



Nathaniel Woodard.....Educationalist



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Just over two hundred years ago, I believe one of Basildon's most remarkable individuals was born, although today not many local people seem to know of him.



Priest/School House at St Nicholas Church, Laindon

Puckles Charity School based at St. Nicholas church had been educating the poor of Laindon and Basildon since the early 1620's until 1877. Private schools around the country were looking after the wealthy but who was looking after the education of the less fortunate sector of society?

This was the concern of Nathaniel Woodard who was born on the 21st March 1811 (St. Benedict's Day). 'Labour and obedience' is the motto of Benedictines. It was going to be this motto that helped drive Nathaniel to succeed in establishing a form of education to rival that of the State.

This what Sir John Otter on Nathaniel's life biography published in 1925 had to say in his opening two paragraphs: -

'In the middle of the last century Nathaniel Woodard conceived a magnificent scheme for uplifting of the Church and nation by providing a system of education by means of cheap boarding schools

for sons of persons of moderate, or less than moderate, pecuniary means.

The state of middle-class education was at the time, as everyone knew was lamentable. The education of the poor had become, to some degree, a matter of national concern: our public schools invited the wealthy; but the children of the classes in an intermediate state were dependent on private enterprise and often became an open prey to bad influences.'



His father was a country gentleman of a small estate, living at the time at Basildon Cottage also referred to as Barstable Cottage here in Essex. It was situated at the end of Hotwater Lane and eventually demolished to make way for Basildon New Town Centre. Today's location is where the old escalators were, now only stairs. It must not be confused with Basildon Hall (Barstable Hall) that was situated in what is now East Thorpe and Cricket Hill area. The Hall was demolished in 1961.

Basildon Cottage



Basildon Hall

Nathaniel was the ninth of twelve children, so although his father

was living the life of a gentleman, the family were relatively poor and it was this that obviously drove him in later life.

He did not go to school even though Puckles Charity School was only a mile or so away. His mother was a deeply religious woman and his religious sense, deep and exacting from very early years, was strengthened and directed by her example and teaching. Therefore, from an early age Nathaniel believed that his vocation in life was to take Holy Orders.

We are aware that his mother took him to a Laindon Church. However, we are not sure whether this was St. Nicholas Church, Laindon or Holy Cross, Basildon. With reference to Laindon, we would assume St. Nicholas, but we have to remember that the Priest's living up to the 1970's was Laindon-cum-Basildon and Holy Cross was initially a chapel to St. Nicholas.

To obtain Holy orders you had to graduate from Oxford or Cambridge but his father could not afford to send him there. He did instead send him to read with Rev. W. Stratton, Rector of Boughton, Norfolk where he followed a course of study.

Sometime in early 1833, his fortune changed as he received sufficient funds for a University Career (believed to be from two aunts). He chose Oxford and it was about this time that he also became engaged to be married to Elizabeth Harriet Brill of an Essex family.

He entered Magdalen College in July 1834. Married Elizabeth at Netteswell, Essex on the 24th March 1836 and with this change in his family life he found it difficult to study and it was not until 1840 that he took his degree. He was eventually ordained on 6th June 1841 by the Bishop of London, Charles James Blomfield.

In his first curacy at St Bartholomew's, Bethnal Green he started a school for children of deprived parishioners. He then moved onto St. James the Greater, Clapton, however he fell out with the Bishop of London over a sermon he gave but, with the help of friends managed to obtain curacy at St. Mary de Haura Church, New Shoreham, in 1846.

He immediately opened up a day school in his vicarage and in 1848 he started up St. Nicholas School where he took in Boarders. This school eventually became the present-day Lancing College. Nathaniel believed and wrote in 1849 that the poor could not be successfully educated or benefited unless the middle classes were educated. So, he set himself the task to provide a good and complete education for the middle classes, where pupils were to be taught the fear and honour of God according to the doctrines of the Catholic Faith as set out in the Prayer Book of the Church of England.

He became ill in 1848, but this gave him time to write and publish, '*A plea for the middle classes*' calling of the need to provide a good and complete education for the middle class at a fee that most could afford. Although he accepted day school pupils, he preferred boarding schools because he wanted to keep the influences of home from them.

It was from these beginnings that he started to work full time in promoting educational projects, resigning his curacy in 1850 to concentrate on fund raising, he appeared to have the charisma to attract a number of sponsors.

The Saturday Review in 1853 had this to say about him: '*Mr Woodard is and is not, a remarkable man. He is uncompromising, stiff, resolute – some people might say obstinate. He is a man of one idea but he pursues that one idea with unflagging energy and considerable savoir faire.*'

Initially he ignored female education but in 1855 he helped a girl's school in Sussex and in 1874 his first girls school St. Anne's School at Abbots Bromley was founded.

In 1870, Oxford University awarded him the degree of DCL and he was made Canon of Manchester Cathedral by William Gladstone which carried a stipend of £2,000 a year.

He went on to establish eleven schools in his lifetime and the Woodard Corporation now controls the largest group of independent

Church of England Schools in England and Wales. Today there are forty six schools under the influence of the Woodard Corporation (Primary and Secondary).

Nathaniel died on the 25th April 1891 and his tomb is in the Chapel of Lancing College.



Lancing College

At the beginning of annual Chapter meetings of the Woodard Corporation the following words are read: *'Nathaniel Woodard, Clerk in Holy Orders, sometime Canon of Manchester, who was called to rest on the 25th day of April 1891 and whose body lies buried at Lancing College, founded this Corporation in the faith and fear of Almighty God, for the love of his Church and the good of his country.'*

On the 24th November 2011 at Westminster Abbey, a National Service of Thanksgiving was held to celebrate the 200 years anniversary of his birth.

The family at a later stage moved to Frith Villa situated near Frith Farm, Laindon Command Road, Little Burstead (previously Laindon). Probably after Nathaniel had left home. Another of Basildon's Famous people, Richard Johnson (Actor) lived there for a short time in 1965/6 when he was married to Kim Novak, American actress. At the time the Villa was referred to as Stockwell Cottage.

Would it not be fitting for the Basildon Council to honour one of its

greatest sons with a plaque in the town centre?

Basildon Borough Heritage Society (BBHS)

Ken Porter – Revised 4th March 2024