

Who was William Edwards?



The plan to build an estate in Stifford Clays had been discussed by the council before the Second World War but the building was not started until May 1946. A primary and secondary school were to be included in the estate. The site of the school was called Little Graven Field and was a meadow covered in poppies. It had an undulating surface and a number of small ponds linked together by a stream. The largest and deepest of these was called 'Little Graven Pond', although locals referred to it as 'Primrose Island' for obvious reasons.

In 1959, aerial photographs revealed lined and ringed crop marks which were a sure sign of earlier occupation of the land and immense archaeological interest. Archaeologists carried out some emergency excavations and found that this had been quite an important site possessing the twin necessities of height (for defensive purposes) and water for sustenance.

When the school opened in 1962, The Gazette headline said "Children will walk on 2,000 Years of History" as the site was thought to date back to Romano-British times. Interestingly in 2008, further archaeological work was conducted (with many of our Alumni such as Tom Hughes, Jacob Smith, Lucy Hutton and Jane Young) leading the way. An ancient well was discovered and excavations revealed artefacts from the Bronze Age (5,000 years ago)

Ultimately the school was completed by 1962 with the first headteacher being appointed, Mr R. H. Saxton.

The school was named after Mr W. H. Edwards, a man whose life was spent in the service of Thurrock education and local government. William Edwards was educated in Cardiff and qualified as a teacher at the University of Wales college in Cardiff. (The very same institution I was privileged to attend many years later).

He began his teaching career in Andover Grammar School but in December 1906 he joined the staff of Palmer's School in Grays teaching the day boys and boarders. Mr Edwards was a resident form master supervising boys from 7:00am to 10:00pm.

The outbreak of the First World War interrupted William Edwards' teaching career and he was involved in the thick of the action in Belgium with the Durham Light Infantry.

In 1919 he resumed his teaching career in Palmer's and was promoted to Senior Master. William Edwards was actively involved in public life becoming a Labour Councillor in Grays and in 1934 a Justice of the Peace.

When he retired, he became Chairman of the Governors at Palmer's in 1956 completing 50 years connection with the school.

In July 1948 Mr Edwards was awarded the M.B.E and wrote the philosophy section for 'Everyman Encyclopaedia'

By 1962, when the school was opened, he was a resident of Cranham Nursing Home. He was visited by some of our first students in 1962 and although at this stage he was quite frail, he was delighted that a school should be named after him and that some pupils had made the visit.

Who was William Edwards?

William Edwards was highly regarded in educational and political fields. He was described as very modest and easy-going but also very shrewd.

By Ralph HENDERSON M.B.E. (Former Deputy Headteacher)