

# Elizabeth Swell 1858 – 1906

Author and Hymnwriter 1815-1906

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Elizabeth Missing Swell Born in Newport High Street and lived her entire life on the Island, except for a short spell at a school in Bath , to died in Bonchurch. She was the third daughter in a family of seven sons and five daughters. Her Father Thomas Sewell was a Newport solicitor and his wife was Jane née Edwards. She was he sister of Henry Sewell the first premier of New Zealand. Her first education was at Miss Crooke's Newport school. Later going to the Misses Aldridge's school at Bath ' not happy period, returning to the Island at fifteen to join her two year older sister, Ellen, to teach the younger sisters. He became a member of the Oxford Movement and very 'high church'.

The family experienced money difficulties through the failure of two local Isle of Wight banks, and when her father died in 1842 the family were deep in debt. With the other children, Elizabeth undertook to pay off the creditors, and she set aside each year, from her literary earnings money until all the debt was liquidated.

Up to 1844 the family had lived at Pidford Manor near Ventnor, but then mother and her daughters' mover to Sea View in Bonchurch. Later Elizabeth bought the house, enlarging it in 1854, changing the name to Ashcliff. Her mother died in 1847. Elizabeth Sewell had already assumed responsibility for the financial affairs of the family, but finding that writing was not yet sufficiently lucrative, with her sister Ellen decided to take pupils. They never regarded their venture as a school, but as a 'family home', which they conducted till 1891.

In 1866, convinced of the need of better education for girls of the middle class, she founded at Ventnor a school, which came to have a building of its own and known as St. Boniface Diocesan School.

Between 1847 and 1868 Elizabeth Missing Sewell published, besides other works, seven tales of which *Ursula* (1858) is the most significant. Her many devotional works and school books include *Thoughts for Holy Week* (1857) and *Preparation for the Holy Communion* (1864). They were reprinted as ate as 1907 and 1910 respectively. Her school books mainly dealt with history.



*Elizabeth M. Sewell.*

## Hymns

One of her hymns which survives was intended for use at sea

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|---|---|
| 1. Saviour! When Thy loving hand<br>Has brought us o'er the sea,<br>Through perils many, safe to land -<br>The land we longed to see.     | 2. Oh help us, for Th help we need,<br>Each Moment more and more,<br>n perils tat we scarcely hed,<br>More deadly on the shore,                   |
| 3. Lord, save us! and the Christian name<br>Oh, help us pure to keep,<br>On sea or land, alike the same,<br>Till we in death shall sleep. | 4. Then through Thy merits, washed<br>and clean<br>From sin's polluting stain<br>In raiment white may we be seen<br>With all Thy saints to reign. |

For nearly the whole of he lifetime Elizabeth wrote at least one publication a year, often aimed at the younger generation, mainly from he religious standpoint and frequently on a number of unexpected subjects. Many of her works are still in print and downloading. From the 75 books she wrote she was able to fund the St Boniface Diocesan School.

### Her written works include:

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|---|--|
| 1844 Amy Herbert  | 1845 Gertrude  |
| 1846 Laneton Parsonage  | 1847 Margaret Percival   |
| 1849 Was it a Dream   | 1850 The Earl's Daughter   |
| 1851 Readings for Lent<br>Stories of the Lords Prayer                     |  |
| 1852 A First History of Greece  | 1853 The Experience of Life<br>Readings before Confirmation              |
| 1854 Katherine Ashton   | 1855 Cleve Hall  |
| 1856 Ivors  | 1857 Sketches<br>Experience of Life<br>Thoughts for Holy Week            |
| 1858 Ursula   | 1859 History of the Early Church<br>Self Examination before Confirmation |
| 1860 Night lessons from Scripture<br>Passing Thoughts on Religion         |  |
| 1862 Ancient History of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon<br>Dictation Exercises |  |
| 1863 A Glimpse of the World   | 1864 Preparation for Holy Communion                                      |
| 1865 Principles of Education  |  |
| 1866 Principles of Education -- Applied Upper Classes female education    |  |
| 1867 Journal of Home Life<br>Uncle Peters Fairy Tales                     |  |
| 1868 Historical Selection<br>After Life                                   | 1870 Thoughts for an Age   |
| 1871 Poems of Bygone Years  | 1872 German Made Easy<br>A Catechism of English History                  |
| 1873 What can be done for Young Servants<br>A Catechism of Roman History  | 1875 Some Questions of the Day   |
| 1876 Popular History of France  | 1881 Note-Book of an Elderly Lady  |

1891	Home after Life	1895	Private devotions for Young Persons
1896	Conversations between Youth and Age	1895	Outline of the History of Italy
1907	Autobiography (edited by her niece)		

## Memorials



On the right is St Boniface Court, Mitchell Avenue at Ventnor with the plaque on the left marking the foundation of St Boniface Diocesan School founded by Elizabeth Missing Sewell

The death of her sister Emma in 1897 caused deep depression, and her brain became gradually clouded. She died at her home, Ashcliff, Bonchurch, on 17 August 1906, and was buried in the local churchyard.

According to the Dictionary of National Biography, Elizabeth Sewell's influence over young people was helped by her dry humour. Despite her firm Anglican convictions, she won the ear of those who held other religious views to hers.

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