

The story of an Essex school

by Terence F. Slattery

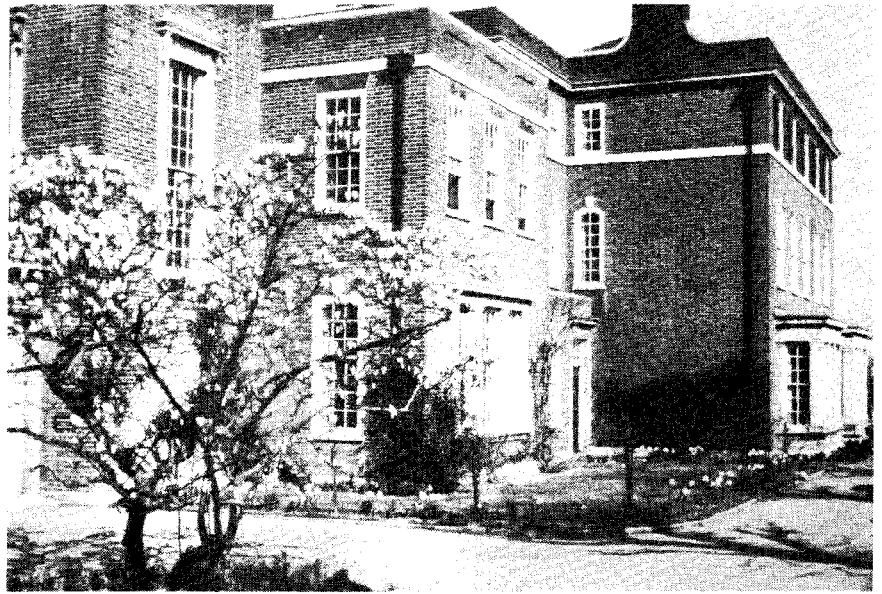
WILLIAM Palmer was an old squire, who, finding himself at the age of 73 without heirs, decided to hand over a portion of his fortune to found a school for ten poor children. Little is known about him. In Morant's *History of Essex* he is merely mentioned as one of the successive lords of the manor of Thurrock Grays. As far as I can ascertain he was a merchant owning property in Lombard Street and having family connections in Leicestershire and Cambridge.

Most interesting is that Pepys mentions him in his diary. In the entry of August 15, 1673, Pepys writes: "So by water down to Deptford, taking in my boat with me Mr. Wm. Palmer, on whom I knew and his wife when I was first married being an acquaintance of my wives and her friends lodging at Charing Cross during our differences. He joyed me in my condition and himself it seems is forced to follow the law in a common ordinary way, but seems to do well and is a sober man enough by his discourse. He landed with me at Deptford where he saw by the Officers respect to me a piece of my command, and took notice of it, though God knows (I hope) I shall not be elated with that but rather to be known for serving the King well and doing my duty."

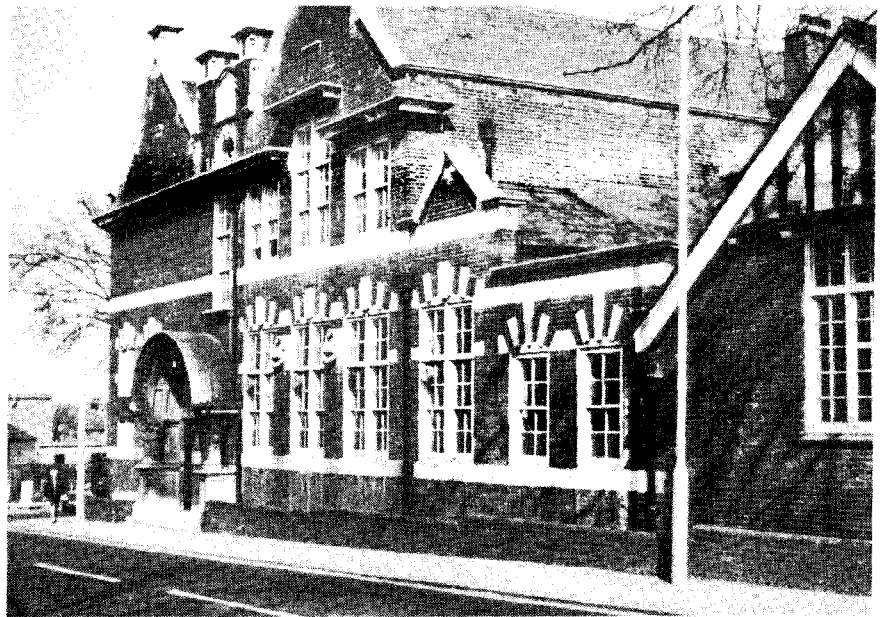
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The Wm. Palmer Trust was managed from the time of its foundation in 1706 until the middle of the 19th century by a succession of persons belonging to the leading families, owning land or residing within a dozen miles of Grays. In the course of over 200 years it has grown from "ten poor children" to a school with some 800 pupils, boys and girls.

William Palmer was surely a man of careful and even canny habits. Although he insisted that the twelve trustees should all be men of good position or with business experience, he did not trust them to erect a suitable school house. He himself prescribed the details: and how careful he was too, for



Palmers School as it looks now. Below: At the turn of the century. Photographs by Mr. Jesson.



the comfort of those who were to occupy it. Lest the master or the scholars should shiver in winter he insisted on a chimney, lest they suffer from cold feet he stipulated that the floor must be raised at least a foot above the ground. Buy why did he insist that the school house must face the churchyard? Was it because he hoped that the boys would be perpetually reminded of their final goal and thus always encouraged to be good?

The old school building was very small and stood close to the parish church. However it continued to serve its purpose until 1844 when a new school was built near the junction of the High Street and Orsett Road. In 1855 the trustees were authorised by the Charity Commissioners to enlarge the new schoolroom and to receive paying pupils in addition to those who were to receive free

education. These fortunate pupils wore a distinctive uniform: blue breeches, yellow stockings and a blue jacket, similar to those worn by children at Christ's Hospital. They were taught counting and Latin and their master, in addition to free accommodation in the schoolhouse, received a princely salary of £20 a year.

In 1870 elementary schools were erected in New Road so there was no longer the same necessity to maintain Palmer's as an elementary school. The Charity Commissioners, therefore, persuaded the trustees and the parishioners of Grays to divert the considerably increased income of the trust to the provision and maintenance of two schools for "higher education," one for 180 boys and the other for 80 girls and to provide boarding accommodation for a portion of



Entrance to the school. Photograph by Mr. Jesson.

each. The present site was acquired for this purpose in 1874 and the girls' school in 1876.

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The population of Grays and the surrounding district steadily increased and with it the demand for secondary education. The County Education Committee was advised in 1905 to make Plamer's School the centre of secondary education for the whole of the surrounding district, instead of providing a separate high school of its own. The recommendation was adopted and since then the county has provided all the funds necessary for the enlargement and maintenance of both schools in excess or the revenues derived respectively from trust funds, pupils' fees and Government grants.

In 1918 the Governors sold a small property in Lombard Street to Barclays Bank Ltd., for £15,000 and part of this sum was used to buy land (about 21 acres) upon which further buildings were erected and a playing field for the boys' school provided.

Overcrowding continued and finally became so acute that the Governors and the County Education Committee agreed that the only method of solving the problem lay in the erection of new premises on an entirely new site for the girls' school. Further alterations were made to the old premises for the exclusive use of the boys' school. When the many difficulties were finally overcome the girls' school was transferred to the new premises and formerly opened in 1931.

In 1944 Palmer's School was voluntarily aided and voluntarily controlled. The intervening years 1971-1975 have seen the phasing out of the junior school so from September, 1975, the original Palmer's School has been transferred to a voluntarily controlled six-form college taking students of both sexes from the age of 17-19. ★1223E

AN ESSEX GIANT

by Canon James Allen

FREDERICK Kempster—known as the Essex giant—died in 1918 at the age of 30. He was so tall that his name still appears in the Guinness Book of Records. There he is described as of Bayswater, London, and was reported to be 8 ft. 4½ in. at the time of his death, but photographic evidence suggests that his height was 7 ft. 8½ in. In 1913 he measured 7 ft. 8.1 in.

Frederick Kempster's burning ambition was to be ten feet tall, but he failed by just over two feet to achieve it. Frederick's home was at Landermere, near Thorpe-le-Soken, in Essex. Up to the age of twelve he was of normal height but for some unaccountable reason after this age he grew very rapidly. At the age of twenty-five, Frederick was nearly 8 ft. tall and weighed 25 stone.

Because of his size most ordinary jobs were out of the question for the young giant. He could not stand upright in an ordinary-sized room and his hands were far too big to be able to handle tools of normal sizes. Even the quite ordinary accessories and needs of daily life were not for him. He dwarfed everything about him.

What then could he do for a living? He decided to make capital out of his size and took up concert party work. He became a one-man exhibition. His work took him all over the country and he often stayed in hotels where the rooms were much too small for him. It was difficult, too, for him to travel in public transport.

Frederick also began to tour the Continent, and in between shows he would return to his native Landermere to visit his mother and sister. Each visit would cause a stir and children would gaze in amazement at this giant of a man. Friends and neighbours would call him to them for the thrill of shaking hands through the bedroom windows while he stood outside the houses. A photograph exists showing him doing this and greeting the landlady of the King's Head, the village pub, at her bedroom window.

Frederick was said to have been a sportsman and a quite clever comedian. His size did not deter or depress him. There were pictures taken of him with soldiers of world war one who were stationed at Landermere. The soldiers' heads scarcely reach to Frederick's elbow. He stands massive and square as well as tall, in the centre of the



group. When war broke out in 1914, Frederick was touring in Germany. He was, of course, interned as an enemy alien. When he was released he had lost five stone in weight. He lived on for another two years but reports say he was "never the same as before."

He died while on tour at Blackburn, where he was buried. The grave dug for him was ten feet long and the coffin had to be carried through the window of the hotel where he had been staying because it was too difficult to bring it through the doorway.

So ended the life of "Frederick the Great," as he was called. In many ways he was an unfortunate man; a freak of nature who could never be lost in a crowd, always recognisable but unable to lead the life of a normal human being.

During his short life of thirty years, Frederick Kempster made the most of it. He made the best of things as he found them and it is for that, as much as for his size, that he is remembered. Mr. E. T. Carter, who lived at Landermere and now lives at Layer de la Haye, remembers Frederick Kempster very well. ★1219E