

ROUND THE CHURCHES

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123: Ballymoney Methodist Church

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This is a special year for Ballymoney Methodism. Although the present church was not built until 1861, it commemorates in the rose window of the sanctuary the spiritual revival which swept across Ulster in 1859 and which gave the congregation a foundation of faith on which to build for future years.

There had been earlier work in the region, and indeed John Wesley preached in the Courthouse in 1785. Matthew Lanktree was among other preachers stationed in the area, but though he and other preachers came regularly the cause remained small.

It was the Rev William Crook's arrival

in Ballymoney in 1858 which proved momentous. On 24 March 1859, he opened an assembly room for town mission purposes in Castle Street, 'in the midst of a poor, neglected population, many of whom are downgraded, and attend no place of worship.'

That year, 1859, as the spiritual revival swept across Ulster, William Crook went to Ahoghill and brought back some of the young men, recently converted, to hold special services in Ballymoney and neighbourhood.

Such was the importance of the events and the extraordinary spiritual energy that was experienced in the lives of individuals and churches that William Crook felt the need of a paper devoted to the record of evangelical work. So he originated *The Irish Evangelist*, first published in Ballymoney in October 1859. It and its successors, *The Irish Christian Advocate*, and the *Methodist Newsletter* share a lineage that goes back to the spiritual and creative impetus released in that memorable year.

The present Ballymoney church was opened on 15 September 1861. The church, like Donegal, Cookstown and Regent Street, Newtownards, is a 'pattern' church based on plans of James Wilson of Bath. Underneath was a schoolroom and residence with a day school for secular education.

'The church', said Mr Crook, 'was designed to promote, in a spirit of charity towards all other churches, the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

The day school continued to function till about 1906.

The membership of the church was probably quite large during the period of the '59 Revival, but as the enthusiasm of revival passed numbers gradually decreased.

The years took their toll also on the fabric of the church. From 1910 onwards there is recurring mention of the state of the property. In January 1946 the church was closed and the services were transferred to the Town Hall.

Due largely to the planning of the Rev D Hall Ludlow, the church was repaired and re-opened on 12 June 1955. A bell was donated by Mr Stanley Cochrane, a native of Ballymoney, and installed in the Church Belfry in the autumn of 1956

Extensive renovations were carried out in 1987 and again in 1992-93. The basement was converted into a church hall and an extension added, providing kitchen and toilet facilities.

The congregation in Ballymoney has benefitted over recent years by new members coming to the town, and both new and old members rejoice in the story of a pilgrimage which they now continue.