

Trinity Church Sutton

Oral History Project – Dorothy Davies

The following is a transcript of a video interview with Dorothy Davies recorded in November 2015. The video can be accessed from our [web site](#).

Transcript

Hello I'm Olwen Stewart from Trinity Church Sutton.

This is part of an oral history project in which we interview members of the church about their life, their interests, their religious faith, in the hope that we will draw the community closer together, and also have a record of people's lives, many of whom have come to Trinity from all over the world.

Today I'm speaking to Dorothy Davies. Thank you very much Dorothy for agreeing to be interviewed.

Pleasure.

Can we start by asking you about your early life? Where you were born, your parents, your name, was that chosen for a particular reason?

Yes I was born on 23rd of November 1918, twelve days after the end of the 1st World War.

And my mother wanted to call me Beatrice Mary, and my father said "No way." He said "This Child is born just after the 1st World War, Armistice, and also we've waited a long time for her, so I'm going to insist that she be called Dorothy." And the Greek translation is "A gift from God".

Tell us about your home. Where did you live?

In Rotherham in Yorkshire, in a long, long street of rather dingy houses, two upstairs, two down, outside loos etc. And a very mixed community, very mixed.

But I had a reasonably happy childhood. I went to school at the age of five to a primary school, simultaneously I was taken by my parents, who were already members of the Primitive Methodist Church in Rotherham, and at the age of 5 onwards, I used to sit on the front row of the balcony, with my parents, and my father allowed me a piece of paper and a pencil, to draw during the long, long sermons by the lay preachers.

They would preach between 45 and 50 minutes, and more. And at the Sunday school, there, we went 3 times on a Sunday, Christian Endeavour in the middle of the week, junior choir on Friday.

When I got to the age of 13, I decided there wasn't enough interest there, so I transferred to the Wesleyan Methodists, who had a junior youth club, and I was much, much happier there. I took along some of the other children as well.

Because the Prims were very primitive Methodists... Very.

And as you get older your aspects widen. To just go to church three times on Sunday, maybe twice during the week at night wasn't widening my life in any way.

Dorothy, what did you do with the youth group? What activities did you have?

Well we used to go hiking on a Saturday morning, till about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We went to the Peak District. We'd get there by tram or bus and walk so many miles, then we'd go home at 4 o'clock, and at night, washed, changed and what have you, we'd go to the YMCA, where the young men were learning to dance, and the authorities there, particularly the man in charge, wanted some young ladies to dance with the young men.

So I went and that's where I learned to do ballroom dancing. It was a very happy time.

So when did you come to Trinity Church and why did you come to Sutton?

Well my daughters, in I say fifty years ago, married two young men who were local to Yorkshire they'd known some years, and then they both decided after apprenticeship to give up the job they'd got and join the Metropolitan Police.

Which meant, the girls, when they married them, would move to London, which happened. Eight years later, they started having their babies.

So they rang me up in Northwood in London one evening and said "Mum, why don't you come and live near us and enjoy the grandchildren?"

So they found me this flat, we moved down on August the 1st, 1975.

Why did you choose Sutton?

Well it was halfway between where they lived. One lived in Kent, still in Biggin Hill, and the other one lived in East Molesey, near Hampton Court, so I was halfway between them.

You came to Trinity Church?

Yes on the first Sunday I was here. Paul Priest had a young lady, I can't remember her name, tall, well-built, and she used to do lots of little jobs.

She was on my doorstep, the day before the first Sunday I came to Trinity, before I'd unpacked anything!

And she said "I'll take you and introduce you to people." And my first pastoral visitor was Enid Bean.

What have you enjoyed as a member of Trinity Church?

I enjoyed being part of the community because it's a happy community, and I enjoyed being involved.

I did the Oasis, I was in post either as Chairman or secretary of the Women's Group, and I just got involved with everything. I used to take the collection, I used to do the door, the table at the back, just to get involved, because I wanted to be involved. So I was...

Dorothy you've lived a very long time. You must have some special memories of important events in history?

Yes. When I was eight, in 1926, they had the General Strike, which everybody, not only in Yorkshire, all over the British Isles, came out on strike for 9 months.

Now the only people who did any work were the students who possibly drove a bus or something, but the miners were out, the steelworkers were out, the bus drivers were out, the train drivers were out, the street cleaners were out, everybody.

And the money was very, very sparse, because there were no benefits at that time for that, none. The only thing, the money you got, was from the Union, 10 shillings a week. So that was when my father decided to have two allotments. He grew vegetables, kept chickens, and the other allotment he grew all the vegetables that we ever needed.

And if a chicken got too old to lay eggs, he'd wring its neck. My Mum would cook it. When he went back to work, I was the one to go and feed them early in the morning before I went to school.

The unfortunate thing about that, was they had to have a cockerel in order to lay eggs, and the blessed thing took a dislike to me. So I ended up in the chicken run, with my back to a shed, and with a dustbin lid held in my left hand as a shield, and my right hand was scooping the food for the chickens and throwing it out. After about 6 visits every three weeks, I got fed up with this, so I told my father he'd have to find someone else. And because, when I'd been doing this performing as it were, there'd been some other allotment holders there. Men, who were laughing, because I was in a pickle as it were,

so I said to Father, "Why don't you ask one of them to feed them?" So he did, and I was excused.

In the 1930s I left school. I was fourteen and a half. I'd taken the exams necessary to go to a high school earlier, but my parents simply couldn't afford to let me go, because there was no free clothing, or books, or anything. You had to buy everything. So I left school and found a job. I was lucky, because the 1930s was a bad time for unemployment, but I got a job.

And I got an hour off on a Monday night from the finishing time at work because I went to night School and did shorthand and typing, so I could progress from being just a body, in a large room with lots of other girls, and men, and I got my certificate, for that. So I stayed at that job until I left in 1940.

However, continuing with the 30s... In '36, 1936, we had what we called the Jarrow March. The miners, and I knew quite a lot of them because where I lived was surrounded by coal mines, Maltby particularly, and they marched all the way from the North of England to Westminster, to bring their problems, because they were really, really working for peanuts and it was hard work. They'd no electric lights. They worked from miners' lamps. Why I know this is because some years later, my father belonged to the WEA, Workers Education Association, and he took me on one of their visits, down the mine.

It was the most horrendous experience.

These men worked 8 hours a day hewing coal by the light of miners' lamps, and they had donkeys down there, poor things, never saw the light of day. They also had canaries, because canaries could tell them if there was gas around, which enabled them to get out before there was an explosion.

But to be in a deep mine, like I was that morning, with just the miners' lamps there, I clung on to my father like nobody's business. And he said to me when we came out, "I shouldn't have taken you Dot should I!" I said "Yes, thank you, you did, and it's an experience I will never forget."

Did you see the miners on the Jarrow March?

Yes I did. My father took me to a point where they were marching down and as they marched past my town, it was just outside my town between Rotherham and Sheffield, as they marched down, people came out of their houses, and gave them food, and bottles of tea, things like that. Because there were no plastic ones then, it was all bottles.

And they had little enough of their own. But they couldn't see those men without something.

And of course the churches, and chapels, gave them accommodation at night, provided camp beds and a breakfast. Where they ever got it from I'll never know. But I've never forgotten those men walking down that street, and the ladies at the side holding out the bottles of tea and the sandwiches from little enough of their own.

And that is community, which is missing a lot these days I'm afraid.

Tell me about the war years?

Well, 1939 I was 21 in the November, and war had broken out in September '39. Because of my age I had to go and register at the employment office. And they said to me "I see you're a shorthand typist." I said "Yes." "Can you work a switchboard?" they said.

I said "Yes, I relieved the switchboard at lunchtime."

"Is it an old-fashioned one where you push plugs in?"

I said "Yes."

"Right" they said. "There's a place with the fire brigade for a shorthand typist and telephone operator at Red House. I'm afraid, if you take it, if you want it, it's yours."

I said "Yes I'd like it please." It meant I could live at home, and they said "You will get lots of calls from all over England where the bombers are bombing and which route they are taking."

So I did it - for two years.

And then I married my first husband. He was in the Air Force. Like a lot of my friends we got married, in a hurry, on a Sunday afternoon at the chapel, because we felt the men needed the stability of somebody to come home to. There were about fifteen of us. Ten of us were divorced fifteen or sixteen years later, but that's another story obviously.

But the war years, when I married, I say in '40, in '41 I had my first child, Jennifer, and she was born during an air raid actually... Not that I remember much about the air raid...

However she was born there, a very healthy child, in a nursing home, and I had to take her, from a very young age, out into an Andersen shelter when the sirens went.

Two years later I had another little girl and the same thing happened. I would go out to the shelter, Jennifer was 3 by then, holding Jennifer's hand, and Sheila sort-of tucked under my arm. I'd got sort-of benches for them so they could sleep in the Andersen shelter, but getting up and down the steps into the shelter wasn't easy. However, they settled into the routine.

My mother and dad used to come round, they lived round the corner from me. And they used to come round and sit in the shelter with me, and Dad would bring a pot of tea or something around. And we had an old lady called Annie, lived a few doors away, on her own, so we invited her into the shelter. Was the worst thing we ever did because all she would do is sit there and say "Oh my God, Oh my God." Well, we'd already asked God to look after us... But it was her way of releasing her emotions I suppose... She was a nice old lady as well, very nice.

Now towards the end of the war, in '43 I think it was, my first husband had worked for a firm as a pattern maker and draftsman, and that firm in '43 was taken over by the Admiralty, to make things for ships. So they said to my husband, "Your career in the Air Force is over, you're back in the firm you worked for, because you're affiliated to the Admiralty."

He was absolutely furious, 'cos he had quite a good life in the Air Force, in fact I don't think he ever settled down when he came out.

Dorothy have you got any particular hobbies or interests?

Only drama. And literature. Read a lot... I've got lovely books of poetry. "The Golden Treasury of Verse" was given to me on my 21st birthday. It's very dog eared, and it's got pictures of very old people like John Gielgud in certain clothes of the parts they were playing. You're welcome to look at it if you wish.

You've done a lot of drama, haven't you in your life?

Oh yes. Even at school. I remember one... We did Twelfth Night, and I wanted to play Malvolio because I thought he was a character I could cope with.

My school teacher, Elsie Moore, said to me, "Oh no, I want you for Duke Orsino because you've got a deepish voice and you can look good in doublet and hose!"

Mushroom coloured hose and purple doublet and a hat with a feather... And the first dress rehearsal we had was attended by the boys' school above us, because we weren't mixed in secondary schools, and they came down, loads of the boys, 13 to 15 they were. They sat on the floor in the big hall. And as Duke Orsino of course, when the curtains were drawn, my first speech was "If music be the food of love, play on..."

The laughter that came from the hall... We had to draw the curtains...

The boys thought it was hilariously funny. I didn't!

However their teachers decided to calm them down... But I've never forgotten that - all those boys...

Mind you, after that, I never suffered from a shortage of boyfriends from the school, they used to be waiting at the gate, bless 'em.

And half of them I lost in the war, later.

Dorothy, what have you been grateful for in your life?

First of all, having family. Cousins and ... In fact one of my brother's daughters is coming down next Monday from Nottingham to spend the day with me. They've never lost touch, which I'm very grateful for.

The other thing, I'm grateful that I've been able to do drama for lots and lots of things, plays that I've really loved, and parts that I've loved... One particular one in Rotherham, with the Rotherham Repertory Company, was... I used to do the parts that Peggy Mount played. The "Sailor beware" parts, because I'd got a very loud voice.

I could make everybody laugh in the audience. And they did, thank the Lord!

There's nothing worse than performing to a dead audience. Your confidence goes.

On the other hand, you have to learn to play to their mood. It's not an easy thing.

Dorothy you've mentioned your daughters Sheila and Jennifer.

Yes.

Do they have children? Tell me about your extended family.

Yes my elder daughter Jennifer has two boys, James and David. James is married, very happily I'm glad to say, and he's two little girls, but he was well in his thirties when they had those little girls, Amy and Elizabeth. They were the ones who woke me up at half-past four one Christmas morning to see what Santa Claus had brought me.

The other daughter, who now lives in Cornwall, where I've been for holidays for the last four years, can't see me going this year unfortunately... However, they lived there because her husband, as I was saying before was a draughtsman. He's also a very good painter, so he joined the community in St Ives, so they all moved down there.

Has your religious belief developed over the years?

Oh yes. When I first went to the Primitive Methodists, I went because my parents took me, and they'd been there, they were married there. So was I the first time.

And it was a sequence that you did on a Sunday. But when I went to the Wesleyans, I was older, and I got more interested. In fact I used to take one of my cousins Arthur, was a teacher, he was older than me, and he used to train us in competitions. I know

the first one I did, a written competition, was on Nehemiah. I'd never noticed him before. But I wrote quite a lot about Nehemiah in the actual competition. I hate to say this, but I won it!

Because I've got a good memory I suppose. But I enjoyed it, I did two or three more.

What hopes do you have for the future - for your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren?

That they can find, even if it's middle age like I was when I married a second time, I was a very happy lady, because I'd just been accepted, because I had two children teenagers to keep, I took the civil service exam, and I spent twenty-five years in the civil service, started as a shorthand typist and finished up as a Higher Executive Officer. Because again, I could talk to people. It's a gift, I know it is, it's a gift. Being able to communicate, particularly at my age, in fact I must bore people to death sometimes... But I don't care.

You've got a large family, of whom you are very, very proud.

Indeed.

Is there any particular advice that you would give to them?

Yes. If you have a big decision to make, use your head, as well as your heart. Because that's what I did in '40, and it didn't work out. The next time round, when I learned my lesson, after a very acrimonious divorce, because we never spoke to one another after the night he walked out, or the children didn't want to. They had Mum, and they've kept that, they've kept Mum in their memories. So I would say to them, as I've said, think with your head, and not with your heart, always, a bit of both OK, but I wish you all the best of luck.

Dorothy it's been fascinating listening to all your stories. You have a wonderful memory, I'm amazed.

Well thank you very much, but, as I've explained to you, it was God's gift to me...

And I think that's where we will end this interview, thanking God for your gift of communication and memory. Thank you.