

*Obituary based on that written by Canon Brian Macdonald-Milne, TSSF, in the Church Times on 4th Mar 2016; reproduced with permission.*

MAVIS SALT was one of those single women who gave themselves wholeheartedly to the mission of the Church, wherever they felt God was calling them to be.

She was a colleague of mine in the Melanesian Mission, serving the Anglican Church in the islands of the Western Pacific from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. She died in January, aged 94, having spent her last 13 years in a care home in Sherborne, where she urged the other residents to “get up and do things”. Her whole life had been full of dedicated activity for the Lord and his church.

Mavis was born in Sunninghill, Berkshire, the eldest of four children, and she was sent to a Convent school. She trained at Salisbury Teacher Training College, and taught for a while, until she felt called to be a parish worker. She trained at St Christopher’s College, Blackheath; and served in the parish of St Stephen’s, Rochester Row, Westminster, where she is still remembered.

After moving to work in a parish in Bristol, she heard that a friend serving in the Solomon Islands was too ill to carry on, and would have to return home. Mavis felt moved to offer to take her place, and duly set out for the Solomons. She stayed there for a year only, however, moving to the New Hebrides.

She spent the rest of her time in Melanesia in education. She became head of the Anglican girls’ secondary school, in the days when few girls had the opportunity of such education. She felt that one of her great achievements was to get the first girls from there to go overseas for further education. On their return, they made a great contribution to the development of Church and State, alongside the men. The country became independent as the Republic of Vanuatu in 1980.

Her other contribution to the cause of women’s training and development was through the Girl Guide movement. Her efforts were recognised by the British colonial administration by the award of an MBE.

Her brother David, with his wife, Margaret, also served in both New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. David Salt later became the General Secretary of the Melanesian Mission in England. For some years Mavis was also the South West England Secretary of the Melanesian Mission (UK).

On her return to England, Mavis went to live with her parents at Bishop’s Cleeve, Gloucestershire, and threw herself into other activities. She became a Reader, and a member of the General Synod, and her caring activities were recognised by Gloucestershire County Council with an award as a “Good Neighbour”. She continued her interest in Guiding, and combined this with a concern for continuing to spread the gospel, and to promote care of the environment. This was an expression of her devotion to the example of St Francis; she had been a Tertiary since 1961.

She once wrote: “I live knowing that I am in God’s hands, to be used to bring others to Him — and, if he so wills, by a long life full of work. . . . My trust is in God, it matters not what I do, or where I go.”

The Lord willed her a long and fruitful life, and she indeed went far in her service of him.