes with about half a dozen people clinging to them, taxies with Staff Officers rushed by, girls and boys, or girls out of offices without hats waving flags crawled on top or were pulled inside by the soldiers.
Wounded lads out in cars to see the fun had no lack of female companions, girls rushed them, clung on anywhere they could get a footing on the mudguards. A man on top of a ‘bus banged the side of it with a shovel that had seen better days. On the roof of the Admiralty Offices crowds of clerks banged tin filing boxes until they were shapeless.

We passed Nelsons Column with difficulty. There a huge lorry pulled up for a moment, it was black with coal dust but that didn’t stop a crowd of people jumping onto it, clambering over the sides. I saw one girl getting pushed up, take a header into it – just two green legs stuck up in the air. On we went up the Haymarket, past Piccadilly Circus, the same wild cheering and shouting and waving of flags all the time.

A French girl suddenly spied a French soldier, she rushed up, threw both her arms around him and the smack of a kiss on each cheek we could hear above the din. Neither stopped a second, but each went on their own way cheering and waving. Outside Liberty’s in Regent St. the girls stood beating huge dinner gongs. Everyone who had a bell rang it and they were selling them at a penny each.

We got off the ‘bus at Oxford Circus and wandered down Oxford Street. Everyone bedecked with flags, people who had rushed out without a hat tied a Union Jack over their head like a nurses cap and looked jolly fine too. Everywhere the Yanks made the most noise and carried gigantic Stars and Stripes. One ‘bus load, chiefly soldiers had stripped the ‘bus of its notice boards – goodness knows where it was bound for. They flourished “Victoria Station” and “Ealing”, banged the
side of the ‘bus with “Hammerstick” and “Camden Town”. Never was there such sights!!

Grandees in broughams with huge flags sticking out. At Selfridges we each invested in a small flag. An Australian blue ensign for me a Union Jack for Gray, and we sallied forth towards the Marble Arch through Hyde Park to Hyde Park corner, where we saw Australian Officers waylaying taxies, climbing onto the roofs and dragging girls up after them.
Several spotted my flag and waved frantically with broad grins and shouts of joy. We turned into St.James Park and made for Buckingham Palace.

The crowd there beggars description but we weeded our way closer and closer towards the great gates and just as we got a good spot and could see the front of the Palace, a bonzer loud cheer went up as out came the King, Queen, Princess Mary and Duke of Connaught. They all looked great, the King in naval uniform, the Queen hatless and waving a small Union Jack. The Band played “God Save the King” and everyone beefed it out. Tipperary and Home Sweet Home followed with numbers of the wartime songs.

When one hears some thousands of people singing and under such circumstances I defy them not to be thrilled to the marrow in their bones. The Queen kept time with her flag and then just looked what they all are, the best Royal family that ever lived.

All the different National tunes were played, several Hymns, the Old Hundreth and then a “Coo-ee” rang out from the top of the big
monument opposite the gates where several Aussie soldiers had managed goodness knows how to climb up.

The King raised his hand to show he was going to speak and although silence reigned I was too far away to catch all he said. More wild cheering followed and the crowd struck up “He’s a Jolly Good Fellow”. Then the Royal Family retired only to suddenly return and stand watching something we couldn’t see, but I heard afterwards the crowd broke through and carried the changing guard shoulder high – an unheard of proceeding, which seemed to amuse the Queen very much.

Our luck still held, and we set off along Pall Mall past hundreds of captured German guns. The Duke of Connought, who is a great favourite, came along in a car, the crowd suddenly spotting him rushed and clung to it waving flags and cheering. I stopped a moment to gaze on the gun taken by C company 44th Bn (Carls lot)

At last we found an A.B.C. but to get food was another matter. I got the last egg, so was so far successful. Everyone took to waiting on themselves, we wandered behind the scenes, Gray got two cups of tea while I dug up some plates and eating utensils, a soldier helped us to find a miscellaneous collection of buns and biscuits. Gray hunted around and found the butter to which we all helped ourselves. The waitresses had downed tools as there was no food left, and they wanted the rest of the day off. A woman stood at the door and as we went out she asked us what we had had and we paid accordingly.

Off again, along to Trafalgar Square where coster girls were dancing, under the huge Admiralty Arch to St.James Park again where
we saw an old farm cart full to bursting of children and women while an Australian soldier rode upon the horses back.

Our next excitement was outside the Houses of Parliament, we wedged in where a crowd had collected to see the members going to attend a Thanksgiving Service at St. Margarets. We had a splendid view, saw Lloyd George, Asquith Edward Carson and Bonar Law. They all looked as if they had been up all night and slept in their clothes for a week. Then came the House of Lords, the large majority seemed to be between 70 and 80. Poor old chaps, they had nearly all lost their sons and heirs in the fighting.

Great thrill! we heard Big Ben strick 3 o’clock the first time it has struck for four years. Was stopped on account of Zepp raids. It had come on to rain but it didn’t seem to damp anyones spirits. We next wandered down Victoria Street where a lorry with evidently Medical Students came along. They had a human skeleton in the front and kept waving the arms at the crowd. I wondered if the old thing had ever walked along Victoria Street in the flesh and if so when.

At the Railway Station we saw troops arriving on leave and joined the huge crowd to cheer them, and call out greetings to and pat them on the back – if lucky enough to be so close – Australians, New Zealanders, Englishmen and Scotties. Half an hour of that and we set off again along the Embankment to Blackfriers Bridge. Golly! I was getting hungry and tired, the queues for the trams were too fearsome to describe, while huge iron gates were shut at every Underground Station to keep the crowd back. Hundreds waited outside. I began to think it meant walking back to Sydenham.
Thinking a feed first might cheer us up we made for a Tea Shop. The door was guarded and locked only letting the same number in as came out. After a fair wait we got in and succeeded in getting tea and a piece of toast after half an hours wait.

When we got out again, the sight of a queue over 100 yards long and five deep (people I mean) settled me. Gray and I had an argument but nothing would persuade me to line up. I suggested trying a wild cat scheme around the Hop Markets to London Bridge, it worked wonderfully and we got a reasonably comfortable train back.

So the old war is over!!

Somehow I could not keep feeling that the lads who gave their lives, know of our rejoicing and thankfulness. Again and again poor old Frank came to my mind, and all our Lads buried in Gallipoli. The world should be better for such wonderful sacrifice.

January 26th 1920

Australia once more! Three years to the day since I left in that old P & O feeling very lonely and suffering much trepidation as to how I should succeed in my venture, and now comes the end of the story.

Here we are anchored in the Outer Harbour on board H.M.A.T “Konigin Louise” – once a German Liner and now a Transport used to repatriate Australian Troops of which there are 1323 on board, 344 wives of soldiers and 118 children.

Charles and I have been leaning over the ship’s rail gazing at the lights of Fremantle, each absorbed in ones own thoughts, thoughts that travel too fast and too far to allow for conversation but there was a
priceless feeling of mutual understanding and sympathy. Memories of the months of 1918 are still vivid to me, the nightmare months of August and September when we handled long lists of Killed and Wounded at the office and there was no news of Charles.

The influenza epidemic which put air raids, food problems and other evils temporarily in the shade, the joy and excitement of Armistice Day, but above all the glorious moment when Charles arrived in London to spend six months on non-military employment. Last of all comes our departure on the 18th Dec. from Southampton upon this family ship.

Who would have contemplated such a possibility in the early days of the War?

Tomorrow we land and a chapter in our married life closes. However small my part may have been during these years I am thankful I was privileged to work with and experience some of the “atmosphere” of the A.I.F. To me those years are not simply a hideous memory as they must be to many another soldier’s wife.
Iron gates were shut at every Underground Station to keep the crowd back. Hundreds waited outside. I began to think it meant walking back to Sydenham.

Thinking a feed first might cheer us up we made for a Tea Shop. The door was guarded and locked only letting the same number in as came out. After a fair wait we got in and succeeded in getting tea and a piece of toast after half an hours wait.

When we got out again, the sight of a queue over 100 yards long and five deep (people I mean) settled me. Gray and I had an argument but nothing would persuade me to line up. I suggested trying a wild cat scheme around the Hop Markets to London Bridge, it worked wonderfully and we got a reasonably comfortable train back.

So the old War is over!!

Somehow I could not keep feeling that the lads who gave their lives, know of our rejoicing and thankfulness. Again and again poor old Frank came to my mind, and all our Lads buried in Gallipoli. The world should be better for such wonderful sacrifice.

January 26th 1920

Australia once more! Three years to the day since I left in that old F & Q feeling very lonely and suffering much trepidation as to how I should succeed in my venture, and now comes the end of the story.

Here we are anchored in the Outer Harbour on board H.M.A.T. "Konigin Louise" - once a German Liner and now a Transport used to repatriate Australian Troops of which there are 1323 on board, 344 wives of soldiers and 118 children.

Charles and I have been leaning over the ship's rail gazing at the lights of Fremantle, each absorbed in one's own thoughts, thoughts that travel too fast and too far to allow for conversation but there was a priceless feeling of mutual understanding and sympathy. Memories of the months of 1918 are still vivid to me, the nightmare months of August and September when we handled long lists of killed and wounded at the office and there was no news of Charles.

The influenza epidemic which put air raids, food problems and other evils temporarily in the shade, the joy and excitement of Armistice Day, but above all the glorious moment when Charles arrived in London to spend six months on non-military employment. Last of all comes our departure on the 16th Dec. from Southampton upon this family ship

Who would have contemplated such a possibility in the early days of the War?

Tomorrow we land and a chapter in our married life closes. However small my part may have been during these years I am thankful I was privileged to work with and experience some of the atmosphere of the A.I.F. To me those years are not simply a hideous memory as they must be to many another soldier's wife.