

# *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.*

## **Minnie Jones**

The word housewifery was first recorded during the early 1400s.

Young girls, usually orphans, were apprenticed to learn housewifery from as early as the 1600s. Listed are three examples of such apprenticeships.

☞ Anne S apprenticed to John N & Abigail his wife to learn reading, sewing and housewifery, 1658 (with the consent of her [named] uncle)

☞ Rachell B dau of William B apprenticed to John F shoemaker to learn housewifery and household affairs, 1695.

☞ Elizb L apprenticed to John G to learn Housewifery, 1698

The original meaning of housewife didn't relate to working within the house, or with housework, and little to do with marriage. The housewife was the female equivalent of the husband. The husband was the male head of household while the housewife was the female head of household. Derived from these words are 'husbandry' and 'housewifery'. In the sixteenth century both 'husbandry' and 'huswifery' being used to mean good economic management with thrift and prudence, as well as competence in a set of practical skills needed to run a

farming household. Today, Collins dictionary's definition of the word housewifery is "the work or function of a housewife; housekeeping."

The Somerset School of Housewifery was established by Somerset County Council in July 1897 at The Grange, Street, Somerset. The aim of the school was to enable girls to become good housewives when married or to give them better prospects of employment as servants. The property was owned by the Clark family and after their renovation of the mansion was offered at a nominal rent for several years to the Education Committee. It is possible that without the generosity of the Clark family the school may not have come into existence. Other councils considered establishing similar schools but were deterred by the cost. In 1908 there was a proposal by members of St Helens Education Committee, Lancashire, to have such a school but this was objected to on the grounds of the expense it would incur. The Somerset school closed in 1916 for financial reasons.

Initially studentships were to be offered to 15 girls each quarter of a year. This was changed in August 1897 to adopting a plan of admitting 30 students each half year. By 1899 studentships of free board and lodging and tuition were to be offered to 30 girls aged 13 or older for a school year. The pupils would be taught cookery, laundry work, general housework and basic dressmaking. One of the girls to be offered a place was Minnie Jones. The award of her studentship appeared in several Somerset newspapers in 1901 including The Shepton Mallet Journal.

Minnie was born on 3 June 1887 in Ashwick, Somerset. She was the 10<sup>th</sup> of 15 children born to Alban Bevan Jones and his wife Ann Bryant. Her parents

married on 8 Oct 1868 in the parish church of Ashwick, a small village near Shepton Mallet. Alban's occupation at the time of his marriage was described as that of cordwainer. A shoemaker who makes new shoes from new leather. He remained a shoemaker for the rest of his working life. Whilst Clarks of Street did engage outworkers but there is nothing to suggest that he had any direct connection with Clarks. Minnie was baptized on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1887 in the same parish church where her parents were married. Her father died 6<sup>th</sup> May 1917 and he must have had strong connections with the parish church as his funeral notice mentions that he was a bell ringer there for 30 years. Her mother Ann died in 1931.

Her siblings had mixed fortunes. One brother Edward George died aged 9 months, ten years before Minnie was born. Two of her younger siblings Mary Ann aged 2 and Reuben George aged 10 months died in April 1894 and were buried 4 days apart on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April respectively. Her brother Frank died in 1896 aged 22. Ten years later in 1906 another brother William died aged 20. William had been a member of the church choir for 12 years. Minnie's sister Ethel was widowed when her husband William Button was killed in a tragic accident at Mells Colliery. Her brother Solomon emigrated to America in 1912. Another brother George Bryant became a police inspector in Bath. In 1891 Minnie was a scholar living at home in Moorwood, Ashwick with her parents and siblings.

The 1901 census taken on 31 March shows Minnie, then aged 13, as one of 30 pupils at the Somerset School of Housewifery. She is listed as studying laundry work at that time.

In the early part of 1910 Minnie married Clifford Joseph Young in Bath and on the 16<sup>th</sup> May that year their only child, a daughter, Marjorie Annie was born also in Bath. Why Minnie was in Bath at that time isn't know. Perhaps she had found employment in the city, maybe at the same hotel, The York House Hotel, where her husband had worked as a hotel page according to the 1901 census. Or perhaps she had joined other relatives who had move to Bath around that time.

In 1911 Minnie and her husband Clifford were living with one of Clifford's uncles, Fred Young and Fred's wife. Clifford's occupation was now as a plumber as was his uncle Fred. Minnie's daughter Marjorie is not recorded as living with them nor can she be found in any of the 1911 census returns. Was it an oversight by Fred when completing the census?

Majorie was living with her parents in 1921 at 2 Ringwood Road, Bath and Clifford is employed as a plumber. They are all still living at 2 Ringwood Road, Bath, in 1939 and Clifford is still a plumber.

Marjorie had married Harold George Herman in the early part of 1938, but he was away at sea during 1939 which explains why Marjorie was living with her parents. Marjorie stayed with her parents throughout the Second World war. Harold was a Chief Petty Officer in the Royal Navy and was serving on HMS Repulse in Dec 1941 when it was sunk by the Japanese off the coast of Malaya. After being rescued he was taken with other survivors to Singapore where he was unfortunately taken prisoner when Singapore fell in February 1942. The records that exist indicate he was a Japanese Prisoner of War for more than three years. What a worrying time for all the family. According to an article in

The Bath Weekly Chronicle they only received news that Harold was alive in July 1943. Another article in September 1945 in the same paper reported that Harold was safe and well in Siam. Marjorie and Harold had at least one child, a son born in 1948. A grandchild for Minnie and her husband.

Clifford Young died in December 1959 in Bath and had still been living at 2 Ringwood Road at the time. Minnie survived her husband by ten years and her death was recorded at Plymouth in Nov 1969. It was probable that she was living in Plymouth to be near her daughter who was also living in Plymouth. One must wonder if Minnie's year at The School of Housewifery helped to prepare her for life's ups and downs. The death of four siblings and then supporting her daughter whilst her son in law was a Japanese prisoner must have taken quite an emotional toll. She lived to be nearly 80 so she must have been a robust person.

***©Helen Brookes***

## References

Ancestry

Census returns

1891 RG12; Piece 1911; Folio 53; Page 8

1901 RG13; Piece: 2319; Folio: 59; Page: 19

1911 RG14; Piece 14665; Schedule 210; RG78 Piece no 890

1921 RG15; Piece 11516; Schedule 2

Lincolnshire Family History Society

Housewifery, A Manuel and Text Book of Practical Housekeeping

Newspapers:

Weston Gazette

West Somerset Free Press

The Shepton Mallet Journal