

Plantation End Chapel -Then and Now

By Lewis Staley

The following are some of my thoughts specifically regarding the Methodist Chapel known as Plantation End. Lunedale was of course a very important part of my early life, due to the fact that I lived in there from age 2 to 14 years.

One of my first recollections of the chapel is when I stood at the roadside nearby and being put into the school car at 5 years of age (needless to say in fear and trepidation?)

My second recollection is that as we lived a mile down the farm track at Thwaites Farm (now under the reservoir), my mother walked up with me most of the way, and as soon as she was on her way back home out of sight, I hid beneath the chapel walls until the school car went without me! Needless to say I soon had to grow out of that move, after being caught by an Uncle, who had observed the whole proceedings.

Personally, I am so very thankful that I had parents and other people involved with events and services at the chapel, my mother eventually bringing up a family of 6, but totally involved with chapel affairs. My father ran our farm and was a local preacher, sometimes taking a service at Harwood in Teesdale. It was 'on your bike' in the true sense of the word in those days as it was the only means of transport he had. A great commitment wouldn't you say?

As I have been involved with stone walling and building etc. all my life reminds me of those who built the chapel. What commitment, insight and vision they had to realize people needed a building in which to meet and worship. It was a natural thing for the whole family as they grew to go up to the chapel, and also to Sunday School, which I think started at 2 30pm. I will not mention our Sunday School teachers in case I miss someone out, sufficient to say I respected them all.

Then there were Sunday School Anniversaries, which came round sometime in June I believe, in which we were all expected to take part. I remember it was a huge relief when I had at last said my recitation?

The yearly Sunday School trip or outing to the seaside was also a reason for great excitement, especially for the younger ones among us. It was a joint event with Carlbeck School. We would set off early in a bus to either Morecambe or Whitley Bay and enjoy time on the beach and at the funfair and arrive back in the dale having had a great day out.

The Chapel Anniversary was also held once a year to remember the date when the chapel was built. On that occasion we often had a visiting speaker from some distance away. Then, for the rest of the year, Sunday evening services were taken either by the minister or other local preachers from the surrounding dales.

Another memorable occasion was the Harvest Festival Sunday. This was usually held in September or October to give thanks for the provision of crops and food for another year. As a young lad my memory of that time is that there was the aroma of fruit and vegetables and the heady scent of flowers, all donated by various people in the dale, culminating on the Monday night, with a concert of singing and monologues by artists from near and far, topped off with supper and the auctioning of the produce given. This was to raise funds for the upkeep of the chapel. Many people were involved and worked behind the scenes with no thought of any monetary gain.

Sometimes the people at Plantation End and also some of the other chapels in the dales would have what was called a Mission, held every evening for maybe 10 days. These meetings would be conducted by an Evangelist. The ones I remember came from Cliff College in Derbyshire.

These meetings I am told had been held at various intervals over the decades, since the chapel was built. It was at one of these Mission meetings (in 1951) that I too entered into a born again experience along with approx 15 others, many of them still preaching today.

The Chapel was a vibrant part of the dale community. I have been told that in one of those 10 day missions, referred to earlier, not one home in Lunedale and below was left without one or two and sometimes the whole household experiencing a changed life.

To quote two lines of one of my favourite hymns: "There men of grace have found glory begun below". What does that mean? Grace means God's unmerited favour to all men and women and 'glory begun below' means knowing the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives.

The Chapel is now closed, but the building still stands as a symbol of all that has gone on in years past. It is only a building, but still reminds us as we pass by it, of the more important issue of where we will spend eternity.