

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written, in November 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who studied at The Grange School of Housewifery in Street, Somerset.*

## **Ethel Pike's Story**

Ethel was born on 23 March 1886 in the village of Locking, Somerset<sup>1</sup> and baptised a month later at the parish church. Her parents were William Albert Pike, known as Albert, and Elizabeth nee King. Locking was a farming community with mostly thatched cottages surrounded by orchards and farms and it's no surprise that William spent his entire life as a farm labourer never moving from the village.

Albert and Elizabeth married in 1885 and only had two children, Ethel and her brother Reginald. The couple both came from long lines of agricultural labouring families.

Perhaps this is the reason that Ethel gets the chance to better herself by going to the School of Housewifery, maybe she will get a good job in service in a

good house rather than follow in her ancestors' footsteps and settling for the life of an ag lab's wife.

Locking had its own small village school that she attended until she was about 10 in 1896, the leaving age being raised the following year to 12, meaning she missed out on 2 years' education. Her school had a good reputation for a village school and as well as learning to read, write and do maths, she also had lessons in singing, sewing and art.<sup>2</sup>

The School of Housewifery opened in July 1897 and an article in the Central Somerset Gazette of 3 July<sup>3</sup> states the school "is a Technical School for girls, in which thorough practical courses of instruction, extending over a period of 6 months, will be given in General Housework, Cookery, Laundry Work, Dress-cutting and Dressmaking and the general principles of Household Management. Accommodation will be provided for thirty students and a resident staff of highly qualified teachers". The same article states that studentships were also available to some students.

At some stage the 6-month period of tuition is changed to a year, running as a normal school year, as can be seen from many small articles about the school in the local newspapers.

So Ethel started at the school in September 1900 and is nearly at the end of her time there when the census is taken in April 1901. She is just 15 and so would probably have spent her time since leaving school in 1896 and starting at the Housewifery School helping her mother with domestic duties at home.

It is not known what Ethel did after leaving the school but by 1905 she has settled in Weston Super Mare, so perhaps she was in service there. Or at least she is marrying a local boy from Weston super Mare. His name is Henry Charles Cooke, a carriage painter, and they marry at the Baptist church there on 12 November 1905.

Six months later the couple have their first child, a boy named Reginald. He is followed by another 8 children over the next 15 years.

The family get through World War One without any losses as their sons are too young to fight. Harold serves for a time in the Devonshire Regiment but is invalided out with emphysema.

By 1921 he is working as a coach painter for local company J Clark Carriage and Motor works along with sons Reg, 15, and Henry, 13. Perhaps his emphysema worsens as by 1939 he is unable to work due to ill health – although he lives to the age of 80, dying in 1963.

Ethel outlives her husband by 5 years and dies in 1968 aged 81.

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## **Sources**

1 Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914

2 Locking Heritage Society

3 Central Somerset Gazette, 3 July 1897