

FRED GOODWILL

Fred Goodwill was born in Helperby, North Yorkshire in 1874. the birth was registered at Great Ouseburn in the first quarter of 1874 (Vol 9 Page 85). Fred's parents were Thomas and Elizabeth Goodwill and they were farmers of 56 acres. The family lived in the Main Street in Helperby. Fred was the youngest of the family and his siblings were James (born 1857), Hannah (born 1859), Thomas (born 1860), Elizabeth (born 1868) and Pollie (born 1872).

Fred attended Handsworth Theological College in Birmingham. This prepared him for missionary work which was to occupy a large part of his life. It has been suggested that it was often the lot of the younger sons to take up a religious life because it was respectable and provided a steady income. I have no reason to think that this was the case with Fred. I believe that the whole family was very religious, certainly Pollie who came to live with us for a time attended the Methodist Chapel and I think Fred had a genuine calling to go into the Ministry. I wondered how the siblings felt about Fred going off to college since the whole family seemed to contribute to his education. Apparently, they were very proud of Fred who had shown his early promise when he was at the village school in Helperby and ended up teaching other pupils.

How Fred met his future wife, Alice Haynes, I don't know. Alice was a Primitive Methodist and Fred, of course, a Wesleyan. Perhaps as part of his training Fred had to go and preach in local churches and so met Alice who lived at Old Hill. Fred was going to India as a missionary and so Alice and Fred were engaged in England and then, according to their daughter, Bessie Goodwill, Alice suggested that Fred went out first to get things sorted out. Fred went to India in 1899 and was appointed Superintendent of the Wesleyan Tamil Mission, stationed in Bangalore. Alice and Fred were married in India at Tumkur in 1901. The newspaper article (from India's Daily Post) describes it thus. "The marriage of Miss Alice Haynes, of Old Hill, Staffordshire with the Rev F. Goodwill, Superintendent of the Wesleyan Tamil Mission, took place at the Wesleyan Church, Tumkur on the 10th instant (sadly, month unknown JS)

Fred and Alice had three children, Fred Haynes Goodwill (born 1905), Helen Margaret Goodwill (born 1907) and Bessie Winifred Goodwill (born 29.5.1909.). Bessie and Meg (Helen) were sent back to England when they were six and eight respectively and went to live with Alice's sister and brother in law in Birmingham. They never returned to India. I believe that Fred Haynes Goodwill spent more time in India although he was educated in England.

Fred was absolutely fascinated by India, its history, its people and other religions its scenery and its languages - he was a great linguist. It was said that given six months he could speak any language like a native. So he learnt Tamil, Telagu and Canarese and spoke and read them fluently. The history of the country wasn't easy to understand but not only did he learn about it for his own interest, he delivered papers to various societies. He wrote well and in a very scholarly manner. Fred loved the Indian culture and people. He was a fantastic photographer, not just of landscapes and beautiful buildings but people going about their everyday lives – women winnowing, men ploughing with oxen, wild looking men with long matted hair, a child chained by the ankle, a mother showering an infant, even a goat about to be executed with a machete. It was as though he could not get enough of India and its people and his pride at working alongside them just shines through in all he does.

There was one subject which was to Fred second only in importance to his Christian calling – education and particularly the education of women. On the occasion of his marriage, the teachers and students of the Wesleyan Mission School write: "We cannot find words sufficiently strong to convey our sense of gratitude for the kind assistance rendered by you in the progress of our welfare and education."

At the beginning of the twentieth century girls' education was fostered by Hindus as well as Christians. There had been a girls' school in Bangalore since 1851 and Fred was probably in Bangalore at the perfect time to build on the foundations laid fifty years earlier. In 1906 the

Principal was Miss Sisterson and “for many years Miss Sisterson's right hand was Rev. F. Goodwill, who was the Manager of the School. Mrs Goodwill, too, took a great interest in all its activities and life, and for some time taught needlework.” The 1995 magazine records that during his 26 years in Bangalore the Rev. F. Goodwill had “contributed to the astonishing progress of Tamil works in Bangalore” and continues “The Rev. F. Goodwill has founded a prize for the student who gains the highest mark in Tamil in the SSLC examination. He was himself an acknowledged Tamil scholar. His name will always be honoured in this school and in the Wesley Tamil church.” As a mark of respect, the School was named the Goodwill Girls' High School. Fred was instrumental in giving girls a good education regardless of caste. He saw that in his own words, “in preparing girls for future work we remember that we are preparing workers to hasten the time when foreign missionaries will be a thing of the past.” I am sure he would have been proud that in 1995 all the teaching staff were Indian and there were “1,200 children from all sections of society, the majority coming from economically weaker groups.”

When Fred and Alice were to leave India and return to England they received an address from the Wesleyan Tamil Church at Kolar Gold field “many amongst us remember and recognise in you the slim young missionary who arrived in India. The Tamil churches on the Field are greatly indebted (to you) for the wise councils and valuable advice. We had in you, Sir, a spiritual leader, a guide and a sincere friend. Many of the poor children who were helped by you are now staunch pillars of the church.” Clearly this was a man who was held in high regard by his colleagues and someone who was genuinely liked.

The last address was given by the teachers in the Wesleyan Elementary Schools in Bangalore. The farewell address was given on the eve of Fred And Alice's departure and has a poignancy because of that. One wonders how they were feeling, there must have been tremendous sadness at leaving their home of 25 years and also there must have been pleasure at the thought of seeing their children who had grown up in England without them. According to Bessie, Fred wanted to stay in India but Alice wanted to come home to England.

While Fred and Alice were in India the events of the First World War would, one assume have passed them by, the growth of National feeling in India probably had more prominence. But some of the newspaper cuttings Fred kept give an insight into life in England. An article dated 23.12.1905 describes a pea-souper of a fog which had descended on London. “Is it worse than any other fogs have been? I cannot say that; but without a doubt it comes pat at the most inconvenient time of the year; on the very days when London most requires plenty of elbow room....Now imagine what this exceptional season becomes when a murky, yellow-inky, blanket descends upon town and country, shutting out the light of heaven and the thin stratum of air beneath becomes a heavy atmosphere of the same hue, opaque as pea soup.” The writer continues to talk about the class struggles and the plight of the poor, describing the case of a gentlewoman receiving charitable benefit “I am indeed deeply grateful; it was quite a Godsend. I obtained some food and firing as soon as possible. We had not had any firing for some days. On Saturday I had not one farthing to procure common necessities – all we had in the house was about a third of a loaf and a penny worth of greens – not a morsel of tea, sugar or butter, in fact, the last named we had not tasted for months, and the past three Sundays, we had our dinner off a penny worth of greens and two eggs between five of us and this morning I had to sell some clothes to get a loaf for breakfast.” Compared with this cold, hungry existence, Alice and Fred might well have been grateful that they were in warmer climes.

The England Alice and Fred were returning to must have been very different from that which they left. The whole social order had changed and the privileged lifestyle which they enjoyed in India would not be replicated in England. The working man who had served in the First World War and the women who had worked in factories at home did not want to return to their old subservient roles and there was a rumbling discontent at the way they were being treated which culminated in the General Strike of 1926.

Fred had chosen the area in which he wished to work and it was not a choice which pleased

Alice. They were offered a circuit in Cornwall which Alice thought would be perfect but Fred said that he had a calling to go to the Black Country and so he worked first in Wednesbury then in Redditch (something of a geographical anomaly), Bilston and Willenhall. Bessie talked most of their time in Redditch which sounded a wonderfully genteel existence and where they rubbed shoulders with the families of needle makers and actors (Ellen Terry's name was mentioned by Bessie). As for Fred's time in the Black Country I have no information. I know that they loved the people and although he reminisced a lot about India I don't think he ever bemoaned the fact that he had to leave. Perhaps of necessity Fred's interests changed. Sadly, he never took any photographs on his return although his interest in history and language was still there. Fred read Old and Middle English brilliantly – I think he was self taught and was always saying that the Black Country dialect was as near as you can get to Old English. Every day until the end of his life he read his Bible in Greek and Latin and as I learnt from one of his letters also read Hebrew. He kept up, by reading, his knowledge of the Indian languages and often used to sing hymns in Tamil or Canarese and when the first Indian migrants came in the 1950s he loved stopping Indians in the street and talking to them. They must have been pretty surprised, too, I would imagine

Bilston was a fortuitous choice of ministry because it was where Bessie met her future husband, John Kirkland who attended the church and was also a keen tennis player (the Wesleyan Chapel had its own court). Fred, too, was an excellent and fiercely competitive player. By the time Bessie and John were married in 1939 Fred had become Minister at Union Street Methodist Church in Willenhall and inevitably the marriage ceremony was conducted there by Fred.

On his retirement, Fred and Alice lived at 32, Honor Avenue, Goldthorn Park, Wolverhampton. As Bessie, John and the family lived nearby they were frequent visitors. As the youngest of the grandchildren (Elizabeth, Richard and Jane), my memories are of a wonderfully tidy garden, a tin of pear drops and a man who loved books. He would sit me on his lap and read to me. His favourite was the Jaberwock by Lewis Carroll “’Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabes. All mimsy were the borogroves...” I HATED it and was always totally bemused while my grandfather chuckled away absolutely loving it! Fred was an avid reader and as he grew older and could no longer go to the library, Bessie would choose the books for him. He read three books a week, usually including at least one travel book and woe betide Mother if she brought him one he had already read.

One love which I haven't mentioned was Fred's love of music. He was an accomplished piano player, loved listening to classical music and sang well. There seems no end to his talents! And what of his hates – television was number one but he didn't tolerate fools and could be very impatient.

In 1955 Alice died, and Fred engaged a housekeeper to live in. By this time Bessie and family had moved some six miles away to Codsall. This was a house with a big garden and Fred used to cycle (it was a motorised bike) to the house so that he could cut the hedge. This was a big job even for a young person and he did this until he was well into his eighties. In 1963 Bessie and family moved from Codsall to a farm at Littlegain near Bridgnorth, some twelve miles away.

I have several letters written by Grandfather when he was about ninety and sent to a neighbour, Alison (Rogers) who was serving with the Queen Alexandra's Nursing Corps. To extract from them seems wrong because they are so beautifully written but they do indicate how even in old age his various interests are still alive and well.. Grandfather comes across as very warm.

“I readily understand your spate of preparation that could not compass all the farewells you would have liked to have made but had I seen you I would have bussed you and blessed your new adventure with all my heart. So I do now in absentia”

He is also clearly a doer

“I sent a brush 8' up the chimney...then took a coldish half hour with a stout hatchet to fill the kindling box.”

Even at ninety he is still preaching and taking an active interest in the Church

“I took service at Darlington Street lately, and they gave me a warm welcome and kindly

appreciation. Our Synod is on the 8th and 9th (1964). I am still Precentor, but I hope they will now release me.”

His firm Christian beliefs are evident. He ends one letter

“Warmly yours. A 'Pilgrim.”

...and he is making social commentary

“Girls in their thousands have gathered hysterically for the Beatles shows. I saw their performance on tv done in the presence of the Queen Mother. I think their performance on every count far 'below proof' as liquors are graded. I think it was an insult to common intelligence, let be culture. It shows up the mind of the mass. And the move of sex. For young men are not in the scramble for the performances.”

“It is sad to see the low moral state of much of our life. Young people acting against moral and State law. Robbery with violence is strangely common.”

Photographs may have gone but he can paint a vivid picture with words.

“On a recent Saturday the local Hunt went over their fields. In one field were four horses, all of quality. Mickey, Irish,said 'chaps I'm going hunting.' He jumped the hedge and galloped off, mane and tail streaming in the wind. He had a gay run with the gentleman, left them, came back and jumped into his own field. Brains and good legs.”

...and on his age

“I think mother saw in the Express and Star ... that I was said to be ninety. A lot of people believed it ...but really it can't be true, it doesn't feel like it at all. I eat moderately and enjoyably, sleep well, read much, can take a service, sing.”

Around his ninetieth year the housekeeper retired and Fred went to live with Bessie and John at Gainsborough Farm. He felt his loss of independence keenly but loved walking around the farm. Fences were no barrier, he would lie down and roll under them rather than make a detour through a gate. Farming in the 1960s was very different from the 1870s when he was growing up and I think he felt that he didn't have a role to play, times had changed so much. But his mind was as active as ever. I remember coming back from university once and Fred asking me what I had been doing. I started telling him about my philosophy studies, specifically Wittgenstein and Kant, only to discover that he knew much more about them than I did! Fred Goodwill died in 1969 after breaking his arm in a fall. He was in every sense of the word a 'great' man. And his children... Fred became an Army Chaplain and then a Vicar and sadly predeceased his father, Helen Margaret became a French teacher and Bessie a Doctor.

(Jane Smith 10.2008)