

First I must express my grateful thanks to Mrs Ethel Badger (Nee Ward) for supplying information of Coalpool Methodist Church, when it began in 1896 as I was not born then.

When I was a child Coalpool was a small hamlet consisting of a row of council houses which still stand opposite the Church today, then there were two rows of cottages, one called Chapel Row and one called Middle Row.

These were divided by a gully, which is still there today, with a cold water running tap at the centre of the gully, where people went to the tap to collect their water each day for drinking and washing etc. Then there were another row of houses called St. Mary's Row which stretched towards the cemetery. There was also a small Anglican Church nearby where the bell used to be rung each Sunday to call the people to worship. They used to have a lantern slide show once a year when nearly all of the children from the village went, the cost of this was one penny which we thought was wonderful. Everyone knew each other and we were like one big happy family for our parents shared their troubles with each other and the children played together, occasionally getting into mischief by knocking doors after tying the knobs together and then running off.

My brother, sister and myself were born in the first cottage of Chapel Row. On the end of the row next door was a large house occupied by Mr and Mrs Samuel Brunt who had two daughters, Emma and Nellie. Nellie unfortunately died very young and Emma married the Reverend Leslie Bickley. They had a daughter named Janet, who became one of my greatest friends, but she did not live to a great age.

Our cottage consisted of one large front room, two bedrooms and a scullery, where Mother could cook and wash etc. The front room housed a large piano, a large carved sideboard, table and chairs. There was a huge trunk of a tree on the ceiling which I believe was to help hold the building up, I often used to hope that it would never fall down. Halfway up the walls there was a panel of wood which Mother used to keep polished and it always looked beautiful. There were small windows and a large open fireplace with black hobs which sparkled. There was always a large kettle of boiling water ready for use hanging over the fire and a large bow round the fire to protect us from getting burnt. As one stepped out of the door there was a thoroughfare, giving access for the people to walk to each cottage, ending at the top of the row, by the side of the little Chapel. Mr Brunt from next door, was a lovely gentleman, he had a snow white soft beard, and used to stand outside his house waiting for me to come from school and would then tease me. He was a diabetic and sometimes when I was in his house, I would often shudder at the dry foods that he had to eat, not like today's diabetics who have many different varieties of food specially made for them, but he never once complained about his horrible food. In the street outside there was a small lamp which was lit each evening by the lamp lighter, who carried a ladder on his bicycle and then climbed it to light the gas lamps and in the morning at day break, came and put them out again. We attended North Walsall School and used to walk by Ryecroft cemetery. There were no houses until we came to the railway bridges, and crossed over the sand hills to school. We did this journey on foot four times a day because there were no buses or transport only horse and carts.

I cannot remember what happened to the Brunt family but the Keeling family moved into the house next door to us and I remember sitting on the sand hills when I came out of school waiting for Ron to come along and take me home. He used to play with us and make up games such as, sitting in our Dad's barrow pretending we were in a ship, sailing to some exotic place with Ron at the helm and he used to rock the barrow pretending we were on the sea.

His sister Miriam was a great friend of our family and used to delight in looking after us and often took us walks around the cemetery.

All the cottages had long gardens which stretched down almost to the next row and the people were enthusiastic in growing fruit and vegetables to provide food for their families. There was one small shop in the centre of the second row, by the gully occupied by the Hendon family where they sold wood, paraffin, etc., for us to light the fires and lamps because in those days there was no electricity in the streets or houses. They also sold a few groceries and sweets. We would glare through the windows, trying to decide what to spend our Saturday halfpenny on, knowing we would

have no more money till the next Saturday. However, our Dad would occasionally go to Walsall market and bring back some boiled sweets in the shape of fishes which were covered in sugar. This was a real special treat, but we would not then get our halfpenny for that week. There was also another small shop which sold fruit and vegetables. At the bottom of the road there was a huge pool surrounded by a few swings and a tea garden. This place was known as the "Pleasure Grounds." At one time our Dad, before he married Mother, used to row people round in boats on the pool. Many Churches used to hold their Sunday school treats here, but our Sunday school held our treats in Wards Farm, where there was a little stream, running along with beautiful, blue harebells growing alongside, which used to fascinate me.

We would enjoy our fun and games there and then sit down on the grass to eat our tea, which consisted of bread and butter, with a large piece of fruit cake stuck to it in a paper bag, which was messy, but we really enjoyed it. Wards Farm used to provide the milk from their cows for the community. Their sons George and Jim, used to deliver it to our doors in a big churn, which they measured out into our Mother's jugs; it was very rich, creamy and delicious. They also sold tetenals (small pears) in the Autumn and these were a special treat.

Our homes were surrounded by fields and we, the children of the village, spent a lot of time in them, picking poppies, buttercups and daises, or climbing the trees playing hide and seek in the very long grass. It was taller than us even when we were standing up. We would stand and watch the canal barges drawn by horses and carrying coal along the canal, to their destination.

The little Chapel was our sanctuary. The Sunday school was attended by most of the children from the village. We also had a Junior Guild which was run during the week and well attended. We used to have open service in the schoolroom and then go into classes in the Church amongst the benches. If a boy opened his eyes during the prayer time he would often get a slap on his head with a cap, the person who administered this will be nameless. The girls being innocent Ha! Ha! were excused.

Our Sunday school teachers were dedicated ladies from the village, we did not always get strictly Biblical teaching, but good moral teaching. I remember being read stories from good books like, "The Lamp Lighter," "Peep Behind The Scenes", and "A Basket Of Flowers" etc, which fascinated me so much so, that I bought these books for different children after I was grown up. My favourite teacher was Miss Lucy Radford, now Mrs Lucy Taylor.

She was beautiful to look at and a delight to know and still is.

There came to the church a Mr and Mrs R.J. Price who had a daughter named Joan and a son named Kenneth. Mr Price became Sunday school superintendent together with Mr Brunt and Mr Keeling and Mrs Price became a stalwart of the Church, their daughter Joan used to play the piano for us at Sunday school. I used to envy her because I wanted to play it. Ron became the organist and I used to mark the cards as Sunday school secretary. However, Joan fell in love with her boss, who was a Pharmacist and a strong Catholic, eventually she married him and left Coalpool and joined the Catholic Church. This gave me the opportunity to have my wish fulfilled and so I became the pianist to my delight, for it still thrills me to play "Tell me the stories of Jesus, I love to hear," and the fourth verse I particularly liked is "Tell me in accents of wonder, How rolled the sea, Tossing the boat in a Tempest on Galilee; And how the Master, Ready and kind, Chided the billows, And hushed the wind", etc, a truly wonderful Hymn. One evening my Mother, Brother and Sister went to visit our Grandmother, Mrs Eliza Hadley who lived about four doors above us, my Dad went round next door to visit Mr Brunt and Mr Keeling for a chat and I was left alone in the cottage. When my Dad came back, he asked me if I would like him to come to our Sunday school and I answered, "Oh yes Dad." Then he told me that Mr Brunt and Mr Keeling had asked him to come and join our Sunday school, but he said, "I have much to be forgiven and I could not join till I have asked God to forgive me, so will you kneel down and pray with me?" This shook me and I was reluctant to do so, so he said "You don't have to say or do anything but just kneel by my side" which I did. He prayed a long, loud prayer and tears of penitence rolled down his cheeks. This was the first of many prayers he offered out loud in time to come. Dad was a man who always went to the limit in everything he said and did, so he joined the Sunday school and became a Sunday school Superintendent and dedicated his life to serving God.

Dad started an open air meeting in the village at Coalpool, he, Mr Keeling and Mr Price, stood on a soap box to preach the gospel. They were surrounded by people standing on their doorsteps to listen and sing Hymns etc. Eventually he organised a carol service one Christmas to raise enough money to buy a portable organ to assist them in this work. They carried it around with them to help the singing etc.

There came the day when we watched the fields opposite us disappearing and the road of Dartmouth Avenue was cut. When the houses were built Dad went knocking the doors, inviting people to come to Church. One family who responded was the Sandoz family. Mr Sandoz had served at Pargeter Street Methodist Church and he became a leader at Coalpool. My parents loved entertaining and every Sunday they used to entertain the preacher for tea, then following the evening service they would invite the Sandoz family and other friends round for supper, and a Hymn singing session round the piano for which I enjoyed playing.

Mother had a very deep faith in God and would openly witness to her Lord to anyone and was always very caring to family, friends and neighbours.

My Dad had a friend who had been to Cliff College and he heard so much about it from him, that it wetted his appetite to go there, so one Whitsuntide he took Mother and us three children to Cliff College. I and my parents thought it was wonderful and this became an annual event for us. In those days the thousands of people who went had tea in the open air on the lawn at the front of the building. The principle, the Reverend Samuel Chadwich used to be up at 3 a.m on the bank holiday Monday praying that no rain would fall on the tea tablecloth whilst the people had their tea, and this miracle always happened, they never had one spot of rain on the tea table ever, but when they built a tea hall for this purpose, the Reverend Chadwich said, "They had lost their faith." My Dad found a cottage at Froggart Wood where some people took us in for future visits to Cliff College and we would walk through Froggart Wood and along by the Derwent river to the college for the meetings, which we enjoyed very much.

In 1939 when the second war broke out, Ron, Jim Ward, Frank Clibbury and Gordon Marriott together with others were called up to serve in the armed forces and this devastated the village, but I used to write to them and keep them informed as to what was going on. During the war, life became very quiet at the little Chapel, with the men away at the war, the village appeared to be lost. During this time we had a ten day Evangelistic Mission led by Mr Herbert Silverwood, who was a funny man, he could bring a smile to everyone's face, young and old. There was a sunshine corner for children at 6.30p.m followed by a grown up Service and I played for both. The children filled the Church on the benches and the floor and Mr Silverwood, taught everyone to sing as their opening chorus. ,

"Sunshine corner, oh it's jolly fine, It's  
for children under 99,  
All are welcome, seats are given free,  
Coalpool's Sunshine Corner is the place for me!"

With all his jollity, he would bring home the Gospel to both young and old and it was a great success. The war ended and things got back to normal, fortunately, all the men came back home from war safely.

A lot of building had gone on; the people in the cottages were all moved to different places. We were housed opposite Ryecroft cemetery and Mother used to say, "we had quiet neighbours," the Pleasure Grounds was closed, the pool filled in, and houses and Ross Road was built, so this ended the chapter of the little village of Coalpool, however the little Chapel still stands as a witness to the past, present, and future and I trust it always will.

Two of the highlights that stand out for me are the Sunday School Anniversary when the schoolroom would be opened up and the men would build the platform at the back of the schoolroom in three stages, each side of the organ.

Then we would start with the tallest child on the back row to the smallest child on the end of the front row, then the first two Sundays in June after weeks of practicing we would hold our Sunday School Anniversary when we would all be dressed in white. We would go to Church, morning, afternoon and evening for both Sundays. The Church would be packed, and when all the benches were full, we would borrow chairs from the people over the road to be put down the centre aisle, and still some people would have to stand in the porch to hear us sing. The other highlight was the concerts that Ron used to get up and was a huge success. The late Mr Harold Downes and I were left to run the Sunday school, then in 1947 I married Mr Frank Goodwin and moved away from the area, and as I had no transport, I was unable to attend Coalpool and had to give it up. Soon afterwards, Mr Downes became ill and he had to give up as well, so the Pastor of the Church went to Mr Frank Heap, who belonged to Stafford Street Methodist Church, to ask him if he could be spared from Stafford Street to help out at Coalpool Sunday School. He also came to see my husband Frank, who belonged to Reedswood Methodist Church, and asked him the same. Fortunately they could both be spared. Mr Heap conducted the morning Sunday school and my husband took charge in the afternoon.

On one Sunday afternoon, whilst my husband was conducting the Sunday school service, two boys ran in by the side door, they sat down and after a while they had a giggle and ran out again, my husband told me that God spoke very clearly to him and said, "Go after those boys," so Frank left the Sunday school and went after them, he talked to them, inviting them to come back and listen to what he had to say, they did so and when the service was over, he talked again to them and told them that God wanted young people like them in his Church and he invited them, to come the following week, which to his surprise, they did and again he invited them to come the following weeks. He then introduced them to the new Pastor Mason who was a wonderful person, who helped to nurture them in the faith. These boys, were Gilbert Rowley and Norman Waddison who have been coming to Coalpool ever since. They are both Society Stewards and Gilbert, is the Sunday School Superintendent and also a Local Preacher and Norman is in training to be a Local Preacher, their partners and families are also involved in Coalpool Methodist Church.

For as long as I can remember, a dear lady - Mrs Harriman was the caretaker of the little Chapel at Coalpool and in later years her daughter Gwen helped her. They opened up the Church for every occasion and made sure it was locked afterwards; they cleaned and polished, washed up, arranged flowers and kept everything shining with cleanliness making the place beautiful fit for a King, indeed it was for the KING of KINGS; they welcomed everyone who came through the door with a smile and a kind word, for theirs was a labour of love, although it was hard work.

Psalm 86 reminds me of Mrs Harriman for from verses 10 to 12 we read :-

For a day in my courts is better than a thousand, I had rather be a door keeper in the house of my God than dwell in the courts of wickedness, For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory; no good will He withhold from them that walk uprightly, Oh Lord of hosts blessed is the man that trusted in Thee. When dear Mrs Harriman died it was lovely that her daughter Gwen continued with the work, keeping it still beautifully kept, and I can remember her telling me how she always polished the brass latch (which was a special feature of the Church door) so it shone like gold for everyone -to see as they entered for Worship. Gwen has recently retired from the job and I am sure she will be greatly missed, but everyone wishes her well and God's richest blessing. I have often wondered how the name Coalpool originated, I think it maybe because the canal barges carried the coal to their destination and of course as I have said at the Pleasure Grounds there was a pool and so maybe the word coal and pool were put together to form Coalpool which is original like the village itself was.

I am proud of the fact that I was born in the little cottage at 28 Chapel Row, Coalpool, and my childhood days hold wonderful precious memories for me, and the little Chapel still holds a special place in my heart and always will.

Dorothy Goodwin. (Nee Hadley)