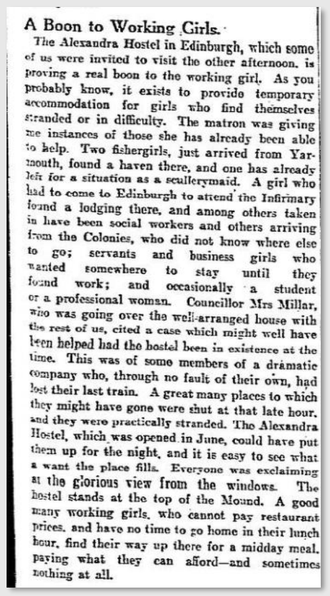
Sheila
Letters from a Sanatorium

very well-educated girl.

Yours Sincerely,
Sheila Mc[illegible]

Sheila was born on 13th August 1911 in Monifieth. Her mother was unmarried and living with her two sisters in Musselburgh, Sheila's NVA case file records that her father was a *"well to do gentleman"* who had paid a considerable sum to a solicitor to arrange for an adoption. Sheila was adopted at birth and her birth mother emigrated to New Zealand.

Sheila became known to the NVA at the age of 16. Her adoptive parents died when she was a young teenager and she had been passed between her adoptive brother and her birth mother's sisters. At the age of 16 Sheila got a job as a nurse in Edinburgh but had to leave after a few weeks due to developing painful cracked chilblains on her hands. Unwilling to return to her aunts the NVA found her a space at The Alexandra Hostel on The Mound, a women's hostel run by the Scotch Girls Friendly Society [SGFS] which provided training as well as accommodation.



A Boon to Working Girls.

The Alexandra Hostel in Edinburgh, which some of us were invited to visit the other afternoon, is proving a real boon to the working girl. As you probably know, it exists to provide temporary accommodation for girls who find themselves stranded or in difficulty. The matron was giving me instances of those she has already been able to help. Two fishergirls, just arrived from Yarmouth, found a haven there, and one has already left for a situation as a scullerymaid. A girl who had to come to Edinburgh to attend the Infirmary found a lodging there, and among others taken in have been social workers and others arriving from the Colonies, who did not know where else to go; servants and business girls who wanted somewhere to stay until they found work; and occasionally a student or a professional woman. Councillor Mrs Millar, who was going over the well-arranged house with the rest of us, cited a case which might well have been helped had the hostel been in existence at the time. This was of some members of a dramatic company who, through no fault of their own, had lost their last train. A great many places to which they might have gone were shut at that late hour, and they were practically stranded. The Alexandra Hostel, which was opened in June, could have put them up for the night, and it is easy to see what a want the place fills. Everyone was exclaiming at the glorious view from the windows. The hostel stands at the top of the Mound. A good many working girls, who cannot pay restaurant prices, and have no time to go home in their lunch hour, find their way up there for a midday meal, paying what they can afford—and sometimes nothing at all.

The Scotsman 24 November 1926
[British Newspaper Archive]

The Alexandra Hostel

This newspaper report gives some idea of the company Sheila would have had in the SGFS hostel.

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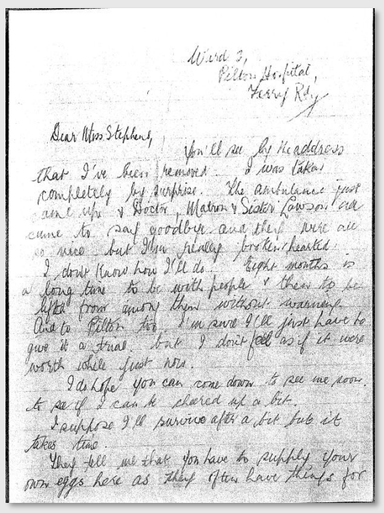
Unfortunately, Sheila was admitted to The Royal Victoria Hospital suffering from TB. She kept in contact with the NVA who sent her regular visitors.

"We are going to have quite a nice time here at Xmas. We have Xmas dinner tomorrow then a concert given by the patients in the afternoon and something by the children at night."

"We have had a fire both yesterday and today, we stopped moaning about the cold, a fire does cheer the thoughts. We won't get any more though because Dr Hewat does not approve of fires."



Ward 3,
Pilton Hospital,
Ferry Rd

Dear Miss Stephens,

You'll see by the address that I've been removed – I was taken completely by surprise. The ambulance just came up & Doctor, Matron & Sister Lawson all came to say goodbye and they were all so nice but I'm really broken hearted.

I don't know how I'll do. Eight months is a long time to be with people & then to be lifted from among them without warning. Out to Pilton this I'm sure I'll just have to give it a trial. But I don't feel as if it were worth while just now.

I do hope you can come down to see me soon. It sets if I can't cheer up a bit.

I suppose I'll survive after a bit but it takes time.

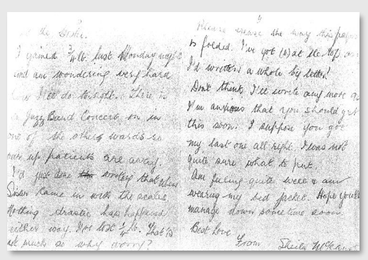
They tell me that you have to supply your own eggs here as they often have them for

Later Sheila was moved to Pilton Hospital, Ferry Road which came as an unwelcome surprise: *"You'll see by the address I've been removed. I was taken completely by surprise. The ambulance just came up and Doctor, Matron and Sister Lawson all came to say goodbye and they were all so nice but I'm really broken hearted."*

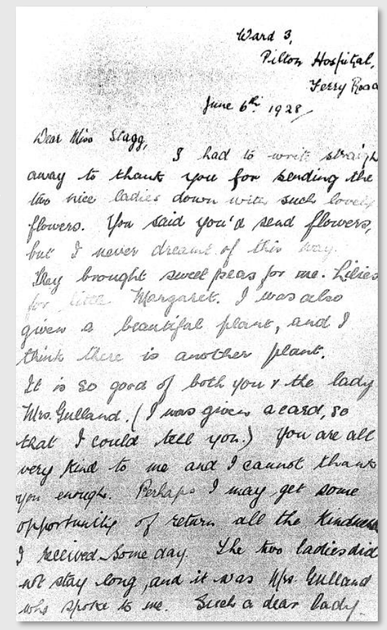
"I had to write straight away to thank you for sending the two nice ladies down with such lovely flowers. You said you'd send flowers but I never dreamt of this many. They brought sweet peas for me. I was also given a beautiful plant."

"I see them coming with our "Cup o' tea and a bun". Saturday's tea - 2.30pm. Far too soon after dinner don't you think?"

"One of your lady friends was down and I'm knitting a jacket for her. It is nice wool, pink and white."



"I still have a poor appetite but one can't do everything in a day. I want up now. Today I feel like that. Somedays I just want to sleep."



Ward 3.
Pilton Hospital,
Ferry Road
June 6th 1928

Dear Miss Stagg,

I had to write straight away to thank you for sending the two nice ladies down with such lovely flowers. You said you'd send flowers but I never dreamt of this many. They brought sweet peas for me. Lilies for Miss Margaret. I was also given a beautiful plant, and I think there is another plant. It is so good of both you & the lady Mrs Gulland. (I was given a card, so that I could tell you.) You are all very kind to me and I cannot thank you enough. Perhaps I may get some opportunity of return all the kindness I received. Some day. The two ladies did not stay long and it was Mrs Gulland who spoke to me. Such a dear lady

Sheila's last letter to the NVA was written on the 2nd August 1928, she died on 20th August, at the age of 17. She was buried in Comely Bank Cemetery. Her funeral was attended by Miss Stagg, Miss Stephens and Sheila's adoptive brother and sister-in-law.