

Memories of Bethany Gospel Hall

from 1956 by Pat Harris

My father was born on the Isle of Wight, so from an early age we always came on holiday to the Island to stay with my seaside nanny in Freshwater. Even then I said, I am going to live on the Island one day!

Sadly war came and all holiday fun stopped. I started school in Twydall Lane, Gillingham, Kent, and loved it so much that when Mum and Dad said I could go to school on Sunday also, I was thrilled! Sunday school was held in an old tennis pavilion, refurbished by some people called Christian Brethren, but my parents thought that was probably ok? I loved it, lots of choruses, learning verses by heart, and super stories about people being healed, a rich man up a tree and even a man being swallowed by a big fish, but always talking about a special Man called Jesus.

In May 1946 I came to know Him for myself and everything was changed! I had always wanted to teach and after University; the question was where to teach? Yes, it had to be the Island.

I arrived on the Island in 1954, found lodgings with a very old lady (she must have been at least 50) in Victoria Road, Newport. I came with details from my assembly in Kent to join an assembly in Newport and gave me their address. Coppins Bridge - sounded interesting!

The first Sunday I got ready, checked I had everything; Best clothes, polished shoes, gloves, Bible, Songs of Light and Love and of course my hat! Not forgetting that very special Letter of Commendation!!

I walked down the road, crossed over at Staplers and there it was! It looked rather special compared with our tin tabernacle at home but here goes! I nervously climbed the few steps and was greeted by a very smart gentleman in a suit and tie. I said hello, passed over my letter and was graciously shown to a wooden chair. I just hoped it was not someone's special place!

It was very quiet, no chatting or clattering, just peaceful, we shared the Breaking of Bread.

The Gospel Service followed and afterwards several people came and said hello and welcomed me. Walking home I thought, a different town, a different building and different people, but the same Lord Jesus and immediately I felt at home, and have done ever since ! During the next few weeks and months I began to get to know people, such as Mr. and Mrs.Croucher and Mr. and Mrs.Thorne who lived in big houses, next to one another in Staplers Road. Mr.Fry and Mrs Fry, the Thompsons, the Stotesburys, the Coopers from Freshwater, the Beckleys from Bembridge, the Lovers from Carisbrooke, and the Cragos from Cowes..

I could go on and on. Oh, and lots of single ladies, all lovely. Two were at every meeting, quiet unassuming, dressed soberly and always hatted, yet always busy, pouring out the tea from large brown teapots, gathering up the hymnbooks (Sacred Songs and Solos and later Golden Bells) and many other tasks.Yes you have guessed, dear Meg and Mir. They had a fish and chip shop in the town and during the week they were busily serving the best chips on the Island.

One thing I did notice, as an only child, all the couples seemed to have lots of children, which helped form a large Sunday School!

The Elders gave us good teaching and what a privilege to be Invited to lunch after the morning meetings.

Often we had visiting speakers who were Missionaries in distant Lands and they were always very interesting. Of course we had our very own missionary. She was only a little older than I, yet she was going to N.Zambia to serve the Lord as a midwife at Kalene Hospital

She had red hair, was quite small and had a big smile! Yes indeed, it was our dear Meg. She left our shores in 1958 and we always looked forward to receiving her letters and hearing of her work amongst the women and children at Kalene. She learned the local Lunda language and when she had a scooter she was able to go into the bush and minister to the women in isolated villages. How we enjoyed her furloughs!

Well Meg is still with us, no longer with red hair, but still has that lovely smile! Those of us who remember those far off days at the old Bethany are so thankful for all our friends who are now with the Lord and so grateful that the work they started so long ago is still continuing in the new Bethany.