

TWO GATES RAGGED SCHOOL



Two Gates Ragged School was opened in June 1867, before this time there was a feeling in the village community of a need for both education and spiritual enlightenment. The village or township of Cradley already had several places for education and for religious worship, the villagers of Two Gates and High Park probably felt somewhat isolated being situated at the top of the hill and separated from the other established schools and chapels.

Worshippers from Lye attempted to establish a presence in the village without success.

In 1864 High Town Ragged School was opened and at about that time Jeston Homfray, a solicitor, and Mr. Perry, a shop keeper in Two Gates persuaded Mr Noah Hingley to help in a project to establish a place of education and worship in this somewhat isolated community.

Jeston Homfray and Noah Hingley were the leading individuals, but Mr Perry and other local people organised the construction of the building and it would seem that they were never in awe of their financial superiors. In 1896 representatives of the local inhabitants William Auden, James Willetts, John Hodgetts, H.R. Perry, H. Hall, Joseph Hodgetts, D. Addams, M. E. Dunn. Mr. James Addams, S. Perry, E. Bird, T. Willetts, A. Bennett, and C. E. Bridgwater became the 'Tenants', Sir Benjamin Hingley and Alfred Homfray were the 'Landlords'.

After the Education Act was enforced the school was specifically to be used 'For the purpose of a school for the instruction of the inhabitants of Two Gates and neighbourhood in morality and the principles of the Christian Religion independently of sects and parties.'

It was shortly after this time that the school gained its independence from the Hingley and Homfray families. There is a story that Mr. Homfray wanted the school to become an annex to the Parish Church, St. Peters, and he invited the minister to attend in preparation for the conversion of Two Gates Ragged School to Church of England. The congregation rejected the plan. On the spot Mr. Homfray offered the school to members for a grand sum of £5.00. The offer was accepted and Two Gates Ragged School was independent.

In the early years when the school was both a chapel and a place of education there were as many as 600 people of all ages passing through the doors each week.

PROMINENT SUPERINTENDENTS

1867 – 1879. James Perry the first Superintendent, must have been a prominent person in the village before 1867 to be the figurehead that guided the complex negotiations between the previous owners of the land, the powerful figures of Mr. Hingley and Mr. Homfray and the uneducated mass of people who wanted an education and a place of worship that they could call their own.

December 1879 – March 1880. In 1880 there were two superintendents, Mr. William Fendall and Mr. Auden both found the appointment to onerous. The minutes of Sep. 27 1880 state Mr. Auden 'backed himself out' in favour of Mr. Downing. It is thought that the first four superintendents lived within a few hundred yards of the school.

In 1884 Mr. John Forrest was appointed, he lead a most interesting life both before and after the time he was involved with Two Gates Ragged School. (See the history of Two Gates Ragged School. ***Through the Years***. Published in 2010)

James Willetts is noted as a teacher in 1913 and in a list of trustees dated 1911 his occupation is given as Labourer. He is indicated as **James Willetts Supt.** on the commemorative bricks built into the wall of the extension to the school. There are the names of Thomas Willetts, Sarah Willetts and Alfred Willetts but what their individual family relationships was is not certain. However, it is thought that Thomas Willetts was the father of Clifford Willetts, Superintendent 1935 – 1981 and therefore the grandfather of Mrs. Hazel Clifton (Supt. 1981 – 2003) and Barry Willetts 2003 - .

SECRETARIES

Until 1936 all secretaries were male, then for the next 70 years there were only females in that post with one exception.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Sunday school was a thriving section of Two Gates Ragged School until the death of Mrs. Hazel Clifton in 2003, it was a great disappointment to her, when she had to invite ex-Sunday school pupils, now of mature years, to sing as a ladies choir. These ladies still contribute to the anniversary services and to other occasions through the year, Harvest and Christmas time.

Mr. Percy Bate. The story goes that in 1910 during morning Sunday school a young man walked into the chapel and without introduction or instruction sat at the organ and played for the service. He came in the afternoon and remained in post for the next 60 years.

In 2010 a history of the school was compiled, the title, **Two Gates Ragged School - Through the Years. 1867 – 2003**. Available from the Cradley Links web site bookshop.

PHOTO GALLERY



John Forrest



Clifford Willetts



Hazel Willetts



Percy Bate



Neal Clarke