

CLARE ELIZABETH ABBOTT/RAYBOULD
(1927-2017)

Those who remember Clare Abbott from her years at Close Farm, will no doubt recall her energy, warmth and kindness; a woman of faith and commitment who saw the potential for goodness in everyone. She and Jack were at the heart of everything (or nearly everything) that happened in the village during the 1960s and 'seventies, and when they moved home in the early 1980s, they left a gap that took some time to fill.

Only daughter of Bill and Carol Pennyfeather, Clare was born in 1927 in Natal, South Africa, where she grew up on a farm. Educated first at boarding school, after the war she came to England to study social sciences at Bristol University, before returning to South Africa once she'd graduated. On a visit to Malaya with her father when she was 24, she met rubber planter, Jack Abbott. Despite opposite political leanings, and the 21-year difference in their ages, they embarked on a whirlwind romance that quickly led to marriage.

For a few years Clare and Jack enjoyed a typical colonial lifestyle; they had two children, Jo and Stephen, but when Jack retired in 1954 they left Malaya and came to Close Farm, where they soon immersed themselves into the life of the village.

A remarkably close and supportive couple, during nearly three decades in Crockham Hill Clare and Jack were known and loved by everyone. While Jack exuded an air of gentle calm, Clare was a flurry of activity, gathering friends along the way. Jack served as church warden; Clare joined the WRVS and undertook voluntary social work. She looked after the churchyard, masterminded a recycling scheme, helped organise the church fete. Together they edited the *Newsletter*, played a lot of tennis, and tended one of the most magical gardens for miles around.

From Close Farm they eventually moved to Sundridge, where Jack sadly died in 1990. Four years later Clare married Gordon Raybould and found herself mistress of a large house with an eleven-acre garden. It was to be a short-lived marriage though, for Gordon contracted cancer and died a year later. Having become widowed a second time Clare went to live in Corsham, Wiltshire, to be near her family, which now included three grandchildren. Once again she became an active member of the church community, giving freely of her time, talents and energy as she had in Crockham Hill. And it was at the church of St Bartholomew's, where she had become such a faithful and active member of the congregation, that Clare's funeral service took place, during which Canon Roger Clifton spoke of her humour, her strong social conscience, the weekly

meditation group she hosted, and of her Christian faith, which he said was 'questioning but committed.'

Those who retain memories of Clare during her time in Crockham Hill, will recognise all of those qualities.

Kev Reynolds & Diana Walsh
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