

Our Hidden Lives

This extract is taken from the beginning of the book, as four diarists prepare to make the transition from war to peace in May 1945.

1: OUR TROUBLES ARE ONLY JUST BEGINNING

‘God bless you all. This is your victory! It is the victory of the cause of freedom in every land. In all our long history we have never seen a greater day than this. Everyone, man or woman, has done their best. Everyone has tried. Neither the long years, nor the dangers, nor the fierce attacks of the enemy, have in any way weakened the independent resolve of the British nation. God bless you all.’

Winston Churchill from the balcony

Tuesday, 1 May 1945

Maggie Joy Blunt, freelance writer and publicity officer in metal factory, living in Burnham Beeches near Slough

Important hours, important as those days at the end of August in 1939 preceding the declaration of war. This is tension of a different kind, expectancy, preparations being made for a change in our way of living. But the tempo is slower. We wait, without anxiety, for the official announcement by Mr Churchill that is to herald two full days’ holiday and the beginning of another period of peace in Europe. We wait wondering if Hitler is dying or dead or will commit suicide or be captured and tried and shot, and what his henchman are doing and feeling.

All the women of my acquaintance have strongly disapproved today of the treatment of the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress. I heard one man in the sales department when he was told that the bodies had been hung up by the feet say glibly ‘Good thing too!’, But RW and myself and Lys and Miss M are shocked and disgusted. Spitting on the bodies, shooting at them, seems childish and barbarous, and such actions cannot bring the dead to life or repair damage, and is a poor sort of vengeance. What a state the world is in and what a poor outlook for the future.

I have worn myself out spring-cleaning the sitting room. All Sunday and yesterday at it – it now looks so brilliant and beautiful I’ll never dare live in it. We had ice cream in canteen for lunch today – the first for two or is it three years?

George Taylor, accountant in Sheffield

I noticed that the flags which were flying on the Town Hall yesterday, presumably in preparation for peace, have been taken down. Apparently the officials were premature in their preparations.

Wednesday, 2 May

Maggie Joy Blunt

One can hardly keep pace with the news. 'Hitler Dead' the News Chronicle informed me this morning in 12-inch type across the front page. Doenitz has either been appointed to succeed him or has seized power over Himmler's head... We discussed the situation all through lunch, wondering how much longer the war would now continue with Doenitz in control. At the office an atmosphere of suspense but little obvious excitement.

George Taylor

News of Hitler's death has caused little stir. I never heard it mentioned on my tram journeys to and from work, none of the clients I met breathed his name, and the only person who mentioned him to me was my 32-year-old colleague. He doubted very much his death, but I said that in my opinion he was indeed dead, but that he had died from natural causes and not in the fighting.

I was completely surprised at 9.10am to hear of the surrender of the German Forces in Italy. It has been a well-kept secret, and I should have been less surprised by a surrender in the West. Events are certainly moving now.

Herbert Brush, retired electrical engineer, south east London

Good news. Hitler is really dead. I wonder what sort of reception his astral form has received on the other side.

I can imagine when he came
And when his victims heard his name
They gathered round him not to miss
So good a chance to hoot and hiss

But those on earth may all agree
From torture he must not go free
That God Almighty has some plan
To punish such a naughty man

Thursday, 3 May

Maggie Joy Blunt

RW had a violent argument with a young woman (A) who works in our firm. RW says that her ears turn scarlet when she gets excited in conversation and when she came upstairs immediately after this scene they were as brilliant as cherries. A is quite unbalanced as to what should be done with war criminals. She thinks they should all be shot without a trial and in some cases tortured. She would like to have seen very special torture done to Hitler and one of her suggestions was pulling out his eyes with knitting needles. When RW declared she would never do it if she actually had the opportunity, she did say she would want someone else to do it. She is a bright, intelligent, friendly person and an amusing

conversationalist. One would not expect her capable of such savage inclinations. But she is Jewish and there is I suppose in all of us still a streak of the savage. I remember once dreaming of my father – seeing him, thin, pale, tottering as he was during his last fatal illness, being pushed about by someone most brutally. And in my dream I just went mad with rage and I attacked the attacker without mercy.

DJ gave me the afternoon off. About 8pm the rain turned to snow. I ate my supper watching the enormous snowflakes fall, wondering if any other country in the world could present such a scene – snow on tulips and broken lilac blossom, snow falling through bursting beeches and the sky ash – snow on shivering pansies and wan forget-me-nots... A fantastic spring. Three weeks ago the temperature was 70° in the shade.

George Taylor

Now that there seems every prospect of VE day being celebrated in the near future, my audit assistant, a married woman of 25, seems mostly interested in when we are to have the holiday. Her forecast is Saturday lunchtime, with the rest of the day holiday and VE plus one will be Sunday. I suppose that is ingrained pessimism.

Police duty on a wretchedly cold and rainy evening. During the patrol my sergeant was telling me of the arrangements to celebrate in the works. It seems that some are to pay time-and-a-half for the hours worked between the signal and closing down on VE day, and full time for the following two days. Another works has set aside £3 for all employees as pay for the three days. In his own office, a Friendly Society, the girls were asking about the holiday, and when he said that they would be working as usual unless they received specific instructions to the contrary, they were loud in protest. One, indeed, declared flatly that she would not turn in.

Herbert Brush

The news is good this morning. I am wondering now whether Hitler died from a clot on his brain, whether he was murdered, or whether he shot himself or took poison. I suppose that the details will come out in due course, unless they have had his body cremated.

They probably want his name to become a legend, something like our King Arthur, so that the young Germans in the 21st Century can be told what a wonderful person Hitler was, and how he died a warrior's death while fighting for his country against enormous odds.

I don't like the idea that we have to feed all the millions of prisoners taken. Most of them are young Nazis who never will be any good in the world now, after they were brought up. I am still of the opinion that all those under 25 should go into a lethal chamber, for the future peace of the world. It rained most of the night.

Friday, 4 May

Herbert Brush

The trams are not running today owing to a strike. I guess there will be a lot of this kind of trouble when 'Peace' comes.

Maggie Joy Blunt

When the first newsflash came through the radio announcing the surrender of the German forces in north-west Germany, I was in bed mopping my ears. We had looked at the headlines in the Evening News in the office just before 5pm and decided that the end *must* be near now, as the enemy was collapsing on all fronts.

I asked RW what she intended to do on VE day and she said that she didn't know. Her people keep a pub in Windsor and they have not decided whether they will keep open or not. If they do (and the brewers want them to) they will not have more than their normal rationed supply and will be sold out by 9.30pm. Her father thinks he will invite in all his pals and keep the pub closed to the public.

No one seems very certain what they will do. There are to be some Victory parades and special services and bonfires. It looks as though I shall spend the day and days following in close, solitary seclusion. My ears are a most revolting sight and even Dr B is baffled. He talks of sending me to a specialist but I am to treat them myself this weekend with rainwater and special ointment. I am worried and tired and do not want to go out or meet anyone. I have been going to the office every day this week after a visit to the doctor in the morning and coming home early. My friends are sympathetic and anxious but I feel rather a leper and imagine all strangers to be goggling at me.

I came home at 5pm, collected ointment from the chemist, and, while waiting for it to be made up, some new stock arrived including a small box of Wright's coal tar soap. I have not seen any of this for a long while and the girls said they would not have any 'for ages' so I bought two tablets. I bought lettuce, radishes, beetroot and mustard and cress, came home, prepared salad, Hovis and butter, glass of milk, honey and an orange, and got into bed and ate it there. Since when I have been dealing with the ears and listening to the news.

Girls in cloakroom were chattering excitedly this afternoon. 'Oh, I do hope it'll happen while we're at work! – It won't seem the same will it?' The official notice asks us all to assemble in the canteen where news of victory is announced over the works broadcasting system. We are then to have the rest of the day off and the two following days. The girls began twittering about their husbands – what group for demobilisation did each belong to? I left them, feeling rather old and forlorn.

Listening now to the repeat broadcast of General Montgomery from Germany this afternoon. My emotions at this moment are indescribable: enormous pride in the fact that I am British, wonder and excitement. 'Tomorrow morning at 8am the war in Europe will be over...' The war in Europe is over... This is a tremendous moment.

The war is over. I cry a little. I think of my dearest friends, my stepmother, my brother in Egypt, of those men in the fighting services I have known – and I wish I had taken a more active part; it is too late now. But it is not too late to take part in the new fight ahead.

I am not moved to rush out tomorrow and wave a Union Jack in the village high street. I think it is a good sign that people are saying universally 'Our troubles are just beginning,' because it would be idiotic to assume they are over with the end of hostilities.

We want a better world and we must fight for it. That is where we must distinguish between pessimism and optimism. I believe with the utmost optimism, faith, hope and joy that we can have our better world (and note that one says 'a *better* world' – not the perfect or even best possible world) – yes, that we can have it if we know clearly what we want and fight for it.

Midnight news now being read. The announcer sounds tired. Pockets of German resistance still remain. I have been down and turned off the radio. For once I waited to hear the whole of the National Anthem, moved suddenly again to tears by this historic, this incredible moment. I stood with my hand on the radio switch listening to the National Anthem and to the voices of a thousand, thousand ghosts. They came over the air into that unlit, silent room, I swear it.

It's time I tried to sleep. One of the cats is outside my window waiting to be let in. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow stretch before me. Infinitely more full of promise and interest than the war years have been. I feel that new and exciting events await me. But that may be due to the influence of tonight's news. The atmosphere is charged with a release and potentiality.

And the bottom sheet, in an exceedingly frail condition from old age and much hard wear, is now torn beyond hope and redemption. I am sick to death of patching worn linen.

George Taylor

The monthly executive committee meeting of the Workers' Educational Association. As an experiment next year we are having a class on Appreciation of the Films, and a most attractive syllabus has been drawn up. The committee members are a little afraid, however, that the class may be used for entertainment purposes only, and they have fixed a class fee of 10/- to emphasise that serious study is intended.

Saturday, 5 May

Maggie Joy Blunt

Awakened this morning by neighbour Mrs C shouting something to the butcher. Don't know yet what he has left me – in saucepan in shed outside my backdoor. It has been pouring with rain from the time I woke and I am spending the morning in bed, reading the papers which repeat last night's broadcast news, attending to the ears which do seem a little better, and dozing. Have cancelled a hair appointment, intend to have an early (salad) lunch and then get up. Shall light kitchen fire, tidy the kitchen, go into the village, return to kitchen tea, maybe have the kittens down, wash a very large collection of soiled 'smalls' and look out for material for making two new cushioned squares for the sitting room – that is my programme. Why do people 'wonder what I do with myself all alone?'

The radio has been on and will be while I am indoors lest I miss some important goblet of information. One of the dangers I think of having the news brought to one so quickly when history is being as dramatic as it is at present is that it makes one want and expect life to move with the speed of a film towards some happy conclusion.

Herbert Brush

W and I went to the Capitol Cinema this afternoon. The German prison camp was shown: it was not very clear, but clear enough to make me want to put our Nazi prisoners in under the same conditions. Nothing less will make those sub-human beasts realise that it is wrong to torture other folk in such cruel ways. Even the women guards must have been sadists of the worst type, who enjoyed seeing and making their victims suffer. Judging by the short glimpse I had of these female's faces, I could easily imagine them singing and cursing as they beat their helpless prisoners.

One of the films was awful piffle, but the other with Wallace Beery in it was good.

Sunday, 6 May

Maggie Joy Blunt

The end of hostilities in Europe is to be announced within the next day or two, we are told, and before Thursday when Mr Churchill is making a special broadcast. Lys came to tea and stayed the evening. Her friend C called in about 6.30. She left a spare pint of milk for us, two eggs for Lys and some ointment for my ears, which has, so she assures me, positively magic powers and has been used by people of her acquaintance who have had the same trouble and found it effective where other remedies have failed. We had a drink and wondered when the announcement would be. Lys thinks she will go home that day and read a good book. C, whose husband is in the Forces and stationed nearby, expects to hear from him and have him home for two days.

I have, urged on by Lys, answered an ad in this week's New Statesman for a job in a publishing firm. Not that I expect any results but it is good for one's morale to make this kind of effort when one feels in a rut as I do.

George Taylor

A joint ramble with the Rotherham WEA. Did not think many would turn up, but 22 gathered at the starting point, including members from Parkgate and Worksop.

We had a charming walk through the Porter Glen, superior in my mind to any of the commercial glens of the Isle of Man, to Ringinglow, and then along the ancient moorland road, known popularly as the Sheeptrack to Longshawe. The sheeptrack has been closed throughout the war, as the moors have been used for bombing practise. It was good to find it open once more, and the RAF dismantling their station. The RAF have left a tarmac road behind, however, and I am afraid that this will be used by motors after the war and spoil another track for walkers.

Usually we go to the Ramblers Café at Longshawe – a clean and smartly run café managed by the Holiday Fellowship. It is usually very crowded, so our leader had booked at a neighbouring cottage. It was an unpleasant place, however.

Monday, 7 May

George Taylor

No news of VE day, so to the office as usual, and my wife went collecting rents. When I arrived back at the office after lunch, my 32-year-old colleague said that his assistant, 17, had overheard a prominent solicitor say that peace would be pronounced at 4pm. Another person he had met, who was 'in the know', also gave the same time. A few minutes later I went out, and overheard a tram conductress say to her mate, 'Well, the war will be over at 4pm.' We did not settle down to any serious work at the office, and listened for the church bells at 4pm, but they did not come, so we lingered on till 5.30. Meanwhile, the office boy had brought in an evening paper which announced that VE day would be tomorrow.

Town was very busy, and there was a holiday atmosphere everywhere. It took me nearly a quarter of an hour longer than usual to get home, so I just missed the 6pm news. However, my wife said there was nothing in it, so we did not know what to think. Hoping to see a news film we went to the local cinema, but they did not show even a newsflash, the whole time being taken up with the Adventures of Mark Twain. We were thoroughly disgusted.

Maggie Joy Blunt

Had a £1 note taken from my handbag at work this week. Like most women there I leave it about unguarded – we do not suspect each other of petty theft. Other people have been missing notes recently also and when I reported my loss to the works police I was told that they had their eye on a certain office boy. I hate everything of this kind happening and won't - I can't - accuse anyone, but I believe I know the boy they mean. He is a weaselly looking lad, impertinent and difficult to handle, but responds I find to a touch of humour - scolding only makes him sullen and disobedient. No doubt he thinks me a good-natured mug. My feelings about him are that he is a slippery, sharp, incurable type, always quite well dressed as though from a fairly good home, but there is something about him, some destiny in his face and manner. No remand home or schooling will make any difference. He won't listen. He will just follow the force that is urging him along a certain path.

From Italy, S wrote on May 1st –

'Last night German resistance on the northern Italian front ended. I was at my desk with two very young officers and my OC who was a captain with me in Greece in 1941. He said, "It's been a long road." We opened a bottle of Scotch and had a lot. Yet the old real Desert Rats – my old 7th Armoured Division – are still battling around Hamburg. The youngsters felt more exhilaration than we. My thoughts, strangely, were on the safari track from Bug Bug to Maddelena – two graves long since covered with sand. The end is near now and a great sense of emptiness. A new desert of emotion to be explored and fought over...'

Herbert Brush

I went to the Royal Academy Exhibition in Piccadilly. My word, it was hot walking in the sun, and by the time I arrived there perspiration was standing on my forehead. The show cost a shilling. I put a pencil mark in the catalogue

against the exhibits that were able to keep me in front of them for more than five seconds.

No 31: 'Girl Resting' by AR Middleton. She is naked, but it was the position of her left foot that caught my eye and I wondered how she could pose in that position without getting cramp.

No 88: 'Snow In Nottinghamshire' by Henry Moore. The reason I looked at this is because there are hills and valleys in the background, and I could not remember there are hills in Notts.

No 184: 'Still Life' by Frederick Elwell. There is a cold ham with a nice wide cut in the middle showing the inside lean part, and a pork pie with a couple of bottles of spirit alongside. It made me feel hungry, and I remembered that I had a sausage roll in my pocket, but I could not eat sausage roll in the Royal Academy. I left the exhibition at 2.45pm. I walked as far as the Haymarket and caught a No 12 bus. A crowd was waiting at the end of Downing Street, presumably waiting to see the Prime Minister, who is expected to declare Peace today.

Tuesday, 8 May

George Taylor

There was the stillness of a Sunday when we woke, and this continued all morning. I spent the morning doing some useful work in the garden, and then, as it started to rain, stayed in during the afternoon. Although we knew what Churchill was going to say at 3pm - or at least what we hoped he would say - we switched on the radio and continued listening until nearly 5pm.

After tea we went for a short walk and found quite a few flags displayed by the houses, although there was nothing elaborate. From the look of the trams we thought there could have been very few in town this afternoon, but a friend we met told us that there had been thousands. We still cannot realise that the war in Europe is indeed at an end. It is true that I have removed some more of the blackout today, as I promised myself on Peace Day, but somehow I still have a sneaking feeling that it may be wanted again any time.

In January 1941 we purchased some tinned chicken, and as we have never been called upon to use it, we promised ourselves a treat on Peace Day, and we did open it today. As with many things, it proved somewhat of a disappointment, for although it is genuine chicken – bones, skin and meat – it is spoilt by aspic jelly. Another long cherished tin, of sausages purchased in November 1940, proved much more acceptable for lunch.

Herbert Brush

I wonder whether any two of the millions of people in London will think the same thoughts today about the date when the change in their lives from War to Peace commenced.

8pm. I heard Mr Churchill at 3pm declare that war will end at 12.01 tonight. I wonder why the extra minute was added? Then an account of the various crowds collected in London and elsewhere, which made me glad that I was not in one of them.

I nearly swore this afternoon when I found that nearly all my runner beans had been eaten before they put their tips above the ground. I shall have to sow them all afresh: luckily I have plenty of my own seed.

10.30pm. Listened to the King's broadcast at 9 o.c. W keen to see a bonfire so we went down the road to the place where a bomb had made plenty of firewood available and saw quite a good fire. W wanted to see another, but one was enough for me, so I returned and wrote this note.

Wednesday, 9 May

George Taylor

Finished taking down blackouts at all windows and fanlights, and parcelled them for storage in the loft, ready for the next war. If we do leave this house before then, they will go along with the fixtures. I hope, however, that we shall be able to forget their existence. Bank holiday crowds everywhere.

Herbert Brush

7pm. I have been on the plot most of the day. I believe the judges in the Competition come round for their first visit before the middle of May, so I have been busy trying to make the plot tidy. I have fixed up another seat at the end of plot close to the hedge so that I can sit in the shelter during showers. This was the spot where I pressed myself into the hedge with the bucket over my head when a rocket burst overhead and bits of it came down all round me.

Thursday, 10 May

George Taylor

Still more work in the garden – these three VE holidays have certainly been useful. Then took my wife to the station en route to a week's holiday at Scarborough with the mother. The train arrived on the dot, was not at all full, and my wife had not the slightest difficulty in finding a seat. I hope that she will be able to do the same at Hull.

Friday, 11 May

Edie Rutherford, Housewife and Clerk in Sheffield

Where to begin? Well, we came home from work on Monday evening, 'bewitched, bugged and bewildered' as a friend of ours used to say. We had our office wireless on hourly without getting any satisfaction.

Then at 9pm we got the news that the next two days were holidays. That was enough for me. The following day I had promised to go to help my friend who is still clearing up her house, so husband came with me. I had stood in a queue for two small brown loaves for them. There were bread and fish queues everywhere all along the bus route and our tram route to town.

A neighbour brought in her portable radio at 3pm so that we could listen to Churchill. He spoke well and seemed in good form. Everyone agreed that we have

been well blessed in having such a leader. I felt once again great gratitude for being born British.

Left at 5pm and walked to nearest tram so that we could come home via town centre. Thousands round City Hall for a service. More thousands just wandering about. All the little mean streets had their decorations just as for Coronation and Jubilee. I find them pathetic though courageous.

We got home and had a meal and sat quietly till 10pm when we decided to go and have a look round. These flats had a neon 'V' right on the top flat roof which looked effective. Also our corridor balcony lights were on for the first time since blackout began. At the street corner, our shopping district, a radio shop had fitted up loudspeakers and music blared out. We saw many people the worse for drink, in fact most that we saw were in that state. Either looking very sorry for themselves or just merry, and we also saw vomit about, ugh.

Met up with a spinster who lives alone on this floor who asked could she stroll with us so of course we said she could. Came home about 11pm, decided we were hungry and what about looking at reserve food put by years ago. To our surprise and pleasure found a tin of asparagus tips and tin of tomatoes. Had these with cheese and water biscuits and margarine. Miss S found a stout for husband at her flat and one gin and ginger for herself and myself. Then we sat and talked till 1.20.

Went to door to see friend off and found terrace floodlit and loudspeakers giving music for tenants and their friends to dance, and they all seemed merry. Kept it up till 2am when, I heard since, someone on a higher floor threw water over them.

We woke next morning about 9am to find all quieter than any Sunday. I did some washing and ironing and sewing and housework, and in the afternoon we went on a tram ride through town and to Bingham Park which we had not seen before. Called at a pub in that neighbourhood to find it shut. So back to town and while I waited in a queue to spend a 1d, husband had an ale at a nearby pub. Said it was packed tight.

I thought, as always, that the King's speech was marred by his speech, but on the whole his stammer wasn't so bad. Maybe if he were to speak to us more often he would learn to relax so well that he would not stammer at all. I have decided these last few days that Rule Britannia is a far better tune than God Save the King.

Goering need not imagine he can get away with it by calling his ex-colleagues nasty names. He is an arch villain and should hang for it. As to all the reasons for defeat given by various German Generals – it is clear they lost because material might is NOT right, never was, never will be. It is good that the Channel Islands are free and I hope we will get food to them quickly, plenty of it.

There are several Nazis not yet accounted for. And I shan't be happy about Hitler till the body is found. What guilty consciences they have who commit suicide. Is it possible they really thought once they'd get away with their villainy?

I laughed when it was announced that the Japs had told the world that Germany's surrender would make no difference to them. Won't it indeed? They'll soon see just what a difference it is going to make.

I keep thinking our few windows are all unblacked and keep finding a pane that isn't. Amazing how long it takes. Thought I had done yesterday when husband smilingly pointed to two small top windows in bathroom. Drat. I'll scratch the paper off sometime this weekend if I get time.

Weather forecasts are a welcome return and we don't care how many deep depressions threaten from Iceland or anywhere. We can bear that kind of depression now. Anyone want tin hats and two gas masks?

George Taylor

I was alone for lunch at home, and noticed there was a symphony on the radio, so switched on for company. It was Beethoven's 5th. Some fortnight ago I had booked for the Hallé Concert in the evening tonight, and to refresh my memory as to the programme I turned up the advertisement in the daily paper. Lo and behold, the programme had been altered, and Beethoven's 5th symphony included there. Twice hearing in one day is pretty good going.

At the Hallé concert there was a very thin attendance, the poorest I have seen for some time. To start, we had three national anthems, I presume the American and Russian played in full, then the British. When we sat down my neighbour remarked, 'It's a good job they didn't play the Chinese.'

Tuesday, 15 May

Eddie Rutherford

Yesterday I had a cable from my goddaughter in Natal – rejoicing about our victory and assuring me I am in their thoughts at this time. Kind gesture.

Friend tells me that he gave a talk to Jewish Youth at a club in town one night last week and was amazed at the intelligent questions afterwards. I listened and told him that in my opinion the Jews need to sort out their own minds i.e. they want Socialism because they believe it makes no distinction of class, colour or creed; yet they want capitalism because so many of them are capitalist.

Shops now display notices that they have plenty of torch batteries... GOD BLESS OUR LADS FOR THIS VICTORY is painted on sides of houses near where I work. Others thank Monty, Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. Clear that decorations were planned some time ago as all show Roosevelt; or is it that folk feel he should get the credit?

Churchill sounded tired when he spoke on Sunday. I think he should be put to grass, as he calls it. Can't understand why he doesn't admit it and be done with it.

I notice the Ford factory at Cologne is working again. Seems there is truth in the oft heard statement that we didn't bomb places which concerned our rich owners.

Burning Belsen is the only thing to do.

Wanted to buy a sponge in town today – but they started at £4 each. Used to be 18/6d before the war. I did NOT buy, will stuff shoes with newspaper rather than give in to such wicked profiteering.

1/- for a small lettuce...oh well. No cress about just now. There are suggestions that we are going to be worse off than ever for food. I believe I would not mind that if the variety could be improved. My husband is quite definitely suffering

from poor nutrition today. He needs more milk, butter, cream...I'm terribly worried about him.

Wednesday, 16 May

George Taylor

The news of the restoration of the basic petrol ration has brought no joy to me. One of the great blessings of the war has been the reduction of motor traffic on the roads, and I dread seeing all the private cars back again. I think that peacetime public transport services should have been restored before private motoring was let loose on us again.

Cleaning up the house preparatory to my wife coming home from holidays tomorrow. Gardening and typing in the evening. I also listened to the BBC broadcast 'Tribute to the RAF'. It was good to hear one of these feature programmes not messed up with incidental music.

Thursday, 17 May

Edie Rutherford

In all the news of the past week in papers and BBC, I have yet to hear a word about what happened in the Dominions at V time. One person to whom I commented said, 'But it doesn't mean anything to them,' which is just typical of the general ignorance from high up to low down. Now that we don't need so much help from our Empire, it can go to the devil again.

Just done a wonderful make-do-and-mend with pyjama coat of husband's. They were bought in Durban 13 years ago so must have been good when new. They had gone where husband's shoulder blades always cut open his clothes, and at top of sleeves. Have made a new top half of back.

Yesterday in a rash mood I bought myself two bunches pyrethrums, 3/- the two. One bunch would not have made a decent vase full. It is an outrageous price but when I've been without flowers for months, as I often am these days, I break out...

Saturday 19 May

Herbert Brush

Roger the dog did not give any trouble during the night but he is now wandering about the house like a lost dog. Went to the Duchess theatre to see a play by Noel Coward, 'Blythe Spirit', a weird fantasy in which the spirit of a dead wife made things uncomfortable for a man who had married again. Irene Browne was good in her part as a medium. It is some years since I went to the theatre, and I am not sure what I prefer - theatre or cinema.

Sunday, 20 May

Edie Rutherford

I just haven't had a chance to see to this diary. On Friday husband woke with temperature so I bullied him into staying in bed, rang his brother and took the opportunity to tell him how worried I am about Sid these days, and that I won't be satisfied till he has been screened; also said Sid should have two weeks' holiday this year as he needs it. Harold says he would mention the screening to Sid, and see that he gets the latter. So I hope I have achieved something. One has to go about things so carefully.

Taken from *Our Hidden Lives: The Remarkable Diaries of Post-War Britain* (Ebury, 2004)