

Patricia Burstall BEM (1936 - 2016)



Miss Patricia Gillian Hampden Raynor **Burstall BEM**
(21 February 1936 - 18 March 2016)

During her lifetime countless thousands of people benefited from the generosity of Patricia Burstall. She gave her time, almost her life, to helping those in need and supporting national and local charitable organizations. The award of a richly deserved British Empire Medal in the June 2015 Birthday Honours List was fitting recognition indeed for all

she had done, especially for the local community in Bisham and Marlow.

How should we remember her best? As an indomitable cyclist pedalling her bicycle through Marlow and Bisham, conveying in her manner and dress the spirit of a bygone age? As the founder, chief organiser and energetic leader of Bisham Gardens Open Days over a period of 22 years? As the spearhead of a successful campaign to buy Bisham Woods on behalf of the Woodland Trust? As a stalwart supporter of Bisham Church, its long-time historian, fund raiser and tour guide to visitors? As a supporter and fund raiser for Buckinghamshire Historic Churches? As a Volunteer Visitor for BBC pensioners for 18 years? Patricia did all these and much more. She exemplified all that is the "Best of British" in that most traditional style of voluntary fund raising and neighbourly support. She was gentle but forthright, a person not afraid, in spite of entering her 80s, to embrace IT and use it effectively in organising the town walks for the Marlow Society and communicating effectively in all her business affairs. She was a patron of the Marlow Choral Society for which she arranged concerts. She sang regularly in both the Bisham and Marlow choirs.

Patricia was a private person and fiercely independent. Her quite gentle demeanour hid a steely resolve.

Patricia Gillian Hampden Raynor Burstall was born on 21 February 1936. In 1941, her father, Colin Burstall, was sent to the U.S. as part of the RAF procurement team tasked with obtaining equipment and supplies before America entered the

war. In the following year, Patricia and her mother went to Dayton, Ohio, where her father was stationed. She went to school for almost a year in the U.S. when she was 6-7 years old. She returned to England in 1944 and went to Lynton House School in Maidenhead and then to Reading University where she studied English Literature. After the war her parents divorced and her father moved to America. She and her mother remained in Bisham.

Patricia maintained contact with her father and met his new family when she visited Missouri in 1959. Her journeys to the U.S. were always by surface transport because she refused to fly. Sadly, her parent's divorce caused her much distress and may well have resulted in a conviction that she would not marry, which she never did.

Patricia worked for the BBC in Portman Place as a secretary and researcher until 1989 when her mother's health failed. She left work to care for her mother and then began her philanthropic, community and social life.

Amongst her many research projects was the detailed study of the Bisham Church and its gravestones along with those of Marlow. Her talks on these topics were very authoritative and most amusing. The Marlow Museum knew her as a stalwart, an enthusiast, an active participant in whatever she took on. In 1981 her book "The Golden Age of the Thames" was published with the following publisher's note:

"Patricia Burstall's earliest memory of the Thames is of losing a much valued sixpence down a gap between the planks of the Rowing Club, walking the towpath, exploring Thames

villages, holiday cruising and trips on Salters steamers. She currently crosses the river six times every weekday on her way to and from work - on foot over Marlow Bridge and in the little train over Bourne End Railway Bridge and Brunel's Sounding Arch. Her hope is that the proposed Thames Walk will materialise so that the river can be walked from source to mouth."

The book is -

"Dedicated to the proud and honoured memory of all those who loved the Thames, but did not return in 1919 to its brown and placid waters. "

She lived to see the Thames Path established.

Her second book, *The Golden Age of the Bicycle*, which is described as a pioneer work explored its technological developments and its social aspects, as cycling flourished and spread to all societies and classes during the 1890s.

Until relatively recently Patricia was an inveterate walker of Britain's long distance footpaths. The walks are recorded on a map of which she was very proud and careful to protect throughout the trauma of the floods that she endured. The only path that defeated her was the Pennine Way which she attempted too late in her walking 'career' as the middle and northern sections lacked suitably spaced accommodation. Her last walk was Hadrian's Wall from east to west.

When you pass the mileposts of the former turnpike in Bisham and on the Wycombe Road, think of Patricia. She

saved them and got them protected by statutory listing. They are a lasting memorial.

Patricia leaves a half-sister, a half-brother and 8 cousins.

Some quotes in tribute:

A lady of the old school who maintained standards.

Patricia was a Tuesday morning escort on the Age Concern minibus for over 10 years until she stopped to have a hip operation. She was always reliable and friendly and arrived on her bike and the guests loved her.

A walk along the High Street or over the bridge usually involved a sighting of her moving resolutely and purposefully to a meeting or a job. Always precise and always succinct, always friendly but always business like, Patricia was the incarnation of the spirit that makes our community in Bisham and Marlow a very special place.

Patricia had an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of Marlow and Bisham and was someone who was happy to share that knowledge generously with others. Her enthusiasm for the subject of local history was infectious and she conveyed it through talks and guided walks that were enthralling, engaging and very often very amusing.

Last year we had afternoon tea with the famous drizzle cake. Now we find there is no bicycle, no afternoon tea but a large hole in the community without her.

Over 50 years of Poppy selling door to door on behalf of The Royal British Legion.

I found it quite difficult to express what I feel reflects Pat as a person. Despite all her huge input into local affairs, she was actually a private person and fiercely independent - truly a cat that walks alone.

Pat was a one off. Her quite gentle demeanour hid a steely resolve. She worked tirelessly to fundraise for the Church, and it was virtually impossible to refuse her! Her sense of humour was wonderfully dry which made her guided tours a joy. The memory of her pedalling through the Village on her bike will endure. She was a community treasure.