

## THE BRITISH SCHOOL AND ELIZABETH WYATT

When the old 'British School' in Barton Road closed in the early 1970s it was bought by the Tewkesbury Old People's Welfare Committee as a base for their Golden Hour Club. They named it 'Elizabeth Wyatt House', to honour their founder, who had recently died. Elizabeth Wyatt was worthy of the honour, and worthy of being remembered in the town.

She came to Tewkesbury in 1922, on marrying Leonard Wyatt, the Latin and History master at Tewkesbury Grammar School. They set up home in Jessop House, in Church Street.

Elizabeth, who was an alumnus of Colston's Girl's School in Bristol, had trained as a teacher but didn't resume her career. A talented pianist, she joined the local Choral Society, eventually becoming Chairman, and the Orchestral Society where she became Secretary. She was also a very active secretary of the Tewkesbury Girls Club, using her keen interest in education.

It was when war broke out that she really used her skills. She took on the role of local organiser of the 'Penny-a-week' fund, which raised money to send food parcels to prisoners of war. She established the 'Tewkesbury Prisoners of War Smokes Fund', and developed the theme by taking leading roles in the local Prisoners of War Families Association and Soldiers, Sailors and Airman's Families Association, where she had a role as the local visitor. Essentially, she became a voluntary social worker.

In 1944, she stood for election to the Borough Council and topped the poll. She was the only woman on the Council, and was re-elected in 1949.

A consequence of war was that the ratio of old to young people had been heavily skewed, and the government became concerned about the welfare of the elderly. In 1947 they developed a strategy, and Tewkesbury was invited to send a representative to a county-wide meeting to discuss it. Inevitably, Elizabeth Wyatt was the nominee. The plan was to create a national network of Old People's Welfare Committees, established with central support and guidance. Tewkesbury was chosen to pilot the idea in the county, led by Mrs Wyatt.

She set to work with gusto, creating the Committee to oversee welfare and then the Golden Hour Club to deliver it. Weekly lunches in the Watson Hall were the first initiative, followed by coach trips to destinations near and far. Craft sessions in the Watson Hall were used to create stock for an annual 'sale of goods' event in the Town Hall, raising funds for 'comforts' Dances, concerts, talks and social evenings were added to the repertoire. The value of the initiative was obvious from the start and the club was immensely popular, attracting well over 100 people to the lunches, and often two coaches for outings.

Elizabeth Wyatt led all this work until 1950, when a health scare forced her withdrawal from public life. She gave up all her responsibilities except the Golden Hour Club, where she remained as Chairman until 1962. Her husband retired in 1960, but sadly he died three years later. She sold up and moved to York Road, living quietly until her own death in 1974. They had no children, and the Wyatt family was slowly forgotten, with just the name of the home of the organisation she founded to remember her.

Thomas Collins was the British School's best-known pupil. His memorial in the Abbey bears the inscription '*A Workman who need not be ashamed*'. That could equally be said about Elizabeth Wyatt.