

## Elizabeth Hannay

1712.

During the course of our lives, we are all influenced, either directly or indirectly, by a wide variety of people. Within the first group are our parents who invariably want the best for their children – a sentiment which is sometimes not always fully appreciated! Our Schoolteachers are also a source of influence as were, certainly for people of my generation – Clergy, Youth Fellowship Groups, along with the Scouts, Guides and Cadet Forces.

Indirect influences are more difficult to discern and we may not recognise them at the time but I now appreciated that my being here today is directly due to Elizabeth Hannay. I have already recounted how we first met Elizabeth in 1973 and during the course of subsequent years, the bonds of friendship deepened, for Elizabeth kept a very open house at the *Villa Solidor* at which one was always welcome to stay. Such visits were not, however, without risk – one soon learnt **never** to appear for a meal in open-toed sandals for her dog *Chouan* would sit quietly under the table and then suddenly snap at your big toe (Gareth would not have lasted very long). Indeed, I was recalling this with a member of the *Groupe Oecumenique* at our recent meeting and she remembers getting up from a meal only to find that the leather of her shoes had been almost chewed through! Or again, Elizabeth would announce *'We are going to cocktails this evening with Her Serene highness so and so'*. I was on holiday with only a sweater and slacks but luckily knew a Frenchman of my size who had an impeccable taste in English tailoring and so I duly appeared in clothing I could never have afforded to buy!

Although Elizabeth often moved in exalted circles – she met personally with Pope John XXIII on no less than three occasions – she did not just mix with 'the great and the good'. At the back of the Church, by the entrance there is the memorial to the Clark family who, father and son, Albert and Johnny, had been vergers at the Church here since it was opened in 1871. Although Johnny Clark had died by the mid 1970's, Mrs. Clark was still alive living here in Dinard on a very modest pension. Very discretely Elizabeth saw, through the Chaplains and Social Services, that she was properly provided for. Or again, she was closely involved with an Organisation to help young people with alcohol/drug addiction. Some of the people she had contact with I would have hesitated to have admitted into my house. But Elizabeth had no such inhibitions – but then she had seen active service during the war with the O.S.S. (the American Office of the Secret Service, in which she rose to the rank of Major – for she was an American citizen) in Burma and China which gave her, given her background, an aura of authority which was coupled with an infinite trust in the ultimate goodness of human nature.

But if I am here as a direct result of Elizabeth Hannay **so are you!** If you doubt the veracity of this just go a few miles up the Rance to Dinan where you can see the former Anglican Church – I say *see* because it is an empty boarded up shell! If we have a flourishing Church here, if you are here, it is due primarily to Elizabeth. Why? Because of two things which she did immediately after her return to Dinard after the war. Firstly, she made sure that the unoccupied building was heated during the winter months, no doubt at her own expense. This preserved the fabric of the Church. Secondly, she offered hospitality at the *Villa Solidor* to Priests to come and take services on an occasional basis – these included family friends and relatives and, above all, Geoffrey Curtis of the Community of the

Resurrection, who had grown up here in Dinard with Elizabeth – his commemorative tablet is also at the back of the Church. Keeping the fabric in good order, subsidising the finances, providing for Chaplains during the summer months – although Elizabeth was not alone she was the driving force. In a confidential letter, written by the retiring Diocesan Bishop to his successor (I think the date must be about 1952) we read:

**'In Dinard you will find yourself in another world. (After describing some members of the congregation the letter continues) The best of the whole bunch is Elizabeth Hannay who is a great peacemaker, tremendously efficient and can be trusted absolutely. If ever there are any difficulties I should never hesitate to consult her. The sexton, Johnny Clark, is a great character. He can be awkward if he takes a dislike to someone but Elizabeth Hannay can always handle him'.**

From a series of summer services taken by relatives and friends, we have Alan Charters and his choir coming across at Easter; a rota of Visiting Chaplains, principally Donald Pankhurst, develops and we arrive at the present with a permanent Chaplain. It is, therefore, right and fitting that we should honour the memory of Elizabeth Hannay for, as Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote, 'It is memory which makes us human' (although he did not put it quite as simply as that!). Also, we owe it to Elizabeth to continue the work which she began in keeping St. Bartholomew's alive – this is a trust which we – all of us – have inherited and, pray God, may be worthy of.

Elizabeth Hannay's funeral service took place here on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2002. We were about to begin the service, indeed we were on the way out to meet the cortege

when I noticed a black-suited clergyman sitting near the back of the Church. It was the Archbishop of Rennes, Monseigneur Saint Macary, who had come, in a purely personal role, to pay his respects to Elizabeth. He was persuaded to come and sit in the Bishop's Chair for the Service and to give the Final Blessing. As he did so, a Roman Catholic Archbishop in an Anglican Church, I felt this was indeed a fitting tribute to all that Elizabeth had done over so many years for the Ecumenical Movement and our Church here. As Marie-France Faudi wrote: 'Dinard a perdu une très grande dame'.

*Preached at the Eucharist by the Revd Canon Roger Gilbert*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

*1<sup>st</sup> July, 2012*

