

Margaret E. Notley

Autograph Book

Transcription

Transcribed April 2026

*Faithful to original text, including spelling and punctuation.
Editorial notes in [square brackets].*

Overview

The autograph book belongs to Margaret E. Notley (later Stevens). She inscribed it herself as 'Margaret E. Notley / 1940.' on the inside front cover. The book spans 1940 to at least late 1942, covering her nursing service in the United Kingdom — principally at a military hospital in Hythe (1940) and at RAF Hospital Cosford (1941–1942) — before her overseas posting to No. 2 RAF General Hospital, Maison Carrée, Algiers.

Margaret's middle initial is given as 'E.' in her ownership inscription and 'C.' in her own verse entry (Hythe, 1940). Both are recorded faithfully here.

The contributors are predominantly military patients and medical staff — soldiers, airmen, and VADs — who were under Margaret's care or served alongside her. Several entries are original verse compositions written specifically for Margaret; others quote or adapt well-known poems.

Ward 2 at Hythe and Station 4 (S.4) at RAF Hospital Cosford are the two wards most frequently referenced.

Page 02 Margaret E. Notley — Owner's inscription · 1940

Pencil inscription on inside front cover.

Margaret E. Notley

1940.

[Margaret's own ownership inscription. Middle initial 'E.' — contrast with page 07 where she signs 'Margaret C. Notley.']

Over the snow on a pair of skis
I hope to God we shall not freeze,
Giving out pills, & rendering First Aid,
Our only worry, Shall we be paid?.

['Finlandia' may refer to a ship, a house name, or a ward nickname. Humorous verse referring to nursing duties. Surname 'Mimlust' is a best reading — handwriting unclear.]

Life is mostly froth & bubble
Two things stand like stone
Kindness in another's trouble
Courage in your own

[Verse from Adam Lindsay Gordon's 'Ye Wearie Wayfarer' (1866), a popular autograph book inscription. V.A.D. = Voluntary Aid Detachment. 29 February 1940 was a leap day.]

Fair be the garden where your love shall grow
Happy the pathway that your feet shall tread
Rich be your garner store with corn and oil
Long be the turning to the sad farewell

[A traditional blessing verse, commonly found in autograph books of this period.]

Chacun pour soi
et le bon Dieu pour tous.

Translation: 'Each for himself, and the good Lord for all.' — a well-known French proverb.

[The choice of a French proverb is notable. Parker-Smith may have been bilingual or had French connections.]

'Taint

'Taint what we have,
But what we give.
'Taint where we are,
But how we live.
'Taint what we do
But how we do it —
That makes this life
Worth goin' through it.

[Margaret's own contribution to her book. Signed with middle initial 'C.' rather than 'E.' as in her ownership inscription. Location Hythe confirms she was based at a military hospital there in 1940. The verse is a traditional popular poem of American origin.]

THANKS

In these few words I wish to portray
How you cared for me in a devotable way
No words can express my thanks to you
Or for those memorable days in ward 2
And so to end this rhyme I feel I must say
I shall be indebted to you for many a day

[Original verse composed for Margaret. Explicitly references 'ward 2', placing this at the Hythe military hospital. Barker was a patient. The London Irish Rifles were an infantry regiment; in June 1940 many units were reorganising after Dunkirk.]

As years roll by sweet memory's recall.
Of friends that are past but ne'er forgot.
We love them all & ask that they may ne'er forget those days gone bye.

[A farewell verse. The 13th Battalion Royal Fusiliers was a wartime service battalion. Dated 20 June 1940 — same date as four other entries, suggesting a ward departure.]

Drink ye to her that each loves best.
And if your nurse a flame,
That's told but to her mutual breast.
We well not ask her a name.
To live in heart we leave behind,
Is not to die.

[A composite verse drawing on Robert Burns and Thomas Campbell. R.A.S.C. = Royal Army Service Corps. Same date as pages 09 and 11 — part of the 20 June 1940 group departure from ward 2.]

Ward 2.

There came to [~~the bush~~] Ward 2 a poor exile of Erin,
The dew on his thin robe was heavy and chill,
For his country he sighed, when at twilight repairing,
To wander alone by the wind-beaten hill.

Attribution: Campbell's 'Exile of Erin'

[Adapted from Thomas Campbell's poem 'The Exile of Erin' (1800). Henry has written 'Ward 2' above the verse and crossed out the original phrase to insert it — placing the poem in the hospital ward. Irish background implied by verse choice.]

Here is sincere thanks from a Royal Blue,
Who has found care, and attention in Ward Two.

['Royal Blue' refers to the Royal Horse Guards, whose traditional colour is blue. Same date as pages 09, 10, 11 — confirming the 20 June 1940 group departure from Ward 2, Hythe.]

What is friendship but a name,
A charm that lulls to sleep,
A shade that follows wealth or fame,
And leaves the wretch to weep.

*[From Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Hermit' (1765). K.R.R.C. = King's Royal Rifle Corps. Rfm = Rifleman.
Part of the 20 June 1940 group departure.]*

LAUGH

Build for yourself a strong-box,
Fashion each part with care;
Fit with clasp and padlock,
Put all your troubles there.
Hide therein all your failures,
And each bitter cup you quaff,
Lock all your heartaches within it,
Then — sit on the lid and laugh.

Tell no one of its contents,
Never its secrets share;
Drop in your cares & worries,
Keep them forever there.
Hide them from sight so completely,
The world will never dream half,
Fasten the top down securely
Then — sit on the top &
LAUGH.

[Two-page poem spanning pages 14–15. Written in blue block capitals, likely by RCAF airman Jim Asserstine, who signs individually on page 15. November 1942 is the latest confirmed date in the book. R.C.A.F. personnel served at several RAF stations including Cosford.]

The Truth about Women

An angel in truth, a demon in fiction,
A woman's the greatest of all contradiction.
She's afraid of a beetle,
She'll scream at a mouse,
But she'll tackle a husband as big as a house.
She'll take him for better,
She'll take him for worse,
She'll split his head open,
Then be his nurse.
She's artful, she's crafty, she's simple & kind
She's cruel, keen sighted, kindhearted & blind.
She'll play like a kitten & scratch like a cat.
You think she is this & you find she is that.
In the evening she will,
In the morning she won't,
You are always expecting she will,
& she DON'T.

[A humorous verse on the subject of women, a common autograph book genre. Signature reading uncertain. Date appears to be 29/2/4[0 or 2] — both leap years.]

When first I joined my motto was:—
"Per ardua ad astra,
But since I pranged one stormy night,
Per ardua ad plasta!"

[An original witty verse. 'Pranged' = RAF slang for crashed. 'Per ardua ad astra' is the RAF motto; the writer substitutes 'plasta' (plaster) — a self-deprecating joke about ending up in hospital. The same 'Johnny' signed a second entry on page 34 at Grantham, Lincs.]

Dedication: To the Night Sister of S.4

Auprès de ma blonde,
qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon,
Auprès de ma blonde,
qu'il fait bon dormir.

Subscription: s.s.s.g.b.s.m. avec amitiés

[The refrain of the traditional French song 'Auprès de ma blonde'. Dedicated to Margaret as Night Sister of Station 4, confirming her night-duty role at Cosford. L.A.C. = Leading Aircraftman. 'Avec amitiés' = with friendly regards.]

There are those who think wisely of the thinking few
There are those who don't think but think they do.

[A wry aphorism, likely original. Datchet is a village in Buckinghamshire near Windsor. Lavender may have been a visitor or colleague rather than a patient.]

When I came round I used to find,
My drink was in a feeder,
For that I knew I had to thank,
Mac and the Sqdn. Leader.

I saw the sports and you conquer,
It was grand to be there,
Then it soon rained, and we got wet,
But really who should care.

I won't forget the sisters or,
How good they were to me,
The M.Os. and the matron,
And of course the V.A.D.

And now dear sister please forgive,
I hope you will not mind,
If during all my stay in here,
I've been an awful fiend.

[Original verse by a patient, addressed directly to Margaret ('dear sister'). References waking from unconsciousness to find his drink in a feeder — a serious injury. 'Ex L.A.C.' = former Leading Aircraftman, now a Sergeant.]

I badge coming up.
Canada

Here's to Red who helps me in bed
And very nice too.

[Brief, informal entry in pencil. 'Red' may be a nickname for Margaret or a fellow nurse. Canadian contributor — likely RCAF.]

She's as stately as a tulip
and of one no rare,
And yet, hails from a land afar.

She's here to do some nursing,
nursing, grousing, loving,
those bright old boys of
eighty
who dotes on one so fair.

[Drawing: stick figure carrying a black bag, labelled 'BLACK BAG LEGEND.']

[Original verse written for Margaret, describing her as hailing 'from a land afar' — possibly a reference to her Canadian background. The 53rd Training Regiment may be a Canadian unit.]

Pages 24–25 [Names unclear] — Canada

Lots of luck
Canada

Here's luck
Don
Canada

[Two brief pencil inscriptions from Canadian contributors, possibly related. Language: English.]

Page 26 [Surname unclear], 8th Bn K.S.L.I. — 19 Apr. 1941

[Signature only — no verse]

[K.S.L.I. = King's Shropshire Light Infantry. The 8th Battalion was a wartime service battalion.]

[Signature and unit details only — no verse]

[Brief signature entry. Unit details partially illegible. Cosford confirms hospital context.]

Life

Life is a book of volumes three,
The past, the present, the
yet to be.
The past is hidden and stored away
The present we are living day by day
The third of the books of volumes three
Is hid from view
God holds the key.

[A thoughtful verse on time and faith. Coombs also signed page 29 on the same date — two entries from the same man on the same day.]

It's easy enough to be pleasant
when life goes on like a song,
But the man worth while,
Is the man with a smile
When everything goes — dead wrong.

[Second entry from Coombs on the same date as page 28. A popular verse of American origin, widely circulated in this period.]

When you're feeling dull & grumpy
And your little world's all wrong,
Ask the Angel with the paint box
Please to send a sketch along.

Instantly she'll mix her colours
Gold & white & heavenly blue
Paint upon the walls of fancy
Lovely things God holds for You.

[A gentle, spiritual verse. RAF Halton was a major training and medical station in Buckinghamshire.]

Don't worry!
It may not happen!!

[Brief and cheerful — a classic wartime sentiment. The nickname 'Felix' in quotation marks suggests a ward or squadron nickname, possibly after Felix the Cat.]

[The outstanding entry in the book — five stanzas composed entirely for Margaret]

Who tucks us in our little beds,
And pillows round our weary heads,
And o'er our woes a tear-drop sheds?

OUR NOTLEY.

Who gives us pills out right and left,
And deadly potions from the chest,
Which need but time to do the rest?

OUR NOTLEY.

Who wakes us in the dead of night
To see that temp and pulse are right,
Then (kind of her) puts out the light?

OUR NOTLEY.

Who's the solarium's guiding light?
Who fills the ward with radiance bright?
(Is all this flannelling quite polite?)

OUR NOTLEY.

We'll be quite loathe to say goodbye,
And obvious is the reason why,
Our future thoughts will often fly

TO OUR NOTLEY.

[Five stanzas composed entirely about Margaret, structured as a comic hymn with the refrain 'OUR NOTLEY.' Describes her night nursing duties, pill rounds, solarium, warmth, and apparent talent for charming the patients ('flannelling'). Written by A.C.J. Stanley, an airman at Cosford, December 1941.]

Dedication: "To a Lady of the Snow Country"

Hope springs eternal etc.
So I'm hoping to meet many
more just like you.

[A warm personal message from a Canadian sergeant pilot. Timmins, Ontario is a mining town in northern Ontario — 'the Snow Country.' The dedication may allude to Margaret's Canadian heritage (her father was born in Kamloops, BC). Tommy Stonehouse signs himself 'Stony' — a typical aircrew nickname.]

Page 34 Johnny ('I've had some') No. one den — Grantham, Lincs · [final entry]

Birds and fools fly by day —
Owls and b---y fools fly by night.

[A brief comic verse. The dashes in 'b---y' represent 'bloody'. This is the same 'Johnny' who signed page 17 ('I used to be a pilot', Cosford S.4, 9/4/42). His reappearance at Grantham charts his recovery and onward posting. This is the final entry in the bound book.]

Loose Sheets

Five loose sheets were found with the autograph book. They are not bound pages and were not part of the original book sequence. Each is transcribed below. They are designated LS-01 through LS-05 in filing order.

LS-01 A.S. (Canada — Remington), signed 'Slim' — [No date]

To a Friend

She's jolly and fine — that nurse of mine
With her Irish smile glowing all the while.
Sure it's no idle rumour her saving sense of humour
Will make you forget yourself to smile smile smile.

With hair as blonde as any Swede's
No respect of religions or creeds,
A turned-up nose, ~~[strikethrough]~~ a provoking pout
Two eyes thru windows looking out.

An accent vile, a heart of gold
Might step up so I've been told.
But take a tip & save your dough
The sad sad end — I told you so.

In Memoriam.

, Du,

/ Slim.

A.S. (Canada — Remington).

[Two linked verses written about Margaret. The first describes her warmly — jolly, Irish smile, sense of humour. The second is more playful: blonde hair, turned-up nose, 'an accent vile, a heart of gold.' Signed 'Slim' — a ward nickname. 'A.S. (Canada — Remington)' — Remington, Ontario; another Canadian contributor consistent with RCAF presence at Cosford.]

LS-02 Doctors and Nurses [unsigned collectively] — Charing Cross Hospital, London W.C.2 · [No date]

Typed on Charing Cross Hospital headed notepaper. Farewell poem.

Oh, Nursie dear, accept these pants,
And with them come our grateful thanks
For many "favours" (?) nobly done,
And many hours cheered with your fun.

On night duty, thanks for the eggs.
(We hope that these will fit your legs!)
Blaud's pills we know you do not like,
Especially those one has to strike,
But pants you surely will admire —
These were so awkward to acquire,
The largest ever made.

Your urine stand with Benedict's
We often have bespattered,
But when you scold we always know
It hasn't really mattered.

And so, dear Nurse, we say "Farewell",
Doctors and Nurses wish you well —
Perhaps you'd like these pants to sell!!

[A farewell poem typed on Charing Cross Hospital notepaper, written collectively by ward doctors and nurses. This places Margaret at Charing Cross Hospital, London W.C.2 — a posting not otherwise recorded. Medical in-jokes: Blaud's pills (iron supplements), Benedict's reagent (urine sugar test), night duty eggs (Margaret brought food for the team). The 'pants' are women's knickers, described as 'the largest ever made' — a ward joke delivered with affection.]

LS-03 Tommy Atkins [almost certainly a pseudonym] — [No date]

Salutation: Dear Nurse,

In your care I'll leave there two,
Because dear Nurse they remind me of you,
When you go to bed at night
Tuck them in, just like Nurse White,
Nurse Mason too was sweet and kind,
Give one to Leo, I'm sure she won't mind.

[A brief warm verse accompanying a gift of two items. 'Tommy Atkins' was the generic name for the archetypal British soldier — the writer clearly did not want to be identified, or was being playful. Names three colleagues: Nurse White, Nurse Mason, and 'Leo' — the most specific named nursing colleagues in the entire collection.]

Because I am your friend

Because I am your friend I strive to be
All that you could ever seek in me
That you may find that I'm your companion true
Your play mate and your wise adviser too
That you may come to me in hours of need
Knowing that with each thought, word and deed
Whatever it be I still shall sympathise
And understand and see it with your eyes
In hours of Triumph I shall with you smile
And urge you on to all the deeds worth while
Constant & true wherever the way may wend
Your hand in mine because I am your Friend

[A carefully composed twelve-line poem on friendship, the most earnestly written of all the loose sheets. Francis A. Hare gives his full name and Army service number (2188290), Royal Engineers — suggesting a patient who wanted to be precisely identified. The poem is sincere in tone and may reflect a genuine personal connection.]

LS-05 a.g.h. [initials only] — [No date]

Dedication: To Sweet Peggie

She is the fairest of the fair,
A golden sheen is in her hair,
Her voice is soft & gentle.

Sweet girl power life before you
And many will adore you.
You've taken up a noble task,
Your health & strength
In prayer we ask.

With happy years before you
To Sweet Peggie

[Dedicated 'To Sweet Peggie' — Margaret's nickname. Describes her golden blonde hair and soft, gentle voice — consistent with LS-01 ('hair as blonde as any Swede's'). Signed with initials 'a.g.h.' only. Written in a slightly unsteady hand, suggesting an older or unwell writer.]

Summary of All Contributors

Listed in page order with rank/unit and date where known.

- p. 02 Margaret E. Notley — Owner's inscription · 1940
- p. 03 Mary Mimlust [uncertain] — 'Finlandia' · 1940
- p. 04 Elizabeth G. Eustace-Duchetts, V.A.D. — 29/2/40
- p. 05 Allan B. Booth — 21/2/40
- p. 06 Frederick Parker-Smith — [date unknown]
- p. 07 Margaret C. Notley [own entry] — Hythe · 1940
- p. 08 E. Barker, London Irish Rifles — 7.6.40
- p. 09 Ab Marshall, 13th Batt Royal Fusiliers — 20-6-40
- p. 10 S.A. Bryant, Pte 2842024, R.A.S.C. — 20/6/40
- p. 11 Pte J. Henry, S/158221, R.A.S.C. — 20/6/40
- p. 12 R.S. Quinton, Royal Horse Guards — 20/6/1940
- p. 13 Rfm H. Murray Miles, K.R.R.C. — 20-6-1940
- pp. 14–15 Jim Asserstine, R.C.A.F. — Nov 12/42 · 'Laugh' poem
- p. 16 M. Ahraens [uncertain] — c.1940 or 1942
- p. 17 Johnny ('I used to be a pilot') — Cosford S.4 · 9/4/42
- p. 18 A.T. Edgar, L.A.C. R.A.F. — 8th Dec. 1941 · French verse
- p. 19 E.P. Lavender — Datchet, Bucks · Nov. 1941
- pp. 20–21 B. Smith, Sgt. i/c R.A.F. — Cosford · c.1941–42
- p. 22 Clive Bolsby — Canada
- p. 23 George Pierre Taidoltan [uncertain] — 53rd Training Regt · 1/3/40
- p. 24 [Name unclear] — Canada
- p. 25 Don [surname unclear] — Canada
- p. 26 [Surname unclear], 8th Bn K.S.L.I. — 19 Apr. 1941
- p. 27 Jack Davis — Cosford · 20/[4 or 6]/41
- p. 28 Wt. Coombs, Sgt. — Cosford · 12.11.42 · 'Life' poem
- p. 29 Wt. Coombs, Sgt. — Cosford · 12.11.42 · second entry
- p. 30 E.M. Church, P.M. R.A.F. — Halton · 13.1.41
- p. 31 Burt ('Felix!') — Cosford · 17/11/41
- p. 32 A.C.J. Stanley — Cosford · Dec 1941 · 'OUR NOTLEY'
- p. 33 Sgt Pilot Tommy Stonehouse ('Stony') — Timmins, Ont. Canada · 27/7/42
- p. 34 Johnny ('I've had some') — Grantham, Lincs · final entry
- LS-01 A.S. (Canada — Remington) / 'Slim' — [No date] · 'To a Friend'
- LS-02 Doctors and Nurses [unsigned] — Charing Cross Hospital · farewell poem
- LS-03 Tommy Atkins [pseudonym] — [No date]
- LS-04 Francis A. Hare, Royal Engineers — [No date] · 'Because I am your friend'
- LS-05 a.g.h. [initials only] — [No date] · 'To Sweet Peggie'

Loose Sheets — Summary Observations

Five loose sheets supplement the autograph book. Together they extend the picture of Margaret's nursing career in two important ways.

First, Letter LS-02 (Charing Cross Hospital) confirms a London posting not previously recorded. Margaret worked on a ward at Charing Cross Hospital, W.C.2, where she was known for night duty, her eggs, her scolding, and her sense of humour. The Benedict's reagent reference suggests a diabetic or medical ward. The date of this posting is not known.

Second, the loose sheets provide the most personal physical descriptions of Margaret in the entire collection: blonde hair with a golden sheen (LS-01, LS-05), a turned-up nose (LS-01), an Irish smile (LS-01), a soft and gentle voice (LS-05), and the nickname 'Peggie' (LS-05).

Nurse White, Nurse Mason, and 'Leo' (LS-03) are the only named nursing colleagues in the collection.

The autograph book covers Margaret's UK service (Hythe 1940; RAF Halton 1941; RAF Hospital Cosford 1941–1942) prior to her overseas posting to No. 2 RAF General Hospital, Maison Carrée, Algiers. The book contains no entries from Algiers, meaning it was likely set aside before she left for North Africa.

The 'OUR NOTLEY' poem on page 32 (A.C.J. Stanley, Dec 1941) is the most personally significant entry in the book.