

St David's Infant School, Mtarfa, Malta....by Maggie Threadingham*

Stand-alone Infant Schools within BFES/SCEA can be counted by the handful, which makes them interesting and probably fairly invisible, as they were usually small schools and overshadowed by their larger neighbouring Primary schools. St David's School at Mtarfa in Malta is one such example, and has very few surviving records. Luckily, we have a description of the school from its last Head Teacher, compiled with help from Bernie Ryan and Dot Cotton, two of the last teachers at the school with HT Maggie Threadingham (née Knight). Maggie writes:

"I was appointed Head Teacher of St. David's infant school in Mtarfa, Malta in 1973. It was to be my first Headship. I had been with SCEA (BACS) since 1964. I'd worked in Germany, Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong (BFES).



Originally there were two Infant schools in Malta. The other being at Tigne which closed in the summer of 1970.



Captain Mike Law, the Naval officer in charge of schools, when writing on the history of schools in Malta said, "*I am*

afraid I have no knowledge of the history of St David's". Having trawled through some of the archives I believe the school could have opened in 1920. There was a Military hospital in Mtarfa which became known as the Royal Naval hospital in 1965. An increase in hospital staff occurred in 1967 when the RN hospital in Bighi closed. Accommodation was needed for these families and St David's would provide education for the young children of the transferred staff. It was a purpose built school with 3 classrooms, cloakrooms, a medical room and a large hall. The walkway to the school office, staff room and swimming pool provided a shaded area in part of the playground. School times and children's uniform changed in accordance to military winter and summer routines. Children began school at 4yrs but at 7yrs transferred to one of the Primary schools in Luqa, St. Andrew's and Verdala.

The David Bruce Royal Naval Hospital, Mtarfa, Malta

Some children walked from the nearby hospital accommodation and others arrived by school bus. There were 3 class teachers, a Headteacher, a secretary and 2 cleaners.

Before I arrived, the school had closed during the Withdrawal of 1971 when Britain withdrew its forces and reopened in 1972 when they returned. The three new members of staff were recruited in London. None had taught in service schools before. The Headteacher, Heather Jenkins was in post for their first year leaving to get married in the July and I arrived in the September.

This was a unique challenge for us all. So much was different from our previous experiences. Being a small school offered lots of opportunities for both teaching and learning. Before long we had offers of help from mothers with reading, baking & art work, while one group set about making clothes for the Home corner.

Sadly the situation changed when preparation for the end of a military presence in Malta in 1979 began.

Military personnel were leaving which affected school numbers resulting in Bernie Ryan moving to Verdala and Dot Wilson to Luqa. I became class based.

After a year, a further change was made. Chris Ford (née Spibey), the remaining class teacher joined the staff at St. Andrews and I became an advisory Early Years teacher to the Primary schools including the one in Naples. Mtarfa School became a Teachers Centre.

In 1978 I left the Island and became deputy head of Spandau school in Berlin. Chris Spibey went to Krefeld, Bernie Ryan to Hong Kong and Dot Wilson to Edinburgh.”



David Bruce Royal Naval Hospital, Mtarfa - a more recent picture

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