

ROUND THE CHURCHES

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109: Avoca Methodist Church

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Avoca Methodist Church is located in the scenic Vale of Avoca, in the Wicklow Mountains, just past *The Meeting of the Waters* made famous by Thomas Moore. It forms part of the present-day Wicklow, Arklow and Gorey circuit.

The building itself is a small, well-proportioned, almost square structure and is located on its own grounds adjacent to the road. It has a classical style appearance though this style is only represented very simply and plainly. Round-headed Georgian style windows contribute most of the external decoration. The building

is of a single storey over a basement, the basement having long ago been blocked up and discontinued from use.

Internally, until 2007 the original pews and seating arrangements were in situ. The interior was laid out simply and plainly, though the building has a light and airy atmosphere about it due to the number of windows.

The church does not appear on the first series Ordnance Survey maps, the maps of County Wicklow being published in 1838. A local history guide produced by Avoca ICA in 1987 states: 'The Methodist Church is in

the townland of Knockanode. This was built in 1840, to accommodate miners from Cornwall. The site was presented by Joseph Levinstone of Knockanode, great grandfather of Wingfield Green of Castlemacadam.'

The guide continues on to say that copper and pyrites were mined in Avoca from 1840, though it also adds that the mines were derelict by 1888. There is still evidence of Avoca's mining past as several tall chimneys, associated with the engine-houses of the mines, protrude above the tree line of this heavily-wooded valley.

Writing in 1902 about the Wicklow and Rathdrum circuit in the Christmas number of *The Christian Advocate*, the Rev J A Duke relates the following:

'Ovoca [sic] like many other districts in Ireland has been sadly depopulated of late. Thirty or forty years ago it is computed that several thousand miners found employment in the sulphur and copper mines in the neighbourhood. Methodism was numerically strong in those days... at the present time the number of earnest, devoted

young people who attend it is considerable. Two services are held weekly; one on Sunday afternoon, which is preceded by a meeting of the CE Society; the other on Tuesday evening. Both services are conducted by the minister located at Rathdrum.'

What was obviously still a significant Methodist community in 1902 dwindled during the course of the 20th century. A noteworthy character of recent decades was Wingfield Green who was instrumental in the survival of the Avoca church. In recent years services have been held once a quarter due to a decline in the Methodist community locally.

In 2007 a decision was taken to modernise the interior of the church building. Running water, kitchenette and toilet facilities were installed. The pews were removed and the building carpeted. The intention is to make the church building more accessible and user-friendly with the hope of attracting various groups and to breathe new life back into a building which is set in one of Ireland's most beautiful locations.