

Lodgings in London

27 Upper Berkeley Street, Portman Square, W.1. Bedsitter with Hilary, October 1938–August 1939

They lived in lodgings where, for £1. 5s. 2d. a week (paid for out of the small allowance her parents made her), Barbara had a tiny room at the top of the house. (ALTA)

As you see by my address I am at present living in London. Hilary and I are in rooms together – she is doing a secretarial course and I am writing a new novel. It is such a pleasant life – I don't think I've been so happy since I was a young girl of eighteen in my first year at Oxford! ... It is such a nice change being in London and our rooms are very comfortable and near everywhere – just by Marble Arch and Hyde Park. (AVPE, letter to Elsie Harvey, 31 October 1938)

Now I am back in London, in my minute little room at the top of a lodging house in quite a good district of London – conveniently near all the shops and art galleries and Mayfair – though why I should want to be near there you may well ask. ... We can't cook anything here and there isn't much space to put things. But we are very happy and the people in the house are nice and we are near Marble Arch and Hyde Park and Oxford Street (and the Edgware Road which is not a very nice district for two young women to wander about in late at night). (AVPE, letter to Henry and Elsie Harvey, 11 May 1939)

To receive a love letter and to be eating honey on a June morning (in a bed-sitting room in London). This was in 1939 – me in Upper Berkeley Street. The letter was from Jay and the honey from Jock (Miel d'Hymette) from Athens. (AVPE, 10 October 1954)



41 York Street, Marylebone, W.1. Bedsitter with Hilary, June–November 1945

Hilary had joined the BBC Gramophone Department in 1944 and was now working at Broadcasting House in London and living in lodgings at 41 York Street while her husband was still abroad with the RAF. Barbara was assigned to WRNS Headquarters in Queen Anne's Mansions, Queen's Gate, 'hanging around' as she put it, waiting to be demobilised. She was allowed to live out, so Hilary managed to get her a room in the house in York street as well. Although she describes it as 'a sordid furnished room – rather Katherine Mansfield' it was marvellous for her to escape from the communal living of the WRNS. (ALTA)

32 Balcombe Street, Marylebone, N.W.1.

Autumn 1972 – July 1974

Flat in London during the week, Finstock on weekends

My sister and I have bought a cottage at Finstock ... and hope to move into it later this summer, having sold this house [Queen's Park]. I shall still be working for another year anyway and shall try to find a room in London, as I wouldn't have the strength to commute from Oxford, though many people make even longer journeys. What a pity one can't still live in Bloomsbury for a pittance – that would suit me very well. I might advertise myself in the Church Times and now that I have definitely given up smoking I could say 'non-smoker', which would add to my desirability (gentlewoman, Anglican, quiet, 'business lady' etc) as a tenant. A pity one can't offer oneself to the advertisers who ask for '4th girl share super Chelsea flat'. (AVPE, letter to Philip Larkin, 29 May 1972)



I am now very well established in two places. I have been very lucky to find a nice little room in the house of friends of friends, and I stay here Monday to Friday. Balcombe Street goes up from Dorset Square and is between Baker Street and Marylebone stations. Indeed as I lie in bed in the early morning I can sometimes hear the station announcer from Marylebone booming away about something. I have been here since August and now feel very much at home. I have 'use of kitchen' and make my own breakfast and evening meal ('dinner' is perhaps not quite the word for it). Then on Friday evening I go to Finstock (good train from Paddington) where I have a different sort of life. (AVPE, letter to Philip Larkin, 24 October 1972)