

Extracts from the Diary of Elizabeth Lee

Elizabeth was born on 2nd May 1867 and was sixteen when she began her diary in 1884. The one volume continues until December 1892 when she was 25. It briefly describes Elizabeth's daily activities and her feelings about them: family life, cooking, shopping, dancing, visiting friends and places both on the Wirral and further afield. She travelled by tram, ferry and the newly-opened Mersey Railway, but mostly walked – to Birkenhead, Prenton or Storeton Woods and beyond.

She was eldest of twelve children born to Margaret and John Lee. Her father owned Hope and Lee's *draper, gentleman's outfitter & hosier* shop formerly in Grange Road. The family lived at 'Wharfedale', a large villa which once stood at the top of Woodchurch Lane in Prenton.

Elizabeth attended Christ Church, frequently walking to both morning and evening service. While, on many occasions, she simply says 'I went to church'; sometimes she tells us more about the services.

The diary ends on 31st December 1892. After that the only information known to the editors of the diary was that she was living unmarried at home in 1901 and that she married Joseph Sheldon a tea merchant of Hulme, Manchester in 1909.

However a search of the Flaybrick Hill Cemetery records in Birkenhead Library has provided further information. The family had purchased a third class private grave (CE8/61) in which the following were interred:

Francis Lee	aged 11 months	July 15 1872	(brother)
George Atkinson Lee	aged 5 years	February 25 1874	(brother)
Frederick Clive Lee	aged 5 years	June 6 1887	(brother)
John Lee	aged 51 years	February 19 1894	(father)
George Marshall Atkinson Lee	aged 56 years	December 30 1905	(uncle)
John Ernest Lee	aged 37 years	June 27 1917	(brother)
Margaret Lee	aged 81 years	April 24 1929	(mother)

A visit to the cemetery itself both brings a surprise and completes the story. The family gravestone, lying flat on the ground among the trees, also includes the inscription 'Elizabeth May Sheldon, died 1st Feb: 1918, aged 50 daughter of John and Margaret Lee'.

Sunday, 13th January 1884

I went to Church this morning. Dear Canon Robson preached a beautiful sermon. The text was "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business." This evening I have been reading the book Ma gave me at Xmas called "Working to Win". It is such a beautiful book and is about a girl called Marjory.

Sunday, 27th January 1884

It has been snowing today. I went to Church this morning. Canon Robson preached about "having peace in our hearts" He began a course of sermons on "Moses and Israel" this evening. Text, "And the Babe wept."

Sunday, 10th February 1884

Canon Robson preached a beautiful sermon this morning on, "Heaven and how to get to it." Text Rev. 21st Chapter and the four first verses. Tonight C. Robson went on with his sermons about Moses. Tonight it was about "the burning bush". Very wild weather and some snow today.

Sunday, 17th February 1884

I went to Church this morning. C. Robson did not preach. Mr. and Mrs. S. Pa, Ma, and I went to Church this evening. I was so vexed for Canon Robson did not preach, and I did so want Mr. Sykes to hear him. Mrs. S. gave me such a lovely box of sweets. It rained in torrents when we went to Church.

Thursday, 21st February 1884

I went to the Bible Class this morning and was late. Canon Robson was talking to us about the 16 ch of Matt, from the 13th verse to 20th. C. Robson said that when Jesus said to Peter 'whom do men say that I the Son of Man that, He meant that He was more than 'Son of Man; and Peter gave him the answer that He was the Son of God. That was what Jesus meant. C. Robson was talking about St. Peter being the Chief of the Apostles. He said he was till St. Paul came on the scene. St. Peter was the chief apostle for the Jesus and Paul for the Gentiles. St. Paul died in the year 68 at Rome. The only Apostle that Rome knew was St. Paul. C. Robson said there was great reason for doubting whether Peter ever was in Rome, so that the Pope's supremacy was all rubbish. ...

Sunday, 20th April 1884

Went to Church. We had a different minister this evening from the one we had this morning. Pa, Ma, and the boys went a long walk this afternoon, to Landican. Miss Beale (Mrs. Roper's sister) and I went to Church together this evening. She told me that Anna (their German servant) left last Tuesday. I was astonished. We had such a jolly seat in Church. On Friday Canon Robson's Baby died of the measles and was buried yesterday. He seems to be in a great way about it. The Dead March was played as we came out of Church.

Sunday, 27th April 1884

Pa has been offered a seat in Christ Church in the South Gallery. We went into it to day to see if we should like it. But Pa does not like it at all and it is very hot up there at night. Canon Robson preached this morning Text; "Feed my Lambs". He was talking about children nearly all the time and he was thanking us for our sympathy with him in his sorrow- Miss Beale and I went to Church together tonight. Canon R. preached a sermon on Moses and Israel.

Sunday, 20th July 1884

Went to Church this morning. Canon Robson preached a beautiful sermon. There was a terrible railway accident last week, 23 people killed and about fifty injured. A young lady who lived in Birkenhead called Miss Jones who was confirmed at Christ Church not long ago, was killed; and was buried on Saturday by Canon Robson. He seemed to be much cut up about it and was talking about her in his sermon. I went to Church

this evening. C. Robson is going away for his holidays this week and he preached very solemnly to us all. Lovely hot day.

Sunday, 27th July 1884

Went to Church this morning, and tonight went with Ma. Rev. Mr Stones preached tonight. Ma would sit in the new part of the Church tonight and I couldn't bear it. You can't see anybody except the choir and the minister.

Sunday 5th October 1884

Went to Church. Canon Robson preached a splendid sermon. Had my new jacket and gloves on. Everything seemed so funny. A lady died or something in Church. Such a commotion. We all went (except Baby) a lovely walk this afternoon to Landican. Pa and Ma went to Church tonight. Mr Carmen preached.

Sunday, 29th March 1885

On Friday evening Canon Robson's wife died. Poor dear Canon R. I am so sorry for him and all his children. He has about 12 children. I didn't go to Church this morning. Went tonight by myself. Had some fun coming home X with the fair fellow. Wet day.

[Elizabeth frequently comments on her love life with the symbol X]

Sunday, 2nd August 1885

Went to Church this morning and evening. Saw 'Christopherson' when I was coming home. Went a walk this afternoon. Fine day. XXXXXX

Sunday, 16th August 1885

Percy is 9 yrs old today. Ma gave him a money—box full of sweets and a ink stand, Pa gave him a knife and 1/-. I gave him a 'drawing slate'. This afternoon we had Arthur, F. Clive and C. Gordon, Christened at Christ Church by the Rev. Mr. Stoney. We had such fun over it. There were 10 children christened altogether. The babies screamed dreadfully. Mr. Teare was going to come and stand Godfather to them, but he was taken suddenly ill and so Francis came instead. I went down to the train with her about 8. p.m. The weather has been perfect today. XXX

Monday, 29th April 1886

My throat feels very bad, it is swelled up so. I had to go to Christ Church Schoolroom to get my printed paper and Canon R. gave me such a nice book called "The Christian Life" by the Right Rev. Ashton Oxenden. D.D. (Canon R. was so nice.) I went to a service at 8.o'clock which C. Robson particularly wanted us to attend. C. Robson gave us such a beautiful address. He was talking about the questions which we had answered on our printed papers. He told us we ought never to go anywhere where we would not like Christ to see us, nor go with any companion who was likely to do us harm, nor read any book which we would not like Christ to take out of our hand and ask us what we were reading. We had our "tickets" given us after the service.

Tuesday, 30th April 1886

"My Confirmation Day" Such a frightful windy day, I could hardly get to Church. Ma was in bed this morning as she felt very ill but she got up this afternoon to go with me, but she had to stop at home after all as she felt so dizzy. I was so astonished when I got to Christ Church schoolroom for it was crammed with girls and boys, from about 6 Churches and all their ministers. The girls filled all the middle aisle from top to bottom. and the Church was "crammed" with people. I sat not so very far from the top. I felt so queer when I was going up to see the 'Bishop'. I don't know who the girl was that I went up with. All the girls looked so beautiful, especially the girls from our Church. The Bishop gave us a very nice 'address'. We had beautiful hymns. Pa has never seen a Confirmation before and he was very much interested in it. He just caught sight

of me coming down, from the Bishop. There was a short service tonight but Ma would not let me go as it was such a windy and bad night. I should have liked to have gone very much. It seems so queer now that the Confirmation is over.

Sunday, 26th December 1886

Went to Church twice. Lizzie was only there this morning. The choir sang some lovely carols after the service was over. I could have listened all night. Mr. Storey preached a beautiful sermon. I never heard him preach so well. The boil on my neck was dreadful today.

Sunday, 5th June 1887

[Elizabeth's young brother had died on the previous day.]

Frightful hot day. Have kept going in the room to look at darling little Freddie all day. He looks as if he is just asleep. Uncle Charlie came to see us after tea. He was so surprised to hear about Freddie and so sorry. I and Ma were in the house all day of course. I made a beautiful cross of pansies tonight and one of white broom and pansies and wallflowers. Jane and Mary made one of wild hyacinths (blue). They looked so pretty. Poor Ma is in a great way and Pa as well. Feel quite done up.

Monday, 6th June 1887

I have been in the room looking at dear Freddie all morning- His eyes are dreadfully sunken. He looks lovely in his coffin. Mrs. Roper came to see him. Mr. Drape came last night. Had such a long letter from I. Armistead this morning asking me to go on a visit there next week and hoping Freddie was quite better. It made us all cry. Poor little man, he better, but in a different way to what she thinks. Freddie was buried today at 'Flaybrick Hill Cemetery'. Uncle George and John Carless carried the coffin. and Ma and Pa. Toddy and Percy all went to the funeral. I did so want to go, but could'nt very well, as I had'nt a black dress. I felt awful after he had gone. I did so kiss him. After they came back from the funeral they had some dinner and then J. and Uncle went away. The memoriam cards came tonight and are so nice. The text on them is, "Jesus said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Louie Holdsworth called tonight. My head is dreadful.

Thursday, 12th July 1888

A lovely day at last. Pa and a lot of men have been working with might and main to get the hay in, and succeeded. I have been scrubbing paint all day. We are having a new organ at Christ Church, and today is fixed for the opening. So I went to it. The Church was packed with people and they had to fetch heaps of chairs in to accommodate the people and then all could'nt get in, and it is such a large church. The Choir performed part of the Oratorio "Elijah" in splendid style. It is the first time I have heard any of it. We also had a special hymn. "The Venerable Archdeacon Lefroy" preached a splendid sermon, on the difference between "Thanksgiving and Praise." I should like to hear him again. The organ sounded magnificent. Did enjoy the service so much. Came home with E. Parker and M. Holmes. We had some fun running races along the roads. Very tired.

Saturday 14th July 1888

Went to Christ Church tonight where there was a "service of Song". The Choir performed Gaul's Cantata, "The Holy City". Enjoyed it very much. Rather wet night.

Sunday 15th July 1888

Dreadful wet miserable day. Went to Church twice but had to sit on a chair partly out of the church (at night), it was so dreadfully crowded. We had two splendid pieces by "Mendellsohn" performed today.
