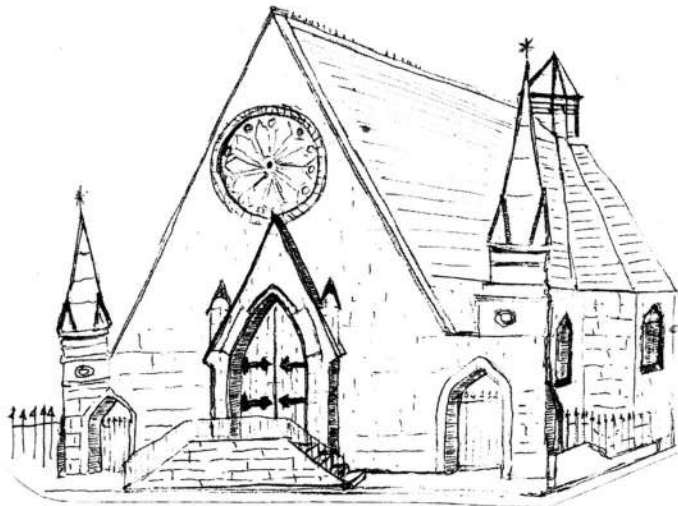


ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Geoff Boles

105: Athlone Methodist Church

Text: Ian Boles



Athlone Methodist Church, built in 1865, is a small yet impressive cut-stone building located in the heart of Ireland on

the bank of the River Shannon, off the town centre.

1748 saw the establishment of the first Methodist society

when John Wesley visited Athlone. He visited on many occasions and preached mainly outdoors on the river bridge or in a friend's house. In 1767 the first Methodist chapel was built in Preacher's Lane, Court Devenish, a short distance from the present church, by Samuel Simpson, Justice of the Peace, entirely at his own expense.

This served the Methodist congregation as a place of worship until 1769 when they moved to a new building opposite to the present church. This was called 'Epworth Hall' after John Wesley's birthplace.

When the present Methodist church was opened on 3 March 1865 the Epworth Hall was transformed into a Methodist School and was subsequently

sold to a local printing company. Methodist ministers lived locally in the manse until 1958 when Birr and Athlone came together under one minister living in the Methodist manse in Birr (Tullamore joined the circuit in 1973). Over the years, a vestry and toilets were built onto the rear of the church and recently the roof was replaced.

At present, 10.00am Sunday worship attendance has grown to an average of 20-25 and we now have a Sunday School. The church is used by 'The River of Life' gospel group who meet on Sunday mornings at 11.30am, so the Methodist Church in Athlone is fulfilling the work of God and the ideals of its founder, John Wesley.