



John A Edwards

Unravelling the Mystery

Growing up it didn't really occur to me that I was a granddad missing because I always thought I had 2, but one of them wasn't my granddad but more a "step" granddad. It wasn't until I was in my mid teens that I started to think about it and started asking my dad, who only seemed to remember bits and bats of information, so I left it alone.

Many years later a friend of mine was looking into his family history and that made me think, he was finding all sorts of information out from his research so why shouldn't I be able to do the same.

Through him I did a little look for my granddad Arthur Edwards but came up against a very fast brick wall, why couldn't I find him, was he still alive all this time! Again I left it alone and carried on wondering.

Quite a few weeks later I thought about it again and did a search through my friend, but yet again the results showed zero matches, until something caught my eye, there was a John A. Edwards listed in the year we estimated the birth as been, my dad always said he's sure he was about 4 and his dad was 31 when he died, so we had a date to start at!

I had a strong feeling about this one, the first of many along the rocky path that is Genealogy. I then looked for a marriage between John Arthur Edwards and Mary Ellen Riley and found a marriage between John A Edwards and Mary H Riley, again having a strong feeling I took a chance on this marriage and ordered the Marriage Cert. The wait seemed like weeks but the cert came and I was overjoyed to see that my grandmothers occupation tied in with what was on the cert and in fact so did the occupation of my granddad or at least what we thought it was at the time. My grandmothers name was recorded as Mary Helen Riley so it did fit in quite well apart from the different spelling but I was assured it was common for names to be wrong as they often just spelled it the way they heard it.

My next step was to find a death for my granddad, again looking under John Arthur Edwards I found a match and ordered the appropriate death cert, so now I had a Birth, Marriage and Death cert. The next port of call was to find where he was buried, and for that I turned to the Stoke-on-Trent archives service who I asked to do a search for me, within a couple of days they emailed me back saying he was buried in Newcastle-Under-Lyme Cemetery and said they keep all records there, they quickly found the record of where he was buried.

A few weeks later we decided to take a trip down, the three generations that followed from my granddad, I expected nothing to be there but overgrown grass and not a headstone in site, it had been nearly 60 years since my dad saw or heard from any of the relatives so we weren't holding out much hope. When we got there we pulled up to the main gate and in the grounds there was a records office who were holding the record for us, having looked at the document it gave it's first clue to me that maybe we might be in luck, I noticed that there was another grave that was empty called Edwards, a reserved grave.

We couldn't make head nor tale of the numbers so we were just roaming about until we noticed some workers who pointed us in the right direction. The first one I noticed was George and Emily's and seeing that gave me goose bumps and sent me giddy like a kid at Xmas, we searched for my granddads but couldn't find it anywhere until we sort of stumbled across it 3 graves to the left of George's!

I noticed almost immediately that the graves where kept very well and looked almost new, it was then I noticed the thing that would give me the biggest hint of hope that I had had so far, I stopped still in my tracks and shouted to my dad,
“have you noticed something about these graves, they have flowers on them!”
This must mean we still have relatives here.

So now the question was, what next? I had no pen and no paper but I felt I had to do something as we could easily miss whoever it was that left the flowers, Christmas was a month away and I knew that if flowers were going to be left again Christmas was the obvious choice. We talked about it on the way home and I eventually came up with the idea of leaving a note on the grave, about an hour too late I might add. Maybe if I rang the Cemetary they would, as weird as it sounds, leave a note on the grave for the person leaving the flowers to contact me. I phoned them and they agreed to it even though they remarked it was very unusual, they must have thought I was a bit loose!

Days went by and it eventually turned into 2 weeks, I was getting desperate now so I started to think we were going miss the Christmas deadline, then it hit me, why don't I ask someone on Rootschat if they could check the graves for me and if there wasn't a note leave one for me, amazingly someone agreed and even informed me that there wasn't a note on the graves.

About a week before Christmas I received an email telling me that the note was in place and securely fixed, now all I had to do was wait.

Christmas went by and I was starting to give up all hope of anyone contacting me, I must have been checking my emails at least every 10 mins by then!

It was Sunday the 11th January when it happened, I received an email asking why I wanted to know what I was asking, It took me about 5 reads to understand it, the adrenalin was pumping, I was falling to bits and thought I'd finally started to unravel the mystery of my granddad, I answered the email and sat on the computer anxiously waiting a reply. The reply came and I'd cracked it, the person I was speaking to was the daughter of my granddad's sister, all of a sudden the questions went dry and I was sat here struggling for things to ask, why now of all times, I had endless questions to ask but suddenly none of them were there.

So what was the next step, what had I actually achieved and what were we going to gain from us finally knowing all this. For me personally it was the whole reason for what I had started so now I'd finally achieved my main goal, what now?

Well first and foremost was obviously meeting up, but how do you go about it, how do you pick the time? Well the obvious answer was pick a meaningful date. the time had come, I thought it's time to stop shying away and sort it out before it was all forgotten and we lost touch again. It was August and I knew It would be October before I could get the time off work. So I picked the day that would mean something to everyone, the 8th October, my granddad's birthday. That's it we were set.

I was slightly nervous but with excitement, two questions were on my mind, when we meet and all the dust has settled, what have we gained? What's the next step after meeting?

The answers are simple, clearly there was a big gap in my dad's life that he knew nothing at all about, so one answer is clear, hopefully it has given him an insight into the man he never knew and maybe even a sense of belonging even though that gap will never be filled, it can be made smaller. The next step? I haven't a clue, maybe the answer is trying to get to know the family and that way we will also get to know my granddad

There was one thing I have noticed, now that we can stand back, look and think about it all. There still seems to be a distinct sense of loss and sorrow over my granddad's death through the family that knew him and my dad. That im sure will not go away but maybe now we have met it can help put one question to rest, Where is Arthurs son. That question will now forever be gone from the minds of the Edwards family. Arthur is clearly still missed to this day and there seems to be a sense of tremendous loss.

I'm extremely proud of who I am and where I come from, my granddad seemed like a man who always gave his all, dressed impeccably and thought a lot about his son and the rest of his family. We are a working class family that stands proud of being so, If you can't be proud of who you are then what is there? I believe a person is formed not only by himself but through the generations that have been before.