SIXTY YEARS BEHIND THE COUNTER



THE STORY OF THOMAS MORSE PRICE (1876 – 1972)

By George Lawrence

INTRODUCTION

I came across "*Sixty Years Behind the Counter*" the story of Thomas Morse Price when I was researching the Morse family of the Forest of Dean from whom I am descended on my maternal side. Although not a direct descendant, Tom's great grandmother Mary Morse was the sister of my great great grandfather John Morse, we are related although distantly.

Mentioned in the book is the fact that Tom's grandfather Isaac Morse was the illegitimate child of Mary Morse and an unknown father, thought to be a wealthy and influential person. In any case Mary was in service in Bath for many years and Isaac was brought up by his grandparents but acquired quite a lot of property around Yorkley including Woodlands Farm, which Isaac farmed with his wife Eliza.

This interesting book about Thomas Morse Price was written by George Lawrence, his son in law, husband of his daughter Marjorie. I have reproduced it mostly as it was written, and I have added photographs. The whole document is a marvellous history of Methodism in the Forest of Dean and mentions many other names in the Forest connected with the spiritual life there, which will possibly be of interest to their ancestors who may or may not be aware of their Methodist forebears.

As well as sixty years in the grocery trade, including a stint as manager of the Pillowell and Yorkley Co-op and keeper of the village store that once graced Claremont House, Yorkley, Thomas was a lay preacher with the Pillowell Methodist Circuit for the same number of years.

Thomas seems to have been a deeply religious and caring man in the community. At first reading it seems a serious document but there are moments of humour, especially in Tom's life as a grocer. Mention of him is made by another distant relation, Freda Phipps in the wonderful "Early Days at Stone Cottage" says *"Mr Price was a good businessman and ran the shop for many years, but he wouldn't have won a prize for window dressing. He used to put a few tins and packets of goods in the window and always a figure of Punch which got grubby through so many years in the window. Most of the local older people will remember Punch with affection as he was part of our childhood."*

He was born on 23 December 1876 and died in 1972, a year after his life story was written, at the age of 96. His daughter Marjorie and her husband George Lawrence had two sons David and Theo.

George Lawrence was a popular Methodist pastor who published a number of small books including *"Kindling the Flame, 150 years of Methodism in the Forest of Dean",* published in 1974 which is a collection of essays. George spent many years in the West Indies and spent at least 10 years based in Montserrat. He retired in 1968, settled in Pillowell and became pastor for the Whitecroft and Pillowell churches. George passed away in the 1980's



George and Marjorie Lawrence outside their home *'Westbury'*

(Photo courtesy of Robin Lowe of New Zealand, another descendent of the Morses in the Forest of Dean.)



Whitecroft Chapel which closed as a place of worship in 2004

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CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND

Among the scattered Whitecroft families in the 1800's were a number of newcomers from Wales, several of whom were Wesleyans. These folk with a few Foresters of the same religious persuasion were well grounded in organising and conducting class meetings and Sunday worship. In this way they did much to integrate village life as well as to consolidate and extend their religious work.

Some of the leaders of this enterprising work were colliers Edward Kear of Parkend, Joseph Preest, Thomas Smith and Isaac Billy of Bream, William and Thomas Kear of the Slade, Isaac Kear of Whitecroft, William Birt of Pillowell, John Martin a carpenter of Aylburton, Thomas Roberts a shopkeeper of Clearwell, and William Williams, a tailor and draper of Chepstow.

These industrious, thrifty, and pious people determined to build a chapel at Whitecroft when they learned that land for the purpose could be acquired from Henry Price who was in fellowship with them.

With the exception of Price and the addition of the influential Hiram Gathem, Esq., of Parkend, and Aaron Goold, Esq., of Bilson, both described as 'Stewards', the men already named constituted the first body of trustees.

Some of these men with members of their respective families had to travel long distances to get to their chosen centre of religious activity. It is on record that before the cottage meeting beginnings of the work at Whitecroft, Mr and Mrs Joseph Preest with others of like mind would walk to Redbrook on Sundays for worship. At some quiet spot by the brook side they rested and enjoyed their packed lunches.

The foundation stone was laid by Mrs Joseph Preest in the presence of a large gathering of happy people. The building was opened in 1824, the year of the opening of the Littledean Hill Wesleyan Chapel. The opening of these two buildings inaugurated a period of thrilling success for the Forest Wesleyans.

Robert Meredith, Esq., a gentleman with a flair for putting words together, drew up a grand petition for a missionary to be sent to the Forest of Dean. It was courteously addressed to the Reverend Fathers and Brethren of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. Attention was arrested by the opening sentence – *"Although we cannot as a Methodist Society boast the standing of the venerable oak which rears its lofty head in our forest, and which has borne the shocks of contending elements for some hundred years; yet, we presume to lay our petition before you, so far confiding in your kindness as to believe that it will be patiently heard, and if found practicable, answered".*

Strong moral and spiritual arguments followed which secured the desired result.

In a Report of 1825 we learn that the minister "zealously exerted himself in endeavours to promote the salvation of the people. The glorious doctrines of the Gospel being proclaimed at Little Dean, Little Dean Hill, Cinderford, Coleford, Ruardean, Lea Bailey, Drybrook, Lydbrook, Blakeney and Parkend".

From those beginnings Wesleyanism took root in many parts of the Forest so that by the year 1875 the Cinderford Circuit was formed.

Soon after Methodist Union in September 1932 which gathered into one Communion the Wesleyan, Primitive Methodist, and United Methodist Connexions, great efforts took place to bring about the amalgamation of the five Forest of Dean Circuits. The three stages of this amalgamation were as follows: The Cinderford Wesleyan, Lydbrook Primitive Methodist and the United Methodist Circuits joined together to form the first large Circuit; the second large Circuit was formed by the union of the Lydney and Pillowell Circuits, then, in 1939 after much careful planning, these two Circuits united to form the Forest of Dean Mission which is now the Forest of Dean Circuit.

From time to time additional lots of land were acquired by the Whitecroft Chapel trustees. It was hoped that some of the land could be registered as a graveyard, but objections from a number of the people in the neighbourhood brought about the abandonment of the scheme.

In 1874 the present chapel was added to the 1824 building. Plans for this scheme were made by Mr Joseph Hale who, at this time was managing the Pillowell Level and local iron mines for Messrs. Luckes and Nash. He had left Cinderford to live at Yorkley and became a member of the Whitecroft Society.

The Rev. Thomas Nightingale, Chairman of the Bristol District, performed the opening ceremony and was supported by the circuit ministers, Revs James Hill and T Harrison. The building cost £750 of which £300 was raised at the time. It took ten years to clear the debt.

The new chapel was registered for worship by Rev. John Wesley Denham on 18th May, 81875, and twenty-three years later it was registered for the solemnization of weddings, the first taking place on 24th October 1898, between Miss M. M. Evans and Frank T James, the eldest son of Joseph and Emma James of Yorkley.

The great-grandparents of Thomas Morse Price were Henry and Sarah Price from whom the first bit of chapel land at Whitecroft was secured. Their sons, Henry and Samuel, were orphaned early in life. The boy Henry was cared for by others, made his way, and one of his sons was Jesse Price.

Jesse Price lived at Pillowell, attended Whitecroft Chapel, and was employed as caretaker of the Pillowell Day School. He and his wife Caroline had four sons – Ray, Bert, Fred and Percy, and two daughters – Elsie and Doris. Elsie married the Rev. Alfred Salmon of the South African Methodist Conference. Almost accidently she discovered that she possessed the gift of healing. In the 1940's and 50's she treated well over 20,000 people. From

these cases she collected abundant material for her book. "He Heals Today" published by Arthur James, Evesham. It took its place beside the best sellers.

On return visits to England with her husband she held healing missions at her beloved Whitecroft Chapel. The administrative side of these missions was undertaken by her second cousin, Thomas Morse Price.

Pulling out of that digression let us look at Samuel, the other son of Henry and Sarah Price. Immediately after the death of his parents he was cared for by John Willetts, a class leader at Pillowell. He generally took his 'adopted' son to pray meetings and on the occasion of one which was being held at the home of a Mr Edwards. Samuel delighted the little gathering by telling them that he had decided for Christ and wished to join the Society at Pillowell. Whatever anyone may think about this youthful decision the fact is that he served the Pillowell Chapel and Circuit with deep devotion to the end of his days.

In due course be became a trustee, class leader, and local preacher. For years his Society class was the largest and the best attended at the chapel. He travelled long distances over the extensive Pillowell Circuit to preach the Gospel. During his closing years failing health considerably reduced his services. His ministers, Revs. A. Bevan and G. Annakin, mere his close friends and frequent visitors. He died on 24th January 1882 at the age of 58. At the interment the clergyman spoke about the saintly character and good works of a departed friend.

On the Sunday following the funeral, George Dowse, a local preacher, conducted a memorial service at Pillowell, an event recalled by Thomas Morse Price though he was only six at the time of his grandfather's death.

Samuel Price married Sarah Phipps and their son George was born on 11th June `848. As a lad he worshipped with his parents at Pillowell, but courting a Wesleyan girl he was drawn to Whitecroft Chapel. His married to Mary Ann, eldest daughter of Isaac and Eliza Morse of Yorkley, was solemnized by the vicar of St Paul's, Parkend, on 21st June 1870. They set up home at Pillowell and had a large family of whom Annie Matilda, Sarah, Emily, Willy, Sydney Edward and James Riley all died young. Thomas Morse, Albert George, Miriam Lucy, Elizabeth, Eva, Amy Eliza, Florence Kate, and Frank William all gave helpful service at Whitecroft Chapel, and when the time came for some of them to leave the district the same good service was given at the places of worship with which they became associated.

For years George Price was Sunday School superintendent, choir-master and trustee at Whitecroft. Work at the Fancy Colliery affected his health and ended his useful life at the age of 57 on 20th January 1905. His wife survived him 20 years, dying on 6th December 1925, at the age of 76.

Before we come to the story of their son, Tom, who was born on 23rd December 1876 and christened *"Thomas Morse"* by the Rev. Thomas Rowson at Whitecroft Chapel on 11th March 1877, something must be said about his maternal grandparents and their children.

There's a family tale, often recited, concerning the illegitimate birth of Isaac Morse whose mother was Mary Morse of St James's Square, Bath,* and whose father was reported to be some titled and wealthy person of that city. It is thought that this "Beau Nash" made it possible for the Morses – mother and son – to come into the possession of so much property at Yorkley. Evidence to support this story is interesting if not conclusive.

For years Isaac and Eliza Morse were responsible for providing the refreshments which were served between the afternoon and evening services at Whitecroft Chapel on Good Fridays. It was no uncommon thing to serve tea and hot cross buns to some 400 persons representing many parts of the Forest of Dean. Today those attending the Good Friday tea and service number less than a 100 but the tradition is maintained.

Eliza Morse died on 15th October 1896 at the age of 87, and Isaac Morse died on 3rd December 1915 at the age of 97.



Back Row in the centre, Thomas Morse Price and his wife Eva.
Middle Row: in the centre, Eliza and Isaac Morse

John James married Amy Preest, a daughter of Mr and Mrs Joseph Preest, foundation members of Whitecroft Chapel. Joseph, a son of John and Amy James, married Emma the second daughter of Isaac and Eliza Morse on 5th September 1871.

Joseph and Emma James had a remarkable family of two daughters and eleven sons. Three of the boys entered the ministry – Joseph Preest James in the Free Methodist Church of America, Isaac Henry James in the American Methodist Church and serving largely as a missionary in Rhodesia, and Wing Commander Percival Walter James, OBE, of the British Methodist Conference.
Rev. Henry Isaac James, M.A., B.D., honoured missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Umtali, and author of the valuable book "Missions in Rhodesia Under the Methodist Episcopal Church 1898 – 1934" has recently, in

his retirement at Bridport, compiled a 'family tree' which is a valuable contribution to the story of the achievements of Foresters at home and abroad.

The families of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph James and Mr. and Mrs. George Price, growing up together at Yorkley and Pillowell, worshipping and working together at Whitecroft Chapel, exerted an immeasurable influence for good in the Forest of Dean, in the British Isles, and far beyond the bounds of their native land.

**Corrected by a Morse descendent – "Isaac's father came from Ross" (Ross on Wye).*

CHAPTER TWO

BOYHOOD AND APPRENTICESHIP

Education at Pillowell School in the 1880's was almost but not altogether a Thomas Gradgrind philosophy of teaching and learning. It was a concentration on the three 'Rs' with some religious instruction thrown in as a fourth 'R'. Somewhat dull but the best that could be afforded at the time, and indeed a sound enough foundation upon which any normal child could build.

This teaching was augmented for Tom by Sunday-school lessons, sermons and discussions in weeknight class meetings.

Tom left school long before his fourteenth birthday to be employed by Mr. Alvin James of Bailey Hill, from whom he learned as much as he ever learnt at school. His employer was kindness itself. Tom's work consisted of odd jobs, running errands, and gathering leaves for the bedding of pigs.

This Mr. James built 'Bailey House' which he sold after deciding to go to America. The property was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Albert James who used part of it as a shop and sub-post office. These were the parents of the much loved Miss Dorothy James who for 42 years taught so many of the children of the area at Yorkley School, and who has been and still is an indefatigable worker at Yorkley Slade Chapel.

Tom was sorry to leave Mr. Alvin James for work at Fancy Pit as a door boy. It was never the intention of his parents that he should continue at the pit, and sooner than expected his father managed to get him apprenticed at Richard Cotton's of High Street, Lydney. Tom lived with the Cottons all through apprenticeship and up to the time he graduated as a fully fledged assistant. Indeed he nearly became a member of this business family through a delightful if brief romance with the cashier, Miss Muriel Stevens, a niece of the Cottons. Much scheming was necessary to escape the watchful eyes of those of the family against any such attachment. Pleasant walks around the fields with Muriel was sufficient compensation for the long and arduous hours of work.

Mr. Seymour, head counterman, taught Tom the lessons of the trade which served him well over a long business career. He learnt how to mix tea, grind coffee, weigh sugar, skin cheese, cut bacon, and to pack all things expertly. Above all he learned how to be attentive and obliging to customers. He recalls, however, that being obliging to a late customer who wanted some bacon nearly meant the death of him. Hurrying in the semidarkness of the store-room where sides of bacon were hung, he fell three or four feet over the steps with a long and exceedingly sharp knife in his hand.

A heavy job falling to the lot of apprentices was the taking down and the putting up of window shutters. A lighter one was the laying of dust with the aid of a watering-can before sweeping, dusting and cleaning.

After 7.30 breakfast the staff was ready to serve by 8 o'clock. Lunch was served in relays and tea was had when one could get it before closing time at 7 o'clock.

Tom shared a bedroom with a lad named Sladden whom he considered to be most peculiar on account of the fact that when he wrote his weekly letter to his mother he always addressed her as 'Dear Madam'. They often argued about this and got to pinching and punching each other so that by morning they were all aches and pains and bruises. Sladden contended that it was extremely childish to call one's mother *'mother'*.

There was nothing dull about Lydney in the 1890's. The town used to receive visits from quack doctors and dentists who claimed to be able to cure all ills. Tom recalls the excruciating toothache which caused him of a sudden to mount the counter, swing around to the customer's side, and bolt from the shop to race down the road to the Chemist's. Mr. Hatherway extracted the tooth while his assistant held the struggling Tom in a chair. A woman coming into the shop at the identical moment turned and fled into the street shouting, *Blood! Murder! Police!*

On another occasion of toothache Tom thought he'd try his luck with a Red Indian *'doctor'* who'd come to Lydney with a Red Indian brass band. This quack set up his surgery on a cart, and in full dress, feathers and all, informed the crowd that he could extract teeth without a sound being heard from the patient. Tom mounted the lorry while the Redskin got to work and the band struck up a lively tune. The extraction was not exactly painless but a big improvement on Hatherway's effort.

The Indian was a healer of sorts. He made lame folk walk without crutches and actually organised a race for them!

Now and then there were processions of various sorts. Sometimes men were seen on high stilts covered with long flappy trousers, walking with amazing strides along High Street, and raising their top-hats to laughing ladies looking out of upper room windows.

Once a procession passing Cotton's brought customers and staff to the door and to the street. Tom no sooner arrived than a finely dressed lady was thrown from a spirited horse and fell at his feet where she died. The horse bolted in the direction of Aylburton and dropped dead from sheer exhaustion. There were athletic sports and flower shows, and, of course, the annual wool fair when Forest wool was fetching 7d. to 8d. a pound.

Trade Unions were gaining strength and their activities were enlivening conversation everywhere. Charles Dilke, Liberal Member of Parliament for the Forest, was greatly admired in many quarters. Tom became a Liberal and has remained loyal to the party through the long years of his life.

It was amusing but not helpful for Tom to have a companion like Sladden, for their pranks interfered with Tom's biblical, theological and homiletical studies. Tom was required to pass examinations in these subjects if he was to achieve his ambition to become a local preacher in the Wesleyan-Methodist Connexion.

Methodism in all its branches has owed much to women preachers and one of the most celebrated Wesleyans was Elizabeth Evans, the Dinah Morris of George Eliot's "*Adam Bede*". A West Country Dinah Morris was Alice Isobel Gardiner of the Bristol business family. She came to Whitecroft in 1891 to conduct evangelistic services. Amongst the converts were Charles Phipps, Ray Price, John James and Tom Price.

Although only 15 at the time, Tom claims that to his youthful decision he owes whatever success in life came his way. After a time Miss Gardiner married Rev. Vallance Cole Cook. On two or three occasions she returned to the Forest to meet the converts of her mission and to her deep satisfaction found them all standing firm in the faith, supporting the work at Whitecroft Chapel, serving in different ways and Tom on the Circuit Plan.

In those days congregations were excellent in all the churches. Tom delights to refer to the great congregation that faced him on his first appointment at 'Wesley', Cinderford. Members of the family were so pleased and proud over the appointment that a decision was made to accompany him to Cinderford. Wagonettes were got ready and off they went with Master Tom and most of the family. Travelling expenses were paid from what was termed the 'Horse Hire Fund'. On this occasion Tom's father received the sum of 5s. for the journey from Yorkley to Cinderford and back.

As a counter-jumper (a term usually applied to drapers' assistants, but sometimes used to describe grocers' assistants) Tom worked mainly for *"the run of his teeth"* and as an assistant for 20s. a week in addition to the *"run of his teeth"*.

The firm did not forget Tom when he wished to improve his position in the trade. Willie Cotton, a nephew of Richard Cotton, introduced Tom to the great T. G. Northam of the Golden Key in High Street and Mary-le-Port Street, Bristol. The interview was successful and Tom was soon an employee with this firm of tea dealers, grocers, and wine and spirit merchants.

CHAPTER THREE

NORTHAM'S OF BRISTOL

Tom was fascinated with the colourful and vital city of Bristol whose streets were lined with well-stocked shops and in whose streets horse-drawn carts, lorries and vans rumbled. The public patronised the trams of the Bristol Tramways and these interesting conveyances generally pulled along by two horses, assisted by an additional horse or horses along steep inclines such as Park Street. Hansom cabs were a familiar sight. The use of horses necessitated the employment of watering-carts and road sweepers. It was a great improvement when electric trams made their appearance.

National occasions such as Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 and her visit to Bristol in 1899 were celebrated with grand parades of the soldiers of the Queen, and demonstrations of loyalty by the cheering crowds.

Great building improvements marked the 1890s – Cabot Tower was built, a great covering was made over the river Froom and much work was being done near St. Augustine's Bridge and Colston Avenue.

Picturesque sailing and steam vessels were to be seen on the Avon and in the Bristol waterways, linking the great city with lands across the seas. There were various kinds of amusements – bicycle races, circuses and variety shows at the Empire and the People's Palace. It was also the cricket era of the Graces.

Tom felt himself to be an important person to be working for a firm whose products were advertised on hoardings and on tramcars. Northam's supplied other firms and local hospitals with groceries which meant that expert hands were needed to load the vans. This work together with many other sides of the business was no hardship to Tom who on account of his training soon found himself in charge of senior men who experience all the dignity of an oriental potentate T. G. Northam was driven to the firm in his brougham drawn by fine horses. When he entered any room workers ceased talking or making a noise. He called the name of any person he missed. *"Where's Buckle?" "Where's Paine?"* One frightening yet gladdening morning he cried. *"Where's Price*?" Tom approached anticipating instant dismissal for some fault of which he was not aware. Fear gave way to astonishment when the great man said, *"Mr. Paine informs me that you can 'serve through'* (do anything in the trade). *On this account I'm promoting you. Back to your work. Paine will give you my instructions".*

Tom soon found a spiritual home at the Wesleyan Chapel in Victoria Road (now British Road), Bedminster. This chapel had only been opened about a dozen years and was situated by the side of the old chapel which was built in 1836. The new building could seat 1,200 people and often on a Sunday evening that was the number of people present for worship. This was the biggest church and the largest congregation Tom had ever seen.

He soon became acquainted with such interesting members as Mr. J. B. Hassell, Mr. J. Cawardine, and Mr and Mrs Quick. Mr Quick, a Bedminster grocer, became Tom's class leader: he believed in keeping constant spiritual

check on his members. Each week he would say, *"How are you progressing, Brother Price? Have you discovered any new truth since we last met? Tell me about your present spiritual experience? Have you been able to help anyone?"*

As a young man living away from his Forest home, exposed to the allurements of a big city, Tom was guarded and guided by his fatherly class leader.

In spite of all this protection Tom could not get away from the world of men. There was one with whom he worked called Jones whose attitude to everyone and everything was severely critical. His influence ate like a canker into Tom's faith and moral standards. The corrosion was so subtle that Tom found himself doubting the sincerity of men like Hasell and Quick and others at the chapel. This unhelpful attitude of mind imbibed from Jones soon began to disturb him very seriously. He had to speak to Jones about it. When Jones realised the distress he'd caused he was all contrition and did what he could to assure and reassure Tom that he really meant no harm. He also confessed that it was foolish of him to criticise what he knew so little about and to denounce as hypocrites people he did not know.

It took Tom some time to get over the depression into which he'd been thrown, but he was soon to be liberated by he impassioned preaching of Revs. L. Railton and E. Mayson Penn, and by the powerful evangelistic appeals of Rev. Thomas Waugh, a visiting minister.

Another spiritual uplift was a debate on the divinity of Christ between a Methodist minister and one of Charles Bradlaugh's disciples. At the end of the debate which devastated Bradlaugh's man, the great audience rose as a man and with tremendous enthusiasm sang Edward Perronet's hymn:

All hail the power of Jesu's name;
Let angel's prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem
To crown Him Lord f all . . .

After some time at Northam's Mr Paine said, "Price, I've been watching you. You're a Christian, aren't you?" When Tom replied that he tried to be a Christian, Paine said, *"I'm glad to hear it. I like your attitude to work and to people."* This was encouragement to Tom who had not mentioned his chapel going to anyone at the firm. It pleased him to know that the life he endeavoured to live had been noticed.

Mr Paine belonged to the Brethren and attended Dr George Muller's church in Park Street. Muller is not remembered for his Bretheranism so much as for his orphanage homes on Ashley Downs, Bristol. For these homes which housed something like 10,000 children, Muller gave his own money and received by faith and prayer a further sum amount to £1,380.000. Muller was in his 93rd year when he died in 1898. Tom Price was one of the many thousands of people who lined the streets to witness the funeral procession.

Earthquake shocks do not often occur in this country and when they do they cause little if any damage. One morning Mr Paine and Mr Price found a policeman standing guard outside Northam's when they arrived to open up. The policeman informed them that it appeared as though someone had tried to break in. Mr Paine turned the key but could only open the door wide enough to squeeze inside. He found that many bladders of lard and other goods had been shaken from shelves and rolled behind the door. It was claimed that an earthquake shock had caused this trouble.

While in Bristol Tom became acquainted with a very gracious German restaurant owner. A more obliging and pious gentleman it would be hard to find. Framed scripture texts adorned the rooms of his establishment. Late one night Tom decided to stay at this place instead of walking all the way to Bedminster. He knocked the door but it was taking a long time to be answered. When the German appeared it was plain to see that he was in an agitated state of mind. He begged Tom to find some other place. This reception, which seemed so much out of character, was soon forgotten when Tom found himself in the comfortable bedroom of an hotel. A couple of days afterwards Tom was shocked to learn that on the night he had sought accommodation the restaurant had been raided by the police who had long had it under surveillance as a disorderly house! Tom believed his deliverance to be providential. Had he been caught at the 'restaurant' he could never have established his innocence. He would most certainly have been taken off the Circuit Plan, and most likely removed from membership at the chapel. It would have changed the whole course of his life.

Being local preacher Tom came on the Bedminster Circuit Plan as a helper. Planned one Sunday with two other preachers, they hired the pony and trap and as they neared the chapel where the first preacher was to be left, the pony suddenly lowered itself onto the road and died. They could do no other than leave the poor animal there in the shafts and walk the rest of the way to their appointments. The owner of the pony sued the circuit for this loss of his animal. The circuit, however, employed a veterinary surgeon who discovered that the horse had been sent out on a long journey on a cold morning without food. The owner lost his case but he ought to he been punished for his neglect.

On another occasion Tom drove a horse and trap to Chew Stoke where he was received at the home of a gentleman whose groom took the horse to a stable where it was brushed down, fed and rested. The gentleman belonged to the Church of England but for spiritual help received from Methodists he resolved on showing kindness to the preachers who were appointed to conduct services at Chew Stoke Chapel.

Tom was overcome by the attention shown to him, and by the care taken of the horse, but he was completely overwhelmed on arriving at the chapel to find the Rev, George Bowden in the congregation with two other ministers. Pulling himself together Tom approached the doctor to invite him or one of his colleagues to take the service. The great man said, *"This is your service, young friend. Don't be afraid of us. We are most happy to worship under your guidance"*.

Between work at Northam's, the filling up of leisure time in study, and conducting worship in the country chapels, Tom's Bristol days were filled with interest and happiness.

CHAPTER FOUR

TROWBRIDGE

Happy Bristol days were marred for Tom by anxious news from home concerning his father's health. It was soon evident that his presence was needed at Yorkley. Fortunately his old firm in Lydney offered him employment as an assistant. Disappointment at leaving Bristol was soon forgotten in the happiness of those at home to have him back, and in the welcome he received from his friends at the chapel.

A mission band was formed with Tom and his cousin Frank T. James of Yorkley and their close friend Frank Pickthorne as the leaders. Appointed to conduct a special meeting at Coleford they set off through the woods and during a rest thought it would be as well if each knew what the other was going to say. Pickthorne was going to speak on the words "*Turn thy face to the wall for thou shalt die and not live".* James had built up a talk on Judas who "went out and hanged himself"; Tom's remarks were based on the death of the first born of Egypt. Realising the gloominess of the addresses they were so overcome with mirth that it was sometime before they could compose themselves.

At the chapel everything went off much better than expected until Tom rose to speak. A brass band passing down the street filled the building with music and poor Tom could not compete with it. Confusion was worse confounded when an elderly gentleman wearing a skull-cap stood up, and cried: *"What are you mumbling and fumbling about, young man? Speak plainly so that we can make out what it is you're trying to say".*

This was not the best of introductions to John Adams but it turned out to be the beginning of an interesting acquaintance with a grand old man of the Forest. From him Mr Price learned a good deal of Forest history and lore. John Adams and his wife Elizabeth were largely responsible for the building of the Coleford chapel in 1849, and they were influential enough to obtain the services of the President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference for the opening of the chapel. When this Coleford cause was in *"The Monmouth, Ross and Forest of Dean Circuit*", Adams secured the stationing of the celebrated Peter Mackenzie at Coleford, and with Mackenzie he had something to do with the opening in 1860 of Zion Wesleyan Chapel in Cinderford. When after 1882 the Wesleyans were able to re-occupy Wesley Chapel (which had been lost to them during the Reform Movement of 1849), Zion was old. Zion Chapel is now used as a YMCA centre.

Mr Price, long conversant with *"The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers"*, has always maintained that John Adams deserved a place in a more recent collection of Methodist memoirs. John Adams died at the age of 90 in 1899. He had been a local preacher for 60 years, coming on the Plan only 48 years after the death of John Wesley!

When Mr Price was first *'introduced'* to John Adams he never guessed that a time would come when as a trustee of |Coleford Chapel he would be responsible with the body of trustees for the closure and sale of this chapel some years before its demolition in January 1970 to give place for new shopping developments in High Street. Mr Price's concern was the

preservation of the marble tablet (now at Wesley Chapel, Cinderford) with the following inscription:

In Affectionate Remembrance
Of
Elizabeth
The beloved wife of John Adams of this town who departed this life July 5, 1880
In the 75th year of her age
For 56 years a member of this Society
'Her children rise up and call her blessed
Prov XXXI, 28

Also the above John Adams
Died October 16th 1899 aged 90 years
He was a member of this Society and Local Preacher for over 60 years and mainly through his influence this chapel was erected.

During Mr Price's Bristol days he had from time to time to present himself before his own Cinderford Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting. One such occasion was in 1897 when with Harold Burdess he was received on the Plan as a fully accredited local preacher. Mr Price also felt that he might be forgiven some strong feelings of pride for gaining more marks in his examinations that Harold who was a recognised scholar. He was the son of Thomas Burdess, Esq., one of the officials of East Slade Pit, Ruardean, and one of the supporters of the Wesleyan cause at Ruardean Woodside. Harold attained academic honours, entered the Wesleyan Methodist ministry in 1906, and later became the Chairman of the Italy District of the Methodist Church.

In the year 1900, during the Forest of Dean ministry of the Revs James Henri Marquand and Llewellyn Roberts, Mr Price was nominated as a candidate for the ministry, and took his preliminary examinations at *"Rheola",* Cinderford, under the supervision of the superintendent minister. With little notice he was informed that he was to preach his trial sermon in one of the Gloucester chapels. The congregation numbered between forty and fifty including three examining ministers. Unwisely Tom made some adverse remarks about certain gentlemen of the cloth comparing them unfavourably with certain officers of the Salvation Army known to him. After the service Tom was shocked to learn how ill the ministers had taken these remarks and guessed that his fate was sealed.

Some weeks passed and he appeared before the Ministerial Session of the District Synod, when questions were put to him by a grave-looking doctor of divinity whose complexion was the colour of old parchment. After the examination Tom was asked to leave the chapel but not to go too far away as he may be needed for further questioning. Tom was outside an unreasonably long time and was just about to collect his hat and coat to return home, when suddenly his superintendent minister appeared, wringing his hands, and saying, *"Why in heaven's name did you say derogatory things about the cloth?*" Marquand read the bewilderment on his candidate's face and tried to

comfort him. *"I'm going back to see if I can change their minds",* he said. His gallant effort failed. Tom was rejected. He returned to his friendly Forest, to his grocery business, and to his local preaching.

About this time a traveller calling at Cotton's told Tom that he had taken the liberty of recommending him as an assistant grocer to a Mr Smith, manager of Watham's in Fore Street, Trowbridge. With the good improvement that had taken place in his father's health, Tom felt that he could accept the offer, and was soon in the old Wiltshire cloth town.

Trowbridge struck Mr Price as being a miniature Bristol with interesting streets full of shops and brisk business going on all the time. There were fascinating old buildings and cloth mills dating back to the time of the industrial revolution. Churches and chapels were all loaded with historical interest. The ghosts of Rev. Edmund Cartwright, inventor of the power looms, and of young Thomas Helliker who was executed for his part in leading a mob to break up the new invention, seemed to haunt every street in the place. During his employment in this quaint town Mr Price became acquainted with the vivid poetical descriptions of village life by Rev. George Crabbe, a one-time clergyman of Trowbridge.

Mr Price had not long been at work before he put himself out of action for a couple of weeks when he sprained his ankle by jumping into the floor after window dressing. Through this accident he discovered the great kindness of his manager, Mr Smith.

At the time Mr Price was lodging with a family in Pole Barn Road. Always interested in people, he was sure that the head of this family had at one time in his life suffered some tragic happenings. His facial expression was that of a man who, as James Thurber would express it, had just put money in a slot machine without result. In rare conversations with his landlord Mr Price discovered the reason for his remote look of disappointment. The man had joined a gold rush to the Klondike to enrich himself and had returned to Trowbridge much poorer than when he left it.

One day Mr Smith called at this home and said: *"Mr Price, my wife has given me strict instructions to bring you to our home. We want to look after you until you are completely recovered*". This gentleman was Mr Price's class leader at Manver's Street Chapel.

At the chapel Mr Price established a close friendship with two brothers named Usher. He was a frequent visitor to the home of one of them. This gentleman invited Tom to accompany him to Bradford-on-Avon to hear the Rev, Thomas Champness. The invitation was readily accepted, for Mr Price had heard much of Champness's work on behalf of local preachers, especially those living in rural areas whom he called his *"brothers in smock frocks*". Champness had actually opened a home in Rochdale in 1886 for the training of evangelists and local preachers. This institution was the forerunner of Cliff College in Derbyshire.

At the public meeting Champness drew his verbal sword and let into the brewers with all the skill and courage of Pilgrim attacking Apollyon. He set about his business with such energy that on two occasions he had to sit down to recover his breath. Tom squirmed at much of what the preacher was saying and wondered how Mr User was taking it. On the return to Trowbridge Tom nervously ventured to ask Mr Usher what he thought of the speaker. The answer was stunning. *"He's a wonderful man",* said Usher. *"An orator of the first order – never before have I heard such great Saxon or felt the sheer power of simple speech."*

The Ushers always impressed Mr Price as being fine Christian gentlefolk.

At Watham's syrup was contained in barrels to which was fitted an iron tap. It took quite a time to run out. Customers brought their own tins or jars. One time Tom thought he'd so something else while a receptacle was being filled, but his attention was claimed by another shopper. Suddenly he remembered the treacle and as he feared the whole floor was sticky with it. From this he learned that in the grocery business the serving of one customer at a time should be the invariable rule.

It was at Trowbridge that Mr Price was almost inveigled into marriage. He became friendly with some Baptists who had three daughters. Tom helped them decorate their chapel for harvest festival services, and on occasions he sang in their choir. or a time he was as happy as Tracy Tupman with the belles of Dingley Dell until it dawned upon him that it was the intention of the parents that he should marry the eldest girl. He admired the family and liked the girl but the obvious scheming frightened him so much that he withdrew from the friendship of the home which he'd so much enjoyed.

As an aid to forget the experience he joined the Trowbridge Liberal Club and the local YMCA where he took prominent part in discussions and debates. Much time was absorbed by these two organizations and with so many commitments he was not doing anything really well. He was visited by Mr Smith, his manager and class leader and cautioned on the danger of being involved in too many activities. Before leaving Mr Smith said: "*We're not seeing so much of you at Manver's Street lately!"* The advice was given in so kindly a manner that Tom immediately admitted his fault and resolved to keep himself in fellowship with the Methodists who had done so much for him and meant so much to him.

He never lost interest in politics in general and the Liberal Party in particular, but Mr Smith's visit was the occasion of a resolve to keep his interests in the following order: Firstly, the Church; secondly, his employment; and thirdly, his politics. When later he got married, his home and his garden took a place alongside each of these three main interests.

The reason that brought Mr Price back to the Forest from Bristol was the same that brought him home again from Trowbridge – his father's failing health.

His father had helped much towards the proposed scheme for the erection of a schoolroom to be attached to the chapel at Whitecroft. Unfortunately he did not live to see the stone laying ceremony. He died on 20th January 1905, and was buried at Viney Hill graveyard.

The stone-laying ceremony took place in September 1905. The stones either side of the entrance were laid by Miss Louisa Cook (who became the wife of Rev. Francis B. James) and Miss Jessie Deakin. Other stones were laid by representatives of the two Bible classes and the Sunday-school, and by individuals whose initials only appear on the stones as follows: EWM – FKP – AH – MH – AG – LEK – AJ – SHJ – WEJ – WAH – ARP – LCR – IM – AMJ – WJP – MEW – CGP.

The building was completed in February 1906 at a cost of £625. At the time £417 had been raised. The balance was cleared at a bazaar held on 25th, 26th and 27th April. Mr Price was the indefatigable secretary. *"The Guide and Programme of the Grand Bazaar",* a booklet of 30 pages, is a valuable record of this thrilling success.

Experience gained at this grand bazaar gave Mr Price the know-how for many another such event. He organised the Centenary and Jubilee Celebrations (1824-1924 and 1874-1924), also the Empire Bazaar in May 1936, and the Yuletide Fayre in December 1948, and finally the Centenary Jubilee in 1949. His booklets commemorating these events contain interesting information and photographs.

After returning to the Forest from Trowbridge Mr Price became more and more deeply involved in chapel and circuit affairs, and made up his mind to find employment somewhere near the vicinity of the old home at Yorkley and to live and end his days in his beloved Forest.

CHAPTER FIVE

PILLOWELL CO-OPERATIVE STORES

Much new interest is added to the Forest story by light thrown upon people, places and events, from the manuscript journals of preachers. A well known example of this is provided by the work of John Horlick who in 1801 accepted a call to minister to the Independents of Ruardean and Mitcheldean, and who died after a long, fruitful and gracious ministry in 1858 at the age of 80.

How many know of Primitive Methodist records of the lab ours of such pioneers as James Roles who in 1824 was taking a leading role in establishing cottage-meetings in the Forest of Dean to form a circuit extending beyond Hereford? Richard Davies informs us that there was not a single Primitive Methodist chapel in the Forest until sometime after 1827 and that the first chapel erected was at Lydbrook. Joseph Middleton recounts the story of the persecution of Primitive Methodist preachers at Newnham on 2nd August 1829. A triumphant story of a day of prayer for the Pillowell Society on 21st March 1832 is told by William Leaker. "From this time", he writes, *"the Pillowell Circuit became an important field of Primitive Methodist enterprise*".

Two years after Leaker's day of prayer a chapel was built at Pillowell at a cost of £70 and a generous amount of free labour. The work so prospered that a new building scheme was launched and Jubilee Chapel was completed in 1885 at a cost of £950 and much free labour.

The stone house immediately opposite Jubilee Chapel was rented as the minister's house for several years. According to Quarterly Meeting Minutes, a committee held at Moseley Green on September 21st 1885, recommended the conversion of the old chapel into a manse and its purchase by the Circuit for £180. On further consideration (to the infinite blessing of succeeding ministers and their families) the recommendation was dropped as unmanageable.

In the end the old chapel was acquired by the Co-operative Stores Society, and the little spot, with its bakery and warehouse, became a village hive of industry until about the year 1958. The old bakery is now the Pillowell Public Hall used mainly by the Friendly Circle which owed so much in its inception to the late Councillor R. S. Jones of Pillowell. The old chapel is now, by kind permission of the Gloucestershire Co-operative Society, used as the headquarters of the Senior Lodge Club which held its first meeting on 11th October 1961 under the leadership of Mrs C. Thomas, the local postmistress. Largely through her initiative the Senior Lodge was able to occupy the old chapel in May 1963. Mr Charles Loughlin, M.P., for West Gloucestershire, took keen interest in the formation of these 'over 60' clubs and in the accommodation for them.

It was an interesting day for Mr Price when a deputation invited him to become branch manager of the Pillowell Stores. He was attracted to a place of business which had been his grandfather's place of worship but the main attraction was the opportunity afforded of living in the family home at Yorkley.

No sooner had he accepted the position when to his dismay he discovered that a body of men known as 'The Committee' expected him to canvass business from house to house. He soon experienced an inordinate amount of interference from certain committee members. One big fellow was particularly annoying by the way he strode into the place at every possible opportunity to discuss matters relating to the business with the assistants. His behaviour was so irritating that Mr Price made up his mind to put a stop to it. The next visit of the offender followed the usual pattern of a confidential chat with assistants, but before he could leave the store he was confronted by Mr Price who said: *"A word with you, sir, in the warehouse*". When there, Mr Price said: *"In case you don't know I must tell you that I'm manager here. I am not going to have you coming into the shop as you do and speaking to the assistants as you do, undermining my authority. I've made up my mind to report your disgraceful behaviour to the Committee".*

This offender was a strong, uninhibited personality, grossly ignorant, and although he troubled the assistants no more, he did not fail to create trouble le where he could. It was against Mr Price's nature to speak harshly but intuitively he knew that here was a man to be dealt with firmly.

The man found something to gloat over when Mr Frank Pickthorne made a miscalculation in the accounts. Expert as he was he could not locate the mistake. The books were brought to Mr Price who took them to a quiet room. Before opening them for examination he knelt down to pray for a quiet spirit, clear mind and guidance. When he opened the books his eye immediately caught sight of the error in the additions.

Candles were an important commodity in the Forest of Dean at this time. They were a means of light for many miners. During the 1914-1918 war no one seemed to take notice of letters, so Mr Price resolved to travel to the head offices in such places as Bristol, Luton, Manchester and London. Suppliers were made to see that Forest of Dean coal output would be restricted if miners failed to get candles.

The difficulties of obtaining goods brought Mr Price to a serious breakdown in health compelling him to rest. When the Committee ceased paying his salary, the matter was reported to the Managers' Association with the result that payments were renewed.

There was much about the work at Pillowell Co-op that was highly satisfying to Mr Price. He'd built up a good business in spite of wartime difficulties and established happy relationships with staff and customers, but he felt it would be too difficult to work with certain members of the Committee. He was aware of a growing and deepening nervous disorder and considered it best for all concerned if he resigned.

Now he was without a salary but fortunately an insurance policy matured bringing in a useful sum of money. His second cousin, Miss Elsie H. Price had taken a job as an insurance agent, and more to help her than anything else; he'd taken out a policy. This was the lady who afterwards became the wife of Rev. Alfred Salmon of the South African Methodist

Conference. At this critical time Mrs Price was a rock of strength to her husband: she made great sacrifices and to help financially took in paying guests.

Mrs Price's maiden name was Eva Fanny Wixey. She belonged to a Bream family who attended Wesley Chapel, Bream, but occasionally came to Whitecroft Chapel. Tom's sisters were friendly with the Wixeys and often brought Eva to the home at Yorkley. Tom was attracted to her by her happy disposition and choice sense of humour. He derived a lot of pleasure watching her imitating the idiosyncrasies of certain preachers. It was all very wrong but she meant no harm. Tom felt that some of the preachers just asked to be taken off and felt that it would have been a means of correcting certain oddities of manner and peculiarities of speech if they could have seen and heard themselves characterised.

Miss Wixey was employed as a private teacher to Mary and Dora Watts. And Dorothy and Cathleen Jones (Mrs Maurice Jarrett). The school was held in part of the home of Mrs Willie Watts of Lydney.

In course of time the Wixeys went to live at Chaxhill which accounts for Mr Price's marriage to Miss Eva F. Wixey at Stanley Chapel, Rodley, Westbury-on-Severn, on 27th August 1907. Their first home was 'Firvilla' Pillowell, where their son Harold George was born on 3rd August 1909. From the local school he went to Bell's Grammar School and from there to Wycliffe College, Stonehouse. On leaving school he served in his father's shop until the time came for him to go as an employee of Barclays Bank. He is now living in retirement at Banbury. Now at Pillowell.



In 1910 Mr and Mrs Price decided to build a house on land near the old Yorkley home. An agreement was arranged with the United Stone Firm Limited of 2 Bristol Chambers, Nicholas Street, Bristol and the house was completed in November 1910 and called "*Westbury*". Here their daughter Marjorie Annie was born on 12th June 1914. From Yorkley School she went to Bell's Grammar School, did some day school teaching at Pillowell and Ellwood, and on 27th August 1936 was married to Rev. George E. Lawrence at Whitecroft Chapel. The Rev. Sidney Lawrence was best man and the Rev. Walter Floyd was the officiating minister.

Mr Price was pulled out of his illness by the devotion of his wife, and the kindnesses of friends at the chapel. He was relieved of business worries by the good management of his wife which gave him opportunity to work in his garden all day and in the evenings to relax with "*Pickwick Papers*" and "*Sketches by Boz*". He was set on a course of complete recovery by sea voyages from Cumberland Basin, Bristol, to Dublin, Belfast, Glasgow, and the Isle of Man.

CHAPTER SIX

SETTING UP FOR HIMSELF

Looking at Claremont House, Lower Yorkley, it is difficult to realise that a large room facing the main road was used by Frank T. James as a butcher's shop, and later by Ethel James, wife of Sydney James, as an oddments shop. When this closed Mr Jim James (Ethel's father) who owned the property approached Mr Price with an offer to let him use the shop at a reasonable rental.

The possibilities of a grocer's shop so advantageously situated on the boundaries of Pillowell and Yorkley appealed strongly to Mr Price. A legal Agreement was drawn up and Mr Price was launched in his own business.

When Mr Jim James decided to leave the district Mr Price was given the opportunity to purchase the property. At the time he was not ready for such a financial outlay, but encouraged by the growing business he approached a solicitor with a view to buying the property. When documents were about to be signed a Mr and Mrs Fred James who had returned from America told Mr Price that they would like to buy the house and would be happy for him to continue at the shop under the Agreement and at the same rental. This suited Mr Price and all went well for a time. The Forest did not suit Mr and Mrs Fred James and they made up their minds to return to America. Mr Price met with the same good fortune when the property was purchased by the Kears (Family Bakers) on the understanding that Mr Price's shop was secure. Mr Price had started his own business here in 1919 and retired in 1956 when he was eighty!

The business prospered and Mr Price was able to employ an assistant, a splendid young woman named Gertie Ambrey. After some years of excellent service she married the local policeman and went away to live. Whenever they returned to the Forest they never failed to visit Mr and Mrs Price.

At the beginning of this new venture Tom's brother Frank was an invaluable helper. He usually brought the goods up from Lydney and Whitecroft and delivered the orders. It could be quite a heavy job for in those days many Foresters kept pigs and the meal had to be brought to the shop before delivery to the customers.

Another girl assistant was the opposite of the first. However Mr Price managed to keep her for two years no one could imagine. He hoped that patience and kindness would bring about improvement. In the end he was compelled to dismiss her.

Mrs Price proved that she could take charge of the business on those days when her husband was doing his rounds, delivering goods and collecting orders. On Mondays he walked to The Barracks and Howbeach, and on to Parkend and Whitecroft. On Thursdays he went to Yorkley Wood. Old Croft and Viney Hill. Each of thee rounds occupied a whole day, but he established good relationships and gained good customers. His business was built up the hard way.

Doing these rounds made him the best known man in thee district. He was the first business man to make contact with any newcomers. Having collected the orders his brother Frank generally delivered them. Mr Price's principle was never let anybody down. Orders given were attended to immediately.

After the first world war and during the period that Mr Price was establishing his own business, he was becoming more and more recognised as the leading layman at Whitecroft Chapel. He built up a Bible Class which was the envy of every other chapel in the Forest of Dean. It met once a week, not only for the deepening of spiritual life, but also for the consideration of services that could be of benefit to the community.

Some of the earliest members of this class were Mr Price's cousins, Howard, Joseph Preest, and Percival Walter James. Other members were Tom and Charles Virgo, Fred and Bill Morgan, Bert and Harry Vedmore, Charles G. Phipps and Alec Lee, Thomas Harris, Bert Price, Bill Taylor, Harry Kear, Will Mudway, Albert Simmonds, Harry Smith, Joseph Wintle, Albert Wilding and Charles W. Luker.

How often have we caught Mr Price in his old age looking at a cherished photograph of this class, and how often have we listened to him recalling memories of these men and speaking of the considerable achievements of some of them.

The spiritual influence of this class is something that cannot be measured. Mr Price led many of these men to Forest villages for open air meetings and wherever they went they stirred the people and gained converts.

They were frequently to be seen and heard at Dab Down Tump, the present site of Whitecroft Co-operative Stores. These meetings always drew together little groups of people standing within the hearing of the Gospel as it was preached by Frank T. James, Charles G. Phipps, Alec Lee and Harry Mantle, the grocer at 5Whitecroft , who later went to South Africa. Fred Morse so often led the hymn singing with his cornet.

At Clearwell they took up their position at the cross, and invited the villagers to attend their evangelistic meeting at the Primitive Methodist Chapel. A notable convert among twenty others was Thomas Brooks. We have sufficient proof of the genuineness and fruitfulness of his decision for Christ in the wording on a brass tablet inside the chapel. A life of devoted service is packed into twenty words which read:

In Memory of
Thomas Brooks
For many years Steward

And Sunday School Superintendent
Of this Chapel
Called to Higher service
January 22nd, 1940.

This men's class had a cricket team generously financed by Mr T. H. Deakin, J.P., but the formation of it went back to the ministry of Rev, J, Daniel Bisbrown (1904 – 1906), second minister in the Cinderford Circuit. Bisbrown was always remembered for his skill with the bat and never forgotten for something that happened one Sunday while he was praying for Pentecostal fire. The pulpit suddenly burst into crackling flames and columns of smoke! With Tennyson every member of the congregation would subscribe to the belief *"That more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of",* but they were shaken to see their pastor looking like a Phoenix arising from the flames.

Certain of the congregation quickly awakened to the reality of the situation and buckets of water appeared as by magic until the fire was extinguished. It was caused by the overheated boiler positioned directly underneath the pulpit. The Trustees' Accounts for December 1905 record that £10 had been received from the Wesleyan Fire Insurance Company, and under the date, 12th May 1906, £8-4-8 is shown as being paid to Thomas Griffiths for some of the repairs caused by the fire. Mr Matthew Morgan of Wesley Road, Whitecroft, delights to recall his father's story of how he spoilt his Sunday suit to extinguish the fire.

One of the people helped by the class was a bedridden woman called Molly Totts who had no known relatives. The class provided her with food and clothing , and when she died took over the funeral arrangements. After a brief service at the home in Pillowell, the coffin was carried down to Whitecroft and along the road to Parkend Churchyard. There were about thirty men in the procession and several of them were carrying flowers for the grave.

It was such village-cross meetings as conducted by the men's class that brought the Aylburton Society into being. Wesleyans had been at work in Aylburton as far back as 1890 when private houses were used for fellowship meetings. It could well have been that some of the descendants of those Wesleyans formed the nucleus of the new Society which came to birth as the result of the evangelistic efforts on the part of Whitecroft Wesley Guilders led by Mr Price. What better place for an open-air meeting could be found than the ancient c roses! Such was the reception of the Guilders that they were encouraged to visit again and again.

The first indoor place of worship for these people was *"The Rink*", a converted malt house. Not ideal but better than nothing. Such was the rapid progress of this little Society that the foundation stone of a chapel was laid on 17th June 1915, and on October 7th of the same year the chapel was opened, the great Rev. Dr. T. Ferrier Hulme leading the service.

It was a thoughtful gesture on the part of the Aylburton trustees on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the chapel to invite Mr Price to dig the grass sod on the site for the school-room. At this ceremony he recounted the story of the beginnings of the work in which Mr W H Lamb of Rodley Manor Farm and many others had taken a leading part. The new schoolroom was opened by Mrs George Wolridge, J.P. (Secretary to the Aylburton Chapel trustees) on 15th June 1966.

Mr Price looks back with satisfaction on his work with Miss Annie Hirst as general secretaries of Whitecroft Wesley Guild. The origin of the movement at Whitecroft may be traced to the spiritual results of a mission conducted by a young minister when thirty to forty young folk decided for Christ. Something had to be done to keep them together, and Rev. Archibald Harrison suggested the Wesley Guild. By 1912 this was the most outstanding organisation in the district. The Rev. Alfred G. Woodnut was president and Mrs. A. G. Price was vice-president. Miss Joynes was the devotional secretary, Mr. L.B. James. Literary secretary, and Mr Charles W. Luker was the Christian service secretary. Misses Florence K. Price and Cissie Hirst were joint magazine secretaries. Mr Frank T. James was treasurer and Junior Guild Warden.

With the aid of these officials Mr Price was responsible for the Home Comradeship Holiday Scheme when young folk from other parts of the country were invited to stay with Forest of Dean Guilders. They were adventurous occasions. Horse-drawn brakes were brought into service to take the young visitors on outings to various parts of the Forest.

Mr Price reckons that no other organization in Methodism could be compared with or ever take the place of the Guild which Connexionally was inaugurated by Rev. W. B. Fitzgerald in 1894 at Leeds as "The Guild of the Good Life" and later to be known as *"The Wesley Guild"*.

Because Mr Price was so deeply involved with religious work at the chapel, he came to be regarded as the minister's 'curate', and indeed more than that. The people of the district consulted him about many matters that ordinarily would have been discussed with the minister. Whenever sickness came to a family Mr Price was called to the home to pray and to give comfort. When death came to a home he was expected to close his shop for half an hour or longer to give him opportunity to *'start'* the funeral. It became the custom of the people to have a little service in the home before going either to the church or to the chapel. Customers were always very good about the closing of the shop on such occasions. A little note was affixed to the door of the shop announcing that he had gone to 'start' a funeral and would be back in half an hour. He lost no business by this service; indeed he may well have gained. This could be done in a sparsely populated village where everybody knows everybody else, and know also how to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

Mr Price has often contended that a village grocer has many of the experiences of a minister, a lawyer, or a doctor. One is always meeting people; one is always listening sympathetically to stories of success or failure; one

sometimes has to try to straighten out difficulties that have arisen in somebody's business or domestic life, one hears the confidences of many people and one often has to speak a word of encouragement, of caution, or rebuke. Mr Price often felt that being behind the counter of a village shop was something like being in a doctor's surgery, a lawyer's chambers, or a minister's study.





Whitecroft Methodist Chapel members c 1928
Back Row: Rev. George Lawrence, next to him Thomas Morse Price
Front row: Joseph James (with stick) Marjorie Price

CHAPTER SEVEN

CUSTOMERS AND QUEER CUSTOMERS

When Mr Price began his apprenticeship at Cotton's, a gentleman from a big house strolled into the shop holding a swagger-cane before him and swinging it like the pendulum of a clock. This gentleman sported a monocle in his right eye. His manner of speech resembled that of Alfred Jingle in *"Pickwick Papers*". He possessed the air of man about to purchase the entire stock. He approached the apprentice, saying*: "Biscuits – young fellow – half pound – my account*". In weighing the order Tom dropped a biscuit on the floor which he picked up and threw in the bag for good measure. He swung the bag around in professional manner to secure the contents and handed to the customer. Eying Tom through his monocle he ordered that the biscuits be placed one side on the counter. Such was his authority that a nervous apprentice could do no other than obey. *"Now – young fellow – biscuits – half pound"*. When this order was handed to the customer he accepted it, and said: *"Advice – young fellow – never again – put biscuit from floor – among biscuits to be served – certainly – young fellow – never – do that again – to me"*.

Tom could not abide the man's superior manner, but had to admit that on this occasion he was right. A salutary lesson was learned. It was a pleasure to serve most customers, but the man with the monocle and swagger-cane made him nervous to the extent that he kept dropping things, making little mistakes, and, worst of all, speaking in jerky, staccato manner.

On another occasion of this man's expansive entry into the shop, he made a beeline for Tom, and said: *"Matches – young fellow – waxed vestas – my place – immediate delivery – enter in book – my account*". No grocer today would allow an errand-boy to deliver so insignificant an order to a house near half a mile away. This man's custom was nothing special but he had assistants and apprentices jumping at his command as though he was General Wavesta himself.

When Mr Price had his own business a member at one of the chapels ran up a bill of more than £20 and was making no effort to settle. As they were frequently called upon to work together in local chapels, Mr Price was deeply disturbed. He prayed about the matter and then decided upon a course of action. The debtor and his wife were visited by Mr Price who explained that he had come to speak about their account but not to dun them for money. He then took a receipt for the amount owed from his pocket and begged them to accept it and regard their debt as paid. They were shamed by this gesture; they apologised for their behaviour and promised to reduce the debt as quickly as possible. This was done, and harmony was restored.

Liberalism waned in the Forest of Dean after the death of Sir Charles Dilke in 1911. Henry Webb, Esquire, who succeeded him as Liberal M.P. fell far below the stature of Sir Charles and was defeated by the Labour candidate after the first world war. From this time many areas in the Forest were becoming strongly Labour. Mr Price never minded how strong a Socialist any person might be so long as that person did not mind him being just as strong a Liberal.

During a time when political feelings were running pretty high, Mr Price was seen presiding at a Liberal Party gathering. Deeply shocked one woman said to another: *"There's Mr Price mixing up with those Liberals: I'll never darken the doors of his shop again"*. *"And that goes for me"* cried her companion. They were as good as their word. One of these women owed Mr Price several pounds but found it beneath her dignity to settle. Not so long after the incident her husband died, and Mr Price was sent for to 'start' the funeral. After the brief service she saw Mr Price to the door and whispered: *"I've not forgotten what I owe you Mr Price"*. She may not have forgotten but she certainly never paid up.

A very good customer expected preferential treatment during the 1939-1945 war. Mr Price could not accommodate her in this way and almost lost her custom and her friendship. After a time she confessed to him that she recognised the justice of his conduct and admired him all the more for his stand.

There were the casual customers, tough and ready yet sincere and independent Foresters, from whom Mr Price learned many Forest tales, ghost stories, and quaint sayings, all of which were skilfully used in sermons and addresses. Speaking on the advisability of examining a fear, Mr Price would introduce old Timothy Mountjoy's story of the ghost encountered at Heywood Enclosure which turned out to be a calf with its mother.

An occasional customer was Mr Richard Phipps, a tall, upright man, with long flowing beard which he tucked inside his waistcoat on windy days. He was a solitary character and remained a bachelor. His appearance was that of a Rabbi. He wore a frock coat and clerical hat of the *"Holy Joe" style*. The bible was his book of books and he kept the Sabbath. He made a present of a watering-can to a neighbour *"because he knew that she would not use it on Sundays"*. In a district where so many people kept pigs he would have nothing to do with them. He baked and ate unleavened bread, and would have nothing to do with fish without scales.

This strange man did many things to earn a living, but he was a clock repairer in the main. A local tale asserts that he invariably left a wheel out of his repair jobs but such was his honesty that he would return the spare wheel with the clock in good working order. Whether or not he was aware of it, he became known as *"Dicky Sparewheel"*. All who knew him were amused at his oddities of manner and impressed by his natural dignity and strict honesty.

Charlie Shoeblack used to call at the shop to see if there were any shoes to clean. He was a cheerful, contented, funny little man, without a care in the world. He was a man of no fixed abode who lived and slept in the woods, and earned his daily bread by going from house to house to clean shoes. F. W. Harvey who occasionally came to the shop immortalised Charlie in a deeply moving poem.

There was nothing about F. W. Harvey of Yorkley to indicate the greatness and goodness of the man. He invariably needed a shave, and seemed to prefer a scarf to a collar and tie. His trilby was an old favourite

which he pulled well down on his head, and his rain coat was hardly ever buttoned up. In his poem portrait he describes himself

"A thick-set dark-haired, dreamy little man,
Uncouth to see"

He confirmed Mr Price's opinion that one should never judge another by outward appearance. Harvey was a big-souled man with a passionate love of county and country. He was most proud to be serving with a Gloucestershire regiment in the 1914 – 1918 war, but all the time he was filled with painful longings for

"His hills again –
His hills again-
Cotswold or Malvern, sun or rain!
His hills again!

It was this nostalgia which drew out the poet in him, and soon appeared the literary gems in "The Gloucestershire Lad". He was not so dreamy, however, as to be incapable of action. In August 1915 he won the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Soon after this he was promoted from Lance-Corporal to Lieutenant.

After the war he returned to the practise of Law and lived at Cranham, Minsterworth and Broadoak, before settling in the Forest of Dean where he spent the last 25 years of his life. He was a solicitor by profession but a poet by nature.

This man was the inspiration of Mr Price's sermon on 1 Samuel 16, 7: "*The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart".*

Mr Price admired Harvey for another reason: He was deeply religious and knew hot to bring God on in his troubles. Harvey was taken prisoner in August 1916 and suffered solitary confinement at Dauy, but instead of fretting and fussing he settled down to write poetry and prose – "Solitary Confinement", "Comrades in Captivity" and "Gloucestershire Friends".

The prison authorities found him a pleasing personality, and as a kindly gesture allowed him to send his manuscripts home for publication.

Harvey was interested in two outstanding interests of Mr Price – music and cricket. Topics of conversation whenever Mr Harvey visited the shop.

When Harvey died in February 1957 his friends gave him a fitting funeral at Minsterworth Church where he had sung in the choir as a lad. Rev. S. P. Venables conducted the service. Representatives of British Legion Branches were present, the coffin was draped with the Union Jack, and on the grave loving hands placed wreaths of Flanders poppies.

He had written lovingly of Minsterworth, and longed that in the sacred spot where his parents were buried, he might be buried also. There are still a few Foresters who remember him and who occasionally visit his grave to pay homage to *"The Gloucestershire Lad*".

There was Dab (an unfortunate young man) who every Christmas went around the houses of Yorkley and Pillowell to sing the Hallelujah Chorus! An extraordinary achievement in an area of considerable musical talent. Dab insisted on silver as a return for his performance, and all who knew him would not insult him with less.

Mr Price established good relationships with most of the travellers, but there was one who proved difficult to tolerate. He was forever advising Mr Price on the running of his business and his breath was always heavy with the smell of whisky. One day while Mr Price was at lunch this man took the liberty of sticking his firm's bills advertising soap on the shop windows, and, heavy handed, he almost pushed a large pain of glass out of its frame. When Mr Price arrived the man could scarcely stop laughing at what had happened. In righteous indignation Mr Price told him never to set foot in his place again,. And warned that if he ever again stuck a bill on his shop windows he would have him prosecuted.

The majority of customers were honest, industrious, witty, thrifty, generous villagers, with whom it was a pleasure to be associated in business.

According to Mr Price there are few men who have the opportunity of getting to know people as the village grocer. The honest men and women are soon discovered as are the rogues and rascals; there are the quiet ones and the noisy ones; the aggressive ones and the submissive ones; those who will tell you nothing and those who will tell you everything; the religious and the worldly; the clean-minded and the dirty-minded; the thrifty and the thriftless; those you know will pay their bills and those who have no intention of so doing. All these people become so well known to a village grocer that he can read them as easily as he can read a book.

There are "tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stone", and there are sermons in people." When someone asked Spurgeon how he got his sermons, he said*: "I suck them out of people*", and added, *"I'm sucking one out of you right now*". This was Mr Price's gift, though like Spurgeon, he never neglected reading He built up a good library at home from which he usually selected a volume to take to the shop that every available moment could be occupied. It might be a volume on theology, a Life of Christ, or some bible study. It might be a biography – D. L. Moody, Gladstone, Cromwell, Wilberforce or John Howard. Often it would be a volume of sermons by such preachers as Mark Guy Pearse, William L. Watkinson and William Wakinshaw. Mr Price claimed that from the study of these sermons he discovered the homiletic art and the secret of illustration.

An idea emerging from what some person said or from some bit of reading would be entered on a sheet of bill-head paper. At an appropriate moment Mr Price would *'rough-out'* a sermon, and give it relevance and local

colour from his intimate knowledge of the Forest and its people. Most of his sermons were thought out in the midst of daily work and finished in the quiet of his home. In this way his messages though always scriptural and doctrinal were made more agreeable for his congregations by the compassionate human element that characterised them.

The most triumphant sermon Mr Price ever heard took place on the saddest day of his life – 12 August 1951. He listened to his wife singing *"In the cross of Christ I glory*" as she was passing to her eternal rest.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REFLECTIONS ON RETIREMENT

Mr Price has often been asked if he would still be a grocer if he had his time over again. The answer has always been a bit *'yes'* if the time covered the same period. He recognises that the changing years have altered business methods. He has never regretted being a private trader. The independence enjoyed over many years suited his temperament. Close contact with men and women, boys and girls, has filled his life with interest. The proper study of mankind is man, and Mr Price has always maintained that a village grocer gets to know more about human nature than most people would think possible. All people are different in intelligence, interests and disposition, and few ministers, lawyers or doctors, can cope with them as simply and adequately as the grocer. His university is his shop; his text books are people.

As one goes through life he develops a philosophy, the development is slow and unobtrusive, but as the years go by one reflects on his life and certain principles stand out. What have these been in the case of Mr Price? They've been simple things.

He has always had a desire to be of service to his customers. From the beginning to the end of his business career covering sixty years, he has taken pleasure in getting for his customers just what they wanted and not something else which he could persuade them to take. He endeavoured to make his customers feel that it was a pleasure to serve them. All through his career he refused to quarrel with or to doge difficult people. With him it was never a case of wanting to be courteous because it pays but because it pleases. He has often said that where one may meet grocers equally efficient but one a success and the other a failure, the reasons for the differences are to be found in courtesy or the lack of it.

Another principle was never discuss customers with customers. This is fatal anywhere but certainly so in a village. The village grocer must learn to hold his tongue. Customers must discover that their grocer will never discuss them or their business with other people. When dealing with a tiresome or discourteous person make no reference to his or her behaviour to the next person served who has been a witness of the bad behaviour.

In mistakes give the customer the benefit of the doubt. Often it's the customer who's made the mistake, but why sing a song about a sixpence and lose the goodwill of the customer. Serve one customer at a time. Mistakes are so easily made when one tries to serve two customers at a time. Cheerfulness is another important disposition of character for the grocer. *"It's no use opening a shop*", say the Chinese, *"if you haven't got a smiling face"*.

Concerning window dressing and comparing it with the past, Mr Price considers that it's the brighter lighting and better windows that have brought the main improvements. He agrees that everything should be more hygienic in these days of paper wrappings and stricter Government control, but he's under the impression that there's more food poisoning these days than in former times.

During the second world war Mr Price was sworn in as a special constable along with others in the neighbourhood. He claims that for no apparent reason he had the distinction of being No. 1. His companion on beat was Mr Albert Wilce, a grocer, and a staunch member of the Pillowell Chapel. One night Price and Wilce were given instructions to see that no house or car lights were showing. They'd not gone far along the road before a car with blazing headlights turned a bend and approached them. In endeavours to stop the vehicle they were nearly run over for their pains. An irate doctor opened his car window and was so belligerent in claiming *"medical immunity"* that lesser men might have failed in their duty. Price and Wilce reminded him that he was not now in his surgery and that he would not be allowed to proceed unless he obeyed their orders.

The doctor had only just got away when another car with blazing headlights bore down upon them. The occupants appeared to be high-ranking army officers. They heard what the Specials had to say and replied in a torrent of abusive language and threatened to run them down if they didn't get out of the way. Before another word could be spoken the car revved up and leapt away leaving the Specials shattered by the roadside in the darkness of the night.

Price and Wilce were so often on duty together, and one night at Old Croft they knocked at the door of a cottage where a light was shining from a badly curtained window. The man of the place cried: *"Well if it isn't Tom Price and Albert Wilce masquerading as a couple of coppers!" "We're old pals, Dick,"* said Mr. Price*, "but we're not playing. You know that bombs have been dropped in the Forest and may be dropped here again all through such stiff-necked people as yourself"*. They were ridiculed by the man who kept singing something about "*a policeman's lot not being a happy one*". Price and Wilce had had enough; they threatened him with arrest and compelled him to cover his window properly.

There was one thing that unfitted Mr Price for constabulary duties – he could not drill without laughing ! He disgraced himself one evening at Yorkley Onward Hall when the Specials were lined up for inspection. When a high-ranking officer entered the building they were called to attention. The great man looked so sternly at Mr Price as to evoke in him a risible spasm which caused him to partially eject his dentures. Mr Price recollects that the incident appeared to rob the official of his authority and dignity, for he passed down the line slowly and sadly moving his head from right to left and left to right. If the Inspector's thoughts were not complimentary he was greatly mistaken – Mr Price was a first-rate special constable and well deserved the medal which he has never worn since the special force was disbanded.

Mr Price considers that membership in the Liberal Party took second place to the Church in his life. He was on Christian name terms with Sir Charles Dilke, and at times supported him at public meetings. Dilke was regarded with great affection throughout the Forrest which accounts for the Dilke Memorial Hospital, the stone-laying of which Mr Price attended on 15th October 1929. Foundation stones were laid by C. A. J. Hale, Esq. on behalf of

the Miners' Welfare Fund, and by Miss Liza Frances Crawshay in memory of her brother Edwin Hole Crawshay.

An important literary interest was found in a Dickens Club. Many of Mr Price's sermons were enriched by illustrations from the novels of Charles Dickens which proved an inexhaustible mine of character delineation.

His sporting interest was never any other than cricket. He identified himself with Gloucestershire and went to see his county play whenever possible. He has vivid memories of W. G. Grace, the grand old man of cricket, who made a science of batmanship. He saw his hero in 1895 knock up 288 runs against Somerset at Bristol, and in 1896 he saw him do better with 201 against Sussex at Bristol. He was much troubled when his cricket hero died in 1915. The only game Mr Price played was cricket and in a match his constant thought was 'how would '*WG' have me play?*'

Mr Price derived great happiness from his fellowship with the circuit local preachers. His partners in this high calling were Joseph James of Yorkley; T. Ruck, Thomas M. Lewis, Frank C. E. Ferley, Sidney L. Dorrington, A. H. Hindle, Edward T. Burton, A.Seymour, and Arthur Dent. All of Cinderford; W. Edwards of Cinderford Bridge; George Powell, W. H. Lamb, Miss J. White, Charles C. Draper, and V. C. Allen, all of Lydney; J. N. R. Williams of Micheldean; E. E. Buffry of Ruspidge; E. Hillman of Lydbrook; Micah Brain and A. S. Parsons of Ruardean Woodside; J. W. Sing of Parkend; L. Carpenter of Bream; and C. F. White of Aylburton Common.

For many years Mr Price held the office of Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting Secretary, and in addition to this he served for many years ass secretary and treasurer of the Circuit Local Preachers' Mutual Aid Association.

Among the local preachers of more recent times and since the amalgamation of Forest of Dean circuits, the names that come readily to mind are F. Burris, Mrs Jones, E. Dent, E. J. Gazzard, all of Cinderford; J. Sowerby, W. J. Serjeant, Miss J. E. Serjeant, and E. L. Kear of Coleford; Mrs. E. A. Johnson and F. Marshall of Blakeney; Tom Gibbs of the Plump; R. C. Aldridge, J. Keith Phipps and Gerald Morgan of White4croft; K. W. Sollars of Lydbrook; Mr and Mrs A. W. L. Lindsay-Smith, R. H. Hodgson of Lydney; Donald Kear of Edge End; Mrs F. Kettle and Mrs J. Ball of Bailey Lane End; Percy Pettiford, Mrs. H. Dainton, Miss V. Chalmers, Mrs W. James, Mrs Helen Nash of Pillowell; Mrs Ruth Ward and Roy Love of Yorkley Slade, and David Kear of Bream Eaves.

In May 1939 Mr Price received the Connexional Long Service Certification with the following citation:

The Methodist Church
May 1939
Presented to Mr Thomas Morse Price by the
Connexional Local Preachers' Committee
On the completion of forty years as a Local Preacher
With very cordial congratulations
On so splendid a record of service
For Methodism and for the Kingdom of God.
Signed on behalf of the Committee,
F. A. Farley General Secretary
"The best of all is, God is with us".

His friends at the chapel never failed to show appreciation of his services. A banquet was held at Whitecroft in his honour on the occasion of his 80th birthday, and later he was presented with a framed photograph of himself cutting the birthday cake. His Anglican friends presented him with a book.

On the occasion of a visit to the Forest of his daughter and son-in-law in June 1964, they were given secret and strict instructions to bring Mr Price to the chapel. The Revs C. A. Getliffe, D. A. Polgreen and T. N. M. Videmore were present and between them conducted a service, during which there was singing by Mrs Margaret Mudway, Mrs Megan Kear, Mr F. L. Wintle, and Mrs. Carol Baker. Mrs Dawn Dorman played the organ. At a given time in the service Mr Price was asked to come forward to receive an illuminated address beautifully executed and framed. The citation being:

Thomas Morse Price
We, the undersigned, desire
On behalf of the
Whitecroft Methodist Church
In the Forest of Dean
To express our appreciation of the
Invaluable service

You have rendered this Church as Trustees' Treasurer for 61 years, Sunday School teacher for 40 years, Choirmaster for 32 years, Society Steward for 30 years and Overseas Missions Secretary for 27 years. We have been greatly impressed by the loyal service you have given and by your faithful witness to our Lord. We pray that your spiritual children in this place may continue to extend God's kingdom and show the power of Christ"

Derek Polgreen	Minister
Matthew Morgan	Society Steward
Percy Davies	Society Steward
Keith Phipps	Trust Secretary
Gerald Morgan	Trust Treasurer

After this presentation the service closed with the benediction. There was, however, more to come. Supper was served in the Guild Room when

speeches were made in appreciation of Mr Price's work throughout the circuit over a period of 67 years.

Among the stories related was the shooting incident at Parkend Road Chapel, Bream. Mr Price was just sitting down after announcing that the offertory would be received when an ear-splitting crack shook the congregation and a bullet buried itself in the wall behind the pulpit. A steward ran outside to confront the gunman who was distressed to find that the shot aimed at a squirrel had nearly found a home between the eyes of the preacher.

Mr Price generally walked to his preaching appointments but on occasions rode a bicycle. Planned one Sunday evening to conduct worship at Lower Lydbrook Chapel which was situated nearly by the side of one of the arches of the great viaduct he surprised the little flock by his tattered and torn appearance. At Mirey Stock he was suddenly catapulted from his bicycle and went somersaulting some thirty yards down the hill. Strangely enough he was perfectly clam and only wondered what the little silver balls could be that were accompanying him on his way down the hill. He picked up the bike and carried it to Lydbrook where it was repaired in time for his return journey to Yorkley.

In his expression of thanks Mr Price remarked that the honour they had conferred upon him reminded him of the presentation and social evening at Wesley, Cinderford, in 1927, when his uncle Joseph James was presented with an illuminated address to make 60 years of local preaching. *"No man was better known on Forest roads*", said Mr Price, *"than this good man who came to be known as the bishop of Forest of Dean Methodism*". Mr Price went on to speak of his uncle's interests which extended beyond Methodism – he was a highly respected Parish Councillor for something like 30 years. Mr James worked almost up to the time of his death at the age of 81 in 1929.

Mr Price often muses on *"The Old Familiar Faces*" only more happily than did Charles Lamb, the gentle Elia. He brings to mind the familiar faces of the Newcomens, especially T. Newcomen, Esq., J.P., and Arthur, his son. For years they kept the Coleford Society together, and assisted Mr Price with Circuit Wesley Guild Rallies.

Often recalled and discussed are the kindly people of the Wesleyan Society at Hill Street, Lydney. This chapel was his second spiritual home. He attended this chapel when he worked at Cotton's. There was Josiah S. Watts and family so well known in the town and soon in the whole of the Forest on account of the bus service started by a member of the family.

Tom met William Jones at Hill Street Chapel in the 1890's and the friendship between them as members of the same denomination and the same political party grew stronger and stronger as the years passed by. Mr Jones, partnered by his only surviving brother Gilbert, succeeded to his father's business at Lydney Docks. Mr Price came to regard William Jones as Lydney and Lydney as William Jones, so many were the active interests of this amazing gentleman. He held a seat on the Lydney Rural District Council for 30 years, 15 of which he was chairman. From 1919 to 1931 he represented the

Lydney area on the County Council. For his many and varied services to Lydney he was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1907 and was chairman of the bench for 15 years. He laboured strenuously for the local hospital, the town hall, the day schools and the grammar school. He was a founder member of the Vassar Smith Free Masons' Lodge. The interest of the family in cricket was a byword. Indeed they had much to do with the creation and progress of the Lydney Club.

Mr Jones died on 100th June 1945 at the age of 92. Mr Price asserts that never before had Lydney seen such a funeral and never since has there been such a funeral. Naturally the service was at his beloved Hill Street Chapel, and conducted by the circuit ministers, Revs A. E. Follows and A. H. Bryant. Mr Jones's nephew, Rev. Dr Newton Flew, Principal of Wesley College, Cambridge, gave the address. The chapel was crowded and the streets were lined with people. Senior grammar school boys were bearers and school children lined the route to the Parish Churchyard. There was a police guard of honour and many councillors and business men were present. The three ministers conducted the service at the grave which held the mortal remains of his wife, Jane, who had died in 1925. Viscount Bledisloe aptly described his departed friend as *"The Grand Old Man of Lydney*".

George Powell of Tutnalls came on the Circuit Plan as a fully accredited local preacher in 1899, and was always regarded as a bit of a wizard for taking Hellenistic Greek in one of his examinations and passing with honours! Later he was elevated to the magisterial bench. On hearing the news Mr Price commented that any man who could pass an examination in New Testament Greek deserved to have the JP confirmed upon him.

Associations with the Kears of Cinderford are affectionately recalled and go back to James Kear, J.P., who was the first man to represent the Cinderford Ward on the County Council. He was heavily involved with work at 'Wesley' and for some time was Circuit Steward. He died in 1909. His son, George, followed his father's example in local government work, in the bakery business, and in chapel and circuit affairs. He was choir-master and Sunday school superintendent for 50 years. He died on 13th March 1956, at the age of 93, and was succeeded by his son Harry, who did the same Council work, but whose outstanding service was to the musical side of worship. He succeeded his father as choir-master. He died at the age of 76 on September 19th 1968. Mr Price's association with this well known Cinderford family was mainly with George in connection with musical festivals and Eisteddfods.

Other faces so readily recalled are those of the Hales of Cinderford. Joseph Hale, Esq., J.P., was the beloved Managing Director of the Lydney and Crumpmeadow Collieries Limited. From 1887 to 1897 he was Circuit Steward. His wife, Fanny Elizabeth, a staunch supporter at 'Wesley' with her husband, died on 28th March 1919 at the age of 86, and Joseph died on 31st December 1927 at the age of 92.

Their sons, Eustace John, Alfred, and Charles, each made valuable contributions to the mining industry of the Forest. Eustace John was General Manager and Secretary of the Lydney and Crumpmeadow Collieries Limited.

He was Society Steward of *'Wesley'* for many years. He died on 4th May 1958. The memorial window at *'Wesley'* illustrates his varied interests.

Alfred was connected with the same colliery concern as Manager of the Arthur and Edward Colliery at Lydbrook. He died suddenly in 1916.

Charles A. J. Hale succeeded his father as Manager of the Lydney and Crumpmeadow Colliery Company Limited and remained in this office until the industry was nationalised. He married Miss Ida Bright who shared her husband's great love of Wesley Chapel, and his interests in Sunday-schools, temperance work, and overseas missions. Mr Price and Mr Hale were liberals of the thrilling Dilke era, and both continued to labour for the party long after the end of the first world war. Everybody in the Circuit showed deep sorrow for Mr and Mrs Hale when their son Captain Alfred Llewellyn Hale was killed in action in July 1918 and everybody in the Circuit showed great happiness with the family when their daughter was married to Rev. F. Wesley Clifford at Wesley Chapel.

Mr Charles A. J. Hale died at the age of 99 on 4th July 1968, Mrs Ida Hale is still residing at *"Lynwood*", Belle Vue Road, Cinderford, and is active and interested in church and community affairs at the age of 103!

Mr Price has most clear memories of the Deakin family for most of them worshipped with him at Whitecroft. Thomas Hedges Deakin, Esq., J.P., was soon established as a leading layman through his Christian personality. Leading laymen of the circuit always referred to him as the young man from Wales who regained for the Wesleyan Methodists the beautiful Wesley Chapel at Cinderford which had been lost to the Connexion in the Reform Movement of 1849. We cannot enter in detail on this thrilling story but Mr Deakin purchased the property making sure that it was settled on the Wesleyan Methodist Church Model Deed.

It is interesting to note that the Reform Movement split the Whitecroft Society in half – 51 members remained at the chapel and 51 met in the stone house nearby but on the opposite side of the road. This division at Whitecroft lasted for about 10 years. The understanding of the chapel friends and the family ties soon brought the seceders back to the old chapel.

Mr Deakin served the circuit as Circuit Steward for many years. His wife, Gertrude, and their daughters Gladys, Joan, Jessie, and Esme, were members of the chapel choir. Howard became a doctor and Carl, who occasionally accompanied his parents to chapel, became a priest of the Church of England. Thomas Hedges Deakin died on 1st August 1935, and his wife died on 1st January 1934. The family gravestone with simple inscriptions is to be seen in the Parkend Churchyard.

Mr Price will not say with Charles Lamb, *"All, all are gone, the old familiar faces*" for his friends lived and laboured with him in the Church Militant and although they are now called to the Church Triumphant they still live in his heart and mind.

"In age and feebleness extreme" Mr Price looks back on what he believes to have been a divinely guided life. His conversion at an early age and his fellowship ion the Church did so much to establish him. His father's illness which brought him from happy work at Bristol and Trowbridge back to the Forest actually worked out for his benefit. His rejection as a candidate for the Wesleyan Methodist ministry made it possible for him to exercise along and fruitful ministry as a layman in one of the most beautiful areas of Gloucestershire. Hill illness and resignation as manager of Pillowell Co-operative Store worked out to his advantage as a private trader. These and other experiences which at the time were hard to bear actually worked out to his moral, spiritual, and material good.

He never ceases to thank God for all the influences which set him on the road of Christian service. It is now his prayer in the 95th year of his age to carry the worship of God in the chapel at Whitecroft into the days of the week in praiseful, thankful, trustful life.

It can never be said of Thomas Morse Price as was said of another, according to a graveyard inscription.

Here lieth the Body
Of
Jebediah Snuggs
Who was
Born a man and died a grocer.