

*The Manor House, Ogbourne St George –
Address and letterhead used in the wartime deception,
“The Man Who Never Was” by Ewen Montagu*

In 1943, a plan was devised to mislead the Germans about Allied invasion plans in the Mediterranean. A team led by Lieut.-Commander Montagu arranged to drop a body in the sea off Huelva, in southern Spain, purporting to be that of a messenger carrying a letter from General Nye to General Alexander and one from Lord Louis Mountbatten to Admiral Cunningham, both indicating that the Allies were targeting Sardinia. The operation was successful in that a substantial number of German troops were moved away from Sicily, which was where the actual invasion took place.

In order to make the deception seem genuine, a ‘real’ person had to be fabricated and personal items placed on the body in addition to the official papers that ‘Major William Martin’ carried. The following extract from Ewen Montagu’s book describes the part played by the Manor House in the story:

.... First of all we needed a suitable snapshot of Pam, Major Martin’s fiancée. The scheme which we devised was to ask the more attractive girls in our various offices to lend us a snapshot of themselves for use in a photographic identity parade—the sort of thing where the photographs of one or two suspects are shuffled in among those of a number of perfectly innocent persons and the “witness” is asked to pick out the one of the person whom he had seen; we asked for a variegated lot, and got quite a collection. We eventually chose a charming photograph and returned the remainder. The subject of the photograph was working in the War Office and, as she had access to “Top Secret” papers, we were able to tell her that we wanted to use the photograph as that of someone’s fictitious fiancée in a deception, and she gave her permission.

None of us had felt up to writing the love letters—after all, ours was not the feminine point of view—and it was a bit difficult to ask a girl whether she could write a first-rate paean of love. So we asked a girl working in one of the offices whether she could get some girl to do it. She took on the job, but never would tell us the name of the girl who produced the two magnificent letters that Major Martin was to carry with him.

I had decided that the first of these should be written on my brother-in-law’s notepaper, for I was sure that no German could resist the “Englishness” of such an address as “The Manor House, Ogbourne St. George, Marlborough, Wiltshire”; this letter, dated “Sunday 18th,” ran as follows:

*The Manor House,
Ogbourne St. George,
Marlborough, Wiltshire.
Telephone: Ogbourne St. George 242.
Sunday, 18th.*

I do think dearest that seeing people like you off at railway stations is one of the poorer forms of sport. A train going out can leave a howling great gap in ones life & one has to try madly—& quite in vain—to fill it with all the things one used to enjoy a whole five weeks ago. That lovely golden day we spent together—oh! I know it has been said before, but if only time could sometimes stand still just for a minute—But that line of thought is too pointless. Pull your socks up Pam & dont be a silly little fool.

Your letter made me feel slightly better—but I shall get horribly conceited if you go on saying things like that about me—they’re utterly unlike ME, as I’m afraid you’ll soon find out. Here I am for the weekend in this divine place with Mummy & Jane being too sweet & understanding the whole time, bored beyond words & panting for Monday so that I can get back to the old grindstone again. What an idiotic waste!

Bill darling, do let me know as soon as you get fixed & can make some more plans, & dont please let them send you off into the blue the horrible way they do nowadays—now that we’ve found each other out of the whole world, I dont think I could bear it—

*All my love,
PAM.*

THE MANOR HOUSE
OGBOURNE ST. GEORGE
MARLBOROUGH
WILTSHIRE
TELEPHONE: OGBOURNE ST. GEORGE 242

Sunday 18th

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Pam's first letter.