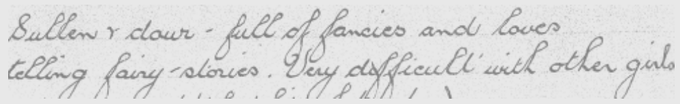
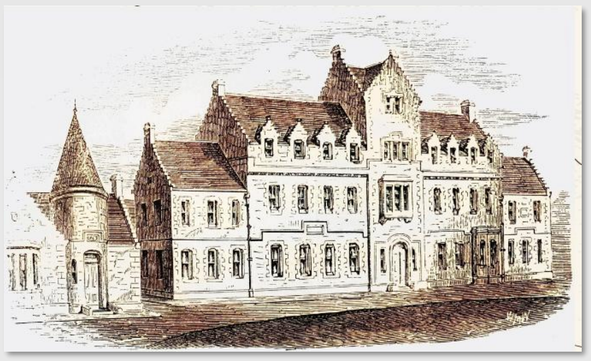
Isabella
Letters from a probationer



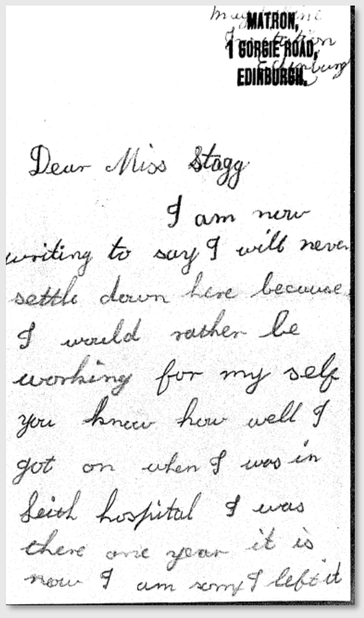
Isabella was born in 1910. After her mother died when she was just 5 years old, her father moved to the North of England and sent Isabella to Aberlour Orphanage. When she reached the age of 16, the matron of the orphanage asked the NVA to find Isabella employment. She was found accommodation at the Edinburgh Rescue Shelter, 18 Dean Terrace but was later up before the Edinburgh Police Court charged with theft from Woolworths. Miss Stagg was appointed her probation officer and Isabella was sent to the Magdalene Rescue Home on Gorgie Road, a large industrial training laundry. Isabella wrote many letters to Miss Stagg asking if she could leave.



Magdalene* Rescue Home, Gorgie Road

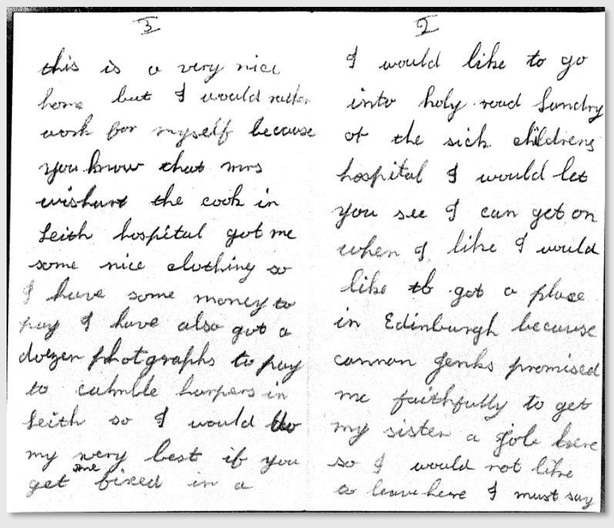
Known as the **Magdalene Asylum** or **Rescue Home for Girls**, the institution began as early as 1797 in the Canongate area of Edinburgh to take in women from the Bridewell [jail]. In 1862 it relocated to the "country" at Dalry and incorporated a large industrial laundry. The NVA had stopped sending girls to Gorgie Road in the early 1920s over concerns about the quality of training and the housing of young girls with older women, but at the time Isabella was sent there a new matron - **Miss Marion Nutter** - had recently taken over. Correspondence in the Birthlink archive describes Miss Nutter as *"a splendid person, bubbling over with ideas for the girls and she has made the Home very, very much better in every way".*

* General term for refuge home and not necessarily an indication that they were of the same ilk as the convents and laundries run by Magdalene nuns in Ireland.


MATRON,
1 GORGIE ROAD,
EDINBURGH.

Dear Miss Stagg

I am now writing to say I will never settle down here because I would rather be working for my self you know how well I got on when I was in Leith hospital I was there one year it is now I am sorry I left it

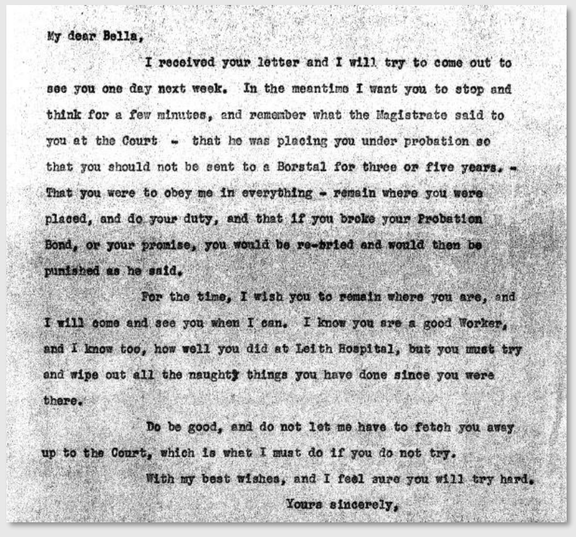

this is a very nice home but I would rather work for myself because you know that miss ~~mistress~~ the cook in Leith hospital got me some nice clothing so I have some money to pay I have also got a dozen photographs to pay to cathrine herpers in Leith so I would do my very best if you get me ~~one~~ placed in a

I would like to go into Holy Road laundry or the sick childrens hospital I would like you see I can get on when I like I would like to get a place in Edinburgh because cannon Jenks promised me faithfully to get my sister a place here so I would not like to leave here I must say

"Dear Miss Stagg, I am writing to say I will never settle down here because I would rather be working for myself you know how well I got on when I was in Leith Hospital. I would like to go into Holy Road laundry or the sick children's hospital. This is a very nice home but I would rather work for myself."

When the NVA purchased a typewriter they began to keep copies of outgoing letters.

This is Miss Stagg's reply to Isabella:


My dear Bella,

I received your letter and I will try to come out to see you one day next week. In the meantime I want you to stop and think for a few minutes, and remember what the Magistrate said to you at the Court - that he was placing you under probation so that you should not be sent to a Borstal for three or five years. - That you were to obey me in everything - remain where you were placed, and do your duty, and that if you broke your Probation Bond, or your promise, you would be re-tried and would then be punished as he said.

For the time, I wish you to remain where you are, and I will come and see you when I can. I know you are a good Worker, and I know too, how well you did at Leith Hospital, but you must try and wipe out all the naughty things you have done since you were there.

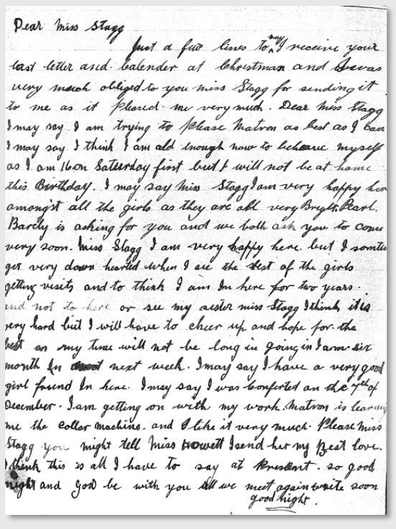
Do be good, and do not let me have to fetch you away up to the Court, which is what I must do if you do not try.

With my best wishes, and I feel sure you will try hard.

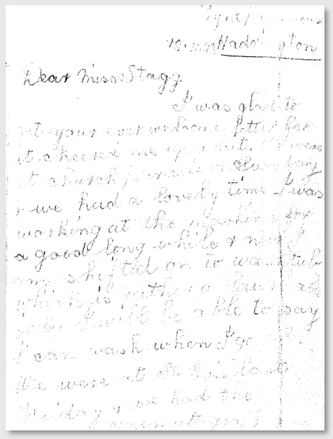
Yours sincerely,

Work

Girls in training homes were instructed in all kinds of laundry work and sewing and frequently helped in the gardens.


Dear Miss Stagg

just a few lines to let you receive your last letter and calender at Christmas and I was very much obliged to you miss Stagg for sending it to me as it pleased me very much. Dear miss Stagg I may say I am trying to please matron as best as I can I may say I think I am old enough now to behave myself as I am then Saturday first but I will not be at home this Birthday. I may say miss Stagg I am very happy here amongst all the girls as they are all very Bright Hard. Barbly is asking for you and we both ask you to come very soon. Miss Stagg I am very happy here but I sometimes get very down hearted when I see the rest of the girls getting visits and to think I am in here for two years and not to here or see my sister miss Stagg I think it's very hard but I will have to cheer up and hope for the best as my time will not be long in going I am six month for ~~theft~~ next week. I may say I have a very good girl friend in here. I may say I was baptised on the 7th of December. I am getting on with my work matron is learning me the collar machine and I like it very much. Please miss Stagg you might tell miss Howell I send her my best love. I think this is all I have to say at present so good night and God be with you till we meet again write soon good night.

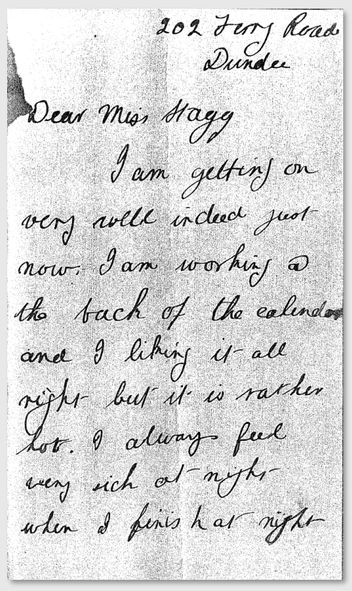

Dear Miss Stagg

It was glad to get your post card and letter for it cheered me up a bit. I was a bit sick for a while as I had a lonely time I was working at the marker for a good long while & now I am shifted on to washtub which is rather an enjoyable job. I will be able to say I can wash when I go.

"I was working at the marker for a good long while and now am shifted onto washtub which is rather an enjoyable job. I will be able to say I can wash when I go." Lizzie, Tynepark, Haddington

"I am getting on with my work. Matron is learning me the collar machines and I like it very much."

Isa, Discharged Prisoners Aid Society Home, Greenock

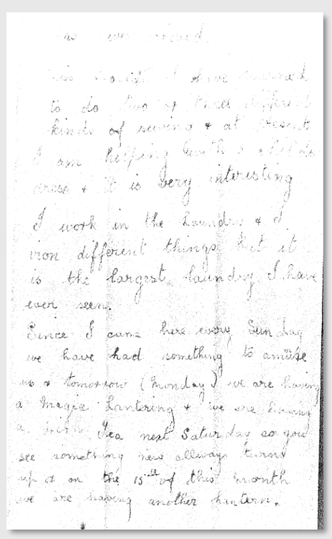

202 Ferry Road
Dundee

Dear Miss Stagg

I am getting on very well indeed just now. I am working at the back of the calendar and I like it all right but it is rather hot. I always feel very sick at night when I finish at night

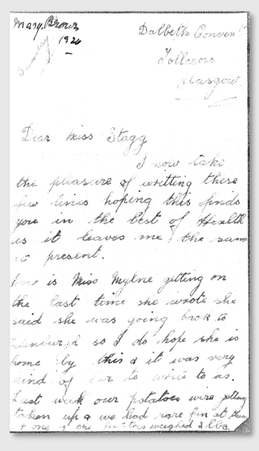
"Dear Miss Stagg, I am getting on very well indeed just now. I am working at the back of the calendar and I like it all right but it is rather hot. I always feel very sick at night when I finish."* Bessie, Dundee Home

*hard pressure rollers to smooth material



"I have learned to do two or three different kinds of sewing and at present I am helping with a child's corset and it is very interesting. I work in the laundry and I iron different things but it is the largest laundry I have ever seen."

Margaret, Dalbeth Convent, Glasgow


Dalbeth Convent
Dear Miss Stagg

I now take the pleasure of writing these few lines hoping this finds you in the best of health as it leaves me this same present.

"Last week our potatoes were getting taken up and we had rare fun. One of the potatoes weighed 2lbs."