

TIME WAS by Mary Braithwaite

Introduction by Muriel Brooks

Mary Braithwaite, even in great old age, was a force to be reckoned with. She was autocratic, imperious, and exceedingly kind, and of course it was this last quality that won her a lot of friends and plenty of help when she needed it in her final years. In 1998 she completed *Time Was*, more than 120 A4 pages of detailed autobiography, and published it privately for her inner circle of family and friends. Because she lived in Eastcombe for years, and is already in danger of slipping out of memory (I think she died in 2004), I asked her son Alan if I might reproduce some of her book for this website, and he kindly agreed. I think Mary must have kept a diary always, as there is amazing detail of what happened through the years – but by the time she arrived in Eastcombe she was running out of steam, slightly, and does not have much to say about the village itself. Nevertheless I decided to make a resumé of the highlights of her life because, as she said in the Foreword that dedicates the book to her grandchildren, she wished to give family and friends 'and any casual readers who may pick it up a glimpse of a world now quite vanished. I lived through years of remarkable and far-reaching change in life and society, and would like to leave behind some memories for younger generations of what it was like to live in the England of George V, in India and Burma when the British Empire was still a great force in the world, and in post-war rural Ireland.'

I am embarking on a mammoth task. I wish to gallop through Mary's life and will quote her at length only at the points that seem to me of great historical interest – or, occasionally hilarity. And the contents list below should enable readers to download just whatever short section they are tempted to read. The chapter titles are mine. The introductory 'We are the survivors' was used by Mary as a postscript, but I have made it a taster here at the beginning in the hope that people will then read on. I have no way of knowing whether Mary wrote it herself or just quoted it, but I think it is rather good, and shows how important are memoirs like Mary's... Here we go. MB

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WE ARE THE SURVIVORS

For those born before 1950

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic, contact lenses, videos, frisbees, ballpoints, dishwashers, drip-dry clothes, air-conditioning, electric blankets, tumble dryers, and before men walked on the moon.

We got married first and then lived together (how quaint can you be?) We thought 'fast food' was what you eat in Lent, a 'Big Mac' was an over-sized raincoat, and crumpet was for tea. We existed before house husbands, computer dating, dual careers, and when a meaningful relationship meant getting along with cousins.

We were born before day centres, group homes, disposable nappies, and sheltered accommodation was where you waited for a bus. We had never heard of FM, tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, word processors, yoghurt, or of men wearing earrings. For us time-sharing meant togetherness, a chip was a fried potato, hardware meant nuts and bolts, and software wasn't a word. Before 1950 'made in Japan' meant junk. The term 'making out' referred to how well you did in the exams. Stud was something that fastened a collar to a shirt and 'going all the way' meant staying on a bus to the depot.

In our day, cigarette-smoking was fashionable, grass was mown, coke was kept in the coal house and a joint was a piece of meat you had on Sundays and pot was something you cooked in. Rock music was grandmother's lullaby. Eldorado was an icecream, a gay person was the life and soul of the party and nothing more, while aids meant a beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble.

We who were born before 1950 must be a hardy bunch when you think of the ways in which the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder we are so confused and there is a generation gap today but

BY THE GRACE OF GOD WE SURVIVED

TIME WAS

Chapter 1: Background, Birth, and Upbringing *[abridged]*

Mary was born in 1915 in Belgaum, India, where her father, Reginald Maxwell, was District Officer in the Indian Civil Service. He was born in Richmond, Surrey, in 1882, oldest of three boys, and as their father died in 1889 the children were brought up by their mother, whom Mary called 'Granny Alice.' Daughter of an actress called Rose Wyndham, she was in Mary's eyes 'a wonderful woman.' The Maxwell family helped her financially, particularly her husband's stepmother – a prolific and successful novelist called M E Braddon – and also his half-brother Willie Maxwell, 'also a celebrated author.'

Changes of school kept the family on the move: Margate, Marlborough, and (while the boys were at Oxford) Market Lavington in Wiltshire. Granny Alice finally retired to rooms in Bath. After graduating Reginald entered the Indian Civil Service, 'retiring at the top of his profession in 1944.' His brother John worked on a tea plantation and then went into the army, and was killed on the Somme in 1916. His brother Douglas went into the Colonial Service and lived mostly in Borneo.

Mary's mother, Mary Lyle, was born in India in 1890. Her mother Elizabeth (Lillie) Shillington came from Northern Ireland and her father Henry Haigh was a Methodist minister from Yorkshire. He was running a mission in India, and was a widower with a son when he married Lillie. Mary never met him though he did not die till two years after she was born, as by then he was in Hankow, China.

[Already, still on the book's first page, we can see why Mary spoke of a vanished world. This background seems fictional, improbable almost, to us, whereas it would have raised not a single eyebrow in Mary's youth.]

The maternal grandparents had four daughters and they went to school in northern England and then on to university. Ethne became a doctor and never married, but was one of the first women doctors to treat wounded men in Salonika in 1918. Her wartime letters were sent by Mary to the Imperial War Museum. Her sister Gladys died in India aged six, and the other girl, Gwenneth, became Principal of Leicester College of Domestic Science. Lillie, however, visited India at the invitation of her half-brother Percy, met Reginald Maxwell, came home and exchanged letters with him and then – as he could not have long leave – returned and married him in 1913.

A District Officer was exactly what it says. '[Mary's parents'] main task was to tour the District under my father's jurisdiction, living in bungalows, perhaps even in tents. Luggage, furniture and other personal effects were transported from place to place on a bullock cart and, of course, they took their servants with them. This sort of life had its compensations. My father had been a very keen entomologist from boyhood and made a large collection of butterflies, moths and microlepidoptera on his travels which is now in the British Museum.'

A brother, John, was born two years after Mary. She recalled nothing from her earliest years in India other than being stung by jellyfish. 'I do not even remember my first journey home to England. I do, however, remember landing. It was at Tilbury on 11 November 1919 and everything seemed so dark. We must have taken our ayah from India with us as I cannot imagine my mother would have coped with two children on that long voyage without her, even though my father was there. The ayah must have come with us and then been sent straight back to India.'

At first there were lodgings in Bath and then Granny Alice took rooms for a holiday in the New Forest. From the age of five Mary had many holidays near Lyndhurst and 'I can remember going for drives with Granny Alice in an open carriage with a coachman and two horses to see the rhododendrons in bloom.' For the next 15 years John and Mary saw little of their parents, who had returned to India and had little home leave. The children lived in Muswell Hill with their maternal grandmother and 'a wonderful governess' known as 'Hay' – Miss Haynes. The aunts also popped in and out of the children's lives; and in 1923/4 their mother stayed in England long enough to have another baby there, Alan. Mary soon found herself at nursery boarding school at St Leonard's on Sea, very much a surrogate mother to her little brothers, but sorely in need of mothering herself.

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Chapter 2: Schools and Holidays *[abridged]*

Mary's mother was around for 1926/7, John went to prep school and later Mary was sent to Badminton. Both children had bouts of illness that were more worrying in those pre-antibiotic days. Even Alan had to go away to school in 1927 when both parents went back to India. The surrogate mother found life tough again, but the head of Badminton realized what was amiss and told the Maxwell parents. Mother came back in early 1929, and took Alan back with her as they were now fixed in Bombay. The toing and froing continued for years, but other adults began to be hospitable to the children and life improved. There were two 'wonderful women,' retired nurses, and their house near Symonds Yat became a home from home. 'There was village life, a rector, parties, and young people. Elspeth had an old Trojan car with a roof that could be taken off and solid tyres. I remember her driving up a particularly steep hill in Malvern banging on the side, exhorting it to go faster. We had a jolly good time there. My brother would come up to Bristol from Sherborne, then we would go on to Monmouth. During the holidays we would embark on bike rides to Ross and Monmouth and the Aunts would take us to events in Gloucester and Hereford such as the Three Choirs Festival. They were the happiest days of my youth.'

Meanwhile at Badminton 'school was a tough grounding for life. [The Head] did not suffer fools gladly. I had to have a cold bath every morning. Coughing was not allowed in Chapel. When I had whooping cough, I was left to whoop, holding on to the radiators for dear life until someone believed I was really ill and sent me to the Sanatorium. School was definitely character-forming.'

Mary passed her school certificate, 'even in Latin,' and she also won an essay competition with the prize of a trip to Geneva to the League of Nations. 'I loved Geneva. I had really never seen anything like it before.' She left school in 1933 and went to a domestic science college in Hampstead which was within easy reach of Granny Elizabeth's house in Muswell Hill. 'As the aim was to train us for a job in a school or a hospital, there was also a substantial business element in the course... I did not particularly enjoy the work... but I will admit I received a good training and it certainly paid dividends later in life.'

Holidays continued to be spent with a variety of people in a variety of places, but in 1934 Mary's parents invited her out to India for six months. 'I was 19 and they wanted to launch me.' The journey took Mary past Gibraltar, Port Said, Aden, with new experiences all the way and a social life on board. Her parents were in Poona when she arrived, but then there was a six-month social whirl in Bombay. The three went home in 1935, leaving their ship at Marseilles and heading for Paris 'where my father took me to the Folies Bergères.' In England and then Ireland the social whirl continued, though Mary's father went back to India alone in 1935.

A friend invited Mary to a dance in Hampstead Town Hall 'with a boyfriend' – which Mary did not have; but at a dinner party before the ball she met her future husband for the first time – Duncan Braithwaite, a former Malvern boy, was on his first leave from the Burma Forest Service. 'He was very relieved to meet someone who knew where Burma was and we saw each other fairly frequently after that. He would even meet up with me after my stint in the children's ward at Hampstead Hospital and escort me home by bus. One of his pastimes was rally driving and another, flying. He was a qualified pilot from the Oxford Air Squadron.'

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Chapter 3: Love, Marriage, and the Outbreak of War *[abridged]*

In the spring of 1936 Mary had scarlet fever and rheumatic fever, had a spell in hospital and was taken by her mother to recuperate at a relation's house in Bracknell. There Mary learned to drive – with a gentle descent into a ditch – and then returned to her parents' rented house in London. 'I was landed with all the spring-cleaning and London grime really was London grime in those days! This was my last term at College and I was due to celebrate my 21st birthday in June. Duncan was away for my birthday doing an aerial survey course in Canada. He was a trained pilot and had learned to fly whilst in the Oxford University Air Squadron. I remember being agitated for the whole of my birthday wondering if he would acknowledge it. Later in the day, a brooch, inlaid with Burma sapphires, arrived for me. A short time after he came back from Canada we became engaged. Father was in India and Mother was in England, but I remember writing to my father to tell him the news before I told my mother.'

A holiday in Ireland followed, and a course at a Bond Street dressmaking school – producing a hyacinth blue wedding dress. Duncan went back to Burma, Mary's mother rushed back to India, and Mary coped with packing, and dealing with her brothers. Christmas with the aunts, a visit to in-laws-to-be, the extraction of impacted wisdom teeth, skiing in Austria – and then Mary caught a train to Marseilles to embark for India 'despite all my friends' warnings about the perils of white slavery.'

Arriving in India Mary learned that Granny Alice had died, but consoled herself with the thought that she had visited her in Bath before leaving for India. Her father by then had been made Home Secretary in the Government of India, 'a very high position indeed,' meaning that Mary's parents were now based in Delhi. Within a couple of months, however, the household removed to Simla where there was an official residence. 'Duncan and I were married in the Viceroy's Chapel at Simla on May 24th, our Empire Day. Duncan had flown in to Calcutta for the occasion and his aircraft had nearly crashed. It was a morning wedding, followed by a reception at Ava Lodge. As Duncan had been accorded only 10 days' casual leave for our wedding, we were just able to fit in a long weekend's honeymoon before going back down to the plains again. After a stop in Delhi we joined the Delhi to Calcutta express for the first stage of our journey. It was a terribly hot journey to Calcutta. There was no air conditioning and the only respite in the carriage was a big box of ice for the privilege of which we had to pay 16 rupees. It was an outrageous price to pay and we talked about this for many years afterwards. I think Father must have lent us his bearer for the trip. You never travelled in India in those days without your bedding roll, which was laid out for you by a servant wherever you were sleeping. Added to which, the journey took over 24 hours and we would have needed a local person to get off the train and buy food for us. This was not a corridor train, nor did it have a restaurant car, we were stuck in our carriage.'

Duncan urgently needed to get back before his leave ran out, so in Calcutta he persuaded a fellow pilot to fly them to Burma. The weather was appalling and when they put down at Chittagong they found everyone there too incapacitated from the previous night's party to be of help. There was no response from any of the local European population. Eventually they walked through deep mud, Mary having to borrow shoes from Douglas, and took a little steamer overnight to Akyab. There was no welcome there either, so they set off in a taxi.

'Akyab island is just 11 miles long and there were, in those days, just 11 Europeans in the whole place, of which four or five were women, so we had to make sure we got on with everyone. There were no telephones, so all messages had to be relayed by hand. We did, however, possess an old Chevrolet for getting about the island. Interesting people came through Akyab. Amelia Earhart and Amy Johnson, for instance, put down there for refuelling during their round-the-world flights.'

Entertainment consisted of attending drinks parties, playing golf on a soggy nine-hole course, using the beach as a shooting range – and visiting the Club (a ramshackle bungalow) for the library, bridge, mah jong... They did manage to play host there to the Governor of Burma during an official visit. Duncan spent six or seven hours in his office every day, and Mary tried to learn the local language. If you passed a proficiency test there was a 150-rupee bonus – with which Mary

bought herself a lovely piece of local jade. The ring she had made was later stolen in London.

Running the fridge on kerosene meant asking advice from nuns at the local convent; using the sewing machine for dressmaking meant plugging it into a light socket; keeping an eye on the servants to make sure all drinking water was boiled; being inventive about bathing, and putting up with a 'thunderbox' lavatory – all served to introduce Mary to married life in a far-flung home.

Food came from all sorts of sources. Some was flown in from Calcutta, some bought in the local bazaar, some (Dundee cake in a tin) was sent by relations in Britain, some arrived by ship. 'Still, we entertained quite lavishly, usually giving Sunday brunches. The dishes were wonderful – Burmese curries have all sorts of delicious side dishes with them.'

Mary found herself accompanying Duncan as he visited local foresters in his district, threading their way through mangrove swamps and little islands, carrying masses of stores and clean water with them and setting up their camp beds and bedding in rest houses wherever possible. As at home Mary had to make all domestic arrangements and supervise sometimes quarrelsome servants. Training a puppy called Twist, coping with cockroaches and bat droppings from the punkah above the dining table, shooting wild chickens for the pot, and applying Epsom salts for people's medical problems from boils to cuts (no antibiotics then) – Mary at a very young age had become a veritable memsahib.

'Just how difficult were the conditions under which we lived in that part of the world was demonstrated by the tragic death of Duncan's father after a visit to India and Burma. We had been delighted to receive both Duncan's parents and his sister Rose as our first visitors from England to Akyab at Christmas 1937. Duncan's father had retired in 1937 from the English civil service and was celebrating the event with a retirement trip to his son to see the sort of work he was doing in Burma. In fact he was so interested that Duncan took his father upcountry with him on one of his tours. After Christmas, my parents-in-law departed by boat for Calcutta, making a brief stay with my parents in New Delhi before sailing for England on a P & O liner. Duncan's father, however, was suddenly taken ill on the journey home. No one knew what was wrong with him, but when the boat reached Port Said it was decided he should be hospitalised. He was found to be suffering from cerebral malaria, far worse than ordinary malaria, and had not received the right treatment quickly enough. Now it was too late. Duncan's father died.'

Duncan had to be sought out as he was away on tour. He was ill himself and in need of a dentist, one complication followed another and Mary found herself in extraordinary circumstances requiring great stamina. These included the need to inoculate an elephant against anthrax. Mary asked what to do if it charged and Duncan told her to jump sideways. This was not helpful on a path bordered by ravines.

'When at last we did reach the next valley we had very few provisions left – a tin of Huntley & Palmer biscuits and not much else. We met up with the policeman who took us fishing and I caught a big manseer. I had to wear Duncan's shorts for fishing whilst I stood in the river. Women did not wear shorts in those days. I went about normally in a khaki divided skirt, thick shoes and puttees (covering for your legs). You would sometimes look down at your puttees and see blood coming out, for it was almost impossible to stop the leeches getting in.'

On tour, while Duncan sat at a table in a tent receiving reports from foresters, Mary took herself off to shoot jungle fowl for the pot. Pestered in the evenings by flying insects, they relaxed by playing bezique, and listening to the wireless – for which they had to carry large batteries. Duncan had to kill a big python outside the camp once, and when it was skinned a whole baby deer was found inside it. The servants offered to cook it for Mary's supper, and her firm rejection gave them great pleasure, and a feast.

After that they headed beyond Mandalay so that the incumbent officer, named Kermode, could go on leave. Maymyo was a hill station used by British wives and children, and also wealthy Burmese, in the hottest months. En route Mary developed appendicitis, but had to wait for an operation as the surgeon fell off his horse and broke both wrists. Six weeks later the operation revealed peritonitis, and Mary nearly died. Two months' recuperation were needed.

While in Kermode's house Mary and Duncan visited the ruby mines at Mogok, and they

bought spinel stones that were made into a ring when Richard was born. Luckily Mary was wearing this ring when her jewellery – including her jade – was stolen in a burglary in London.

The outbreak of war in 1939 meant that Duncan stayed on in Kermode's place. There was already a military presence in Maymyo, and to the north-east were British infantry lines. Mary settled in to a life of riding in the jungle, churning butter, biking around town, dancing and playing tennis at the Club. Going on tour in October in appallingly wet weather was gruelling, but Mary seems to have found the wireless an adequate compensation for the presence of man-eating tigers. Lent a hut to get them out the rain, they found themselves having to scrape ticks off their legs with a knife. Mary discovered she was pregnant – and was frequently sick – and Duncan became very ill. Mary borrowed a pony and bullock cart to get him to the main road, and back at the hospital their medic friend diagnosed typhus. Friends put Mary up – she was obsessed with the thought that she would be a widow before she was a mother – and she drove every day to see Duncan.

He recovered slowly and was allowed home to Kermode's house, but two weeks later went down with malaria. Leave in wartime was out of the question, so Duncan was given a less strenuous posting – that of forest entomologist. It was not too demanding. Trips were short, the climate was not too extreme, the houses in Maymyo were attractive and had proper gardens, there was congenial society.

'Our first son, Richard, was born in the labour ward at the hospital in Maymyo on 25 July 1940. Sadly it was just a month later that the government announced that those of my husband's generation and younger who wished to join up could do so. Duncan accordingly volunteered for the Burmese Volunteer Air Force... with his flying experience and being able to speak the language, Duncan would have been an asset to the Burmese Air Force. All he had to do was pass the interview and the medical.'

Richard was christened in style, Mary's mother sent a pram from England, the proud parents were able to push their baby around – and then Duncan was called to Rangoon to go before the selection board. Within a very short space of time he was told he had been accepted, and Mary prepared to move while Duncan had to report to the airport. She boarded the 1.50 train to Mandalay on 15 November 1940.

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Chapter 4: Family Life with a Baby in India and Burma *[abridged]*

Mary got herself and the baby, the nanny and the dog, the luggage and piles of nappies, to Rangoon. 'As well as Duncan, there were two or three other English and several Burmese trainees on the flying course. The Burmese, unlike my husband, could not fly at all.' Duncan's day started very early with PT or flying, and interspersed with visits home for meals his day was filled with tuition, report-writing, and various other administrative tasks and the lectures 'broke up the evening so we could not play tennis.' By early December Duncan and one of the instructors were making aerial photographs of Burma for strategic purposes.

Meanwhile, Mary and the baby suffered in the extreme heat, so while Duncan's course looked set to continue in a rather unsatisfactory manner, the end of their stay in Burma seemed in sight so Mary decided to join her father in Delhi (from where it should be possible to rendezvous with Duncan at Simla).

'My father had written to say that there were no ayahs available in Delhi and we should bring our own. Our existing Karen nanny was unwilling to accompany us for less than 65 rupees a month and as my budget was very firmly fixed at 55 rupees, I looked around for a replacement. I eventually took on Ruth, a 20-year-old Madras from Maymyo who had lived for two and a half years in Calcutta and wished to go back to India. She had good references, having looked after two babies straight from birth.'

Vaccinations were needed for India and the volunteer air force also was having them done so Duncan took Mary and Richard for injections. Duncan had two days off night flying and this coincided with Richard becoming extremely ill with vomiting – for which Mary applied a drastic old remedy that seemed to cure him after several days. She herself had a very sore arm from the injection, but she reflected that she knew other people had died from typhoid, for example, and that she and her family were very fortunate not to become seriously ill while in the East.

Once again Mary had to organize a move, overseeing packers, sending off tea and sugar to her mother in England, foisting their 'uneven-tempered' dog on a friend who would rather have had a puppy. 'Sad to say, Twist was killed by a Japanese bomb in 1942.' 'The journey from Rangoon can be described in one word: foul.' A small and noisy Chinese coaster, a dash to catch the Delhi train in Calcutta – and a lovely welcome next day from Mary's father.

On leave in Ireland when war broke out, Mary's father had returned to India as soon as possible but her mother stayed in Britain till 1943, spending time with Mary's brothers until each joined the forces. Conditions were cramped for everybody in Delhi, whatever their seniority, but as always the social life continued and Mary enjoyed meeting fascinating people, sightseeing, and watching the Assembly at work. Duncan was training on a course which still had ten weeks to run. Mary meanwhile bought a smart outfit for parties at Vice-Regal Lodge, took Hindustani lessons, attended charitable events...

Mary's diary details a life divided between looking after a baby (being rapidly spoiled by her father and doting servants), making lifelong friends, learning to live at close quarters with people who were irritating, part-managing her father's household, and preparing for the hot-weather move to Simla. There was also dancing at the Viceroy's Wife's Aircraft Fund... Mary's father went off to Bombay, but before leaving gave her 'a very superior ladies' bike.' She wondered if she would ever return to Delhi: 'Little did I know that in a year's time I would be pedalling all over Delhi on this bike doing voluntary work for the troops.' Despite the pleasure of being at Ava Lodge in Simla, Mary had to catalogue a never-ending list of other people's illnesses, her own exhaustion, worry at the lack of news from Britain – letters by then were taking about 21 weeks. With the arrival of a woman who was much more useful than previous helpers, things gradually got better – Duncan's occasional leave in Simla made for happy marital excursions, the baby flourished, life in Simla was pleasant. There was a 10-day break in Karachi that was fun; and indeed the sociable life that Mary describes – made easy by efficient servants – must have mainly made up for the inefficiencies that Duncan was meeting on the training course at Ambala.

With the end of the course in sight Mary felt that, whatever the difficulties of travelling with a baby, she had to get herself back to Burma in case this was the last chance to see Duncan before he was posted. 'We heard on the news that Allied troops had just walked into Iran. I wondered what the repercussions of this development might be for India. We had no idea where this war would end, only that everything was in a real mess... Duncan's new "marching orders" came through...Singapore for a short stop-over. His real destination was New Zealand for a seven-week course to learn about flying modern aeroplanes...' After making a real row Duncan achieved permission for a month's leave *provided* he got himself back to Rangoon – which he did when ordered, but it was not possible for Mary to travel with him. She was left to make another of her epic journeys: Simla, Delhi, Calcutta, Rangoon...

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Chapter 5: Alone in Burma and India and Making the Best of It *[abridged]*

Mary arrived back in Burma and found several letters from Duncan at Cook's [?Thomas Cook's?]. She learned that he had had a week in Rangoon before embarking for Penang and Singapore. She got herself established back in Maymyo, fully expecting Duncan to return from NZ when his training was finished. Having difficulty in accessing funds without his signature, Mary saw an immediate need to find a job.

She biked around the district, but eventually the car arrived from India. It had to be persuaded back into running order. Mary also tackled a total blackout for the house, as Burma began to fear Japanese plans to attack. She found unpaid work as a member of the Women's Auxiliary Service – deciphering signals after signing the Official Secrets Act.

'On 7 December 1941 I decoded a particularly important message. The US fleet at Pearl Harbour had been bombed. That morning 189 Japanese bombers had swept low over Pearl Harbour, the Hawaiian island, and destroyed eight battleships, three cruisers, three destroyers...and many grounded aircraft. The next day, the United States and Britain declared war on Japan... I remember all the Signals Officers gathering round me while I was decoding the first message.'

A fortnight or so later the first air raid warning in their part of the world sounded. Christmas was spent away from friends and family for the first time, but 14 children were given a party at Inlya Lodge. Food supplies seemed likely to suffer in the near future, but Mary planned to grow more vegetables to supplement rice.

'After new year, I continued with my First Aid and Home Nursing for four hours a week as well as on my Signals work...off went the sirens...and we were sent off to sit in the trenches...Once the alert was over, we had tea, changed our wet and dirty clothes and went off for a game of tennis.'

The news from Malaya was bad, it was months since Mary had seen Duncan and she did not know for certain where he was but soon they managed to exchange letters and news. A Christmas cake arrived belatedly from England. Mary put her name down for new married quarters being built at the Club, and was accepted.

'I had very definite feelings about evacuation. I would have felt like a cad if I had been in the relative safety of India at that moment. If air raids did in fact start happening, I felt we could cope with them, and if the Japanese invaded, that would be the time we would evacuate...'

Her father had a rather enjoyable Christmas with the Viceroy. He sat next to Wavell 'and found him pretty unperturbed by recent events.' Mary, meanwhile, was earning 'the princely wage of 100 rupees a month as a full-time cypherette', and all the time kept shifting her quarters and making sure that Richard was adequately cared for. With increasingly bad news from Rangoon she sent a man down to organize sending their stored valuables to Maymyo. Businesses were evacuating to Mandalay, and the news from Malaya worsened.

Mary passed her course and needed 52 hours of practical work in a hospital to complete it. She took a week off from the cypher work and went to the British Military Hospital to gain the necessary experience, driving the car (virtually without lights) through the total blackout to get there. Casualties were coming in from the south of the country, where the Japanese were invading. 'The Burmese Army at that time was a mixture of Burmese, Gurkhas, and Karens. There were British troops in the country, but the British Army was committed very fully in Europe...the Burmese Army lacked both troops and equipment.'

The families of British men working for companies in Burma began to leave, some trekking out to the north. 'What really annoyed us was that 25 families had gone off without telling a soul. We felt particularly angered by the fact that some of the women evacuating did not have the excuse of children and had chucked in their jobs in order to escape. They were the ones we felt were really ratting... The Burmese did not want us to go and could not understand why we were abandoning them.' The morale of others who shared Mary's point of view remained high, but things got worse. Singapore fell, Japanese troops were closing on Rangoon, Chinese troops started crossing into Burma to fight the Japanese – 'by March 1942, people were leaving. You would talk to them one day and they were gone the next.'

Mary tackled the bank to transfer all funds to Delhi, but as an air force wife had to wait for military evacuation. 'It was a question of abandoning everything we owned. We had expected to be in Burma for 25 years and we had silver, cutlery and glass that I simply had to resign myself to losing... I did manage to make myself a waistband out of one of Richard's nappies for my jewellery and carried it out of the country that way. We also dressed ourselves up in extra dresses, otherwise after the journey we would have nothing to wear.'

'We had to be at Maymyo station at 10pm. I was carrying Richard's potty, I remember, and dropped it on the platform...It was a native train we were travelling on with wooden seats and a hole in the floor for the lavatory which small children could not possibly cope with... Richard and I travelled with Joy and her two children, who had returned from Rangoon as the Japanese approached. I had a bottle of whisky and Joy had a bottle of gin and we also brought along water for the children.'

At Schwebo a 50-seater troop carrier plane arrived from Chittagong to pick up these refugees, and they suffered a turbulent two-hour journey with Mary thinking that an RAF officer's wife could not possibly be sick... Then it was back on to another train – still with whisky and gin, now supplemented by some oranges. They reached Calcutta at 11pm, were put into buses, and transferred to the barracks at Dumdum.

Mary took herself in search of travel warrants, mentioning her father's name, and a brigadier's wife turned up to take her and Richard to their home. Mary was able to ring her father, and then got herself on the train to Delhi – another 24-hour journey – where her father met her in the middle of the night. From there Mary and Richard sought cooler weather in Simla – but he caught whooping cough and Mary became ill with jaundice, as many people did on leaving Burma. The hospital was busy with military casualties so sent her home with instructions to cure herself with tea and lemon – which she did.

A letter arrived from her mother to say that Duncan had been seen in England – puzzling – but she later discovered that he felt that his contingent had been totally overlooked in Australia and New Zealand so he pestered the authorities till they put him on a ship to return to England, working his passage to a certain extent.

'On arrival in England he went straight to the Air Ministry and they were delighted to welcome someone who actually knew Burma, could fly, and had studied aerial photography. He was sent on a course to Medmenham in Buckinghamshire and also visited Churchill's underground bunker. He was told there were no proper maps of Burma in existence. Duncan therefore went down to see his mother in Kent to retrieve some maps which he had sent during his time as a Forestry Officer'... now these were to be used as the basis of official air ministry maps.

And eventually Duncan was posted to Delhi where Mary met him and they went to Simla on leave. Afterwards Mary could not be told what Duncan was doing, but she did know he was flying reconnaissance over Burma. Her father was also working very hard, but occasionally got up to Simla despite the unrest caused by the Congress Party's activities. When the hot weather was over Mary and Richard took up family life, housekeeping for her father and playing hostess to people who were glad to encounter a little normal family life. Mary, Duncan, her father – and his Pathan bodyguard – all got around Delhi by bicycle. For a time Mary worked in the Naafi canteen, organized people into inviting bored troops to tea, and had a permanent 'at home' on Thursday afternoons for the photographic unit. 'We also gave a Christmas Dinner to which a whole lot came and of course, when my father retired in 1944, we gave an even more enormous party.'

Moving to the hills and back according to the season, buying rice and conserving fuel for fires, working for troops, hospital visiting, doing the canteen, bicycling around Delhi, dancing with Lord Mountbatten, carol singing, trying to converse with Wavell, and – eventually – deciding to return to England with her retiring parents on the troopship Otranto: never a dull moment for Mary, who seems to have been the personification of intrepidity. 'We were very late arriving in Liverpool, but the reception we got was marvellous. There was even a brass band on the quayside to welcome us. We felt quite tearful.'

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Chapter 6. In Peril Still at Home *[abridged]*

Back in Britain Mary and her parents seem to have slipped seamlessly into the fairly privileged life they always negotiated: a network of friends, relations, and 'people' they knew – but of course the south of England was not a place of safety at that time. Staying with her mother-in-law in Kent, Mary soon experienced V1 rockets so departed to Pembrokeshire. Nothing however could protect the family from the news that Mary's brother Alan was killed in the D-Day landings. Her parents came down from Scotland and Mary from Wales and a memorial service was held in Hampstead. Then her other brother married in St George's, Hanover Square, and the family came together again.

In October 1944 Duncan, at the end of his tour of duty (and after eight years with no leave), returned to Britain but after a week with Mary in Tenby was posted to the Special Operations Unit in Baker Street. Mary and Richard returned to London, the grown-ups had mumps, and V2 rockets started. But May 1945 brought VE day, and typically the Braithwaites biked down to Whitehall to join in the celebrations – and then had to puff back uphill to St John's Wood.

Duncan was demobbed in November, a house was bought in Belsize Park, Duncan got a forestry job in Germany, Mary became pregnant, and she started letting the top-floor flat to bring in an income. Alan ('a very big baby') was born in August to a rather lonely Mary, but Duncan got home in November for the christening. Immediately afterwards he had to go to Tanganyika and Kenya in search of timber. The couple considered and rejected the idea of relocating to East Africa.

A very severe winter and lots of London pea-soupers, a freezing cold big house, and continued rationing, two burglaries, no car but much visiting of inconveniently placed relations – the exigencies of London life were certainly alleviated when Mary's father took final retirement from the India Office and her parents moved to Hampshire. Though their father continued to be often overseas, the boys now had a dearly loved country place to visit, and they also saw all the sights of London and had the Heath as a playground, and the Zoo, and the river...

So the family was still in London when the Coronation took place in 1953. Mary's parents were invited to the Abbey, Duncan took Richard to watch the procession from the balcony of his Club – and Mary saw it on a neighbour's television. 'In fact 1953 was a momentous year for us all. Duncan was working for Mallinson's and had to be away quite a lot, doing tours of Africa and France. Alan started at his prep school at The Hall, not far from Belsize Park. Richard went to Sherborne. I had a hysterectomy. My mother-in-law was 80 in October. We all went to stay with them for Christmas instead of the other way round. The following Spring, she became ill and died.'

Duncan resigned from his job, there was a family holiday in France, and soon he started work in Essex and the London house was sold and a move made to Kelvedon Hatch where the Braithwaites stayed for 13 years while the boys pursued their school careers and Mary did a lot more bicycling. She also learned about smallholding the hard way, and steeped herself in village organizations. The boys enjoyed their time at Sherborne, and missed doing National Service by a year; and the year after Richard graduated from Queen Mary College the parents and Alan had a holiday in Ireland.

It took a year to persuade the Irish Government to allow foreigners to buy an Irish property, but Duncan and Mary clung to their determination to acquire a dilapidated 'Lodge' in County Mayo. Three years of repairs followed, and then Mary convinced Duncan to leave his job and take up running a guest house. The countryside was very beautiful, and guests could follow country pursuits including excellent fishing. Richard went off to get married in New Zealand, Alan studied chemical engineering at Birmingham and graduated in 1967 – a new era was beginning.

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Chapter 7. Beginning Adventures in Ireland – and Ending Them *[abridged]*

Mary's father died that year and as well as trying to sell the Essex house Mary had to keep going to Hampshire. Her uncle also died. Their purchaser thought he would have to pull out of the deal. Foot-and-mouth broke out and complicated the transfer to Ireland. The first Christmas at Tourmakeady was spent entirely alone, up a one-and-a-half mile drive and 17 miles to the nearest shops. The Lodge was big and had to be furnished, mammoth curtains had to be made, china and glass found, a whole guest house equipped. The Braithwaites tried to buy as much as possible locally. Then guests had to be sought – and then fed. Mary found herself creating three or four meals a day – and then gutting the day's catch to keep guests from attempting it themselves in her kitchen. A loyal clientèle was created, staff were employed, the wild garden became productive. 'Telephonic communications were difficult. I remember once arriving in Cork three or four hours late and wanting to ring The Lodge to say I would be late. I phoned the Exchange and asked for The Lodge. "She's away," came the reply. "I know she's away," I replied. "I'm she."

Mary gives a long and detailed description of life at The Lodge, which was obviously very hard work and great fun. She felt they were well accepted locally, and had no problems through the early years of The Troubles. Between times they continued to have far-flung holidays. Family births and deaths are mentioned, as are politics, and ailments. Well into their sixties Mary and Duncan began to feel they should retire.

'On our way back to Ireland...we travelled via the Cotswolds and started to make contact with a few house agents. We stayed at the Fleece Hotel in Cirencester and looked at Chipping Norton, Bourton on the Water, Chedworth and Bibury, then through the Forest of Dean...' I would call this the thin end of the wedge.

Alan announced the birth of another granddaughter – Harold Wilson was elected – John Curry won a gold medal at the Olympics – Mary went to see 'Jaws' – a threatened bank strike materialized – Mary's birthday was a party on the beach – Chris Evett won the tennis – the British ambassador was assassinated in Dublin.

A farewell round of family visits was made and then Mary and Duncan flew to Australia to see Richard and his family. They came back to nightmare conditions at The Lodge – a giant water crisis – and it took a very long time to get things back to normal.

'Then on Thursday 21 July 1977 my mother died. She had been ill for some time with a bad heart and had been taking something to the compost heap at six in the evening when she collapsed and died in the garden. She was 86.' The family came together for the funeral – even from Australia – and on return to Ireland the Braithwaites turned their minds seriously to selling The Lodge. It had to be to the right sort of people – they felt they owed that to the local inhabitants, with whom they had worked closely. Eventually negotiations began with a French couple for the low-ish price of £40,000 – and once things were under way Mary and Duncan rather characteristically took themselves off for a protracted trip, which included the Cotswolds again.

'Our main reason for coming to the area was to do some house-hunting. We had toyed with the idea of living in Suffolk [near their son Alan and family], but we knew we would wish to return to Ireland and that would add another stage to our journey. Gloucestershire to us seemed the ideal place. We called at agents in Cheltenham before booking into the Fosseyway Manor hotel in Stow on the Wold. Here, we called on several House Agents. Then we travelled on to Cirencester where we stayed at The Black Horse. We spent a whole day dashing about looking at houses before going to stay with a friend of ours in the next village to St Mary Bourne, prior to attending the burial of my mother's ashes on Friday 11 November.'

Three weeks or so of gyrating around friends and relations followed, and then on 5 December the couple flew to Madeira for a holiday, where they continued their usual energetic pursuits. They squeaked back in to Britain (Mary's Dublin-issued passport omitted to say she had right of residence in Britain), spent Christmas in Suffolk, and then got down to serious house-hunting in blizzards and storms. 'Bourton on the Water, Northleach, Cirencester, Cheltenham, Leckhampton, Bussage, Rodborough, Ross on Wye. Then on 9th January, we visited Springfield in

Eastcombe, just a little way down from Orchard Cottage. We went straight back to the agents and made an offer of £27,500 which was accepted. We then went back to a well deserved supper by the fire at the Fossebridge.'

Next day they arranged the financial side of things. 'We went back to Eastcombe the next day in the snow and called in at The Lamb for a whisky mac. We had another look at Springfield and asked a lot of questions of the owner, Mr Symonds. The surveyor arrived and we drove back to see Loveday removers in Cirencester.'

After that there was a trip north to stay with friends, go to the theatre in Liverpool, walk the course at Aintree... Then on to Ireland to continue packing and sell off whatever they and their buyers did not want. 'Then these terrific strikes broke out. Both the postal workers and the telephone people were involved. We couldn't do a thing...' but eventually the French buyers made their way to The Lodge. 'Robert had brought with him a little Gladstone bag stuffed full of money so on their arrival they had to go straight into Westport to bank the money.' The Braithwaites introduced their buyers to everyone and everything they thought they needed to know, sold off their final surplus possessions, saw their effects off to the Swansea boat, had a nap, and then received a telegram to say the owner of Springfield, Eastcombe, had reneged on the sale. 'I was sick with disappointment.'

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Chapter 8. Getting to Eastcombe in the End *[unabridged]*

We had planned to come over via Dublin with the car and Murphy, our Jack Russell terrier. We stuck to our plans and stayed in Dublin with friends, Duncan taking the opportunity to do a bit of business with our solicitors in Dublin. We had run The Lodge as a company so all the financial and legal aspects of closing down the company had to be seen to.

Our friend in Dublin had bought our car which was a big Volkswagen and he took us to the boat. We went on the day crossing to Liverpool from Dublin, Murphy travelled across in the hold which meant frequent visits to make sure he was all right. Duncan had bought a Volkswagen Polo through another friend in England called Ted Watkinson who lived in Hanley Swan near Malvern. It was decided that we should drive a hired car down to pick our new car up from Ted and our friend Eric Parry duly met us at the boat with a Hertz Escort estate car.

We stayed overnight with the Parrys and I found accommodation for us in the Cotswolds where we would be allowed to have Murphy, the Greyhound Inn in Barnsley. We came down with quite a lot of luggage on Wednesday 8 March.

The house agents were furious that our vendor had let us down like that and had promptly arranged for more for us to look at. Then Duncan went off to Hanley Swan to collect the Polo which subsequently turned out to be a less than perfect car. House hunting now began in earnest. We actually looked at a house on the way down but we found out afterwards it had been sold. By the middle of March our life was house agents and more house agents, and we were homeless displaced persons.

One of the agents was so disgusted by way we had been treated that he offered us West End cottage in Minchinhampton for £15 per week on a monthly basis. This was a good deal, as lets were usually on a six months' basis. Having a house meant that we could be private and independent. We had no sheets and no towels as these were still in our shipment so I had to borrow all from my daughter-in-law.

We then went to see the man in Eastcombe who had reneged on the sale of his house to us but we could get no sense out of him. Meanwhile life went on as usual around us. It was the middle of March, Cheltenham Gold Cup time and St Patrick's day and it snowed. Not the best sort of weather for continuing our intensive house hunting programme.

We took Murphy to the kennels at Withington and prepared to move into our cottage at Minchinhampton. After getting ourselves established, we walked round the village, had a cup of tea and then drove to Suffolk. We had left all our summer clothes at Alan's and Pat's house and wanted to repack them. We spent the Easter weekend there, returning to Minchinhampton on 28 March.

It was just two days after returning to Gloucestershire that we saw Orchard Cottage in Eastcombe and thought it fitted the bill quite well. We arranged to make a further visit the next day and on 1 April agreed to buy it for £28,000. We collected Murphy on 2 April and settled into a routine at Minchinhampton, taking Murphy for a walk on the common, doing all the washing at a local launderette, and nervously continuing to look at houses, in case the sale of this one fell through. I must say it was one way of getting to know the area. On 12 April, our solicitor and friend came down to look at Orchard Cottage and we had a pleasant day visiting our first Conservator from our Burma days, RWV (Pedlar) Palmer who lived in nearby Eastington and was now over 80.

Optimistically, I rang the agent who had found the cottage in Minchinhampton and gave notice for 20 May. As it turned out, we were to be there for another month. The Miles, who owned Orchard Cottage, were in a chain and their purchase had fallen through. They also didn't like us taking people round. We continued to look at other houses but decided our time would be better occupied with organising things so that we wouldn't have to wait once we had possession, so we went off to Comet to buy a fridge freezer and washing machine, booked the connection of the telephone and took care of all the other endless details of moving.

On 24 April 1978, our 41st wedding anniversary, we phoned the agent who informed us that the contracts were in the post and it was all systems go for 19 June.

We took a short break with Alan and Pat, returning at the end of May. One night, whilst we were there, we were watching television and I heard my name mentioned. I had sent in an amusing item to Esther Rantzen's programme 'That's Life.' I had been returning from Castlebar one day shortly before leaving Ireland and saw that a new notice had been put up saying 'Black Accident Spot'. I thought it so funny I wrote it in and there was Cyril Fletcher mentioning my name to the Nation! I did wonder how many people saw it as "The Godfather" was on the other channel!

We got possession of Orchard Cottage on 19 June. We arrived before 10am to find the gas men already there. The agent arrived late to hand over the keys with Midland Electricity Board hard on his heels to put in a cooker point. Both gas and electricity meters were duly read and then the telephone people came to fit the phone. Next it was the turn of Lovedays who had been keeping my mother's furniture in storage until we were ready to move in, followed by Comet delivering the machines we had bought. The TV arrived, but would not work so it was taken away again. We went back and slept at Minchinhampton that night, awaking to even more hectic clearing up and cleaning out. Duncan took a load over to Eastcombe and found Nat Ross Removers waiting for him with our shipment from Ireland. We worked until after 7.30pm unloading and unpacking that little lot. We virtually needed a shoehorn to get it all in. Even though we had disposed of so many of our belongings before leaving, we had expected to be moving into a different, larger house when we had packed up. When Alan and Pat came to stay shortly after we moved in, we passed on some bits of furniture and paintings to them and arranged Jolly's to come to take away pieces of furniture for auction in Bath.

There was still no heating and we couldn't turn on the gas boiler. Eventually Clive Hunt, a builder from the village, came and fixed it. We slept at Orchard Cottage for the first time that night and whether it was "too quiet", we could not manage to fall asleep.

The next day we went to fetch Murphy from the kennels only to discover that he had bitten a man there. It was off to Cirencester to purchase a carpet for the spare room from Galley carpets, followed by Nailsworth to choose curtains. Duncan and I worked very hard the next few days. One of our main tasks was to rid the spare room of its dreadful carpet in preparation for the arrival of the new carpet from Cirencester, but first, of course, we had to shift all the furniture out. The next day, two women arrived to measure up for the curtains, the new garden shed arrived in the afternoon and just as we thought our day was over, the carpet layers came at 9.05pm. Still, they laid the carpet very swiftly and it looked good. On Thursday 6th MFI came and delivered the cupboard for our bedroom, and Duncan put up the tool shed himself.

We did have time for some pleasures and one afternoon went picking gooseberries, raspberries and strawberries from Chipping Campden which I duly put into the deep freeze we had purchased from Comet!

Even with the arrival of our shipment, we still had no china and no comfortable chairs as we had sold all those and left them in Ireland. For quite a time after we moved in, we had only enamel plates to eat from and sat on our garden chairs in the sitting room. We eventually went up to Worcester and bought some china from the Royal Worcester factory.

Alan and Pat and her mother, Joan, were our first family visitors to Orchard Cottage. They had been down on holiday in Wales and had been delayed coming back over the Severn Bridge, resulting in Alan, Pat and Frances with Alison in one car losing Joan who was in another car. Eventually everyone arrived. Alison stayed with us whilst Alan, Pat and Frances went to Chalford Hill to stay with some friend of Neil Valentine who took in guests. I gathered it was not a huge success. The following day, Duncan walked round Minchinhampton Golf Course with Alan whilst he played a round. Alan, Pat and Duncan also went to Aston Down where a gliding day was being held. They all had a glide but did not return till 8pm.

In mid September we took off for a short tour round the West Country. The first day we went to Wales and Glastonbury where we climbed the Tor and nearly got blown off the top. The next day we went to Street, famous for Clarks shoes, and on to Wookey Hole and down the Cheddar Gorge. We also visited Dunster Castle and had a ride on a little steam train. After travelling down through Minehead and Ilfracombe, we caught a steamer from Ilfracombe to Lundy Island. We

landed at about 2.30 and had a very steep climb to the top of the island. We bought stamps at the Post Office and posted them there. We arrived back at the hotel at about 6.30 after a very calm voyage. The next day we drove to Barnstaple and visited Saunton Sands, and then on to Westward Ho which we did not like apart from the beach which was very sandy. We stayed the night in Woolacombe. On the return journey we went for lunch with friends in South Moulton and stayed seven nights with Molly at Dulverton.

We went to visit Alan and Pat in October, staying the first night with Rose. We collected Frances from school, and she had a friend to tea. When we returned we had a few local outings such as a visit to Westonbirt. We also joined the Oxford Society and went to a meeting in the library at the top of Gloucester Cathedral. We found the people there very pleasant. Eric and Marion came to stay for a few days in early December and we took them to Cheltenham Races.

Christmas was spent at home, our first in Eastcombe. Then on 28 December, we drove to Suffolk for the New Year. We had snow and had to delay coming home. We made a dash for it on 3 January. The loos were frozen at the garage! Milk was frozen solid when we got home. There was snow in the garage and the old back porch. On our return Murphy was struck down by a mysterious illness which initially failed to respond to antibiotics and he had to have tests which proved negative. The vet said to give Murphy two weeks to recover and he did slowly get better, even to the extent of getting into one or two dogfights. The thaw took from 8 to 11 January. We had units in the kitchen fitted at the sink end and had more snow on and off all month into March. We went to Slimbridge and the car park was like an ice rink.

On 26 January, the Hunts started work pulling down the old back porch and started to build the lobby and cloakroom, which lasted many days because they could not work with so much snow about. On 17 March, seven inches of snow fell.

Alan, Pat, Frances and Alison came for Easter. They stayed at Hillside below us. First Frances then Alison was struck down by mumps over the last few weeks and Alison was still recovering. On Easter Monday, I made a picnic and we set off in the car to Belas Knapp. We walked with Murphy to the Knapp and ate our picnic in the shelter of a wall where the sun felt quite hot. After lunch we went to visit Sudeley Castle. Duncan and I queued for tickets whilst Alan, Pat and Frances and Alison watched a Punch and Judy show. We looked at a small part of the castle, then went to see the wildfowl, and the adventure playground. Alan played golf and there was racing at Cheltenham which we attended. Continuing the horsey theme, we attended Badminton Horse Trials for two days, watching the dressage, walking round part of the cross-country course and looking at the show-jumping.

Earlier that spring, the Conservatives had won a vote of no confidence in Callaghan's government in the House of Commons, and a General Election had been called for Thursday 3 May. We had been asked if Orchard Cottage could be used as a committee room and we readily agreed. The tellers were all punctual and we had a busy day – not so busy, however, that we didn't have time to watch the 1000 Guineas from Newmarket! The committee rooms closed officially at 9pm by which time we were physically exhausted but we still managed to stay up till 1am to hear the results as they came in. The news that Mrs Thatcher and the Conservatives had won was announced at 3pm on 4 May. I had my ear to the radio all day, even coming back in the car from Cirencester, and it was all very exciting. Later in the afternoon, I watched Callaghan going to the Palace to offer his resignation, and Maggie triumphantly entering Number 10.

We had decided to have the kitchen window enlarged. We felt it would be best if we were not in the house whilst the building works were going on, so after getting the house ready for the builder, we set off on 15 May for Wales via Leominster and Welshpool. We travelled to Swallow Falls and then to Bodnant Gardens where the blue azaleas were in bloom. We were very interested to visit the slate caverns at Blaenau Ffestiniog and Harlech Castle whose tower we duly climbed. This gave a very good view of Snowdon even though it was cloudy. We then travelled on via the strange village at Portmeirion to Caernarvon for the night. We rushed off after breakfast on 19 May for Llanberis where we bought tickets for the train up Snowdon.

Unfortunately there were maintenance works on the railway and the train did not go right to

the top. We were unable to walk it ourselves as we had only a half-hour stop before the train left for the journey back down. It was very cold and windy on the mountain but we had a fabulous view. We also went to Beaumaris, Plas Newydd, and Conway. In fact we had a good explore of North Wales which we enjoyed. We returned slowly to Eastcombe via Hereford, arriving home on 24 May.

The new kitchen window was a marvellous improvement. The first thing I did on returning home was to roll up my sleeves and start cleaning! The new lavatory pan was cracked and we had to wait for a replacement which was an inconvenience. There was dust in all the cupboards everywhere. In fact it was 7 June before we got the lavatory pan. What with cleaning and gardening I never stopped. In mid-June the carpet fitter came to lay new carpet in the dining room and on the stairs. The sweep came to do the sitting room chimney after which I thoroughly spring-cleaned the sitting room. We were now celebrating our first anniversary in Orchard Cottage and things were really starting to come into place. We also had been told by our surveyor that by adding the extension we had increased the value of the house to £35,000.

We had a few days in London with Rose at the end of June, going via St Mary Bourne where we stayed the weekend with old friends. We did some shopping in London, including Hamleys where I bought a kite for Frances and Alison. We came back to Gloucestershire for my birthday and Frances and Alison sang happy birthday to me over the phone. Doreen arrived the next day and we took her to Hidcote Manor Gardens.

On 8 July we went with the family for a week in Wales. Alan arrived with a broken tooth and had to consult a dentist. We were staying at Mrs Whithead's at 16 Bosco Lane, Penarth near Swansea. We went paddling on the beach and visited Worms Head and Alan played a round of golf.

Richard and Patsy came home in August and went to stay with Alan and Pat for a few days before coming to Eastcombe where we welcomed them with a champagne supper at which the champagne blew up. Richard had business appointments and we did a little sightseeing with Patsy and the children. We had a trip to Bath, then on 31 August Richard drove the family down to Sherborne for the day to show them his old school. The next day, whilst he went to Cheltenham, we 'did' Gloucester, including the cathedral, and then went to do some shopping in Cheltenham. We saw them all off from Cheltenham as they started their journey north. We were very sad to say goodbye. It had been a lovely visit – a dream come true. They returned to Australia on 9 September.

I had been suffering from a skin irritation for a while and this was diagnosed by the doctor as psoriasis. I was told I must go to Cheltenham General Hospital every day for treatment which did not please me very much. The treatment consisted of a hot coal tar bath in which I had to soak for ten minutes then 30 seconds each side under the lamp. On the third day I couldn't have any treatment as the bulb in the lamp had gone and they didn't have another one. It took several days for them to get one, which was maddening. The treatment, when it continued, was still uncomfortable but I made progress over the weeks. In August we had a short trip to the Loire Valley and saw châteaux and Chartres cathedral. The French blockade complicated the journeys. My psoriasis was clearing up and the doctor said I could carry on my ultra-violet light treatment at Stroud Hospital.

We were now planning a holiday abroad and in late September we went on a Saga holiday to Minorca, staying in a pretty awful hotel. For the first few days, the sea was rough and the red flag was up for quite a few days preventing us from going swimming. There were, however, lots of interesting things to do and trips to take. On one occasion we visited three factories in quick succession, a leather factory, shoe factory, and silver factory; and on another visit a bird sanctuary. All in all it was a relaxing holiday with much time spent sunbathing and on the beach. We were back in October and the doctor was pleased with my improvement.

In 1980 we went to Suffolk in October and were back in time for Christmas. Pat and Alan's third daughter was born and the girls were transfixed by the new baby. The weather was dreadful and at one point we were recording six inches of snow. In February we went to Suffolk via Burnham in Buckinghamshire to see friends, then lunched with Doreen Peel who now lived in Watford. In March we had the worst floods in Gloucestershire for 21 years.

On 3 April we drove down to Ninfield near Bexhill for the wedding of Justin Llewellyn, Desmond and Pamela's second son. We met a lot of friends and family there but I was rather sad to miss the Grand National which was on the same day. We did, however, make a detour on the way back to St Mary Bourne, my mother's village.

On 23 April we went to Cheltenham races with Pat and the girls. On 27 April Alan went to play golf and Duncan took the grandchildren to look at the new lambs. Then it snowed. On the Sunday there was thick snow everywhere. We went downstairs to turn on the boiler only to discover there was no electricity. We therefore had to make do with a kettle on a gas ring. Then the telephone packed up as well.

Nell, our next-door neighbour, still had electricity so said she would cook our joint and potatoes for us. At 12 noon, her electricity was cut off too. Despite repeated calls to the electricity people, we had to content ourselves with the fact that it was going to be bread and cheese for lunch! Duncan and Alan did a bit of snow-ploughing and Alan managed to get his car stuck. Then Nell's power came on, and we went to her house for dinner. The power was still off the next day and Duncan in frustration took his binoculars out to look at the various transformers around us. He rang the Midlands Electricity Board to tell them he thought he had found the transformer concerned.

Meanwhile it was to bed by candlelight and no bath. The snow had caused massive damage to the garden. At one point in the saga, the MEB had the effrontery to phone us and ask if the power had come back on. The family left on the 27th and we had another three nights of to bed by candlelight and no bath.

Alan and Pat were meanwhile back in Suffolk and Pat rang as power was restored. We had been keeping a tally of the hours we had been without it and I was able to give her the final figure, 80 hours and 29 minutes. It was, however, a treat to be able to have a warm bath and do the washing. Even the deep freeze was not too badly affected and we did not have to throw too much away, but it was strange weather. One week later we had rainstorms backing up in the main drain which we had to have rodded.

It was Duncan's 71st birthday on 12 May and as I had had a party for his 70th, this was a low-key affair. The next day we set off via Suffolk for Harwich where we took the boat to the Hook of Holland to catch the Rhine express. The train was comfortable but there was no food and I was glad we had taken some rolls with us. When we arrived at Cologne, we changed trains for Königswinter where we were to stay. We made some interesting excursions to Bonn where we saw Beethoven's house – and up the Drakenfels on the cog-wheel railway – Trier, and Cologne Cathedral.

Sunday 24 May was our 44th wedding anniversary and my last with Duncan. It was also the date of Louise's christening. There were 20 for lunch, then it was off to the church for a 3pm service which we shared with another baby. The other baby cried all the time but Louise was a little angel. After the ceremony, we had the christening cake and drank a toast to Louise. We were all exhausted at the end of the day.

On 14 September we flew to Oporto from Gatwick with a Suntours party for a holiday in North Portugal based in Praia de Ancora. It was a very pleasant holiday, the only real problem being the wind. We went to a huge market selling everything you could think of, visited Oporto for the day, toured a wine lodge to see how port is made and saw the Stock Exchange building. We had to change hotels after a week and the second hotel was not as good as the first but we met some interesting people and enjoyed relaxing by the pool in the sunshine. We arrived back on 28 September and landed at Gatwick at 8.50pm, too late to travel back to Eastcombe so we stayed overnight at a hotel there. On the 29th we returned on the train via Reading and a friend in the village met us.

We had said our farewells to Nell before leaving. New neighbours had moved in during our holiday and we went across to introduce ourselves. We went to stay with Alan and Pat for a few days in October and in November the Parrys came for a few nights and joined us at Cheltenham which they thoroughly enjoyed.

The weather was appalling that winter. We got up to snow on 8 December. The next day

there was a great deal of ice around, on the 10th we had freezing fog, and on the 11th we had five inches of snow in the night which meant we had to clear the path. One of our neighbours couldn't get to work and the BBC said that this was the worst pre-Christmas weather for 31 years. Some were without electricity, but not us.

On 17 December Duncan woke me at 3am to say he had a bad pain. He would not let me call the doctor, but I did as soon as it was daylight and he was here by 8.45am. He said Duncan had had a heart attack. There followed a terrible week of nursing Duncan and trying to get everything done properly, but he woke me in the early hours of Christmas morning. His condition had worsened and I called the doctor, who called an ambulance – but I was told that he died in the ambulance at the top of the lane. So there I was left on my own.

The doctor returned and Mike Tanner came and sat with me for the rest of the night. There was a great deal to do such as letting the family know what had happened. Everyone was marvellous and rallied round. The cremation funeral took place at Gloucester at 9.30am on 31 December. Richard had come home from Australia and he and Alan stayed with me after the funeral for a few days, which was a tremendous help as we needed to discuss things and make various decisions. All this was happening against a background of the most appalling weather and freezing cold the whole time. Poor Richard couldn't come to terms with the climate at all. Alan went home on the Sunday while Richard stayed with me until the Tuesday. I was still very very upset and so tired I could hardly think. Then Alan came again Tuesday night very late and I saw him at breakfast the next day.'

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TIME WAS

Chapter 9. Adjusting to Travelling Alone [*abridged*]

'Rose came on 7 January and the next day we got up to a snow storm which had drifted right up to the back door. The snow plough had to come out to clear the roads and we had to lift Murphy over the drift. Two days later there was such deep snow that there was no milk, paper or post. This just could not have happened at a worse moment. Rose stayed until 13 January and we had a terrible time getting her off on her journey as her car had frozen up. The weather went on and on being very cold. The thaw started very slowly on 16 January and I had to empty the dustbin which was half-full of snow. On 17th the slow thaw continued – conditions were treacherous but the neighbours were keeping me supplied with essentials such as milk, bread and wood.

On 13 February I had to have poor Murphy put to sleep. He had a growth and the vet said he would soon not be able to walk at all. It was very sad, because this was the first time I had been all alone with no one to look after.

Slowly, I began to take an interest in things again and thankfully I had good friends and family who were a real support. Doreen came to stay with me in March and I went to Liverpool to stay with the Parrys. In April, Alan, Pat and the girls came for Easter and stayed until the Sunday after which meant we could go to Badminton.

The next drama came in May. I had been on a course of antibiotics for my sore thumb but these had not worked and on 20 May I attended an appointment at the Cheltenham Nuffield Hospital. Mr Rooker, the surgeon, said I should have an operation on the thumb and I went in on 28 May and came out two days later.

All this time I had been planning a trip to Australia to stay with Richard and Patsy and the children over Christmas and the New Year period. There were lots of preparations to make. I had to apply for a visa and left my passport with Thomas Cook so that this could be arranged.

Duncan's birthday came and went and made me feel very sad. Princess Diana gave birth to a baby boy, William, in hospital in London and I felt very patriotic about this. I was working hard in the garden picking gooseberries and sorting out the vegetables. On my own birthday, Frances and Alison rang and sang Happy Birthday on the phone. I went to Aldbourne to Margaret and John for lunch and we had trout, salad and new potatoes and a lovely pudding, washed down with wine. I took them some raspberries from the garden. Doreen came to stay at the end of July for a few days: we picked raspberries, watched racing from Goodwood and decided to go in person next year. The only blight was that I had a bad back which had by now extended to my neck and shoulders.

On 14 August Tom White took me to Cheltenham station to begin my holiday with Alan, Pat and family in Scotland. I bought a ticket to Dumfries, changing at Crewe and Carlisle. Alan was waiting for me at the barrier in Dumfries when I arrived and took me to the chalet where we would be staying. It was such a successful holiday that no one wanted to leave at the end. We went bird-watching on the river Dee estuary, played on the sandhills and the beach, went castle visiting... Alan played golf and Frances and Alison had some very enjoyable riding expeditions.

One castle we visited was Castle Douglas. From there we walked to Threave Castle which had beautiful mowed lawns all around it and we saw swans and their cygnets on the river. We tasted local delicacies like kippers, haggis and savoury duck, visited the local, rather noisy, swimming pool which the girls liked, Frances swimming the whole width of the bath. We walked quite a lot. One of the highlights was a walk along the Solway Firth where I found some wild cherries which I'd never come across before. The girls had a wonderful time at Southernness playing on the beach and at an adventure playground.'

From then on Mary took the bull by its horns, as it were, and resumed a life of adventurous travel alternating with spending time with old friends. A visit from Rose, watching a Falklands victory parade on 12 October [presumably on television], a visit to Alan and Pat in Suffolk before setting off to Australia. 'Alan took me to the airport and there was fog on the motorway. There were some worries that the plane would not be able to take off on time. Luckily they put me in a buggy to take me to the plane, because it was about a mile from the desk to the departure point. I had an aisle seat in the bulkhead. We took off at 8pm. I had a cognac and tried to sleep. Our first

stop was at Abu Dhabi just as it was getting light. We waited there just over an hour admiring the ultra-modern airport. It was then a six-and-a-half hour stretch to Singapore where we had a 24-hour stopover. A coach transferred us to the hotel where I had a bath and went straight to bed. Next day we had a coach tour round Singapore, taking in the harbour, the ghastly Tiger Balm gardens, and the botanical gardens before being dropped in Tanglin Road to do shopping. The coach trip was far too long and I spent too much money in Singapore. My feet were agony after shopping in that heat.

We were back at the airport the same evening for our trip to Perth. Maggie Pelham met me and brought me home to get over the jet lag. The next day I paddled in the Indian Ocean to relieve my feet. Her house had no vegetable garden and the bugs were atrocious, but she gave me a very good time indeed. We went on a river trip to Fremantle and had an excellent commentary on board. By way of contrast, we were taken right outside the harbour area where it was quite rough.

On 4 December I took off for Adelaide and was met by Norma and Kenneth Adams who drove me home via the city. The next day we went to a National Park where I was struck by the rolling countryside. With its wheat and sheep, it would have looked so English if it hadn't been so brown and drought-stricken. The next day we made a trip to the Barossa valley and spent an interesting time visiting vineyards. I managed to stay quite sober. We had a shopping trip in Adelaide before I packed up and left for Melbourne.

Here I had to get myself to the Country Women's Association where I had booked a room. This was quite a hike. Liz Clarke picked me up and we made a visit to the rain forest which was so thick with cloud and rain we had to eat our sandwiches in the car. I had been invited to see Wyndham Richardson for lunch the next day and he showed me letters written by my Granny Alice to his mother Madeline, some of which were fascinating. We spent the whole day sitting and talking. I had hoped to see a little of Melbourne but did not go out at all and spent the evening looking at television in the guest house.

The next day I did the shops at Toorak, had my hair washed, had a coffee, and was on my flight to Sydney by 2pm. The family met me at 3.15 and we went home, dropping Michael off at a party en route. Richard bought a Chinese takeaway for dinner and we ate mince pies made by Patsy. I was fascinated to see that Nicola was nearly as tall as me and how tall Michael was. I liked Richard and Patsy's house and admired their new kitchen.

As we were going to be away up north for Nicky's birthday, she opened all her presents the day before we left. We went out to a barbecue at friends' in the afternoon and I had a swim in the pool when we got home. On 16 December we got up at 5am and left an hour and a half later, driving the whole day up the Pacific Highway. We had a picnic lunch at Kempsey and then Patsy drove as far as Coff's Harbour whilst Richard had a rest in the back of the car. We turned off the road at Brunswick Heads and reached our chalets at Tanglewood at 8pm.

The holiday was very pleasant. The children saw a koala in a tree. This was the first time they had seen one in its natural environment. We had a dip in the sea but it was rough and the sand blew everywhere. Nicola and Michael did some riding and we spent a couple of days very pleasantly beach-bound. Then it was off to the Gold Coast to spend a day at Surfer's Paradise. The clocks changed as we headed north. We saw a water-skiing show, sealions and dolphins doing tricks and sharks and turtles being fed by a diver under the water. Richard and Michael went on a roller-coaster and we saw the strange spectacle of a dolphin pantomime.

It was Nicola's 16th birthday on 20 December. We went to the beach at noon and the sea was so rough that Richard had to look after me in the water. I found it difficult to get up again once I had been knocked down. We had a barbecue and played tennis and more golf; we also had a Devonshire tea at the Madura tea gardens whose owner had once lived in Ceylon.

On Christmas Day we had a service at 7am on the lawn, given by a layman. I found myself feeling very sad. It was very hot and I went for a short bush walk where I found a four-foot long carpet snake lying across my path. Christmas lunch was enormous. I have never seen so much food in one place in my life: chicken, turkey, fish, duck, fruit salad, icecream. I felt bloated afterwards. By 30 December, I had worked out that people in Australia eat once every two and a half hours.

The weather now turned and became much cooler. We got home at night on 29 December to find two possums up a tree in the driveway which we went and inspected by torchlight. On New Year's Eve Richard drove us all in the car to Pymble Hill to see Sydney fireworks but, as it was misty, the dramatic effect was somewhat lessened. On New Year's Day we went to friends for lunch. Afterwards I stayed by the pool and read my book, and in the evening I settled down to watch the Edinburgh Tattoo on the television.

I had a relaxed start to 1983 after my long trip to Australia. The first time I ventured anywhere was about the time of Duncan's birthday when I went down by train to Bexhill to stay with Pamela. Desmond left shortly after my arrival as he had to fly to Australia to help promote the new Bond film, 'Octopussy.' Pamela and I had a lovely few days together visiting Sissinghurst where the cherry and horse chestnut trees were in full blossom. Then it was on to Bodiam where I was able to take Pamela in for free on my National Trust card. We also visited Rudyard Kipling's house, and had a walk down the front at Bexhill.

I went across to Holland at the end of May with Pat, Alan and the girls to stay with Bernard. We embarked at Harwich and took a cabin for the journey for £8. We arrived at the Hook and went straight to Bernard's house and managed to fit quite a schedule of sightseeing in to the few days we spent there. At one point, Bernard's parents arrived from England and there were 12 people staying in the house! The girls enjoyed a train ride to Delft where we had a lunch of toasted sandwiches and visited the enormous market. We also did The Hague and saw the churchyard where all the Dutch royal family are buried, and Amsterdam where we took a canal ride and visited the Holland Art and Craft Centre. The Madurodam was another interesting place for the children with its model houses, churches and planes. After a fund-refreshing trip to the bank at Scheveningen branch, some last-minute shopping and a delicious Indonesian takeaway, we made the long, tedious trip back to England on the 'Princess Beatrix.' Luckily it was a sunny day, but the ship was huge and seemed crowded. I rested up before returning to Eastcombe. It was the première of 'Octopussy' the night of our arrival back and I was very disappointed that Anglia television did not show the stars arriving until after midnight, which of course I missed because I had to go to bed.

In June, a visit to my old school brought back memories. An open day had been arranged to coincide with the opening of the new music school and we were treated to a very good concert in the gym. We were shown round the school, including my old House, before lunch by two little girls who were very polite and said how interesting it had been to meet us.

It was decided that Alison could come and spend a riding week with Granny in the Cotswolds. I went up to Paddington to pick her up and we came down together. Her father was suffering from mumps at the time! We had booked her in for a week at Cerney Wick and I took her each day, sometimes staying to see her ride. In the afternoons we went home to Hickstead and Goodwood on the television so it was a very horsey week. There was a huge thunderstorm during the week which had been so bad that the ponies had to be brought inside. Alison, however, did not wake at all. Alison stayed a week in all and the whole family was out in force to greet her when I took her back to London the following weekend.

Mid-September saw me embarking on yet another voyage of discovery, this time to Edinburgh. After a train journey from Cheltenham, I stayed at the very old-fashioned Maitland Hotel and spent the first evening orientating myself by walking down Princes Street armed with my brolly. The weather may have been unsettled, but the castle was floodlit and looked wonderful.

The focus of my visit was Hopetoun House in Abercorn, home of the Linlithgows. Lord Linlithgow had been Viceroy of India during my father's time. I arrived just after lunch. The estate was beautiful and there were lots of pheasants on the walls around it. I did not have time to go through all the books and cuttings but I was lucky enough to find a photograph of my father with the Linlithgows in Calcutta at Christmas 1939, and a news photo of Sir Henry Craik. I checked through the family tree and found Sarah who was then divorced. She had been a contemporary of Richard in India and they had played together at Viceregal Lodge all those years ago.

The next day I went to make enquiries at the Royal Scottish Academy about Kenneth MacLeary whose painting of my great-grandmother I have inherited. They were very interested in

what I had to say and discovered from their records that they had a portrait of Helen Fawcett by MacLeary in store there which was very much like my own. From here I went on to the Central Library and had a very interesting time reading through the Annals of Edinburgh Theatre. Then it was back to the tourist trail and I visited John Knott's house and the Museum of Childhood. I noticed when passing St Giles' Cathedral that there was a Battle of Britain Commemoration Service about to start so I joined the congregation and heard the Moderator of the Church of Scotland speak.

Pat, Frances, Alison and Louise came down to stay after my return. The girls stayed in the spare room and poor Pat came and slept with me in Duncan's bed. We had a lovely outing to Cheltenham Races and Alison was able to show her mother Cerney Wick where she had done her riding earlier in the year.. Christmas and New Year were spent with Alison and Pat and we rang Richard on New Year's Eve.'

Mary worked on her family history in the early part of 1984. 'I was sent a book on M E Braddon for £36 – what price – and this kept me busy taking notes. I was also looking into the possibility of buying a dictating machine so I could embark on a family history in earnest.' The need to keep on the move won, however, and Mary went to friends in Liverpool before going to Suffolk again, then home to receive visitors before setting off for Scandinavia.

Mary described getting to London – Tilbury – Holland – Bergen and taking a coach tour before rejoining the ship after an expensive interlude. The sea turned rough but docked at Andalsnes next day – shopping and lunch and a coach tour that included hairpin bends and 'fabulous waterfalls' – and then they pushed on to Narvik, marvelling at the light nights.

'We entered the Arctic Circle at 6.30pm. We were going further and further north and we were dressing very warmly indeed. Some people had even got their fur coats out! We arrived in Spitzbergen on 25 June and were taken on shore 50 at a time in the lifeboat! It was actually sleeting as we explored. Some fellow travellers were saying it must have been like this in the Falklands, especially when one realized one was only 600 miles from the North Pole. Back on ship for the rest of the day, we sat in the music room as this was a good vantage point for the passing scenery. The recurring themes were sun and snow, but we did sail past what we thought was a Russian minesweeper, the 'Barents King.'

Mary continued to relish the experiences of being so far north – the North Cape, Laplanders, reindeer – a barbecue on the aft deck, rum punches – her 69th birthday and a hairdo.

Back home the pace continued, with more visitors and outings, and while staying in Suffolk there was the *faux pas* of miscalculating the time difference and ringing Richard on his birthday at 5.30am in Australia.

'Then it was garden chores for the rest of the month, including the purchase of a garden seat and table from Gardeners of Cirencester and the disposal of a wasp nest on the brew house by a lady from the Council! In mid-September I embarked on a day-long coach expedition with the British Sailors Society. There was a long queue to see the 'Mary Rose' and it was very tiring to wait because they were only letting a few in at a time. The D-Day Museum, at Southsea, with its tapestry, was also interesting.' Then another round of visits.

'In February, I had booked a trip to Kenya with Saga. We flew via Madrid to Nairobi and settled in our hotel for a couple of days.' Then a National Park – the Rift Valley – a trip on the lake – a visit to a Masai village – a safari – the Taita Hills in Tanzania – more animals – Mombasa... 'The organization was a bit of a shambles but after arrival and an orientation meeting we managed a dip in the sea before tea. The next day we visited a Hindhu temple and Fort Jesus in Mombasa, then went shopping. We then made our way gradually the 300 miles back to Nairobi where we had a day and a half sightseeing before flying home via Madrid to Heathrow. I loved the safari but did not like Mombasa.' [What I want to know is, where did Mary get her energy from?]

A family Easter and Cheltenham races followed, but then: Copenhagen. Mary's bag was snatched – with all her traveller's cheques and passport in it. The police – gin and tonic – a canal boat trip to see the Little Mermaid – coffee, cake, the theatre. Next day, arranging a refund at the bank. 'Then I faced a most inefficient wait at the Embassy whilst my passport was sorted out.' On to Stockholm, sunshine and a tour of the royal palace; overnight train to Oslo – a fjord tour,

museums, City Hall to look at newly-weds; back to Copenhagen and on to Harwich and Alan and Pat and the girls... For the first time Mary describes that trip as enjoyable but over-ambitious.

Then Mary's 70th birthday had to be celebrated. A friend to stay; family and lunch and presents; racing on the television... 'The caterers arrived at 5.30pm and the party started soon after 6.00pm. It was a great success, we had a marquee in the garden, 43 people attended and I received lots of presents and masses of flowers. The next day, the girls took advantage of the marquee to give a circus show.'

Rose came to stay, the chimney was repointed, there were trips to the Wildlife Park and the Forest of Dean. Peggy Gingell came to stay and they went to the Lake District for a weekend before returning through Suffolk to stay with Rose in Highgate. 'I returned to Suffolk for Christmas and spent the New Year in Eastcombe...'

'In February I found myself anxious as I anticipated my imminent trip to Egypt. I caught the National Express bus to Heathrow on 12 February and checked in at Terminal 3. The flight was delayed and we got to Cairo at 10pm. We stayed at the Hilton.' Mary describes her sightseeing as far south as Aswan, and then a trip on a felucca. 'It was very relaxing, sailing along the Nile and pleasant sitting up on deck chatting. We visited the temple of Horus in the afternoon, returning to the boat for an oriental buffet and a very noisy belly dancing show by the all-male crew! On 18 February we visited the temples of Karnac and Luxor. We watched the Son et Lumière at Karnac which was very interesting but too long and I needed my coat!' And the tour went on. Temples and more temples; the Valley of the Kings and King Tut; the Valley of the Nobles and more temples. Back to Cairo and home.

The weather was cold at home. Ice on the windows. 'Pat and the girls came the Thursday before Easter and Alan joined us on Saturday. He and Pat slept in the village hall which was rather uncomfortable. On Easter Monday we went to Bristol, through the Avon gorge and under the suspension bridge and parked near the SS Great Britain. After lunch and looking over the ship, we drove to Badminton school and I showed everyone round the grounds and we visited Molly Blue.

I left Eastcombe at the end of April for a trip to London, staying with Rose. We visited 97 Duke's Avenue, Granny Elizabeth's old house, which I found to my amazement was up for sale; and a couple of days later we went to Highgate cemetery where we saw Marx's grave. Then I went down to Bexhill where Desmond met me, the family came to lunch on the Sunday and tadpoled in the swimming pool.

As usual I had a full cultural life fitting in visits with the theatre club to Bath and to the Pittville Pump Rooms to listen to classical music. At the end of July, I drove to Sutton Veny for Peg's 69th birthday which was attended by Cousin Pat and Sandra. The next day we drove down to Romsey Abbey and Broadlands to have a look round. Then we drove to the New Forest to Rufus Stone and then to Lyndhurst. We drove back across country via Fordingbridge.

On 20 August, I set off to France on the overnight boat from Portsmouth to Caen to stay with a French couple who had been guests in Ireland.... We drove off to La Moulonnière to a great welcome, a good lunch, and plenty of drink. I had a very good afternoon nap after that. The next day we went to Tours and found a supermarket and looked at some old Irish maps and photos. We also visited a couple of châteaux... Next it was on to link up with Alan and Pat. I took the train to Le Mans and thence to St Briec... We visited all the local attractions, Dinan, Dinard and St Malo and I returned home on 29 August.'

Over the next four months the visits to and from Alan's family filled the autumn and Christmas. 'We had snow and ice in January 1987. I was afraid I would not get to the airport, but Jane managed to drive me to Cirencester to get the bus. I left for Vancouver on 16 January. I had a very interesting 24-hour stop in Vancouver, then eight and a half hours on to Honolulu and then another plane to Sydney – interminable!' But it was worth it, to relax with the family and admire the brilliant night skies before launching off on more expeditions: Canberra, the Snowy Mountains, Sydney, a day at the races. 'Only Patsy finished up on the day with the betting! Richard lost \$40! We had a champagne buffet lunch and an excellent dinner at a top restaurant after the meeting.' Then Chinatown and a military tattoo with Richard, a weekend at Smiths Lake where the swimming

pool was out of action and 'when we returned to Sydney it was the coldest March day for 43 years' which was a pity because they were at, yes, the races.

Mary's route back to England took in Hong Kong, but she arrived back to thick snow and intermittent power cuts. 'In April, a picture I had taken in Stroud, New South Wales, appeared in the *Stroud News and Journal*!'

Easter. The family went with Mary to the Rare Breeds Farm at Guiting Power, Frances went in a glider at Aston Down 'at the princely sum of £12.50 for five minutes,' they all went to Cheltenham Races, and Mary bought a microwave. And the drains blocked again. They continued to block on and off through April and May, and finally 'Mr Conboy and Son came mid-May and looked through the drain with a light and a mirror. The old pipes were cracked in places so we decided to do a test dip. In June the Conboys came and started digging the drain trench. It was no good so we decided to have all the pipes renewed... We had rain and thunder which made things difficult..'

Another election came and went, with 'various people' helping run the Committee Room in Orchard Cottage. Work for a new boiler and radiators messed up the house. The weather was 'funny.' And in September Mary had trouble with the new installation, but she was soon off to spend time with the girls while Alan and Pat had a few days in Paris. At home a new pump for the boiler put things right at last, and Mary was able to go to Suffolk for Christmas as usual, returning home for New Year.

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TIME WAS

Chapters 10 and 11. Travels and Tribulations, 1988-1993 [abridged]

In 1988 the boiler kept on misbehaving. Mary bought a new car (Renault 5 automatic), got rid of the old one, and in February recorded cold weather. At Easter the family came and everyone went to Hereford, where Alan had work. They visited Symonds Yat, and stayed in Geoff Herford's cottage [a Rose Cottage, Eastcombe, friend]. Later Mary drove to Suffolk and saw the arrival of the girls' first horse, Dollar. She returned to Eastcombe via Peggy Gingell in Essex.

'Also in April new people moved into Reg Shipway's cottage, next door. G*** [I am playing safe here] and Julie, little did we know what a pain they would turn out to be.' By May Mary was off visiting again, and then on 29 May she left for a six-day trip to France with a National Trust group.

'We saw Pegasus Bridge, Honfleur, Arromanches, and the beaches. The remains of the Mulberry Harbour, Bayeux Tapestry, Rouen, Falaise, Caen. I was very glad I went but I was exhausted by the time I got home at 2am on the sixth day. June 9th was the coldest day for 20 years! In mid-June G*** next door lit a huge bonfire outside my kitchen window – both bathroom and kitchen windows were hot to the touch! Later, a fire officer came to look and said the fire was too close.'

A new carpet; another National Trust holiday. Harrogate, a pleasant hotel, lots of 'Yorkshire Scenery' – but a coach breakdown on the way back and a very late arrival in Cheltenham. 'The angelic Lawsons [Woodview on the Green] were still there to meet me.' The visitors and visits continued: Sutton Veny, Sherborne, Thurleston, Hungerford, Hanley Swan, London, Suffolk...

'October/November visits to hospital and arrangements for an operation on an ovarian cyst. It actually snowed on November 20th. I went into hospital on November 23rd for op on 24th. Had masses of cards and flowers – amazing! I came out on December 2nd and had Mrs Warren to look after me at home until the 15th. On my own then till 21st when Alan came to fetch me to go to Suffolk for Christmas. I had a happy time with them but I got gastric flu on New Year's Day [1989].'

From there Mary launched herself back into her busy existence, taking in a visit to Rose and a matinée on the way home. New carpet in February. Snow, frost and rain. Sorting out of affairs. Hip operation in King Edward's hospital in London. 'Not very pleasant. All my friends were so kind.' Phone calls from all over including Richard in Australia. Lots of visitors. Hydrotherapy. 'The 20th was Easter Sunday and I went to the Duke and Duchess of Richmond's room to have Holy Communion with them. They were so nice and friendly and we chatted after.' Recuperation continued in a nursing home at Osborne with views over the Solent, nice staff, and good facilities. 'At dinner on Fridays we had Grace and the loyal toast and then pass the port!' Then Alan helped Mary home, and at 6pm set off back to Suffolk.

'The next few weeks I spent at home convalescing. All my friends and neighbours were wonderful, except for the man next door who started a campaign of hate against us all. The Watkins were the worst sufferers.'

Peggy Gingell came, the two were given a lift to Bath where they took a coach to Portsmouth for the P&O ferry. Le Havre – Angoulême – Le Bugue – three days exploring the Dordogne – south over the Pyrenees – Pamplona – San Sebastian – back into France to Poitiers – Le Havre – Portsmouth – Bath – home. 'I was very tired and my back was painful!' hardly surprising after covering so many hundreds (thousands?) of miles in 12 days.

The following week the London consultant told Mary she was a credit to him, she handed in her two sticks, saw Rose on the way home, and spent her birthday in Eastcombe – the Lawsons came in for a drink. July brought a heatwave, the wisteria flowering for the first time, lots of harvesting and freezing of produce. Alan and Pat and family came in August and there were days out, tennis, golf, Gatcombe [horses], Blenheim Palace, and then a parting of the ways. More visitors came, and then Peggy told Mary she was not to visit her in Devon as the water shortage there meant she would have to wash in a teacup!

'In mid-September we had a deluge which helped with the drought and later I went to stay

with the Drylands. We visited Salisbury Cathedral and Mompesson House and we saw a letter there...written in ink by a child saying "I have been nearly good and hope to be quite"!'!

A six-year battle with the Water Board commenced about the ownership of School Lane (and therefore responsibility for repairs.) Cheltenham races. Remembrance Day service at Bisley church with Prince Michael of Kent attending. 'In late November I bought a video for the first time. I had a lot of trouble at first but finally got it to work. I caught a County Surveyor nosing around and he said our lane could be adopted. I had to attend two funerals in a week. I went to Suffolk on 21st December for a Christmas visit. I had a good time and came home on 2nd January 1990.'

Boiler trouble – bad storms that did a lot of damage at Westonbirt Arboretum – thousands of people without power for days – February floods – continuing boiler trouble, with 'no heat just when I needed it. Meanwhile G*** next door was doing awful things. I started to try to buy a piece of land outside the kitchen window from him. He just ignored it as he never opened the letters. The family came for Easter. The girls stayed with me. Alan and Pat stayed at the Lamb Inn. It was not very comfortable, I'm afraid.'

A visit to Peggy, and to Llanhydrock with her flower club. Suffolk, and Hadleigh Show. Alison's confirmation. A National Trust outing to the Gateshead Garden Festival. Levens Hall, Kendal. The Wetlands Trust. Kielder Dam. Through the Tyne Tunnel to Cragside and the Armstrong Centre. 'We went round the house which is an amazing place but very ugly from the outside, but with wonderful rhododendrons all round.' Chillingham Castle. Souter Lighthouse. Gibside Chapel. 'I came back on the 8th of June via Wetherby and Clumber Park where a lunch had been ordered for us and across England and back to Cheltenham.'

A visitor, a birthday drinks party, and a wet Wimbledon to watch on television. A heatwave in July. 'G*** continued to annoy everyone and he put two ferrets in a hutch just under my kitchen window, on my piece of land. I have a foot wide round the side of the house for access.' A round of visits, and then a 'good go' at the local MP about the water supply (lack of), and about the council adopting the land, and about the poll tax... This time when the family came for a short visit they brought a tent so that the girls could sleep in the garden.

After this Mary flew to Dublin and stayed with friends in Ireland. A good long tour followed... On 9 September 'we drove down to Tourmakeady and saw old friends and went to The Lodge, then owned by Nicholsons who had only been there three months but she still showed me round..' Other old haunts and old friends followed, with a great evening at the theatre in Dublin, and then Mary was home again and 'on 14th men came to renew the windows and put in double-glazing instead. In fact they turned out to be faulty and I had to call the firm out to put them right. Then the boiler pump packed up so that it had to be renewed... All this time there was trouble from G*** next door. The Environmental Health Officer called on me. Ten days later the ferret hutch was removed from under my window. Coincidence!'

October, and Edinburgh: a stay with friends, a Poussin/Cézanne exhibition, shopping, a friend's wedding in the Cathedral and a reception in the Playfair Library, the Botanic Gardens, a drive round 'old Edinburgh' – a lovely weekend.

'In November I sorted old letters and sent a packet of letters written by Aunt Ethne to the Imperial War Museum for their archives. The letters were written in the First World War when she served as a doctor in the Dardanelles. November 22nd was the day Mrs Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister. December 8th we were snowed in. No papers, no post, and windows covered with snow when I got up. Next day various people came and dug me out. What kind friends I have. The snow thawed in two days luckily as I went to Birmingham with the Theatre Club to see "Show Boat," very good and interesting outing. Then frost and fog the next weekend.' That year the Christmas visit to Suffolk was done by train.

'The year 1991 started with very bad weather and power cuts. In mid-January the Gulf War started and later I had a visit from the Divisional Surveyors to tell me about our lane. This was a result of another letter written to the MP. I was told that the lane had been "left off the map" at some stage. But the Council agreed that it had not ever been private.'

The bad weather did not prevent Mary visiting Rose in London. Easter was in late March

and the girls stayed at Orchard Cottage while Alan and Pat enjoyed Beechcroft, the Salts' B & B in Brownshill. After that Mary visited friends, but 'In early June I heard that G*** had put the house up for sale at a scandalous price so I had to have a Land Registry search done to make sure he did not tell lies to his buyers, if any.' The Council put up notices to say the lane had been adopted, Peggy Gingell came to stay and together they watched Royal Ascot on television, Mary went to Suffolk for her birthday and then had another visitor at Orchard Cottage. 'The Land Registry search confirmed the [three-foot wide] land around the house to be mine. G*** refused to believe it and started shouting at me over the fence. Then lit a huge bonfire to annoy me.'

The summer passed with garden and house jobs, culminating in September with a kitchen cupboard falling and narrowly missing Mary. A huge amount of china and glass was smashed, and while – with much local help – dealing with the aftermath Mary continued to experience persecution from next door. It did not prevent her submitting entries to 'the Show' [Hilltop Gardening Club, I assume]. The Richard arrived from Australia. 'It was wonderful to have him here,' and weeks of touring around followed. Cirencester, Westonbirt Arboretum, Lavenham, Colchester, shopping, golf, sailing, parties, horse trials, Kelvedon Hatch where the current owner 'was very kind and allowed us to look round our old house. I got home to find that Rob Gardiner had put up a fence round my three feet of land.' Then Bristol, Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, Hanley Swan. 'We drove through a terrible thunderstorm in Winchcombe. The roads were awash.

On 27th the weather was much better and we shopped in Cirencester and drove via Hungerford to St Mary Bourne and drove all round the old haunts and hung over a bridge to look for trout and stopped at the church and Barford House. All bringing back happy memories. On the way home we stopped for tea at Aldbourne with Margaret Wilson, Richard's godmother. On the Saturday it was wet all day but we opened the big chest and looked at old photos and in the evening I had a small party of local friends. On the Sunday we went to church and then had lunch at The Butchers Arms, and tea with the Lanes. I had to have the heating on in the evening as it was so damp and chilly.'

At the end of Richard's 'lovely visit' Mary was sad to see him go, but soon got back into gear. 'On October 7th I was DONE for parking in Cirencester – only 15 minutes late in getting back to the car, I was furious!' There was the garden to deal with, and house repairs, but then Mary and Peggy launched themselves into a Saga trip to Fuengirola via Malaga. Ronda, Granada and the Alhambra, Torremolinos, and so on. Gibraltar! Jerez – Spanish Riding School, and sherry bodegas – and Seville (the Alcazar Palace). Back to Malaga airport for the flight home, which was late and Mary missed the bus home. She got another, changing at Heathrow. 'It was pouring with rain and very cold. It was half an hour late in leaving and 40 minutes late at Cirencester. Poor Robin [Sharpe] was very cold waiting. Glenys gave me supper and I got home at 9.45pm very tired. The day after we had snow and lots of activity next door. It seemed that G*** had sold the cottage to the Walls. On the 5th December G*** lit a bonfire but went away and left it, he came back at lunch time but left it half burnt. They moved out in the night and left rubbish all around and on the 6th the Walls moved in to chaos, poor things. He had been DONE by G*** and was very unhappy.' Mary decamped to Rose in Highgate and on to Suffolk for Christmas. She returned home on 30 December and went to Cheltenham races the next day. [I still do not know where her energy came from.]

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TIME WAS

Chapter 12. More Travels and More Village Life 1992-1994 *[abridged]*

Visitors came in the January of 1992, and then Mary got on with a lot of paperwork until there was the vicarious excitement of a grandson marrying in Sydney. More visitors, a trip to London (Kew Gardens and Ireland House, the theatre, and and a meeting with Mary's solicitor).

'The 9th of April was Election Day and I had the Committee Room here for the last time. I was on the go from 8am to 10pm: people came and spent all day helping to record the visiting numbers. It was an exhausting day.'

There was then a happy interlude of the family visiting, and after that Mary set off on 30 April for Aberdeen, by train: 'a very long journey but interesting.' After an overnight stay in an Aberdeen hotel Mary boarded a P&O ship for a cruise around the Orkney and Shetland islands. As usual she took a great interest in everything, and then finished off with a few days on the mainland with friends before taking the train home. 'I felt I had achieved another ambition and enjoyed it.'

There followed a Garden Club outing to Highgrove, and then trips to Aldbourne, Marlborough, Avebury, and a visit from the Llewellyns, 'On my 55th wedding anniversary I went on a National Trust half-day outing to Hanbury Hall near Droitwich and the following week to Malvern with the theatre club. It was a lovely drive there and a good play. In late June I went to Suffolk. Frances was preparing for her trip to Australia and Alison was picking strawberries for Bridget. I came home on my 77th birthday via London and had lunch with Rose on the way. It was very hot and there was a power cut starting when I was in the bath!'

Summer continued in its usual way, and Mary then gives details of an exhaustive – maybe exhausting – family holiday in Ireland. She visited The Lodge. 'We were given a very kind welcome there.' Mary left her family and went to Dublin in order to get herself back to Gloucestershire. At Birmingham her suitcase had gone missing. 'Mr Walklet met me and after a lot of rigmarole and shenanigans brought me home. The garden was a mess after the storm' – but her case was brought to the door that evening.

There was then a gas fire to be installed and the ousted wood burner (and wood) to be sold. 'On October 4th I went to Heathrow and flew off to Boston, USA. The airport was packed out. Unluckily I had the worst seat in the plane under the screen and next to two babies. I could hardly move. I got to Boston at midnight our time and to bed exhausted at 3.30am our time. There followed some remarkable and enjoyable sightseeing. Mary particularly appreciated the autumn colours. 'On the Saturday there were three weddings and one bar mitzvah in the hotel. I have never seen anything like the bridesmaids' costumes. Amazing!' She mentioned getting stuck in the bath at the hotel, 'but got out in the end' and then moved on to Plymouth, Cape Cod, Falmouth, Newport Rhode Island, Martha's Vineyard. 'Then back to Boston and the airport via the Plymouth Plantation and a cranberry farm which was very interesting and we saw the Mayflower.'

At the airport Mary complained about her outbound flight. She was 'put in a club seat which was much better. It was a 9pm flight and I got home at 1.30pm, all on the same day. I was very stiff for a long time after that trip, my knees were very painful. In fact I had X-rays sent to Mr Tasker who said he thought I had got Pseudo Gout! and suggested Hydrotherapy at Standish.'

There were floods all over the south-west and Wales in early December. Nicola had her operation which was very anxious for all the family. We nearly lost her several times. On 23rd December I went to Suffolk by train to spend Christmas for the family. Louise played the little organ in Milden church for the morning service on Christmas Day, she was very nervous, but did very well. I came home on 30th December. The weather was very cold and frosty for the new year. Writing this now I am amazed at how much I did five years ago.' [Some of us must be amazed at how much she was still doing...]

January 1992 started with frost and fog and continued concern about Nicola. 'We phoned every few days which was all we could do to help Richard and Patsy.' Power cuts, sorting out papers, writing to the water board – time passed. 'By late February, Nicola had one foot on the path to recovery after 11 weeks in hospital. By the time she came out it was 14 weeks, a miracle, but of

course there was a long convalescence.' The old woodshed was made into a garden room, Mary had hydrotherapy at Standish hospital, 'which was not very helpful and a long way to go.'

For Easter two of the Suffolk granddaughters stayed with Mary and the rest of the family 'slept at Mary Macdonald's bungalow in Munday Close while she was away. It was very kindly lent to us.' After that Mary went to the races in Cheltenham 'and talked to the Secretary and decided to give up my membership. Everyone agreed it was not as much fun as it used to be. The club life atmosphere has gone and much of the time I could not go because of the weather or infirmities! I had had years of enjoyment and things change. I have not regretted that decision.' There followed a trip to Bexhill to see the Llewellyns...

'In early May the council came and resurfaced our lane. Quite a red letter day after all the arguments over whose lane it was. Discussions continued about our water supply, or lack of it. I had a visit from the Bowens from Australia which was lovely and I had a day out with the British Legion. We went to Maidenhead to see the Shire Horse Centre. Ivor and Mary Nelson came to Stroud to meet me and I took them to Westonbirt Arboretum where we saw masses of rhododendrons and azaleas. They had not been there before so they were thrilled. Much of May was cold and wet and we had power cuts. On June 3rd I heard our friend Tommy White had died. The whole village was very sad. Bisley church was packed for the funeral. Towards the end of June my neck began to be very painful. However I went to Suffolk via Rose in Highgate for 24 hours and then Pat took me to a physiotherapist for some treatment. Alan had to go to Stockholm so only Pat and Frances were at home on my birthday. They took me to Orford as I had never seen it and we had a fish lunch which was fun. I came home by train the next day. It was very hot and that night I got stuck in the bath. My neck and shoulders were very painful. It was decided that I should have a Life Line provided by the council. Also I should consider having a new bath. The old one had been here for ever and was very deep and narrow. I began wearing a neck collar and having physiotherapy at home. I could not drive. Dolphin produced a plan for the bathroom.'

Visitors came and went without Mary being able to take them on outings. Friends and neighbours rallied round. After steroid injections Mary recovered a little, and was able to drive herself to Miserden church. The bathroom project dragged on unsuccessfully.

In autumn Mary took herself off to stay with Peggy Gingell and itemizes a truly happy holiday spent quartering Devon – energy levels were obviously back up. 'I came home...and the train was late as the sea wall at Dawlish had fallen down. It was quite funny as I was afraid of missing my connection in Gloucester for Stroud, but it turned out that the conductor on that train was on mine. He carried my case over the bridge and I just got to the train in time.'

Bathroom problems were sorted out. November had snow and frost and then December produced heavy rain. There was the usual round of local activities and then it was off to Suffolk for the usual family Christmas. 'We went to see "Annie Get Your Gun" at Ipswich which was very good. Rose came for New Year 1994.'

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TIME WAS

Chapters 13 and 14. 1994-1996 *[abridged]*

Back in Eastcombe at the beginning of 1994, Mary got up on 6 January to a blanket of snow. 'I then got a bad cold and ended up with flu and laryngitis. It was quite funny because I did not know I had lost my voice, answered the phone, and nothing came out. I had to force it. The doctor came to the house twice and said it was a very bad infection, in spite of the fact that I had had an anti-flu jab... In early February I discovered that the loo seat had two cracks in it. Another black mark for Dolphin. In mid February, more snow and chaos on the roads everywhere for two days. Later the Cains took me to see Moll Blue in Bristol on an afternoon visit. The next day we had more snow. Moll was very interested in my "living will" and asked me to send her copies. On 2 March I went out and discovered that the corner of my wall by the garage had been knocked down by a careless lorry driver, picking up a skip from next door. It took a week before their company sent a man to repair it.'

At Easter Frances stayed with Mary and the rest of the family at the Lamberts.' Cheltenham, Snowhill, church in Miserden. 'It was too wet and cold to go out again. On Monday they all walked and later the girls got down to some homework. Alan and I went through the silver chest. They left at 8am on the Tuesday. On 6 April Dolphin at last turned up with the new loo seat, which I had reported cracked in February. It turned out to be the wrong colour so they took it away again.'

On 26 April Nicola arrived from Australia, which was wonderful for Mary. Nevertheless as May began she was on the move in a whirl old friends: Margaret Wilson, Rose, Bill Rowan, and a family lunch at Rules hosted by Alan where Mary saw Nicola for the first time. They all had a trip up and down the Thames.

On 11 May the loo seat arrived at last and next day an 'engineer' to fit it. The weather was very mixed from then on, but on 27 May Nicola arrived, tired, for a 'quiet' visit to Mary: Westonbirt, Owlpen Manor, Cotswold Farm Park.... 'Nicky left on June 2nd and on the 4th I left for Cornwall.' With Peggy Gingell and other friends Mary made the most of a few days' sightseeing. 'The Cornish icecreams were very good and we much enjoyed the holiday. A week later I was off again, this time to Chichester' – another mix of seeing friends, going to the theatre, attending matins in the cathedral 'which was lovely with a good choir. Back to the hotel to pick up luggage and the car and drove home. I was back in Cheltenham after 3pm and I got home about 4. After that trip I was very lame as my hip was playing up.'

Mary went to Suffolk by train and enjoyed time with the girls, including Nicky. There was a reunion party with a friend, Joan, and then Mary returned home to host a visit by Margaret Wilson. 'I continued to be very lame. I had a new door for the front porch as the old one had rotted.

Then I found out I had to have the whole house rewired. The doctor reported that X-rays showed my left hip had gone and that I would have to have a replacement. I was given an orange badge by the council which was a great help for parking. I had to start making enquiries about where to have my hip operation. I obviously could not wait 18 months or more for the National Health. I had a weekend visit from Rose and later Elaine. I saw Mr Tasker in late August and he said he would do my hip at Standish on November 8th. Standish offered me a package deal. At the end of August the electrician came to do the rewiring. He took two and a half days and it was quite an upheaval. Apparently it was very necessary as some of the wiring was antique!'

Suffolk in mid-September for Alan and Pat's 25th wedding anniversary and Frances 21st birthday. 'A lovely party where I met a few old friends.' At home in October Mary was inspired to book Egypt Mill for her 80th birthday party the following year. Her operation followed. 'I felt awful for the first few days but was much cheered up by many visitors, cards, flowers and phone calls. Glenys and June came every other day. I had physiotherapy and learnt to walk on two sticks. On the 18th I moved to Resthaven nursing home. It was a very long walk to the ground floor where the dining room and phone room were and phoning was not easy... It was not a very good experience but I could not have managed at home alone.'

Nevertheless, at home from 2 December Mary was sustained by helpful friends and

neighbours, visits by a nurse 'to wash me and deal with awful white stockings' and then a visit by Alan and Pat and Louise. 'Unluckily I had a nasty fall on my back in the kitchen while trying to get supper ready. I could not get up but managed to knock the phone down and ring the Lanes who came at once and got me up and stayed with me until Alan and Pat arrived. Jane cooked the supper while she was waiting. Everyone was upset. On the Saturday Alan bought a cordless phone as a Christmas present. What a boon! They had to go home as they were flying out to Tokyo on the 18th. So I continued to live very quietly. We had a lot of frost and freezing fog.'

Mike Leworthy drove Mary to an appointment with Mr Tasker. Libby 'my physio' had written to him about Mary's fall and a 'suppressed fracture' was found in a vertebra – but Mary's hip was OK. Told that she needed physiotherapy and six to eight weeks to heal, Mary went home. Mike slipped on the icy path, 'fell and took me with him. I was so sorry. He got up but I could not but luckily Les Beard heard the commotion and came to help and they got me into the house, a bit bruised and battered but no harm done. Later I rang Libby and she said she could not bear it so the dear girl turned up on Christmas Eve!

So I was home alone for Christmas day. All the family being in Australia. I was so happy for them to be together and Richard said it was magical. They phoned me. I went to church across the road, to the Baptist church. The [Beard] boys fetched me and brought me back. Later Glenys and Robin brought me my Christmas dinner on wheels. All most beautifully arranged on a tray and I only had to heat it up. Alec Hinkson phoned me from Dublin in the afternoon and I had television for company. Boxing day was mild and wet. I watched television and had a visitor. Later in the week we had gales, rain, hail and thunder. On Friday 30th Mike Lane took me to Peter Lewis's funeral at Gloucester Crematorium and on to Whitminster for the wake. On New Year's Eve, Rose arrived to stay for the New Year.'

The first few days of 1995 were freezing cold, and Mary was told not to go out. Variable weather followed, and then the family returned to England on 16 January. But Mary continued to improve and by 24 January was able to go out shopping – for the first time in three months. She progressed to bathing herself, and then to driving her car again. There were floods, but Alan and Pat and Louise came to see her and told her all about the trip to Australia. 'In early March we had snow several times. I started trying to organize flowers and cake for my birthday party. At the end of March I had to get Libby to see me as my back was painful. On April 5th I had a fall in the road which resulted in a cut cheek, a black eye, and a small fracture in the wrist.

This was a great nuisance and I had to wear a wrist brace, but luckily not a plaster.' Mary was fit enough to head to Suffolk for Easter, and enjoyed being driven to Peterborough to meet Frances off the train – pub lunch, shopping, and a tour of the cathedral – and then to Bury St Edmunds to return Frances to a train – and another cathedral. 'The rest of April I was busy at home.' VE Day celebrations, visits to the doctor, dentist, and hospital, a course of reflexology. Patsy and then Richard arrived from Australia, and Mary continued with organizing the party – lifts – accommodation... 'I also had to juggle with the table seating which was very difficult.'

'I had trouble with the travel arrangements for the Irish holiday because the catamaran was not working. We had to go on the ferry instead which took longer. On June 11th Richard and Patsy arrived rather late. I had a small drama with the brewhouse door not opening. First John tried and then Terry came to help. In the end he had to take a pane of glass out of the window and squeeze in and open it from the inside, marvellous on a Sunday afternoon. It was vital to be able to get in.'

The expedition to Ireland began via Gloucester, the M4, Haverfordwest with a stop for lunch, and then Fishguard – Rosslare, Waterford and the glass factory, through Cork to Kinsale 'which was packed. We parked with difficulty and went to the tourist office and eventually got a B & B in a bungalow on Bandon Road. It was rather basic but adequate.' And dinner in Little Skilletts was excellent. On to Bantry, Glengariff, Garnish Island, Kenmare 'and dinner, bed and breakfast in a rather posh country house, very nice.' Next day the tour resumed with Killarney and the Gap of Dunloe, then the Ring of Kerry, Tralee and Listowel. 'Unluckily it rained. The next day we got the Tarbert ferry early and drove to Lahinch and the cliffs of Moher. Then over the Burren to Galway and on to Oughterard. We went to see the Prevites before having a meal. They were delighted to

meet Richard and Patsy...' Connemara, Westport, a puncture, a new tyre, then off to Tourmakeady. 'We called on Jimmy and Mary. Then drove up to the Lodge. There was no one there so we walked round and looked in the windows and the barn. Out the back way and on to Betty's. She gave us a super lunch of salmon and strawberries!'

Onward. Derryvinney – wild rhododendrons – the waterfall walk – Lough Mask – Lough Nafooe – Cong and the B & B booked at Betty's. 'Great excitement as Maureen was a Tourmakeady girl and just had to phone her mother up to tell her I was here! Her grandfather used to deliver turf to us. There were two funerals in Cong that day so the town was rather full. We had real Irish bacon and cabbage for supper and drove round to see Ashford Castle and grounds.' Then (a hot and sunny day at last) to Cornamona and the salmon smoking, where Richard bought a side, vacuum-packed. 'After that we had to put it in the fridge every night wherever we were, and I took it home in a suitcase!' Headford – Tuam – Athlone. On to Dublin by the main road.

'It was not too busy and I managed to find the way to Blackrock and Newtown Park Avenue. There was a lovely welcome from the Hinksons and tea. Alec took Richard and Patsy on a tour of Dublin even though he was only just out of hospital. I stayed with Kathleen who was busy with the dinner. Then we all had drinks and dinner, more drinks and then fell into bed. They are so hospitable and it was a lovely fun evening.'

Returning to Holyhead by catamaran, they pushed on to Bangor (the tourist office there was hopeless compared to Irish ones') and further to Caernavon. On down the coast and then 'up through the wonderful pass to Llanberis: it was wonderful scenery. We got to Bettws-y-Coed and found rooms at an hotel. It was so hot that Patsy bought a hat.' They went to Llanrwst and on to Bodnant gardens. 'There were wheelchairs there so Richard pushed me round a bit. They parked me several times while they walked further. I met an Australian lady from Wagga Wagga who was most amusing and delighted to have a chat with them too.' Conway, Denbeigh, Llangollen. 'There was a good girl in the tourist office there and we booked into Tyn-y-Calyn farmhouse' before having a meal in town and then a quiet night at the farm.

Richard and Patsy went on to the Lake District but paused at Wrexham to put Mary on a train to Cheltenham. 'It was a lovely holiday.' Back home the 80th birthday party preparations hotted up, and the clan gathered. The Suffolk contingent had the Lamberts' cottage. On Saturday 1 July everyone dressed for the lunch at Egypt Mill. 'It was wonderful and many people came from all over the place. There were 57 altogether and everything went according to plan. We all enjoyed it.' Within days, however, everyone had dispersed and Richard and Patsy on 5 July went to London for their last few days. 'To my surprise Alan came for the night on the 6th, which cheered me up.'

'On 10 July it was so hot that the whole garden wilted. At about 5pm we had thunder and the sky was black but no rain fell. I heard later that Nailsworth was flooded. There was a lot of picking of broad beans, gooseberries and raspberries. In fact the garden and the heat kept me busy. We had to keep on watering which was very difficult as the water supply was so poor. If the outside tap was on no water came into the house. The situation was so bad we decided to get estimates from contractors and stop waiting for the water board.'

A surprise visitor from abroad was Geoff Robinson. 'He is my third cousin once removed. I had not met him before but I knew his parents. He came to stay for 24 hours and we searched family trees together which was interesting. I took him a short drive around on the Monday and we had a pub lunch and he got the train back to London. It was still hot and dry and the lawns were parched.'

'Elaine came to stay for a long weekend and was here for VJ Day. We watched the Queen's parade on TV and went to Bisley in the evening for the commemorative service with the British Legion. I had lent some of Duncan's photos for the little exhibition they had and I wore my medals. The only time I ever have.'

The hot summer continued with various treats, and then September brought rain at last. Desmond Llewellyn took Mary to their house in Bexhill for a 10-day stay and then drove her back. 'He says he likes driving.' In October Mary 'began to make arrangements to write my memoirs... On 30th October I had my first session with Kathryn my "writer"... Little did I know it would take

so long to finish. We had eight sessions before Christmas and decided to take a break in December.'

A Suffolk Christmas. 'We had freezing temperatures for days [afterwards]. Beautiful to look at but difficult to travel. I came home on January 3rd. I intended to finish my book at the end of 1995 but have to add a footnote. After many delays the men came to renew our water mains on Sunday February 4th. A water board inspector came to look on February 5th but no work was done that day. The snow began that night. After that nothing happened for 13 days. On Sunday 18th they dug up the lane at the top of the road to fit our new pipes to the main. The old single pipe was leaking and fell to bits in their hands, scandalous, after all the years we had been complaining. On the 19th they came again and actually joined me on to the main. There was a blizzard before they finished. I could not believe the flow of water that came out of the tap.

The other important thing that happened to me in 1996 was that I managed to get to the Outer Hebrides that summer and stood on the Butt of Lewis. It was lovely to be back in Scotland again.

It has been very nostalgic writing these memoirs, and has brought back many memories, happy and sad. Inevitably I have missed out some stories, but I hope I have written enough to give a picture of these last 80 years. If I have unwittingly offended anyone, I apologise. I am very lucky to have a loving family and grandchildren, and it is for them that I have written this. I think I can fairly call myself a survivor.

WE ARE THE SURVIVORS

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