

## Mr Page's Roll of Honour

When war broke out on 4 August 1914, Mr William George Page was headmaster of Ombersley School. He had taken up the position in 1881 and was now 61 years old. He had taught the parents and possibly even grandparents of many of his pupils during his 33 years in post.

Throughout each school term, he made regular entries into the school log books, detailing the weather, pupils' achievements or misdemeanours, the work of his staff and the decisions of the school managers. These log books are now held by Worcestershire Archives & Archaeology Service at the Hive in Worcester.

Throughout the years, his observations are fair, even when his pupils and their parents try his patience sorely:

*19 May 1914*

*Mr Moule complained that his boy had been punished for eating onions in school today. He had told him I had given him 3 stripes for it. I told him I had not the slightest recollection of punishing anyone today, but I would enquire.*

*20 May 1914*

*Investigated above story & found it all a fabrication. The boy was not (nor indeed any boy) punished yesterday at all, he has never been punished for that particular fault, & he acknowledged that I have never given him 3 stripes. The only foundation for the complaint is that his teacher has repeatedly put him by himself for eating onions during playtime & making himself a nuisance to her & the rest of his class. I am sorry to say this is not the first time he has taken a false story home. He ... causes all of us much trouble & anxiety. I have sent result of my enquiries to his father.*

*At about 5 o'clock, Mr Moule called on me today to say that [his] boy's story was entirely false, & to apologise for what he had said to me.*

On 18 June 1915, Mr Page wrote a list in the log book of the 'old boys of the school [who] have joined His Majesty's Forces, & are serving in the War' and listed, if he knew it, the unit in which they served.

*He then wrote 'The above list contains the names of 108 boys, all of whom have attended the school during my time here. There may be others, of a former date, whom I have not traced. Our Parish has done very well to aid the Country, nearly 200 young men having joined the Colours. It has made it bad for Agriculture & has rendered really necessary the relaxation of the Attendance Rules & I am rather surprised that I have but 8 boys taken away from school.'*

Forty two, the majority of boys on Mr Page's list, joined the Worcestershire Regiment, 15 joined the Army Service Corps and 12 the Royal Field Artillery. Good agricultural labourers would have been in demand for the Service Corps and Artillery because they were strong and used to driving the horses and vehicles required for moving heavy equipment about. Several young men in the village joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force, having emigrated to find work there before the war.

Of his own children, his eldest son Frank was in the Metropolitan Police, Harry served in the Army Service Corps, and Wilfred was in the Coldstream Guards. His daughters Gertrude and Edith continued to teach at the school during the War. Gertrude's husband, Alfred Abrey of Ombersley, was a career soldier who had served in the Boer War as well as the First World War. Edith, his

younger daughter, married a William Burgess in late 1915, who also served in World War One, but little information has been found about him.

Like many teachers in the area, Mr Page kept a close eye on the lists of local men killed and wounded, and recorded their names in the log book.

On 14 September 1915, he recorded: *'Another of my old boys – J Blunt – has been killed in the Dardanelles, making the 4<sup>th</sup> to fall in the war. The others are Albert Miles, Alfred Smith and Albert Hill. William Wheatley and Ernest Hill are both very dangerously wounded.'*

On 30th October 1916, Mr Page received very sad news for the family. He wrote in the log book that *'We have received official information that our son Wilfred was killed in action on Sep. 15 & also that my younger daughter's husband met a like fate on Oct. 12. Percy Biddle & Neddy Skerrett, old boys, have also lost their lives. There are now 25 names on my Death Roll of Honour. 174 of my boys are serving, or have served, their country in this war.'*

Wilfred Kirkman Page was 32 when he was killed. His name is engraved on the Thiepval Arch, along with those of the 72335 others who died at the Somme and whose remains were never found. His brothers and sisters survived the war, as did his brother in law, Alfred Abrey.

On 20 November 1917, he records that his daughter Edith *'has given notice to leave at the end of December. She has been very unsettled ever since her husband was killed a year ago, & has only stayed as long on my account.'*

By this stage, the combined strains of age, illness, teaching and worry mean that Mr Page and his wife are becoming increasingly infirm. On 31 January 1918, Mr Page wrote his last entry:

*After nearly 37 years' work here, I have come to my last day in school.*

*The last year has been full of difficulty for me: 1<sup>st</sup> the poor attendance & irregularity of the upper standards owing to agricultural needs; 2<sup>nd</sup> the closing of the school for 6 weeks when we had just begun to get into the new year's work; 3<sup>rd</sup> the loss of the teacher of Standards. iii-iv, but above all the increasing deafness which, for a long time, has made me really unfit for any work. But for that, I should have been glad to ask for the extension of my Certificate, but I felt that, had I done so, I should be remaining under false pretences.*

*Still I resign my school with very great regret, the more so as I feel that, under other conditions, I could have handed it over to my successor in a better state. I trust he may be as happy here as I have been. I take this last opportunity of testifying my gratitude to my managers and to HM Inspector, for their invaluable kindness to me during my long service. Looking back, I can see that perhaps I might have done more, but it has ever been my aim to make any dear boys & girls God fearing children & worthy citizens of our grand Empire & I trust that I may have, in some measure, succeeded in this. Nearly 200 of my boys are now fighting for their country & 25 of them – one of my own among them – have given their lives for her.*

*I am glad to know that, in Mr Stiles [sic], I have a very worthy successor, & I beg him to love my boys & girls for my sake, as he will soon do, I hope, for his own. May God be with him, & them.*

W.J. Page 1881-1918