

Betty Saumarez Smith obituary



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My mother, Betty Saumarez Smith, who has died aged 96, having lived longer than she either wanted or expected to, was a remarkable woman.

Born in Cambridge, the daughter of Canon Charles Raven, who was then chaplain of Emmanuel College, she was raised in the fields of mid-Surrey, where she used to bowl a hoop down the main roads on her way to school. From an early age, she inherited her father's passionate interest in all aspects of - natural life and was proud of the fact that she had caught 25 species of butterfly by the age of five.

Educated at a boarding school outside Woking, she was sent off to learn French with a bird photographer in Haarlem, in the Netherlands, and German as a tutor to the daughter of the Count von Espenburg. Having read modern languages and Arabic as an undergraduate at Girton College, Cambridge, she spent the 1930s teaching and driving a missionary bus across Canada.

By 1940, she felt it was time to get married, having had numerous liaisons with future bishops of the Church of England, so placed an advertisement in the Times for a chaperone to accompany her to the far east, where her then fiancé lived. Always impatient, 10 days later she married the chaperone, my father, William, who was one of the last of the Indian civil servants.

She detested India and its life of servants, whisky and heat. She had two sons, John and Richard, born in the hill stations of Simla and Darjeeling, and the three of them came back to England in 1947, while my father was involved in arrangements for partition. In a different era she would have had a career, but, while my father worked in church administration, she devoted herself instead to her four children (two born after his return), her many friends and relations, and to a passion for the British countryside. Until nearly the end of her life, she would drive up the lanes of Monmouthshire to walk in the fields. She is survived by her children, seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

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