

Elizabeth Crofton
(3 October 1919-8 August 2016)

by Philip Mansel, Sylvia McClinton, Lizzie Loring, and Maxine Humphries

Elizabeth Madeline Nina Mansel was born in London on 3 October 1919. The family moved around. In 1924 they were living at Post Green, Lytchett Minster (where her sister Felicite was born. She could remember her great-grandmother Mrs Cecil Chapman, an early supporter of the suffragettes, as was her grandmother, Mildred Ella Mansel, who was sent to prison in 1911 for breaking the windows of the War Office.

Around 1924, they moved to Smedmore, near Kimmeridge, Dorset, where the family lived until 1940. She could remember that she had to walk on arrival, behind her parents' car which was pulled all the way up the drive by villagers from Kimmeridge.

Aunt Liz, as we all called her, had very long white-blonde hair. It was so long she could sit on it. It was usually in a plait.

She adored horses and riding. She once told her niece Sylvia that her favourite fantasy as a child was imagining that she was a Viking princess! She was educated at home, and later shared a governess at Whatcombe with her cousins June and Trish Pleydell-Railston.

She had 2 seasons as a Deb., in 1938 & 1939, and was at the ball where her brother, my father John Mansel, met his future wife Damaris Hyde-Thomson.

She came from a military family. Her father had been wounded in the First World War as an officer in the Rifle Brigade. As soon as war was declared in 1939, with her generation's strong sense of duty, she joined the ATS, the auxiliary territorial service, the women's branch of the army.

While she was in Bristol, she took unexploded bombs out of the city in her own car, in order for them to be defused in safety. She could remember the sigh of relief in her family when they learnt that the Ministry of Defence would requisition Tyneham for military purposes, but not Smedmore. In 1944 all three sisters, Elizabeth, Felicite, and Pamela attended the funeral of their mother Sylvia, born Campbell, at Thames Ditton, where the Campbells had lived, wearing the uniforms of the different branches of the armed forces in which they were serving: ATS, WRENS and WAAF respectively

After the War, she visited her uncle Sir Ronald Campbell at the British Embassy in Cairo. She lived for a long time with her aunt the actress Juliet Mansel at 33 Lower Belgrave Street, and later looked after her in old age with devotion. She got a job at St James's Palace, in the Ascot Office. She could remember the crest-fallen look of the young men whose applications for the Royal Enclosure had been turned down by the Earl Marshal.

She married Sir Malby Crofton in 1961, but divorced him in 1966.

After her divorce, she often visited her sister, Felicite in Winnipeg, Canada and also travelled to Russia, Cyprus and Belgium where she had briefly worked as a travel agent. She then got a job at Queen's Secretarial College, in Queen's Gate, South Kensington, where she ran the Model Office, teaching the young secretaries how to run an office.

She lived in 19 Margareta Terrace, Chelsea where for a time she had young girls doing the Season to live with her. Then she shared it with her sister Pam and brother-in-law Nicky McClintock.

When the lease on Margareta Terrace ran out, she had a bed-sit in Queen's Secretarial College for a few years, until she retired.

She then bought a house in Wareham, Dorset, near the family home Smedmore, which was then lived in by her brother Major John Mansel, and joined St John's Ambulance Brigade in Dorchester as a very able administrator for some years. She had a very strong Christian faith and went to Holy Communion at St Martin's on the Walls every Wednesday. She loved that church and had helped prevent it being deconsecrated.

She was an excellent aunt, highly intelligent, loved and beloved by all her family. She loved life and was always interested in people. Woe betide them if they misbehaved or disappointed her - she soon let them know with a look. She was enthusiastic, sociable and cheerful and loved meeting new people and finding out all about them.

She was fiercely independent and loved technology and gadgets. In her diary of 1985 her first reflection on landing in Canada was "lots of lovely gadgetry things that make my eyes glisten". Who had one of the first email addresses in the family? She did.

She was always elegant, smart and appropriately dressed. Her attention to detail was also evident at work, where she was organised, efficient and proactive in a quiet and undemonstrative manner.

After St John's Ambulance Brigade in Dorchester, she worked for the parish office in Wareham. She loved amateur dramatics and could portray characters as diverse as a 'bag lady' and a member of the royal family. She also did Meals on Wheels until she was in her nineties. She never considered retiring, despite comments such as "you're a bit old for this game aren't you?", as she knew she could be useful. She also volunteered to be recorded reading books for the blind.

Maxine Humphries writes:

I have been asked to give some information about Elizabeth as I knew her, and I have contacted others who have knowledge of her connections with the Church in Wareham:

What a special, lovely lady! Very sad she has passed away. I thought of her and loved her just like a mother. For some years I worked with Elizabeth as a volunteer in the Wareham Parish Office. She worked many hours there as a volunteer and managed the office so well. I joined the Office as a volunteer in about 1998 and Elizabeth took me under her wing! She was the one who asked me to research for the Flower Festival information booklets about the

subjects depicted in the floral displays. At first, I felt nervous to do this but I continue to do it and enjoy it until this day. She was the one who got me into it!!

I shall remember Elizabeth as someone with a wonderful and wicked sense of humour. Everyone I've spoken to recently about Elizabeth has commented about her wicked sense of humour – she made one laugh as well as put you at ease! I smile even now! I've asked people who have been volunteers in the Parish Office over the years whether they remember when Elizabeth began to work there as a volunteer. Jo Johnson was working in the Office when Elizabeth first began working there and we think it was in the early 1990s, perhaps from 1993. It was probably after she retired from her position with St John's Ambulance. She was also very much involved with St Martin-on-the-Walls Church and I do remember seeing her walking regularly to be on duty for Guardians and Guides there. Whilst working in the Parish Office, Elizabeth worked many, many hours. She was an unsung hero. She is and will be much missed by us all. She was a very private person and fiercely independent, keeping her own private feelings to herself.

She sometimes talked about her family and family history, which we found very interesting and sometimes amusing. We remember particularly about the forebear who, she said, was a highwayman! [She could also remember children's parties before the war, at which the Digby children's nanny - 'Nanny Digby' - took precedence of all others]. Elizabeth was also very much involved with the Priory Players, which was ecumenical and began binding the churches together in Wareham. She was an excellent reader and read poetry so well and with feeling! She was a great actress! The Priory Players started during the 1980s, when June Benham had the idea to hold a Passion Play in the Parish and Margaret Mulraine (later ordained the Reverend Margaret Mulraine at Salisbury Cathedral in 1994) formed the idea of The Priory Players. Elizabeth was also a member of the Mothers' Union.'

She loved the novels of Georgette Heyer and Hester Chapman, and history books, especially about the Duke of Wellington and British victories. She retained her energy and enjoyment of life into her 90's, visiting London for the theatre, or churches and country-houses with friends. She was a member of NADFAS and the Art Fund. She generally finished the Daily Telegraph cross-word. Unsentimental, good company, self-sacrificing, she tried to express the truth about a person or situation. For many people, from many walks of life, Wareham will not be the same without her.