



Mary Swan Collection

Winston Churchill Memorial and Library in the United States

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Winston Churchill Memorial and Library in the United States
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1939

April 30

From Mornington on Argyll Street in Ryde Mary Swan to her aunt – Miss M. O. Stevens

Mary explains how she and her dog "Sue" are settling in at Mornington. She has added a "rockery and birdbath" to her garden. Letty is mentioned as a good housekeeper and "an old friend of long cub service." Minnie and Rose, who moved into a smaller cottage from the larger house, are mentioned as healthier than when they lived at Tower house. Here she writes more about her involvement with the Scouts. A.R.P and the women's volunteer service that helped evacuate children from Portsmouth. She writes also about her opinions of the "Jewish owned newspapers" influencing public opinion. She mentions the "extreme communists", "shirkers" and "Irish Republicans" in this letter - then closes with questions about "Bill and Sara on their Columns Expedition". She includes a copy of song she wrote for the R.M.S. "Adriatic Cruise" and a photo of Oak ? Palace.

Step 1

Mary warns her aunt of imminent war-mobilization and evacuation starts. She writes her worries about friends, relatives in Poland and France. "Lorries" of soliders =s and stores pass. She writes that some of the soldiers were once her "Cubs" and that she feels pride at seeing them – enclosed photo of All Saints Parish Church – Ryde

Step 21

Mary writes of war-time conditions: air-rides, gas-mask, blackouts. She is concerned about when and where Cub Pack meetings can be held due to the unsafe wartime conditions. There is controversy with the evacuee children mingling with the island children and she is concerned for her dog, Sue. She mentions England's "spirit" and is happy that America has stayed out of it.

Step 14

2 letters sent together.

Mary fears the boys in the Cub Scouts and getting them home in the dark as Blackout is in effect. Censorship is also in effect. She fears for the rationing of food and heating coal. She wants to know of family and friends close to the war fronts in Europe and if they are safe.

Pictures

- Mary Swan with Cub Scouts
- Lt. Col. P Murray, D.S.O. (District Commissioner and Cubs of the first Ryde Pack June 1932.
- Whitsun All Island Scouts Comp. at Brook. Flag break.
- Inter –troop tug-of-war at the All Island. Camp
- Cub Pack with Plague

Newspaper Article

“Three Counties, Scout and Cub Workers at weekend Conference “at Bournemouth – 2 newspaper photos”.

October 5

Mary is having difficulties keeping the Cubs going because of the various Restrictions and the Cub masters have help with various other services; she has managed to keep it going.

(Red Cross) Hospital suppliers’ depot has opened and Mary and Letty work there 2 times a week. She speaks of fewer cars on the road, fewer airplanes flying and most men are in uniform. Mary seems surprised that the “nation has adapted “to the situation of war so calmly and naturally.

She also writes of the evacuated children from “prosperous” towns being dirty and full of lice 20,000 children were evacuated through the Island.

October 9th

Waiting Hitler’s next move, meets and says farewells to former Cub who is now in the military, on 24 hr. leave before shipping overseas. She gives him a coin to buy cigarettes; she also states that the aunt she is writing to, probably gets more news in the US than she does in England.

October 18th

Mary finds out from her Aunt Mabel that her Polish relatives are prisoners with the Russians (Dolly and Lech).

Alex and Stas joined Polish Legion in France.

- Germans have tried air- Raids on the British Fleet and East Coast. She puts much faith in the British Air Force to protect them. Newspaper pictures of Red Cross officers and workers with mayor and wife.

October 29th

- Mary hears from Bill safely home from the Harvard Columns Expedition.
- She tells of the British planes being faster than Hitler's planes, they are awaiting "Hitler's threatened offensive"
- Mary fears when winter sits in and Rations become shorter.
- She had the skylight boarded up for the Blackouts at night to keep the glass from breaking.

December 8th

Learn of "Aunty" in New York who is ill: tells her she is worried and to take care of herself. Mary states she is safe as far as the war is concerned: they are well guarded. Mary writes of the bad weather and tell Aunt to rest her heart.

October 31st 1939

Letter to "Aunty" Mary Stevens from "Mimi": thanks Aunt Mary for the 200 friends she sent for the "Rabodangers poor" children: lets her know it will be of good us: treats of chocolate or jam with the bread at 10 and 4 a clock recess. She compares this war to the war in 1914: not so many deaths. Germans involved Poland as they did Belgium in WW1. Disagrees with France and England making treaty with Stalin. Does agree that Hitler and Stalin belong together. Makes more comments/ observations about Stalin and Hitler- She thinks Stalin less "impulsive, fanatic" and more "calculating" and "deliberate".

-mentions she is interested in an orphanage 10 miles from her present location. "Julian" mentioned and "Sophie" mentioned as vice presidents. Sophie died and they asked her to take up the post: she only goes there once in a while. She mentioned not being able, this year, to have the orphans to her picnic and to play in the woods. She support the financially. She hopes the war does not spread. They heard that the refugee would be coming from Paris. She prepared bedrooms in her house for them and no one showed up. They all admired the B.E.F (British military).

October 20th

To Mary Stevens from Mobil in Sarvorean. Suip, she is staying there since she has six grand children and some Polish Refugees with her. She states her worries of relatives (Dolly), in Poland, as they have had no news. Stas and Alex in Polish army. She tells of the news (funny) family and friends. She hopes the war would not last long but realizes it will.

1940

Letters and postcards mixed

January 1st

- From Mary Swann to Aunt Mary Stevens
- Thanks uncle Francis for the check(\$\$)
- Weather was dismal and foggy
- Christmas was peaceful: hoped her (aunts) Christmas was good and she was hell
- No news from France

January 22nd

- Weather is cold: edge of the sea froze, morning milk frozen, pipeo froze – No not water- cold air like a “knife”. She feeds the birds 2 times daily and fills the birdbath that freezes almost instantly.
- Rationing is not severe but it cost of living is going up: she thinks of the poor people how they are dealing. The cost of the war and the sacrifice they must make to make England and Europe safe.
- She hears from her Polish relatives (Dolly and husband who is prisoner). Dolly is living under an assumed name in a Soviet village. They hope to free him through the Jewish underground.
- Minnie and Rose – health is indifferent: she thinks there maybe jealousy of her new Regime. She thinks they could never have done what she does everyday for the household and how Letty Cash ford never complains and helps so much.

February 13th

- Explains what they do to get along with food rationing and complaining of the cost of the food. Meet rations cut down severely – price hiked – Government word “offal” (Liver, Kidneys etc.) in plenty at this time – weather is cold. Not hot water or hot baths still.

- Mary starts gas mask inspections – door to door, she attends lectures on it
- Their spirits are still up despite everything that is happening – they feel safer in winter from air rides – she expects them to start up again in spring.
- Article from Newspaper on “Glass Frost” (ice storm)

March 12th

- wishing her aunt Happy Easter
- cold weather is gone for a few days
- Influenza went their town, everyone ok now.

May 16th

- latter was typed; pages larger
- tells aunt not to worry about sanding sugar
- Germans got foothold in France, Belgium and Holland
- Royal Air France is superior in every way to Germans but in numbers
- Grateful Mr. Chamberlain held off war until they were prepared
- Mentioned her will and a chest at Lloyd’s Bank with silver, lace and jewelry left to Elizabeth and Fran
- She went though training for air Roads: tells aunt not to worry
- Queen of Holland spoke on radio May 15th

May 28th

- She mentions threat of Hitler’s 5th Column
- National call to prayer from King
- Hitler’s Blitzkrieg succeeded “but our turn is coming”
- On quiet evening she could hear the third of war on the French coast
- She has clerical fob with the W.V.S
- No Wolf Cub Pack meeting up

July 22nd

- Aunt wants her to come to America – she says they wouldn’t let her go because of the work/ position she has there with W.V.S even if they evacuated; she says she needs to stay even if for example – frequent air Ruds, they go to the cellar, take safe from shrapnel or glass – she keeps busy- more family information.

September 10th

- living in cellar 8:30 pm – 4 am
- noise from English barrage, terrible but safe
- dog "Sue" gets jumpy and Nervous let the guns noise but she covers her ears and cuddles her and she calms down
- London gets bombed badly – she wants them to stop being gentlemen and "give Berlin a doze of their own medicine"
- Thankful America is a "loyal-friend"
- She "Mothers" her district – checking gasmasks, explaining governments' orders. Looking out for them in air raids
- Wants to start up the cubs again if there is a lull in the "Bottle of Britain"

October 15th

- postcard to say everything is ok

November 5th

- thanks aunt for the money (check) to buy a winter coat
- Rations, no eggs to be had last week, pork, bacon, cheese scarce.
- Some profiteering (black market)but heavily punished
- Enjoys' working in canteen with soldiers and sellers
- Note enclosed for Bill-asks to forward it
- Mentions election day in US

November 24th

- postcards to buy, all is well

June 17th

- Postcards to Mrs. Willis Reese (Fran) – wishing luck to them – she thinks they are "for it"

October 14th

- letter to Fran Reese
- received letter and photo
- to Raids every 24 hrs, heavy A.A (Air Artillery) barrage
- she almost got shot – outcry for America to enter war
- writers of British moral being high
- Roosevelt mentioned as having a following
- Warning siren goes off as she is writing

July 22nd

- Congrats to Fran on the baby boy
- 1 air ride every 24 hrs
- She writes about the spitfires and hurricanes patrolling the sky
- Streets patrolled by soldiers
- Mentions "Sue", the dog getting used to what the siren mean
- She visits a neighbor widow who lost her husband in WWI and just now lost her only son in WWII.
- She is a real inspiration to Mary

June 23rd

Postcard to May Stevens, from Blanche (in Brighton)

- Writes of the "queer" way they live day to day: soldiers preparing their machines on one side of the road – 2 cricket games being played on the other, men in white flannel

September 16th

Letter from Blanche in Brighton

- writers of results of bombing on villages
- all unpleasant but no panic
- Raid killed 60 people (most refused to take cover)
- 3 volunteer air wardens killed
- Admiration for the working class who volunteer unselfishly
- Mentioned what Churchill prophesied as a "very grim time before us"
- Mentions May Stevens, and French relatives and what a terrible time they are having because of the fall of France: she blames it on "individual interests" of the French.

January 16th

Letter from Mabel

- Unsure of the dependable service of the mail – 2 postcards from Dolly who is living in a small town of "Dubvo" (SP?) USSR, her husband in prison: they are trying to get them out but too much attention alerts the soviets and people die.
- She heard from Mary

January 12th

Postcard from Fanny

- sad that the family is separated
- she is in Neuilly, France
- grandsons too young to be taken (for military soldiers)

1941

Letters to May from Mary

January 11

- thanks for Christmas present
- Heard of Aunt May's operation
- (letter is cut apart here)
- Raid on Portsmouth
- Describes what it was like in her basement with her winter coat: the gas fire, Sue, the dog, hiding from the barrage.
- (letter cut apart here)
- Italians (Stalin) in Libya mentioned
- Idea to help supply rations along, submitted to Mayor, who submitted it to the Minister of Food after discussing with town clerk (barrister)

January 27th

- Mary went to the church – describes what “scars” the church bears now: windows covered on outside – shards of glass on window sill – can hear birds singing more clearly now during service
- 5 peaceful nights in succession
- No news of her idea on the Food district yet
- Talks about growing flowers in garden – too small to grow vegetables

March 12th

- all are safe – Postcard
- looking forward to spring

March 23rd

- Relays – News of relations in England. Alfred retired to Bristol. Ernest is now cannon. Aunt Lily still alive but invalid. Aunt Grace is in a home,

Gordon in Canada. Aunt Doria also in a home, uncle Sidney should be too. He is feeble-minded.

- (Letter cut up here) talks of bombs dropped damage done.
- "Kings Day for Prayer" today all services well attended
- Explains her idea about the food and drinks for each town: 1 day food Ration for town, stored in each depot of several surrounding the town. Heavy bombing would only get one day
- Ernest appointed Chaplain to H.M. the king have small girl and son who is 17, at Cambridge, who will be joining up (to military service)
- Writes about garden

April 21st

- Received letter and Birthday present from aunt May and Bill – went to bank along with her allowance – Bank informs them this. Waiting on statement to see how much she has – Banks understaffed
- Three people she met on the street - all gone next day along with house
- Speaks of loss of St Pauls, Chelsea Pensioners (hotels)
- She has skin conditions caused by vitamin deficiencies, "Boils" - Dr. gave her a "Blood tonic"
- Rations even tighter – No fruits at all
- House was blasted before Christmas
- Love to uncle Francis – aunt Bess

May 6th

Letter to Bill

- thanks him for shared present from him and aunt May
- past 6 weeks were noisy with warfare
- tells Bill of the people she met one day and next they were "blown to bloody Rags"
- writers of looking out after the bomb dropped and the silence surrounding after, except the "murderers engine" (enemy plane)
- Explains rationing: no meat joints, no oranges, meat rations are \$ 0.25 to last a week. Minimum "Edgar" and Mary get \$0.50 worth for a week. (\$ used instead of pounds)
- "ordinary fish" is not rationed but expensive and is scarce
- Ordinary boiling fowls 2 and 3\$ a bird
- Black-market profit a ring is abundant in the food line - should be stopped
- Min "Edgar", herself and little Sue are safe
- Letter from Stas Orłowski – with Polish troops in Egypt
- Sends regards to Gil Stearns

May 6th

- postcards to May Stevens
- they are safe – still noisy at night
- news from Stas in Egypt

June 23rd

- 23 postcards to May – all is well – had bad experience but safe now

July 13th

- sorry for not answering sooner – uncle Francis to Relay news to her
- Rose and Minnie had narrow escape
- Mary sees “heart rendering” sights
- Major Reginald Mitchell of Princess, Patricia’s Canadian light returning to Canada on a staff job: maybe in states looking up aunt May
- His sister Doris is good friend and fellow Cub – they came up to see her before leaving for Canada
- He is qualified for Brigadier General, very important person
- Mitchells are “good old English Stock”
- Not rich from Somerset yeoman origins
- Reggie is personal friend of Princess Patricia
- Talks of gardens and first rain for months
- Potato crop spoiled and green veggies tall and lanky with no heart
- Wilton Grange on Ashly Road – where May slept once – roof is gone as well as windows, no one is hurt

August 10th

“Wonderful spell of quiet, thanks to Russia”

- difficulty with keeping Cub Pack meetings going
- H.M. the Queen made speech to America: Mary agrees with what she said in the speech
- Major Mitchell reached Canada safely
- Thanked Fran for parcel (10 days ago) via Ireland, arrived in good condition
- 2nd parcel arrived from America – biscuits, chocolate
- Tell aunt May to thank whoever sent it
- Writes of flowers she grew: roses, carnations etc.
- Also, have salads, beans, cabbages all grown by herself.

September 20th

- postcard – all is well – thanks again for the 2 gifts

September 14th

- Short letter and photo
- Letter explains picture of Mary Swann. Last week – cub Packs information - Mary to side, but not as Cub leader but as Marshall of the (IVI), defense for women section.
- "Lady's Day" – big parade of all woman's organizations in Ryde
- She also marched in Min's parade (photo)
- Hopes Russia can hold out thro the winter
- Russia losing lq. Number of men

October 19th

- busy getting scant work done
- dance to raise money: to buy a place for central headquarters for scouts
- super intending a scouts messenger service for Home Guard
- Collecting lose hips to make joins and S'
- Collecting wood for winter in bags and baskets
- "Fire watching" twice a week – she finds it exciting with overcoat, tin helmet and gas mask
- But all is quiet
- Writers of same one she met who worked with the mobile canteen in the blitzed areas – (mobile canteen called "Queens' Messengers")
- Letty mentioned here as good house keeper
- War story of Alice, cleaningwoman, her husband is a sergeant, and their 8-year-old boy, Ray. Bomb dropped on house across street –blew door in – decapitated sergeant. Alice and Ray went to hospital, Ray lost his leg and Alice fainted. Now are back at home "bravely"- Ray has artificial leg
- Scouts' old and new, from military leave and come to see them for advice, to feel at home. T he boys write to them. They have added some names to the Roll of Honor that were from our pack.
- PS. at end about "Sue" doing well

November 16th

Received letter and photo from aunt May.

- quiet time here
- cold winter

- They live on food for a week, what Americans live on in a day: 1 egg per person per month; cheese ration for a week, 1 lb of jam a week; bread 3x a week; bacon has iridescent but does not taste bad.

July 29th

From Mary to Fran

- thanks for the gifts from Fran (Mrs. Willis Reese)
- explains how rare each of the "items" were and how appreciated
- asks how Willis , Young Bill are; her and Letty are fine and "Sue" the dog in the "pink of good health"
- mostly quiet expect for 1 out burst close to home
- they are prepared (rest is cut out)
- asking for more pictures

September 7th

To Fran

- thanks for the letter and drawing of the family cradle
- letter included letter from censor, don't ask for anymore gifts
- busy with Scouts instead of war; selling programmers throughout the district: war Savings Drive
- Marshall of a woman's parade
- Women's Civil Defense Group managing
- This was all great fun, butting
- Days were hot but it was all a success
- Talks of Miss Letty Cashford as a friend and companion
- Wants pictures of young Bill, Fran, and Willis, also of aunts Bess and uncle Francis
- Let aunt May know that Fran heard from Mary
- Mentions Fran's mother-in-law as lovely and great-hearted

November 30th

- to Fran, Christmas wishes
- received gifts
- tight rationing and Blackouts, people suspenseful
- daily routine of war
- fire watch nights are easier lately
- wants to tell of the incredible things has seen but must wait
- Ship Ark Royal lost – many island men aboard – casualties light
- Asks form list of books to read, historical novels

- Reminds her to send pictures of little Bill and family

December 30th

To Fran

- Lettys parcel arrived for Christmas
- Writes of us, entering war at last, surprised by Japanese
- Writes of situation in far East – Manila and Singapore going same way as Hong Kong
- Europe - War-going betel with American tanks helping in Libya. Russians are deadly in Moscow front
- How will war affect lives in America
- Hope Willis is safe from war
- Sce pictures of New York air raid alarms with people standing in streets looking up – she warns them not to do this event if it is test; behave as if it is real (even thought is Eastern seaboard will unlikely have real air raids), wear helmets, lots of things fell in Air Raids, bombs, shell splinters
- Gets bags of sand ready to throw on incendiaries
- Get kids use to wearing gasmasks. Some in England don't because parents taught them wrong: think of it as toy
- Give them advice on war and to stay positive, will come out of this on top. See English as example

Poem written by M. Louise Haskins; lived in country village – Poem quoted by King George V in speech on Christmas day: "The Gate of the Year"

1942

January 1st

To aunt May

- Thanks for letter and present \$\$ - spent on woollen cardigan
- Writing letters on night duty, so quite that it is just a matter of staying up all night – gas fire to keep warm
- "cushy job" compared to last year
- Next autumn – her age group, called up for voluntary service – she is already voluntary
- Work at canteen – 3 months on / 3 months off
- She is substituting for ill supervisor
- Worries that aunt is now in danger zone as well; explains safest place in house, stairwell, inside passage, or landing with No glass/windows
- Best to use adhesive tape in crisscross/diamond pattern on windows

- "rubber solutions" sold not as effective - all these panes of blew in as a result of bombings – taped windows did not
- She feels "competent" to give advice for all the things she went thru with air rides and the Battle of Britain
- Most awe inspiring thing that she witnessed was a blitz that killed 7000 people – (here she writes eloquently about the tears, "screaming on her face", the prominence of the historic events she was witnessing terrible and gruesome as they were.
- Letty and Sue are fit –sends love to family
- PPS –David Swann (Ernest's boy) is 18 joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
- Ernest wrote to her to keep an eye on him
- Ernest and wife are in Bristol- bombed out
- Church – St. Mary's Redcliff is unhurt
- Ernest – is cannon: chaplain to the king
- Uncle Sidney is dotage – married housekeeper? 3rd wife
- Aunt Lily – semi – invalid
- Aunt Grace in asylum – family does not talk about her – not sure if she is dead or alive
- Aunt Lily sent her a present – a letter written by Lord Nelson in 1804 to the uncle of uncle Bobs
- Sent a replica on paper of the badge she wears for the W.V.S

February 10th

To aunt May

- received aunt May letter
- past month was easy, peaceful
- on leave from canteen, till March
- Writes of USA in war – largest threat to US is from Quislings
- Western coast – Japanese air raids
- Reminds her that she has been living in war for 2 years and survived and so can they
- Shortage of Coal – 5 pounds per ton – only half that available
- 2 eggs each a month; scrap of meat twice a week – size and quantity one would buy the day in peacetime.
- No fruit till next summer
- Fish occasionally. Rabbits in winter months