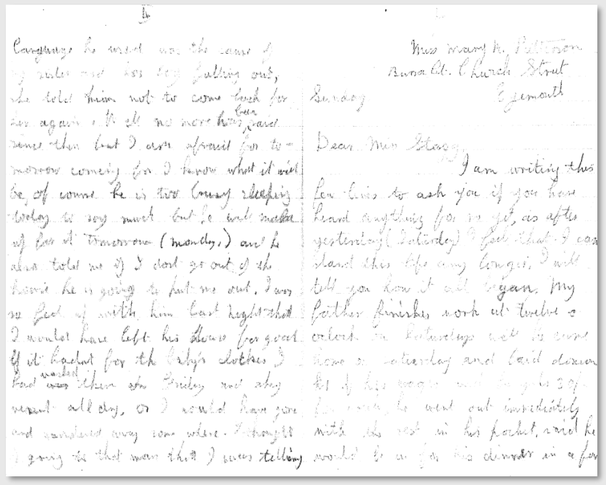
Mary
Letters from an unmarried mother

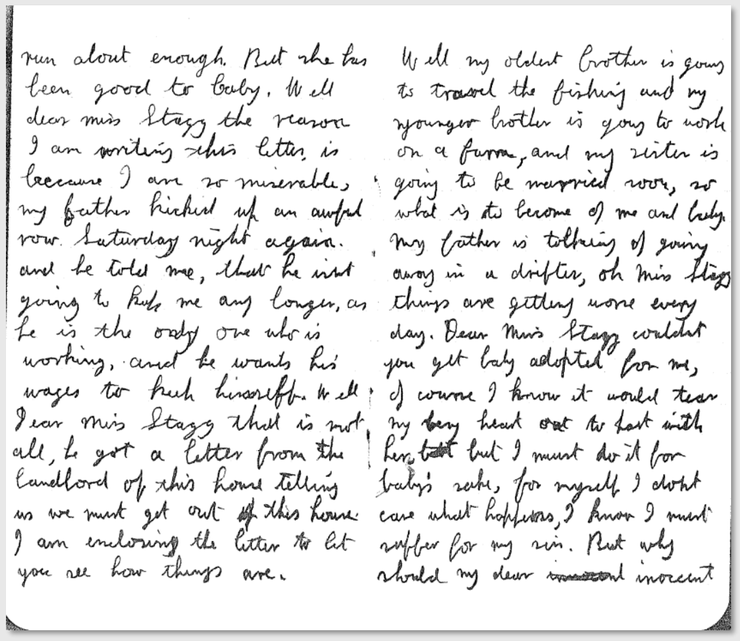
Mary was born in Eyemouth in 1902. In her late teens, Mary left home and went into service on a farm near Berwick. She became pregnant to the man of the house who gave her £6 for an abortion but Mary sought help at the NVA instead. They found her beds in two different mother and baby homes, however, Mary decided to return home where she gave birth to a baby girl. Times were hard and the lack of work and money caused family conflict. At the beginning of 1925 Mary, worried about not being able to provide for her daughter, wrote to the NVA to enquire about giving her up for adoption.

The NVA arranged an adoption for Mary's baby and as Mary no longer had a home to return to, they found her accommodation at the Newcastle Diocesan Home. Her letters from there told Miss Stagg about her daily life and work as a parlour maid and also show that she still worried about her family back home.



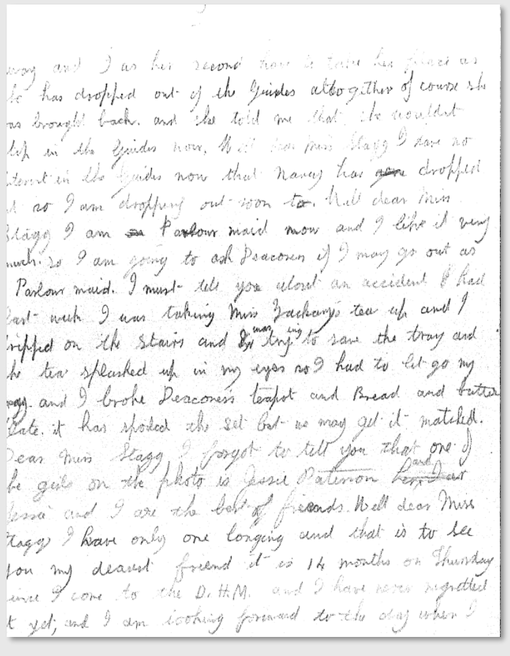
"My father finishes work at twelve o'clock on Saturdays well he came home on Saturday and laid down £1 of his wages and he gets 30 shillings per week, he went out immediately with the rest in his pocket and said he would be in for his dinner in a few minutes, well he did not return until 4 o'clock and my sister just said to him you are a drunk you can hardly stand, that was all she said to him and he lifted a piece of hard bread from the table and threw it at her, well I was sitting behind her with the baby on my knee and it struck the baby's shoulder instead, if it had hit her on the head it would of killed her. Well I spoke up and told him to be careful what he was doing and you never heard such language and he said some awful things to me. He cast up the baby's father to me and about him giving me £6 to get rid of her and all the time this was going on there was about a dozen people standing at the door listening to it all. Well in the end he cooled down but he started again about five o'clock and I never let on to him, I thought perhaps if I didn't speak he would get tired of it and go out but instead he got worse and for spite he doubled his fist and smashed the baby's feeding bottle into pieces."

"Well dear Miss Stagg the reason I am writing this letter is because I am so miserable, my father kicked up an awful row Saturday night again and he told me that he isn't going to keep me any longer as he is the only one who is working and he wants his wages to keep himself. That is not all, he got a letter from the landlord of this house telling us we must get out. Well my oldest brother is going to travel the fishing and my younger brother is going to work on a farm and my sister is going to be married soon so what is to become of me and baby. My father is talking of going away in a drifter, oh Miss Stagg things are getting worse every day. Dear Miss Stagg could you get baby adopted for me, of course I know it would tear my very heart out to part with her but I must do it for baby's sake."



Letters from Newcastle Diocesan Home

*"Now dear Miss Stagg I would like to tell you of the nice holiday we had a fortnight ago. We started in the morning by getting our photos taken. Then we had dinner then we went out again in the afternoon and had races, skipping, jumping, running, walking and all kinds. I didn't join in any of the races because I don't like racing and it was too hot but I enjoyed it all the same then we had our tea and fish and chips, then the girls that won the races had their prizes given them then we all went to the pictures and saw "*Sally in the Sawdust*" and we enjoyed that also. Altogether we had a glorious day."*



"I haven't had any letter from home yet so I have written today again if they don't answer this time I don't know what to do. I have been worrying myself ill the last few weeks. I do hope my sister will answer this time I can't help thinking my father has been getting into trouble and they have been put out of the house. I wonder how little Mary is getting on now, she will be over 2 years old now."