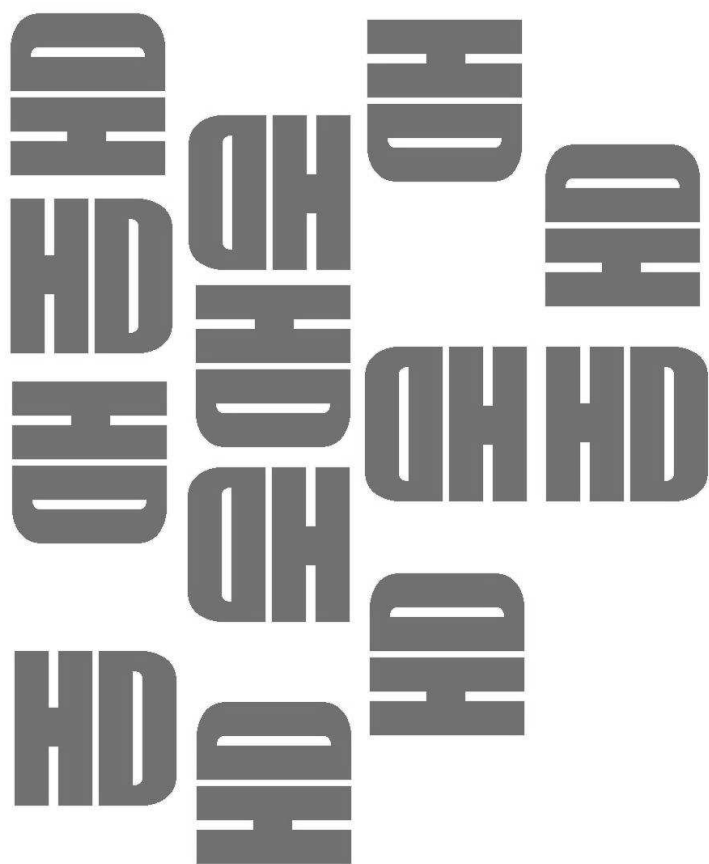


Diary 1944



Diary 1944

a return ticket to the past



Carla van Beers
huisdetective.nl

© Carla van Beers, The Hague
Cover: Collage by Nisha Alberti, London
Translation: Nisha Alberti
First print 2019
Second print 2026
Production by Huisdetective.nl

ISBN: 9789402189025

No part of this publication may be reproduced and/or made public by means of printing, photocopying, microfilm, internet or in any other way, without the prior written consent of the author.

“I know it is going
to happen soon
it’s inevitable”

9-6-1944

Dear Reader	9
Diary 1944	11
The Farm	39
Flying Robots	68
Wooden Figurine	92
Some of the Others.....	106
Identity	129
Elements of fiction.....	148

Dear Reader

In this book, you will find the transcription of a diary, written in the Forties of the previous century. I had found this treasure in a display cabinet in a second-hand shop in the Piet Heinstraat in the Hague, the Netherlands. The small red canvas diary had caught my eye and I asked if I could take it out and have a look. When opening the cover, stamped with gold-coloured letters that read “Diary 1944”, I found it held a succinct review of the year, offering an account of one day, written in English, on each page. Every day started with the weather and ended with a tally of the number and type of eggs laid that day. I quickly got the impression that the diarist must have lived somewhere in the English countryside, but there was no name to indicate who wrote it. After I had leafed through most of its pages, I decided that I was going to buy it. Not because the pages had been full of interesting details (quite the opposite), but because it was full of mystery.

How did an English diary, written in the Second World War, end up in the Hague in a shop selling second-hand things like tableware, furniture, books, and now this diary? Did its author have Dutch relatives or had she moved to the Netherlands? Was she even a she? Who was this anonymous person who diligently wrote in this diary every day of 1944, and where was his or her home? These were all questions that popped into my head while I was at the checkout with my purchase. Not only having a fountain-penned diary in my hands, but a challenge too.

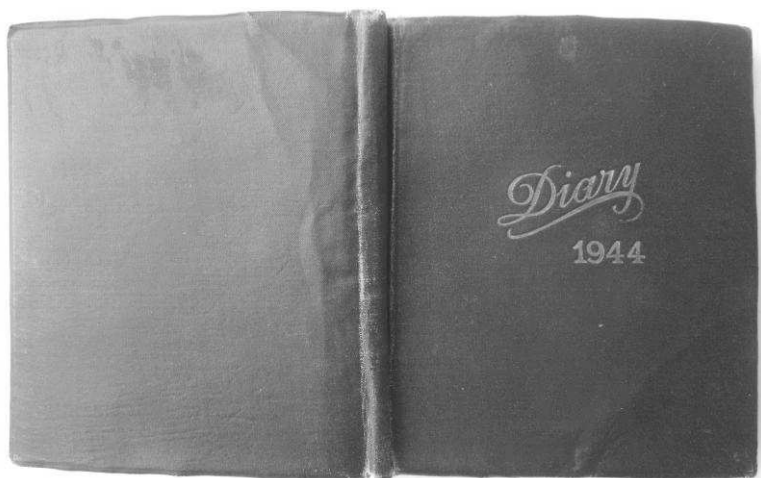
Dear Reader, join me on this journey and take part in the process of unfolding the diary's mystery. You will witness lively methods of research, you will see struggles, successes and shortcomings in a chronological order and eventually the outcome of this extraordinary investigation. So in this book you will find two stories: the historical tale of a diary and the trail of my search.

This is it, in a nutshell or maybe there is more to it?

Oh, yes, if we don't manage to find the answers I will continue to write and find a way to end an unfinished story. We will see. I will do my best to figure out who the diarist is and to discover the place where he or she lived. Once I have a name or an address we can move on to the next step: identifying the main character and trying to trace descendants in the hopes of finding out more about the author's life story in a time of war.

Enjoy the slow reading, let's dig into the past, we will begin with the transcription of the diary on a weekly basis.

1 January 2017, The Hague



Diary 1944

Saturday, January 1 An ordinary Jan: day, with its mixture of weather. Arrived back from my brief stay at St. Albans between 2-3 p.m. After a feed, very badly needed, fed stock + locked up.

10 Eggs: D5, H, BR5

Sunday, January 2 A windy day, but not cold + no rain. Burnt some hedge cuttings, very damp ones in the morning. After a very good lunch of goose + wine with their essentials rested during afternoon.

Had a heavy fit of depression + was none too cordial. N + C left for London at 9 p.m. Upset R. badly, feel sorry. 5 Eggs: D2, H, BR3

Monday, January 3 A lousy day, trying to rain, wind + a heavy dullness. After chores to E + Sev: to take a peep at a slow + dull market, collect a [...] of very necessary potatoes at a place I wot of. After feeding inner man with R at The Chequers, back to farm. 8 Eggs: D3, H, BR5

Tuesday, January 4 A cold day, but fine + bright. Got to work at burning all hedge cuttings, a long and hard job. Flints are going next Monday so went across to the Gibbons + arranged to collect our bread from there, also to Froggett who is going to let us have milk. A load off our minds. I am going to miss the Flints when they are gone. 8 Eggs: D3, H, BR5

Wednesday, January 5 A heavy frost, but a lovely wintery day. Hedging all day, hard at it + with a little help from R. I accomplished my day's objective. Killed + partly plucked a Guinea fowl + a goose. Gave tea to Mrs. Flint + Peggy. 9 Eggs: D4, H, BR5

Thursday, January 6 A dullish, windy but dry day. Helped R in house, then to E for shopping. Paid for disc + collar for Susan at Rices. Got back at 1 p.m. finished plucking birds, fired some hedge cuttings + cleaned out some of the stock. a busy, but on the whole a satisfactory day. 7 Eggs: D4, H-, BR3

Friday, January 7 A mild almost spring like day. Cleaned out stock + stockyard. Birch's arrived next door, today, with a couple to view cottage. Separated 3 geese + gander for breeding, at least we hope that is what has been done. 9 Eggs: D2, H1, BR6

1 to 7 January 1944: Let's call the author of the diary 'X' for now. Based on this description of daily life on the farm, I assume X is a woman. It's not clear what kind of farm it is, but I do know they keep poultry, because each day she counts how many eggs were laid, and what type of egg it was. D must stand for duck, and H for hens, but I'm not yet sure what BR could be. X is also keeping an eye on house supplies. Several other people join our story in this week, and they will become pillars of support in my quest to identify the writer. X does not give it away very easily by using initials. She mentions N + C *left for London*, to E + Sev. And there is someone called R. But she is also giving full names, like Gibbons *arranged to collect our bread*, Froggett *is going to let us have milk*, Mrs Flint + Peggy, Susan, Birch *next door*.

The year 1944 starts with *a heavy fit of depression*. It's an engaging beginning, *was none too cordial* and *upset R. badly, feel sorry*.

Saturday, January 8 A dull day + some rain.

Chores in the morning + to E. for shopping, a visit to the O. H. at H. + the K + Q. Later a game of snooker at the Swan. Home at 2.30 rested + had tea, then fed stock. One of my deep depressions has been around all day. 9 Eggs: D3, H1, BR 5

Sunday, January 9 A dull day, rain + wind. Did the usual chores + a couple of hours at hedging. Into dinner with our goose. Rested afternoon. W down on his usual Sunday visit. Left at about 9 p.m. as usual. A duck that has been queer was killed today.

6 Eggs: D2, H1, BR3

Monday, January 10 A dull + cold day, looks like a freeze tonight. Chores + then E + Sev: market lunch at The Chequers + then to the Plaza for quite a good show. Back to the farm to feed animals O.K. Made first journey to the Gibbons to collect our own bread.

6 Eggs: D3, H1, BR2

Tuesday, January 11 A very bloody day, rain + lots of it. Did some repairing of Fences until both R + I got soaked to the skin. Came in early afternoon. Had some food + a dry-out. Hodge's men came with 2 loads of cinders to finish off the road.

9 Eggs: D5, H, BR4

Wednesday, January 12 Another very dull day, although warmer. Chores + the killing + plucking of

a couple of geese. Hedging later. An expert of the Surrey W. A. Committee came today + examined our wheat. It is O.K. He left taking samples of Oak Tree field + the Home field for analysis.

12 Eggs: D6, H1, BR5

Thursday, January 13 Weather as yesterday. A hurried run through the chores + then to E. for shopping. Later in pouring rain put up a length of barbed wire to try + curb the antics of the colt. Ended day very tired + very depressed.

6 Eggs: D3, H1, BR2

Friday, January 14 A lovely day. Quite warm sunshine. Stock pens, houses + yard thoroughly cleaned out. Helped R in + around house. The new Tenants of The Birch's moved in next door today. Rather a Surprise. There is a 1 year old baby. Hope they like + get away with it.

8 Eggs: D4, H1, BR3

8 to 14 January 1944: The author's handwriting is consistent, and generally easy to read. There are only 15 lines to each page so her writing is usually on the small side. On some days it's larger or sometimes it's messier. Her penmanship is a bit erratic; sometimes it leans to the left, other times it's perfectly straight, or it leans to the right. Her handwriting is distinguishable by the way she liberally crosses her t's with long horizontal slashes. I wonder what a graphologist would have to say on the matter. It's not always easy to tell where a sentence ends, and her use of capital letters is inconsistent. How old would she be? I have no idea.

She probably has friends or relatives near St. Albans because on 1 January she writes that she's returned from St Albans.

That's a small city in Hertfordshire, around 30 kilometres outside of London. She seems very depressed, maybe her husband was drafted into the army? It's 1944 and England is still at war against Nazi Germany, but there's no mention of this in the diary yet.

Does she, single-handedly, have to do all the work on the farm? Luckily she has R who takes care of the house. But R.'s existence in this story makes me doubt my initial assumption. Could X be a man, and R. be his wife, or perhaps his housekeeper? That would be a better fit for the traditional gender roles in the middle of the 20th century. And who is W, who visits on Sundays? This week X gave away more clues about the farm and I've learned they have their own wheat so they must grow some crops at least. They also have a piece of land with oak trees and a *home field*. I have been told that this usually is a meadow, closely situated to the farmhouse.

The farm must be in the vicinity of E. because that's where she goes to do her shopping. In around 100 km circumference of St. Albans there are several places starting with an E. It could be: East Hyde, Egham, Epsom, Effingham, Edgeware, Edenbridge. In one of these places I must be able to find The Swan, The Chequers and The Plaza, because she's written about those. But before I follow up on that, I'll continue reading the diary to look for more clues.

Saturday, January 15 Foggy all day. Coldish. Such a contrast from yesterday. Chores till 11.30 a.m.

Then to E. for our usual Sat: Shopping + a drink with C + G. B. at the old house at Home + K + Q later to Swan + a game of snooker with G.N. + I won on the black. Back to the farm + its routine. Killed another goose. Muchie is not at all well. Muchie died in front of our fire this evening. 7 Eggs: D5, H, BR2

Sunday, January 16 Weather foggy + very cold. Plucked goose for supper. Went with R + N.W. to Mayfield + brought back 2 breeding geese from a Gen: Fuller .N.W. has just left. It's 9 p.m. I don't envy him his rotten journey. N.W. had to come back after all + he got bogged. 14 Eggs: D9, H1, BR4

Monday, January 17 A milder, but still a dull + cold day. R. not feeling too well, stuck to house + farm chores. Snow + Ball are now in their temporary quarters, as a prelude to becoming one of the farm family. 5 Eggs: D4, H, BR1

Tuesday, January 18 More dullness + a little more warmth was our weather today. A good day spent on hedging + quite a bit of progress made. Not altogether a bad day. BR's are slacking off in their laying, but the ducks are going ahead. 9 Eggs: D7, H-, BR2

Wednesday, January 19 Wet, muggish + dull day. Another full day at hedging which finishes boundary hedge to Cobhambury. R + I plucked 2 more geese killed this morning. 10 Eggs: D7, H-, BR3

Thursday, January 20 A fair day + some sunshine very welcome. As I am off for a couple of days rest at St. Albans, R + I have been in a rush getting house + stock buildings cleaned up. Went to E at noon for midweek shopping + managed a very good game of snooker with W. Ashley. The Postman came today + is going to tackle our numerous rabbits, all being well. 10 Eggs: D8, H1, BR1

Friday, January 21 8 Eggs: D7, BR1

15 to 21 January 1944: *Cobhambury* is a new geographical clue, but I don't know if it's a place name, a neighbourhood or a street name. Google tells me there's a Cobhambury Wood in Kent and a Cobhambury Farm Stud in Edenbridge. A few more searches and I discover that there's still a pub called *The Swan* in Edenbridge.

For now, I'm guessing that X's farm is not far from Edenbridge, somewhere in the district of Sevenoaks in Kent. I must change my mind about X's gender. It's clear that X is a man – a man who regularly frequents The Swan to play snooker and meet up with people he knows there. On Saturday he mentions that *Muchie* died by the fire. Muchie is probably a dog or a cat.

I wonder whether the diary is just a daily log for the farm, or does X have another motivation for writing?

Saturday, January 22 Eggs: D8, BR2

Sunday, January 23 Pleasant weather during the day, but a galish evening + night. Returned from my short stay with Mollie at St. Albans. Found one of the white kittens ill + the loss of 2 guinea fowl. I was presented with a very wizard pair of slippers (house) by Caroline. 8 Eggs: D6, H, BR2

Monday, January 24 A fine, but coldish morning ending in a foul afternoon + evening. One of the white kittens taken to the Sev: Vet: was put to sleep at his emphasized advice. Got back from Sev: at about 4 p.m. hastily fed in pouring rain + wind + got in to a bit of comfort. 8 Eggs: D6, H, BR2