



# Elizabeth Holland

*Interview by John Wroughton*

## Introduction

I first met Elizabeth in the early 1970s. It did not take long for me to become aware of a quick and lively mind, which delighted in precise detail and was exhilarated by discovery. Since then she has given enormous support to my own research, directing me to crucial documents, identifying specific sites within the Stuart city and (through her Chapman genealogy) untangling the complex interrelationships of leading members of the City Council during the period of Civil War, when many families (including the Chapmans) were divided in their loyalty. Generous almost to a fault, she has placed the enormous riches of her research - garnered through countless hours spent in the Bath Record Office - at the disposal of local historians. Many have drawn on this expertise over the years; most have gratefully acknowledged their debt.

Elizabeth, a highly cultured person, is also a true scholar. Painstaking in her search for evidence, she never advocates a theory until it can be fully substantiated. Unsurprisingly, therefore, she is intolerant of sloppy research or half-baked ideas - and is always forthright in expressing her opinion! A formidable opponent when roused, she is nevertheless a loyal and trustworthy friend.

Although she recently gave an impressive interview on television, Elizabeth is by nature both modest and self-effacing. Her public utterances have therefore been infrequent, but her contribution to the understanding of Bath's history has been immense. A prolific writer, she has laid bare the old city in all its former glory and has provided for posterity a wealth of detailed material. Our debt to her is immeasurable.

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## The Interview

*JPW: First of all, Elizabeth, tell us something about your early years and your education.*

EAH: I was born in Farnborough, Hampshire. At the age of around six months, I was taken out to India where my father, J.C.F. Holland (Royal Engineer), had transferred to the Bengal Sappers and Miners. (My father was born in Cawnpore and - when he died - he was, like my mother, legally Indian.) At first we lived at Roorkee, Bengal (now Bangladesh). One of my earliest memories is of a monkey sitting on the veranda by my cot, holding the bars and looking down at me. [fig.1] My father was then moved to Quetta in the United Provinces (now Pakistan) to attend a course at the Staff College. Auchinleck (later Field- Marshal) was a lecturer there at the time. We were caught up in an

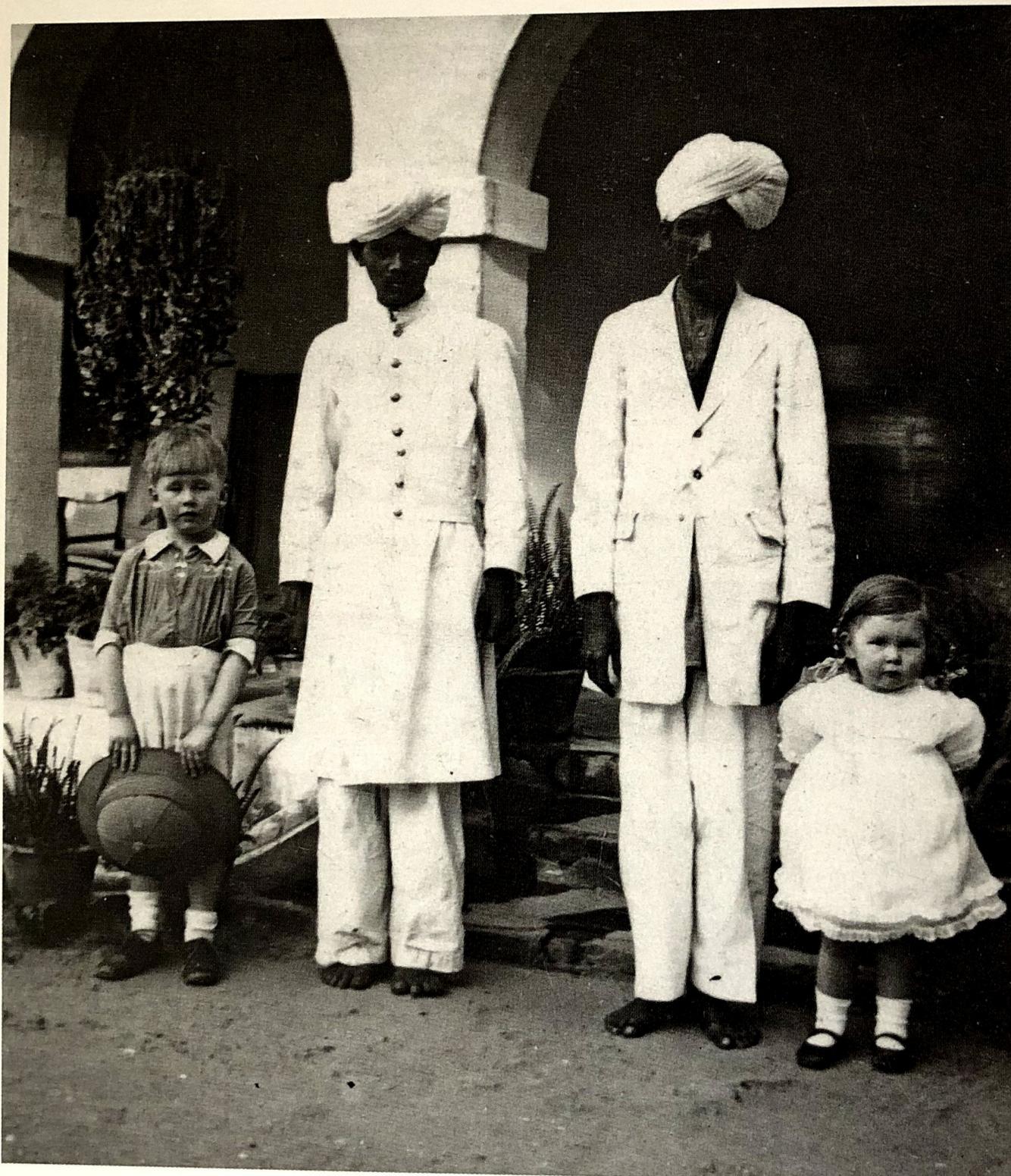


fig 1: Elizabeth and her brother Charles with two of the staff in India, c.1930  
*Private Collection*

early forerunner of the Quetta earthquake, and slept in a tent for a time in case it recurred.

I had my fifth birthday at the time of our return. As we sailed through the Mediterranean, the troops all unwound the binding of their topees and trailed them in the sea. I remember the porpoises accompanying us, presumably also in the Mediterranean. On our return to England, my father was stationed at Larkhill on Salisbury Plain, where he took a signals course. Stonehenge was then a monument on an empty plain with no visitors - just sheep. My father later commuted from Farnborough to the War Office in London, where staff were engaged in research into weapons, better tanks, armoured personnel carriers, guerilla warfare and so on.

My father's frequent postings with the army and our later stay in Canada meant that I went to eight different schools in all. The best was Queen Anne's School in Caversham, near Reading, where I boarded. There was a cricket match, and I was standing in the field thinking what a wonderful school it was.

Afterwards we all walked home across the playing fields to tea, including Alison Macdonald (Hannay), the first person to pay a subscription to the Friends of the Survey of Old Bath. It was a blazing hot day, with rooks in the elms. Then suddenly it was Dunkirk, and because the school was in the south, many of the pupils scattered.



fig 2: Elizabeth skating in  
Winnipeg, 1940  
*Private Collection*



fig 3: T.H. Holland,  
Elizabeth's grandfather  
*Private Collection*

My younger brother and I went to Canada in a convoy - that is to say a number of commandeered civilian vessels in the middle and naval vessels in a ring outside, all very low in the water with the sea breaking over them all the time. I thought nothing of it and it never occurred to me that we might drown. I was used to being surrounded by instruments of war - that was our life. We stayed in Canada with the family of my grandfather's sister, Elizabeth, in Winnipeg. [fig.2]. My grandfather, T.H. Holland, was a geologist, who worked for the Geological Survey in India before he took up appointments in Britain. He was a dedicated scientist and he - more than anyone else - was my ideal. [fig.3]. The notion of putting ideas in order is something I understand, but I have never felt a call to guerilla leadership or the blowing up of bridges.

On returning to England, I read History and Anthropology at Edinburgh University and later took an external degree with London University in Economics and International Relations. Before settling in Bath I had various occupations, which might be called community projects. At that time I was serious like my grandfather was in early life, and I felt that everything that one did should have social worth. I also did a great deal of writing. For a time I worked, chiefly as supply, in various homes for deprived children. I also spent a few years working in a residence in Edinburgh, founded by the former Rector of the University. There were many students from overseas there, especially doctors from India come to take higher degrees.

*JPW: What made you eventually set up home in Bath - and what career did you then follow?*

*EAH:* I did not in fact settle in Bath until the 1960s, although I had visited it previously when staying with my aunts, who lived in a beautiful William and Mary house in High Littleton. We had therefore gone into Bath on various occasions to eat sticky buns and visit the Roman Baths. [fig. 4]. My mother's grandfather was also Governor [i.e. Headmaster] at Kingswood School in his time. When the moment came to find a permanent place to live, I made a shortlist of possible cities and visited each in turn. However, as soon as I stepped off the train here, I knew that it would be Bath. I lectured part-time for some years in Economics and Social History, especially at what is now known as Bath College. I chose to teach older students at a college so that I could meet a wider range of people. These included many highly intelligent individuals from such places as Iraq and Persia - people who were actively involved in the politics of their own countries. This gave me, therefore, a window on the world.

**JPW:** *What first sparked your love of history?*

**EAH:** I had actually thought of reading English at university, but both my grandfathers persuaded me that history would provide a good education for both training the mind and fitting one for a useful career. I was not really interested in history *per se*, but in solving problems correctly. I like trying to grasp a given subject, whether it is history or not. For instance, with a friend and artist, Tim Brown, I have lately brought out a study called *The Pathway to the Tarot Trumps*. In this I searched for the meaning contained within the twenty-two pictures that are found in the pack of cards (dating back to around 1442) and came to the conclusion that these were illustrations of the 24th and 25th chapters of St. Matthew's gospel. But to answer your question, I suppose that my interest in studying the history of Bath was sparked by your own volume, *The Civil War in Bath and North Somerset* (1972), which showed me that one could discover facts about Bath instead of just the old legends.

**JPW:** *How did you come to establish The Survey of Old Bath?*

**EAH:** *The Civil War in Bath and North Somerset* led me to 'The Survey of Bath, 1641' in Bath Record Office, and I used it to plot all the property holders on John Speed's map of Bath dated 1610 (although it was apparently drawn in about 1575 by someone called Girtin). I became totally fascinated with this and realised that history could actually be interesting. In 1979, Tim O'Leary, working for Bath Archaeological Trust, suggested turning this into a scientific scale map using the resources of the Bath Record Office and other collections of documents. Tim and I chose the name 'Survey of Old Bath'. Mike Chapman, a surveyor and cartographer, joined the Survey in 1988, which was a major breakthrough. The Survey then began bringing out a number of publications - for we were now able to publish properly drawn maps. Since then we have received support and encouragement from a number of groups, including the Spa Project Team, Bath Archaeological Trust and Bath and North-East Somerset Council. In 1993, June Hodgkinson founded the Friends of the Survey of Old Bath from a nucleus of supporters of the Stuart Age events, hosted by you at King Edward's School. They receive our journal, *The Survey of Old Bath and District*, which has recorded a great deal of new research.

**JPW:** *What has The Survey of Old Bath actually managed to achieve?*

**EAH:** The primary aim of the Survey as such was to locate specific sites within the old city (i.e. the old city as it existed before the nineteenth-century improvements). This has now been achieved - as, for example, with the 'Spa

Quarter' of the city, where every house has been identified century-by-century. You will also remember our discussion about the site of the original schoolhouse belonging to King Edward's at the time when you were writing the School's history. We have since extended our field to Widcombe and Lyncombe, and a number of old sites have been located there. I have worked closely on several projects with the Widcombe and Lyncombe History Study Group, of which I am a member.

The Survey has in fact been part of a general movement towards a more scientific assessment of Bath which took off during the eighties. This has been influenced by a number of factors besides the Survey - your own works, Bath Archaeological Trust, Trevor Fawcett's History of Bath Research Group, the new local societies, the publication of *Bath History*, Bath Record Office, the museums and so on. There has been a complete change of attitude towards our history, which is no longer based on guesswork.

**JPW:** *What are the main qualities you look for in a historian - and what annoys you most?*

**EAH:** The qualities one looks for - the absence of which is annoying - are the same as in any field, on a national as well as a local level: i.e. the willingness to take note of new research, instead of repeating old mistakes; acknowledging other people's work instead of writing as if it were one's own; and not bringing forward old ideas as if they were new ones. Particularly annoying in Bath, because of people's desire to make a name through the city's own reputation, is the habit of producing 'breakthroughs' - i.e. jumping to conclusions, refusing to discuss the evidence and publishing theories as if they were facts.

**JPW:** *How well does the city portray its history? What, if anything, is missing?*

**EAH:** The city is now quite well portrayed in print, because a mass of valuable work has been done of late. Nevertheless, in its portrayal to visitors, the Roman and Georgian periods still predominate - so there is no completely balanced view of its history. There are, however, three areas I most admire. Bath Record Office, which has been styled 'the Best in the West', is outstanding but needs more accommodation, funding and staff. A Local History Centre has been suggested, which would be valuable, provided it was directed by a well-qualified person like Colin Johnston, the Principal Archivist. I also admire the work of Stuart Burroughs at the Museum of Bath at Work, because it conveys something that was never previously presented - namely, the history of the city's ordinary people. Thirdly, I have been impressed with the Victoria Art Gallery, which has hosted a number of high-quality exhibitions.

*JPW: I know that you have produced a wonderful genealogy of the Chapman family - but why are you so interested in that family?*

*EAH: My grandmother, Maud Holland, was a Chapman. Although she was born and married in India and her family before her, they always referred to themselves as the Chapmans of Bath. The Chapmans lived in the city for hundreds of years, which means that they interconnect with many of the old Bath families. They also owned a great deal of property locally - all of which ties in with the Survey of Old Bath. There were no fewer than eighteen known Chapman mayors of the city, who between them held the office thirty-five times. Furthermore, Peter Chapman, who was a distinguished soldier, made a*



**fig 5: Capt. Thomas Chapman**  
*By courtesy of Herr Ludwig  
Becker, Herrnhut, Germany*

major contribution to the restoration of Bath Abbey in the sixteenth century - the north aisle being named after him. I can tell you who each Chapman was, except for very minor figures. But there were also other distinguished Bath families, special in their own way (including the Atwoods). They deserve the same kind of publicity that the Chapmans have received.

*JPW: Of all the Chapmans you have researched, who is your favourite?*

**EAH:** It is without doubt Captain Thomas Chapman, who fought in the American War of Independence [1775-83]. A dashing young man, he fought with great valour and saved the life of his commanding officer. He was eventually taken prisoner, but - after being released on parole - eloped into the forest with the daughter of a Quaker settler. Her father insisted that they married. He later returned with his bride to England for a time, but subsequently died of yellow fever in San Domingo. [fig. 5].

*JPW: Which of the seventeenth-century Chapmans is your favourite?*

**EAH:** Henry Chapman [1610-90], who was mayor in both 1664 and 1673 - because I enjoy his dashing, rounded character. But then you disapprove of him. [An explanatory note from JPW: Elizabeth is right - I do disapprove! He was guilty of political sleaze and electoral fraud long before the terms were invented. A royalist officer in the Civil War, he had been expelled from the local council for his delinquency. After the Restoration in 1660, he had become deeply frustrated that the old parliamentarian and puritan faction continued in power locally. He therefore attempted a political coup by kidnapping eleven of his opponents prior to the mayoral election of 1661 in a bid to win the vote. Although he was outmanoeuvred on this occasion, he did eventually become an impressive mayor, who helped to gain national fame for the health resort by launching an effective publicity campaign.]

*JPW: As an historian, do you approve of the recent development plans for the city?*

**EAH:** The Survey of Old Bath by its constitution has no opinions on planning matters. We supply information to both sides of a discussion, if they ask for it. When one sees the spirit of personal acrimony that seems to creep in, we are glad to remain outside!

*JPW: What ambitions do you still have in research and writing that are at present unfulfilled?*

**EAH:** My ambition is to make more of our work accessible to the public. The Survey would also appreciate funding for the maps still pending (similar to those of the Spa Quarter through the centuries) - i.e. the High Street and its area

and the Walcot Street area. Material for these is already available, but the very detailed maps cannot be drawn for nothing. I also have an ambition to ensure that people always read what we have researched and written before they embark on the same subject. I read a long description of an old house the other day, except that the site being described did not relate to the house in question - as we could have told the writer instantly!

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### Footnote

Over the last twenty or so years, the Survey of Old Bath has been responsible for a wide range of publications, articles and exhibitions which cover neglected aspects of Bath's history. These have normally been produced jointly by Elizabeth Holland and Mike Chapman, although sometimes they have worked separately or occasionally in conjunction with other contributors (e.g. Peter Davenport, Giles White, John Hawkes and David McLaughlin). Several of the booklets have been funded by Avon County Council, Bath and North-East Somerset Council, the Millennium Commission or Bath Archaeological Trust.

**The booklets** include *Citizens of Bath* (1989); *The Story of the White Hart* (1990); *The Kingston Estate within the Walled City: a Composite Plan of the 1740s* (1992); *Bath and the Warwick Book of Hours* (1994); *A Guide to the Estates of Ralph Allen around Bath* (1996); *The J. Charlton Map of Lyncombe and Widcombe, 1799* (1997); *An Historical Analysis of the Corridor Area* (1999); *Baths and Pump Rooms of Bath; an Historical Summary* (2000); *'Bimbery' and the South-Western Baths of Bath* (2001); *The Lost Streams of Bath* (2003); and *The Spa Quarter of Bath, a History in Maps* (2006). A forthcoming publication in 2008 is volume one of a projected new series, *'Records of Bath': Papers of the Ralph Allen Estate and Other Documents*.

**Articles** include two which have appeared in *Bath History* - 'The Earliest Bath Guildhall', volume II (1988); and 'The Development of Saw Close from the Middle Ages', volume VIII (2000). There have been numerous articles in *The Survey of Bath and District: The Journal of the Survey of Old Bath*, including a series entitled 'This Famous City: the Story of the Chapmans of Bath'. 'The Precincts of the Bishops' Palace at Bath, Avon' was published in *The Archaeological Journal*, volume 152 (1995) and 'Stothert's Foundry, Southgate Street, Bath' in the *BIAS Journal*, number 30 (1998).

**Two exhibitions** produced by the Survey are also worth recording - *The Baths of Bath* exhibition (1988) and *The Holloway Street at Bath and its Neighbourhood* exhibition at the Museum of Bath at Work, which is planned for April 2009 in collaboration with the Widcombe and Lyncombe History Study Group. There is in addition an illuminated genealogy *The Descent of the Chapman Mayors of Bath in the Seventeenth Century*, which was presented to Bath Record Office in 1989 (Accession 170). The display boards of *The Baths of Bath* exhibition are also located there.