

EDNA SEWELL, 1925–2021

Edna was born on 13 February 1925. Her parents were Clarence and Alberta Evans. The family lived above a confectioner's shop in Manchester run by Alberta and known locally as Evans' Cake Shop. Here is the first clue to Edna's lifelong relationship with cakes. In 1928 Edna's brother Jack was born. In 1940 Manchester was bombed on two consecutive nights on 22, 23 and 24 December. Edna hid in the cellar below the shop to avoid the worst of the bombing.



In February 1943, Edna joined the WRNS. In her own words, 'it wasn't patriotism, they just had the most flattering uniform'. She had never been further than Blackpool but at the age of 18 she found herself travelling on her own to London. After training she spent a short time at Chatham before being posted to the Convoy Signal Base at Southend-on-Sea in Essex. Her job was to keep the confidential signals books up to date. These were handed to the Royal Navy signalmen before they left on the latest convoy. It was there that she met a RN signalman called Kenneth Sewell who was to become the love of her life. On VE day, 8 May 1945, Edna spent the whole day trying to get back to Bury from Southend, dodging parties and over friendly servicemen. She married her sailor four days later in Salford, Manchester. He was 21 and Edna was 20.

Moving to London, Ken completed his apprenticeship as a compositor and Edna worked in the offices of Harrods. Soon the family had moved to Clive Road in Dulwich and in 1947, Ken and Edna had their first child, Sue, followed three years later by their second child, Linda. By the late sixties the family was established in Bury with Ken a leading member of the Rotary Club and an active mason, and Edna a leading member of Inner Wheel. They were both president of their respective clubs in the same year. During this period of her life Edna developed skills such as dressmaking and embroidery, as well as cake making and icing. She was also an accomplished flower arranger. Edna loved making and icing three-tier wedding cakes not only for her own daughters but for all her friends' daughters as well. She made dozens of cakes and never charged a penny as she considered them to be a gift.

Sadly during this time Ken developed the heart condition that led to his early death in 1979 at the age of 56 followed by Edna's father who died two weeks later. The grief that Edna had to carry was enormous. It is a tribute to her as a person that this was dealt with in private for the rest of her life. There wasn't a day when she didn't miss her sailor and grieve his loss. Rarely, if ever, did any of us see the pain she was going through.

In 1988 the house in Bury was sold and Edna moved to Deddington. She joined Inner Wheel in Banbury, helped at the baby clinic at the Health Centre and the pre-school at the Windmill. She quickly became established as someone of note. When Frank and Janet Shaw became the new owners of the Unicorn, Edna was there willing and able with her sewing machine. Not only did she make the curtains for five bedrooms, she also made the bedspreads for five double beds. Frank said the quality of her work elevated the bedrooms to luxury level.

Edna made friends wherever she lived. When she first came to Deddington she met up with Gwen Swain and they went on many holidays together all over the world including many cruises. Her friendship with Wendy Burrows led her

into majong and the village concerts . She was also a member of the Bowls Club and continued her work in Banbury inner Wheel. She spent many happy days collating the *Deddington News*.

In the annual village show one of the categories was 'Best Fruit Cake' Edna's cake won for at least three years, maybe more. Edna always said 'well the year I lose will be my last year'. Sure enough one year her fruit cake came second. The lady who won was astounded as she had tasted Edna's fruit cake and knew it was superior to hers. The lady related her concerns to the judges and after an investigation it was discovered that the first and second place tickets had been put on the wrong cakes. So Edna won again. She gave her recipe to anyone who wanted it and it is now made by young and old far and wide, including West Yorkshire. Wherever it is made it is always known as Edna's Fruit Cake.

As she grew older and less strong Edna was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Most of the time the only evidence was the clinking of the ice in her gin and tonic. Eventually she admitted that she needed more help and decided to move into Featherton House Care Home. Very quickly she met up with Tomasina always known as Ina. In the care home they became known as Hinge and Bracket. As well as forming a dominoes club they used to visit Deddington Arms for lunch. When it was time for Wimbledon on the tv, they kept their white wine chilling in the bathroom sink. Edna was well liked by the carers. As one said, with Edna it is a two-way street, we look after her and she looks after us with advice on our problems outside of work. More than one carer has told us how grateful they were for Edna's wise words, especially as they did not have their own grannie.

Even in the last year of her life she made friends with Jock. Jock and I spoke after Edna's death. He told me, 'I will miss her, she was my bestest pal'. The family would like to thank Vicar Annie and Aaron from Edd Frost and daughters.

Finally we do not have the words to adequately thank the staff at Featherton House. Edna's care was exceptional and the tears we saw on the morning of her death was testament to the love they all felt for Edna. A love that was shared by so many of us who were fortunate to have her in our lives.

Sue O'Brien
23 December 2021