

Miss Page's Path

Bob Pearce

The many footpaths and lanes that branch out and reach through Bratton are part of the character and charm of the village. The path that strolls from the War Memorial between The Duke and Bratton Primary School is named 'Miss Page's Path'. Who was Miss Page?

Miss Page was the Head Teacher at Bratton Primary School from 1945 to 1967. During these years she lived in a tiny cottage in The Butts. On the day she retired, she had been Head Teacher for more than half the lifetime of the school. In those years she taught 300 or more village children, and so would have had a huge influence on the character and well-being of Bratton.



Back: Aida Pearce, Doreen Miller, Maude Vidler. Front: Mrs Hunter, Miss Page, Gwen White.

Former pupils remember her now as a quite strict but kind teacher. "She seemed ancient to us," remembers Claire. "She always wore a skirt, usually blue, a blouse and a grey cardigan. She always had a handkerchief tucked up her sleeve and had her hair in a bun. That was her signature hairstyle."

"She used to bring her dog to school every day," recalls Jill. "It was a black spaniel. Jet black it was. And his name was Bogie. It used to sit under her desk all the day. She was much different really in her approach to teaching. She had a big dressing up box and we used to put on concerts and things, and I think some of the parents thought too much time was spent on that sort of thing than the actual learning."

Miss Page also encouraged nature studies, leading nature walks out around the village, teaching the children names of all the wildflowers, bringing them back to press, draw and write about in nature diaries. Claire remembers a big nature table. "And people used to bring in wildflowers, the shell of an egg after it had hatched, and fossils was another thing that we used to find."

In the school grounds children were also given their own plot of garden, and Miss Page allowed them all to choose a packet of seeds to grow. Even today people can remember what they grew there.

"Once a week we used to walk up to her house, to have a Science lesson on a black and white TV," Linda recalls. "There were about 12 of us, all sat on the floor, in a small sitting room and we would be given a small glass of orange juice before retuning to school."

When the severe winter of 1963 closed the school, Carol remembers, "Those of us due to take the 11 Plus that summer had lessons in Miss Page's cottage." Claire can still picture "10 or 11 of us, and we all had to get round this table to do Maths and English."

"Every year she taught us 3 or 4 dances round the May pole for the church fete that was up at the Vicarage," recalls Valerie. "Each Christmas she'd arrange to go across to the Jubilee Hall and have a proper Christmas tea laid out on long tables for the children, with Father Christmas giving everyone a memorable present, like a craft set or a sewing set."

"We used to have a small harvest festival at school," remembers Claire. "Each year the produce brought in by the pupils was donated to charity. In my final year Miss Page took three of us leavers with her when she took it to a children's home in Devizes. That left quite an impression on me, knowing that the children living there had no home of their own."

It wasn't all fun and games. The boiler at the school needed to be refuelled with coal, and in colder months it was Miss Page who did this dirty and dusty job, 3 or 4 times a day.



Miss Page also ran a weekly Girls Friendly Society at the school in the evening, where they played games, enjoyed dressing up, played rounders up on Happy Valley, and had treasure hunts. "She'd leave us clues to go round the village to look for," remembers Valerie. "Once we found her halfway up a tree. But she would do things like that. She always had us doing something or other. We used to have a lot of fun." They even learnt to play Christmas carols on hand bells so they could go out and play carols.

"I can remember we had a beret with a badge on it," tells Mary. "I still remember the GFS motto," says Claire. "I promise to learn, to love and to serve the Lord, Jesus Christ, and to help other people."

"You saw a different side to her," Mary recalls. "She was never her school teachery sort of person. Not at all. We could have a laugh with her. She was like a different person in the evening."

She would also occasionally hire the little bus from Doug Reed's garage to take the girls on trips to places like Trowbridge Swimming Pool and Farleigh Castle. "I remember Mum saying one day she thought she funded all that herself," remembers Valerie.

When she retired in 1967, Miss Page was presented with an engraved clock and a hand loom, and moved to Exeter. "She didn't marry," recalls Valerie. "She was always Miss Page."

Many pupils from that time say that she sent them a Christmas card each year for the rest of her life. "And she always put an interesting letter in," remembers Mary. "And she'd always ask about my family, my parents, and everybody. I always wrote back to her – in my very best writing and spelling." When they became adults and married Miss Page even presented them with wonderful wedding presents and sent gifts for their new babies.

"Latterly the writing was ever so big," recalls Mary. "She told me she was losing her sight. Then one day the phone went and a voice said, 'I'm Sylvia Page's niece, and I'm just phoning to tell you my aunt died this morning.' I think she was 101. She must have left a message to let us know." Her niece told Mary, "She so enjoyed getting your letters every year."

Naming the path beside the school after Miss Page gives permanent recognition of her enormous contribution to Bratton through her dedication to the lives of its children, who were and are always the future of the village.

This information was collated from Bratton Primary School's archives and the Bratton History Association's oral history project.

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Posted 29 May 2024

Bob moved to Bratton in 2020 and has now become a member of the BHA committee. If you were a pupil at Bratton Primary School in the 1940s and 50s, he would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about your memories for the BHA oral history project. Please contact him at bobpearce2021@hotmail.com. Thank you.