

# A MISSIONARY FAMILY IN CHINA - 2

Michael Ball

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- *Michael Ball is a retired Baptist minister.*
  - *Records of his wife's extended family of BMS missionaries in China show something of the demands of such service on family life. In this first part, Ball looks at Fred and May Price, his wife's paternal grandparents.*
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## FREDERICK WILLIAM PRICE

Born 16 July 1881 at Waunavon, Llanelly Hill, Fred lost his father, John, at the early age of forty-eight. The family remembers John as an enthusiastic Socialist and trade unionist, following in the local Chartist tradition, who used to read political pamphlets to customers at the local inn. After some violent trouble, he hid in a ditch where an injury became infected, resulting in death from septicaemia on 27 April 1885. His family feared he had lost his faith when he refused last communion at home, when really he did not want the socialist books and pamphlets under the bed to be discovered!

His mother was Frances, née Roberts, the Welsh-speaking daughter of a miner who had moved to Llanelly Hill from Denbighshire. A family photograph taken about 1888 shows Fanny seated with

Frederick, Mary Jane (Jinny), Edith, Johnny and Jimmy, standing at the back. The young Fred already liked to play at preaching to the family.

Frederick William went to the local board school and then attended Maindee College, Newport, for a year at some time after he left and was for a short time employed in the stationery business, but then became a collier. He attended Darenfelin Baptist Church near Abergavenny, where he was baptized by the minister, the Revd William Jones, in September 1898, aged seventeen. His mother was baptized on the same occasion. He was a keen church worker, helping in the Sunday School and Christian Endeavour and undertaking lay preaching. After his mother died in 1902, he moved to Bargoed, living with his sister Jinny (Mary Jane) and became an early member of the Baptist Church there. Later they moved to Pengam, living next door to his sister Edith and her husband, Ben Walters. Ben and Fred shared a 'stall' down the mine, enabling Fred to save more towards his theological training. When he was going out of the house, his older sister would tell him to leave all his money at home, because he was so kind and generous he would give his last penny away to anyone he met in need. The family formed anew Baptist church in a friend's house. Fred became interested in missionary work, partly through hearing of the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 when 171 European missionaries and their children were murdered, together with several thousand Chinese Christians. Many of these martyrs were in Shansi province where Fred and May were to serve. At some stage, while at work in the mine, he received a specific call to be a missionary in China, something he experienced as a bang on the head!

He and his future wife, May Rose Nicolle, already knew each other by 1907: there is an extant postcard from May to Fred, dated that June. She addressed him as 'Dear Friend', but most of the content is about the health of their siblings. She mentions a trip to Coombe the next day, saying 'it would be nice if you could come'. According to a poem she wrote to celebrate her twentieth wedding anniversary, their engagement lasted eight years, so they must have become engaged later in 1907, about the time he enrolled at Harley College in London to train for ministry. The Harley Bible and Missionary Training College was

established in London's East End in 1873 by H. Gratton Guinness, a well-known revivalist preacher. It specialized in training students whose lack of education debarred them from the larger denominational missionary societies, and was closely associated with the China Inland Mission. By 1915 it had trained about 1,500 men and women. Life there was hard, with no maintenance grant or support. According to Edith and Ben's daughter Edith, if Fred ran out of money, he would send a letter without a stamp to her parents, who would send him a sovereign or half sovereign by return. Nevertheless, he completed the four-year course and was a student pastor at Sherfield-on-Lodden, Hampshire. Fred was accepted by the BMS in 1911 but, because the situation was too unsettled for him to go to China then, he was in sole charge of this church in 1912, while attending Chinese classes at King's College London and at the Oriental School in Oxford during the vacation. On postcards from 1911 and 1912, he writes to May Rose as 'Dearest' and closed 'with love from yours ever, Fred'.

May Rose was the fifth child of Matthieu Nicolle, blacksmith (b.1848) in St Saviour, Jersey, and his wife, Louisa Rachel Maret (b.1852). They moved to Saint Helier, where May Rose was born in 1883, and soon after moved to Monmouthshire, presumably to seek better work in the new industrial area. By January 1885 they lived in New Bristol Street, Maindee, a poor part of Newport where six more children were born, but only Reginald Francis (b.1892) survived babyhood. In Wales, Matthew described himself as a mechanic. By 1891 they were at 85 Tredegar Street, Rhiwderin, Bassaleg, a small village a few miles north of Newport on the Caerphilly road. They now attended the Baptist Chapel at Bassaleg, in whose graveyard Matthieu and Louisa were later buried. The Bethel Bassaleg Sunday School gave May Rose a Bible when she went to train and her letter thanking them expresses much affection for the Chapel and its people who she missed. May Rose was a devoted worker in Bethel Bassaleg Baptist Chapel where she was baptized. She worked in business for some years, family tradition suggests she was once a milliner at Tredegar House, the nearby country house of the Morgan family. Her three younger sisters went into business together as dressmakers, working from home. The

engagement was made before Fred had finally decided to offer as a missionary. According to family tradition, he had courted another girl who had refused to go to China with him.

Fred sailed for China in October 1912. According to BMS rules he had to be in China for a year before May Rose could join him. She had meanwhile prepared by taking a full course in nursing and midwifery at the City of London Infirmary in Clapton and in Southampton. She received her diploma from the Central Midwives Board on 1 November 1913.

Fred served in Sinchow, Shansi, from 1911-1915. May Rose joined him in the spring of 1914 and, after a period of language study at Shou-Shang, they were married on 20 March 1915 in Tientsin. They honeymooned at the seaside at Cheefoo where the China Inland Mission had a boarding school, which their sons were later to attend.

#### LIFE IN CHINA

From 1915 to 1922 Fred and May served in Taichow where their three boys were born, Brynmor Francis on 23 April 1916, Ronald Frederick on 25 August 1917 and Richard Ewart on 22 January 1919. They replaced Dr Kirkwood whose health had broken down but who left stocks of medicines which May was able to use. Since they were 100 miles from the nearest medical colleagues in Taiyuanfu, her skills were useful for her own family. Although untrained, Fred would sometimes help her in her medical work.

In those days travel was uncomfortable, on mules, in a litter, or in a Chinese cart. In the rainy season, these latter often became bogged down in mud and had to be dug out by friendly Chinese peasants. At best, they only travelled at three miles per hour. Often their drivers were not very clean, and the passengers' clothes became infested with lice during the journey: this happened on their first trip from Taiyuanfu to Taichow.

The climate of this part of China had extremely cold winters and spring brought dust storms which could last three days. May Rose described seeing her babies lying in their cot with their faces covered

with a layer of dust which had seeped in through window frames and other crevices. She left her husband for several months before Bryn's birth to receive medical care in Taiyuanfu. On the way back with Bryn, one month old, she encountered one of these dust storms.

In the *Missionary Herald* for 1916 (p.81) Fred describes his work, including baptizing five candidates at Fan Ssu, eighty miles north of Sinchow, the first ever baptisms in the village. 'One of the women was 74 years of age, and though simple, very earnest in her love for the Master. These all had vivid recollections of what took place in 1900 when twenty-two Christians faced death in Fan Ssu rather than deny the faith. This old lady said in conversation that she did not fear what men might do to her old body since they could not harm her soul.' In 1917, there was an outbreak of pneumonic plague in the locality, which missionary doctors managed to control.

In the *Missionary Herald* (1917, p.166) Fred describes Tai Chow as 'our most idolatrous city'. There were many temples, Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, but the most popular was a very scruffy 'shrine of the fox'. A man had once seen a fox standing there and decided the spot was sacred. Soon afterwards, one of his family became ill and went to the spot with offerings of meal (afterwards taken home and eaten) or paper money which was burned. The relative's recovery was attributed to the healing power of the fox. The worshipper wrote on a piece of board messages such as 'pray to the spirit and he will certainly respond', and the shrine became very popular with the inhabitants of the city. May Rose described how such superstition impinged on the missionaries who were seen as 'alien spirits'. A young boy used to walk through the street where they lived every night at about 8.00 p.m. singing in a penetrating falsetto voice. Apparently, this was to drive away the bad spirits so that he could pass the house in safety! May Rose also described how a girl from the government school dutifully rose at 5.00 a.m. to do exercises in the school yard on an extremely cold morning and was brought to the missionaries with frozen hands, one in very bad state. They were black and blue, and May Rose hardly dared touch them. However, after weeks of treatment and prayer, they were completely healed.

In the 1919 *Missionary Herald* (pp.91-2), Fred told the story of one convert, baptized in the Tai Chow Church. Sister Hsu lived in Fan Ssu Hsien where twenty-two people including children were murdered during the Boxer uprising. She and her husband, a former soldier, had become Christian enquirers in 1897. A man of extraordinary size and strength, before conversion he had terrorized the neighbourhood, but became as gentle as a lamb. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of 1900 (Chinese dating), the Christians had met for worship. The Boxers arrived, but most worshippers escaped, because their leader and evangelist pleaded with the Boxers to take him and let the others go free, saying he was responsible for them being Christians. The Boxers murdered him, then set out to seek the others. Brother Hsu was caught in a village just outside the city and was brought to the chapel yard, where he was pierced with a spear, his arm was cut off and he was thrown into the chapel which they set on fire. Hsu was thirty-six years old. His wife meanwhile reached a village in the Northern Hills, about four miles from the city. The next day, with a few other men, women and children she went further into the hills. They spent one night in a cave and another in a deep gully in the pouring rain. On the fourth day they reached the mountain top but the Boxers were on their track. The men escaped, but the women were driven back to the village and beaten. The villagers pleaded for their release. Only Sister Hsu remained in custody and she was dragged to the Magistrates' Court in the city, stripped naked and condemned as a believer in 'foreign doctrines'. They made a heavy birch of peach tree branches (as used to exorcise demons), gave her 400 stripes. Then she was imprisoned for three months and badly treated. They told the blacksmith to prepare long nails to crucify her and a young male relative on the city wall, but she was released when her father paid a ransom of about thirty shillings. She did not have the courage to make a public confession of faith until September 1918 when she was baptized on the spot where her husband was martyred.

The BMS General Committee meeting on 23 January 1962 passed a memorial resolution to May Rose which gives an over-view of her

work:

During their joint service at Tai-Chou and Nain-Chou, Mrs Price used her medical training to good effect, particularly in the dispensary work at Hain-Chou where, almost daily, she relieved the physical ills of numerous local folk. This work also made a valuable contribution to evangelism. Mr Price's work in the district involved him in frequent and sometimes prolonged absence from home. But Mrs Price carried on her medical work, and friendly intercourse with her Chinese friends with courage and kindness.

May used to hold meetings for elderly Chinese women in her home, where they were served tea and Welsh cakes! Fred describes their work in more general terms. They ran Bible classes, prayer meetings, Sunday Schools and perhaps Christian Endeavour. During the winter when the farmers had little work, the missionaries would travel out to the villages with a group of Chinese Christians to conduct open-air services. In summer the missionaries travelled on foot or by mule to visit the smaller rural stations. They would hold annual baptismal services as part of Church Conferences, baptizing as many as thirty at a time. In the *Missionary Herald* for 1920, he describes such a Church conference in Kuo Hsien which agreed rules on marriage and funeral rites, tried to take a stand against too early betrothal and excessive bride dowries, and decided to organize a Temperance Society. In May 1921 Mr and Mrs Stonelake relieved Fred and May Rose to go on furlough.

In 1922 Fred Price wrote of a visit by another missionary, Dr Stockley, to Taichow. A local policeman asked for help with toothache so Dr Stockley, Mr Smith and Fred Price went together. Returning with cocaine, the doctor dealt with the abscess. Much impressed, the policeman said he wanted to become a Christian. In 1922, the Prices moved back to Sinchow where they remained until 1935. May Rose began to be badly troubled by hay fever. A letter of 28 October 1924 says she had suffered for some months. In April 1925, Fred gratefully acknowledged receipt of a magic lantern, a gift from the young people

at the Cwmbran Baptist Church. Phyllis May was born on 4 March 1926, and Fred wrote, 'We are naturally very happy in having our one and only daughter, being our hearts' long desire. She is bonny and easily the biggest of our 3. Mrs Price is better than she has been for months and looks 10 years younger.' The boys were doing well at the Cheefoo school, though there were worries – in 1924, another missionary's son there, John Henderson Smith, had an attack of typhoid. Fred wrote to the BMS thanking them for forwarding a parcel from May Rose's relatives.

#### PANIC

On 13 June 1925, in a circular letter Fred described anti-English unrest among students, whose chant was 'Kill the English!' The Chinese church elder, Chao, a hero in the Boxer Uprising, showed 'tact and courage' in negotiating with the students. Chinese church leaders had to flee from Taiyuanfu after threats that they would be torn limb from limb. Fred thought it unlikely that missionaries would be killed, but they could be starved out. This letter caused great consternation in South Wales. His relatives in Llanelly Hill seem to have panicked and thought that he was in mortal danger. His older sister Sarah wrote to BMS headquarters seeking reassurance, the letter is still in the files, though her niece, Verna, says she could not read and write – if so, she must have gone to the trouble of having a letter written on her behalf. Alarming paragraphs appeared in Welsh newspapers. May's family, in particular her brother Reginald, the relieving officer for Newport, and an unmarried sister who was librarian at Rogerstone were drawn in. Reporters called at Reginald's office seeking information. The situation calmed down and a paragraph in the *Western Mail* in July said that they were all safe.

Even the trip home was not necessarily safe in troubled times. Their missionary colleagues, the Emmotts, were on a boat captured by pirates on Christmas Day 1925. They were safe and had helped the captain, who was injured in the attack. Other concerns in January 1926 were that the Price's three sons, now aged nine, eight and seven, were

returning to school almost a week's journey away, including a twenty-hour rail trip in very cold weather.

The family were due to come home on furlough, and asked permission for Rose May to return to Britain eight months early in the summer of 1926, because all three boys were to go to Taunton school and Bryn had been offered a place, with a bursary, in September 1926. Early return, however, proved unnecessary as Taunton agreed to take Bryn year later. The BMS was in severe financial difficulties, after the depression years, and in a letter of 11 June 1926 Fred agreed to take the suggested reduction of 5% in his allowance. They were told to take care with their passages back to the UK, planned for February 1927. They wrote on 5 December 1926 that they were booked on P & O SS *Morea* from Shanghai on 1 February 1927, due to arrive about 10 March. Fred's sister Sarah wrote again to BMS in January asking for news of them. By 2 March they had reached Marseilles. At first they stayed at 9 Park Avenue, Rogerstone, but by the end of March, they were living at Craigiellands, Balmoral Road, Newport. Early in May, Bryn was taken ill with chronic colitis and spent twelve days in Newport Hospital. He was diagnosed with amoebic dysentery at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London on 2 March 1928 and given medication for fourteen days, plus a restricted diet for the following six weeks – no cheese, fresh bread, fats, suet puddings, rich cakes with raisins or spices, pastry of any kind, pickles and red meat.

#### RETURN TO CHINA

In March 1928 there was an urgent request for Fred and other missionaries to return to China, and Fred was soon back. On 28 September he describes a visit to a recently established cause, Shang Ssu. Heavy rains had washed part of the road away. Fred took pick and shovel and hauled stones up from a dingle to repair the road. The church was overflowing, eleven people were baptized, including a Mandarin doctor who had taught Chinese to Henderson Smith and Stonelake, and had evidently been liberated from opium addiction. In

another September letter, he wrote *'a few weeks ago we baptised 8 candidates, four men and four women. One of these women was the mother of one of our keen young men in this City church, and although she is 71 she bravely went through what must have been an ordeal to her since few of them ever go into water at any time'*. May Rose wrote from 60 The Uplands, Rogerstone, on 16 October 1928 that she could not find guardians, except the Revd Joseph Williams, Fred's nephew who was minister at Collenton, Cambridgeshire, and was willing to take Bryn. Williams was pastor of Cinderford Baptist Church, Gloucestershire, 1930-1939 and he and his wife provided a home for all three Price brothers, giving them happy boyhood memories. In her search for guardians, May Rose found that their friends in Newport and the minister of their chapel were reluctant: the men were willing but not their wives. Rose May tried an old childhood friend who was not presently able. She was also worried at not being able to save even a shilling towards the time when their allowances ceased. She wrote to the BMS General Secretary, wondering if he knew of two Christian families, adding that she understood some missionaries had had to resign because they could not find suitable guardians. She was becoming depressed and downhearted. By November the Revd J.G. James, Director of the Board of Education for Newport, had agreed to take one of the boys, and the Revd C. Norris of Summerhill Baptist Church, Newport, the other. Ron says that for a while he had a woman in Newport as guardian who was mean and fed him with bread 'with a scrape of margarine and marmite', while Dick was with someone in Rogerstone. The Prices had great difficulty making ends meet - resources were stretched by having the family in three locations - China, Eltham and South Wales. Fred began to consider when his wife and daughter Phyllis should join him. China was in a better state and the BMS could save £33 if they travelled before Phyllis became three. He suggested sailing on 8 February 1929 when the boys had been settled in school and had suitable guardians. According to Ron Price in 2006, Bryn attended Taunton for half a term but then they all went to Eltham College, beginning on 19 September 1928. By November 1929, May Rose was back in China and suffering

again with hay fever. Fred was grateful to receive a 'Trojan' car, though the Chinese driver who delivered it left without giving any instructions on driving or maintenance.

#### ANOTHER FURLOUGH

Fred wrote on 10 November 1932 that he was coming home on *SS Empress of Japan*, due to leave Shanghai on 5 March 1933 for the USA where he would spend ten days, including a visit to American relatives in Des Moines, and would leave New York on *SS Scythia* on 31 May, due at Liverpool on 6 April 1933. By April 1934 he was back in China, having taken an Italian ship, which was much cheaper than the P & O line but Fred did not feel able to recommend it generally for BMS missionaries. 'The food is one matter which makes it a bit difficult for anyone lacking a first rate digestion. Then the company is so cosmopolitan which means that one cannot get the fellowship one could in a British boat'. That October he was delighted to hear that Bryn had been accepted for training at Regent's Park College, which had recently moved to Oxford. In a prayer letter of 13 May, he describes their life.

Mrs Price and I went around our western churches which took us into the hill district. Our first day in a cart was most trying as we met with one of the worst dust storms I had ever encountered during my 23 years experience of such in this country. At times the mule which drew our cart had to stand as the wind was too strong for it to proceed. Our task was to try and keep the dust and sand from our mouths and eyes, and we were glad none of our home friends could see our plight on arrival at Chomochen this late afternoon. Next day we took pack mules and a chair for Mrs Price to reach Liu Chia which is high in the Western Hills and the track is but a narrow path, very steep in places and dangerous for even man and mule. In these places we prefer to trust our own feet than either the mules or the carrier men. We call on members in a village half way and get refreshing tea and see a few suffering folk. We reach Liu Chia by 2 p.m. A late lunch and early tea rolled into one fits me to climb to the

cave up in the hills where the Sin Chow Missionaries hid in 1900 and which Mrs Price had not seen before. What a place for 8 men and women to live in for 10 days not as large as your smallest bedroom and nowhere could one stand upright. (These missionaries were discovered and later martyred). A full chapel at night when most of the village turn out to worship in the place where once stood their one and only temple.

Early in 1935 General and Madame Chiang Kai Shek visited Taiyuanfu, and met the missionaries, making a deep impression on them by their outspoken Christian testimonies.

May Rose badly missed the children, as Fred mentioned in a letter to the BMS. On 8 March 1935 she confided to her journal, 'have felt lonely this evening...' and had cheered herself by listening to some gramophone records, including Dame Clara Butt singing 'Abide with me' and 'The Lost Chord', and other artists including Caruso and Paul Robeson. She wrote some lines on their twentieth wedding anniversary, which ended: 'And here today I sit alone/ Without them – not even one,/ My children are all away at school/ And my husband at Chomochen.' About the same time, she wrote a poem largely about the terrain of Sinchow. The second verse reads:

Away in China so far from the sea,  
This age old City seems to me  
To have been the same for centuries long -  
Clothes, customs, & streets, - where the people throng.

The last two lines of the poem say,

But in far away England, over the sea,  
There, there is the home, where I long to be.

In 1936 China was very unsettled, with Communist insurgents and Japanese invading troops. In the Prices' guest book for 27 March 1936 there are the signatures of W.A. Lovatt Fraser and Ronald Scott, with May's comment, 'These two gentlemen came from the British Embassy

to consult with Fred about the Communist Situation', indicating the importance of the resident missionaries as sources of information about the political situation. On 15 June 1936 they entertained Mr and Mrs Willard Price, with May's comment, 'Geographical Magazine Photographer (American)'. According to *Wikipedia*, Willard DeMille Price (28 July 1887-14 October 1983) was a Canadian-born American natural historian and author of children's fiction. He travelled on many expeditions for the National Geographic Society and the American Museum of Natural History, in particular to Japan, and wrote books about his travels and also used them as inspiration for his *Adventure* series of novels for young readers about teenage zoologists, Hal and Roger Hunt.

By 20 October only a small party of missionaries remained in Taiyuanfu: Fred, the Revd and Mrs V.E.W. Hayward, the Revd S.R. Dawson, Miss Beulah Glasby, Dr Ellen Clow and her mother, Dr Bloom and Dr Harry Wyatt They had decided to stay whatever the problems

Meanwhile there were problems about Ron's career. In 1936 he failed to win a scholarship to train as an architect. Fred wrote to the BMS asking for help in finding him a position: 'He is interested in Art; would probably do well in architecture... Failing this he might consider Photography or some kindred calling....' Ron still had no job by the end of November. May Rose and Phyllis planned to sail on *SS Rawalpindi* from Shanghai on 2 February 1937. At a farewell gathering of missionaries on 14 January 1937 someone composed words to be sung to the tune 'God bless the Prince of Wales', including:

Our May is off to England, 'twill soon be time to go.  
 What shall we do without her? Well, really, I don't know.  
 But would you hear the story, of how she did excel,  
 I will recount the glory, now listen, while I tell.

There's many a 'Shensi memory' within this Mission crew.  
 We often can't remember the things we say and do.  
 But if we have forgotten, a fact, a word, a day,

There's one will recollect it, that one, our dearest May.

Among our Shensi mountains, and stony river beds,  
There moves the shaky litter, and where the 'le tzu' treads,  
Our Fred has travelled widely by night as well as day,  
But how could he have stood it unless he had his May?

The 'Corner House' is famous for luncheons and for teas;  
The Corner House in Shensi is noted, too, for these,  
But no spreads are more famous, there's no such fine display,  
No better hospitality than that you'll get from May.

Sometimes, of course, a table will overthrow man,  
Sometimes the food's too tempting, especially 'Chung Kuo fan';  
But, if you've eaten largely, now, listen to this hint,  
Our May can tell you what to do – take some soda mint.

#### SEPARATION

On 27 January 1937, they were in Peking on their way to Shanghai when May Rose turned her foot when getting on a bus and cracked the fibula just above her left ankle. Her leg was put in plaster at the German Hospital. As a result, Fred had to change his plans and travel with them all the way to Shanghai. The plaster was removed on board at the beginning of March. May Rose was glad to receive a cable from the BMS at Port Said telling her that 3 St Michael's Terrace, Highgate, would be available for her and Phyllis when she arrived in the UK. Later that year, she tripped over a chain link fence and damaged the ligaments in her right hand and wrist. By this time, she had moved to 41 Kenton Gardens, Kenton.

Meanwhile in China, Fred was having a 'hectic time'. The Japanese had occupied the province and committed many atrocities in the north. Many Chinese Christian leaders had been killed, and Taiyuanfu shelled. Fred led the mission through these difficult times with wisdom, tact and bravery. At one point, the Japanese Army wanted to occupy the BMS

girls' school, but Fred refused them. They looted the missionaries' homes. The missionaries were having to take war orphans into the orphanage, and Fred was trying to negotiate with Japanese High Officials. Fred wrote to May Rose and the children ('My dearest Wife and bairns') on 20 October 1937, describing the unsettled times in Taiyuanfu (for some reason, this letter was in the BMS archives in Oxford. Presumably there was much other private correspondence which does not seem to have survived). There were frequent air raid warnings, and he had visited Sinchow which had been badly bombed with many casualties a few days earlier (Sinchow was only twenty miles from the front line of the war). There Fred conducted a service. The letter took him several days to finish, and on the 21<sup>st</sup>, he was without electricity because of a bombing raid which brought eight casualties to the BMS hospital – one of them died and another was gravely ill. When a second siren sounded at lunchtime, he went to the hospital to shelter with the nurses in the cellar. 'They like me there when the raids are on. One nurse said, "There is something Mr Price does not understand, that is fear." She was wrong of course, but I try to keep it out of sight.' Letters were slow. His last one from Rose May had arrived via Canada. 'O for another letter from you, but when will it come?' To the children, he gives information about his situation and news of other missionaries. 'I am just aching to hear from you all. I want to know what you think of Oxford Bryn, your views on Edinburgh and other things. Then Ron should have something to tell of his trip to the Eastern Counties which seem to have some secret draw for him. Then Dick should tell me all about Isle of Man a place I have never seen, and about his work and prospects, same from Ron. Then you Phyl. must be quite used to Snocks (i.e. Sevenoaks, the location of Walthamstow Hall Girls' School) now and should want to say much about it. So glad you all had good holidays and hope you are all keeping well.' He ends, 'I wonder when I shall hear from you again. This will be all this time, so will close with lots of kisses and heaps of love and hugs and the very best wishes for each one of you, Cheerio and don't worry, we shall get through and furlough is only 18 months away. Work hard and help one another and so enjoy life. Yours as ever

and always lovingly. Dad'.

A full account of life in Taiyuanfu at this time is to be found in *Harry Wyatt* by Ernest Payne ((London: Carey Press, 1939, pp.70-75), which quotes a letter written by Harry Wyatt to Dr Chesterman. On 5 May 1938, Dr Harry Wyatt and Beulah Glasby, two BMS missionaries in Taiyuan, together with their Chinese driver, were murdered near Guoxian by Chinese Guerillas who mistook them for Japanese. According to Ron Price (verbal communication) and Payne's biography of Harry Wyatt, Fred should have been on this trip rather than Dr Wyatt who took his place because he was unwell. Both of the dead missionaries were close friends of May and Fred. Beulah Glasby's name appears in their Visitors' Book, and May wrote a poem to celebrate the birth of one of Harry Wyatt's children. Twelve Baptist members had been among the estimated 4,000 civilians murdered in Taiyuanfu by the Japanese when they had captured the city on 8 November 1937.

On 26 August 1938, Fred wrote of not receiving a letter. Rose May was unhappy. She had not been able to afford a seaside holiday with Phyllis. 'I lie awake at nights wondering how I am going to get through the next months before my husband gets home'. She hoped he would come in time to celebrate their silver wedding on the 20 March 1940.

#### FINAL YEARS IN CHINA

The Japanese involvement in China continued to create problems, and in a letter of 5 May 1939, Fred suggested the BMS should send missionaries to Japan to learn the language to facilitate work in China. Fred's final furlough took place in 1939. He wrote to the BMS from aboard the *SS Coute Biancamano* near Bombay to say he was on his way. A letter to BMS on 16 November 1939 shows that he was planning to return early in 1940. May Rose was considering going back with him, either leaving Phyllis with guardians in the UK, or letting her attend Cheefoo school. However, Fred decided to return alone and by 14 May 1940 he was in the College of Chinese Studies, Peking. The following month, the BMS decided not to send any more missionaries

back to China, unless they were urgently needed on the field.

On the 18 September, Fred wrote to the BMS suggesting they should try to sell their property in Shansi, since it was impossible to manage and collect any rents. Facing a dangerous and delicate situation, he wrote 'Only yesterday, we had a deputation of three Japanese making a request to use the Tung Chia Hsiang Church as a social centre for ex-soldiers, or possibly for present troops. We said we could not do it, but as a means of putting the evil day off, we said we were prepared to write to you asking what you thought of renting the boys' school for such a purpose.' Fred suggested to the BMS that, if mission work were to continue, four principles must be agreed

1. The BMS must define its attitude to the New Order in East Asia.
2. They must be prepared to co-operate with the Japanese Church in China, e.g. With that part of it which is known to be as much political as religious.
3. The Mission HQ must be in Occupied China.
4. The Budget must be submitted to the authorities on request.

#### MAY ROSE'S PROBLEMS

Back at home, May Rose found it very difficult to make decisions. She thought of going back to China via New Zealand where she would leave Phyllis to be safe from the bombing. With this plan in mind, in June 1940, she obtained a reference from the BMS to the British Government 'Children's Overseas Reception Board' for her to be an escort to other children being evacuated to New Zealand. In July she wrote to the BMS, asking them to send Fred birthday greetings from her in code with the information that she was still in England. She obviously sensed that she was a bit of a nuisance to them. On 15 July 1938 she had written a cross letter to the BMS General Secretary complaining that a letter addressed to *her* from one of Fred's American relatives had by error been forwarded to him in China. By 1940 she was writing, 'I think I must have a "phobia" about going to the Mission House. I always feel that people think when they see me "What is *she*

here for now, some new 'idiosyncrasie'" (I don't believe that is spelt right). Perhaps it is all my imagination. I wanted to go up on Friday, but just couldn't face it.' Later that year she sent a letter to the BMS saying that she would not return to China, then a telegram cancelling her decision, and in a letter to them dated 19 November 1940 she says '...I think it is as well risk a torpedo as to live in perpetual dread of a bomb falling on you all night long..... Phyllis does not really want to go and that is another of my difficulties..... All his [Fred's] people in South Wales say I ought not to go, but that my husband should come home.'

Her husband was interned, her three sons were in the Army with Dick missing in Malaya. In addition, she had a gynaecological problem and had to write to the BMS asking for £50 to pay for an operation. Although she had moved to South Wales, she still owned the house in Kenton (with the help of a Building Society loan) and it was damaged in a bombing raid in 1944, probably in early July, because she asked for advice from the BMS on how to proceed.

#### WAR

Fred was taken ill in November 1942 and the BMS forwarded a cable to May Rose, 'PRICE INTESTINAL OBSTRUCTION CAUSED BY ADHESIONS OPERATION CONDITION SATISFACTORY LOVE WIFE' dated Peking, 4 November 1942. War broke out between Japan and Britain and America in December. Fred's first intimation of this was when four armed Japanese soldiers marched through the Peking Union Medical College Hospital where he was a patient. On 10 November May Rose, 'Valpre', Hereford Road, Monmouth, heard that most missionaries had left Tsinan and were at Tsingtao or Shanghai, but there was no news of Fred. He left hospital in January 1942 and on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, she received the following message from the Red Cross, 'Inform relatives of North China missionaries associated with Anglican, Baptist, London, Salvation Army organisations well treated in their homes.' Fred was living in the Language School in Peking, with only Miss Rossiter for company. A Japanese chemist living in the same

venue, on a visit to North China, gave a talk on 'Japanese Christianity'. He claimed that Japan had a mission to the whole world: his country was as much an incarnation of God as Christ was; war was not murder, but necessary surgery of the sick parts with Japan as surgeon under God performing the operation. Fred wrote, 'Needless to say, we disagreed with him, but we dared not say so.' He wrote to May Rose on 17 March 1942 that he and others had been detained.

#### INTERNMENT

In July 1942 Fred was ordered to prepare for evacuation to Shanghai to join a repatriation ship due to sail on 15 August because he was an 'undesirable alien'. After a very uncomfortable journey, he and about 300 others were housed in the Columbia Country Club. Fred and about sixty others slept in the bar, where rats played openly. During the following five months, they were allowed to visit the city and make purchases, but then most places were banned and they were transferred to Lunghwa Camp on 17 March 1943. This had been a higher grade school which had suffered in the Japanese attack on Shanghai. The buildings were windowless and there was no sanitation. It was very uncomfortable in the cold and wet for more than 1,800 internees of all nationalities, occupations and ages (including 300 children). The food was reasonable at first, rice for breakfast, a little meat and vegetables at mid-day and stew in the evening. Towards the end, the rice was very short and the ration of meat and vegetable soup was very meagre indeed. Fred served successively as watchman, road maker, laundry worker, dispensary assistant and librarian. He was also hospital chaplain through his whole two and a half year confinement. The missionaries were viewed with some hostility to start with by the other prisoners, 'but this changed to admiration and respect when they saw how missionaries undertook and tackled the hardest and most undesirable forms of work.' There was an active religious life with Anglican and Free Church services, a Sunday School, study and discussion groups and a ministers' fraternal, to which Fred sometimes delivered papers. Fred said the attitude of the Japanese authorities was

generally speaking, fairly good. However, 'for trivial offences and, sometimes, for no offence at all, the guards would slap the faces of men and women alike. On one occasion, a man who did not give information desired concerning an escape party was badly knocked about. When he retaliated, he was imprisoned and removed to another camp.'

May Rose received a circular letter from the BMS dated 9 April 1943 containing excerpts from letters written by Mr Adam Black, BMS accountant in Shanghai, to his wife. One, dated 16 November 1942, included the reassuring line, 'Mr Price is all right again.' May Rose tried to write to him. There is a draft of a brief message to him on the reverse of a letter from the BMS which reads:

Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> 1944

To Rev. F.W.Price 15/533 at Lunghwa Civil Assembly Centre c/o Japanese Consulate General, Shanghai, China. "Dear Fred. Visited Sarah last week. All well except Will Jenkins has his old trouble. Saw Edith Thursday looking remarkably well. Lots of love. Come home soon. May, Phyl."

The next record in the BMS files is a letter dated 29 August 1945 from Lunghwa a fortnight after the Japanese surrender, saying that most BMS missionaries had registered for repatriation but several were willing to go back to posts if it were allowed by the authorities, acceptable to the Chinese Church, and approved by the BMS. Fred was by now entitled to retire, but willing to serve a further period of two years, if Rose joined him.

#### FINAL YEARS

Fred wrote to the British authorities in Singapore, enquiring about their son Dick who was missing, requesting that any information be sent to May Rose. Some time after July 1938, when his mother sent him a postcard from Oxford, Dick had gone to Malaya as a rubber planter in Malaya, working on the Sunnei Gapi Estate Serendah, Selangor. He had hoped to join the RAF, but the events of war moved swiftly and he joined the army instead. On 7 February 1942, May Rose received a

telegram from him, 'Have taken Commission Indian Army All is Well Dick Price'. Throughout the war, May Rose sent telegrams to the Red Cross and to Prisoner of War addresses, and put advertisements in magazines, seeking a response from Dick or news of him. As late as 10 February 1945 she wrote to him, hoping he was a prisoner of war, "Darling, am longing for news of you Praying that you come home. Phyllis home lately we talked and longed for news of you. Love Mum'. Her prayer was not to be answered. She forwarded the sad news to the BMS in a letter dated 24 October 1945: 'We regret to inform you that according to our records your son 13309 Lt. R.E. Price F.M.S.V.F. Attached 3/16 Punjab Regiment was killed between Jurong Village and Choachukang Village on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1942. The witness was Capt. A.E. Charlton, 3/16 Punjab Regiment whose address is Brentford, Middlesex.' May Rose had several letters from Fred, one dated 1 November 1945 said he would go to Shansi before coming home. She wrote to the BMS, 'Dick's death will be a sad blow to him. I feel a light has gone from my life and cannot yet grasp the fact that we shall see him no more in mortal life.'

By May 1946 Fred was back, and they were living at 107 Carleon Road, Newport. The following month the BMS doctor gave Fred a clean bill of health to return to China. In July he was thinking of returning to Shansi, but the BMS saw a problem because that was where Bryn and Margaret were likely to go, and 'it was not policy to have two members of the same family in the same province', so if Fred agreed to go to Shansi they would send Bryn to Shantung. In a letter of 12 July to the BMS, Fred was clearly exasperated by this, because his service would only be short-term, and he was unwilling to get in Bryn's way. However, 'Mrs Price doesn't feel she is equal to return to China and willing for me to go alone, so that's that too.' On 29 January 1947, the BMS decided that it would be unwise for Fred to return, so granted him superannuation of £200 per month plus a 10% bonus from January onwards.

Fred was involved with deputation work, visiting various churches, but decided to look for a position in the UK. His name was offered to

the church at Sholton in May 1947; he turned down Shipston in July, but by May 1948 he had accepted an invitation to become the minister of Bethany Baptist Chapel, Abergavenny, where he was inducted on 17 June. They remained there for seven years. On retirement, Fred and May Rose moved to South Lodge, 2 Manor Road, Worthing, a home for retired missionaries. Fred suffered a slight stroke on 24 February 1959 and then a more serious one. He died on 10 May 1959, aged seventy-seven. May Rose followed him on 4 December 1961, aged seventy-nine. She had belatedly received some financial compensation from the Japanese for Dick's death.

In the eulogy delivered at Fred's funeral, Dr H.R. Williamson, a long-time friend and China Missionary colleague who became General Secretary of the BMS, said, 'In the many times that famine, flood, plague or civil war inflicted serious and widespread distress upon the Chinese people, he was amongst the first to volunteer for the work of relief and reconstruction.'