

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Marcus Patton



The first Methodist church building in the Ballynafeigh area was a simple chapel/school, opened in 1838 as the church building of the Willowvale Society.

By the end of the century, the area around

the school house had developed to such an extent that a dedicated Methodist church building – a corrugated iron hall – was opened in 1893 beside the present site.

Although described at the time as “one of the neatest and most commodious churches in Belfast” the congregation grew so quickly that within five years it had outgrown the hall and plans were set in hand for a bigger permanent building. A fast-working committee appointed an architect and within six months the foundation stone was laid and the church opened in January 1899.

Although the architect was Australian, the building is described as being in the style of American Romanesque. The architect’s idea was to design a circular building based on the crosses of St. Andrew and St. George. A rather outspoken Lord Mayor, who opened the church, thought it would have been more appropriate if it had been based on the cross

9: Ballynafeigh Methodist Church

of St. Patrick. Neither was he very enthusiastic about the building materials, “brick, cemented and stone-finished...” not at all according to his taste.

There was no doubt that the building was highly fanciful and unfortunately perhaps because of his Australian origins, the architect had not reckoned with the effects of the Irish weather. The spire had to be removed a few years later for structural reasons and eventually the brick and cement were plastered over and painted in vain attempt to keep the damp out. However, in spite of its flawed architecture, it is a very pleasant church to preach in, with the pulpit almost equidistant from the main floor and balcony.

Although the congregation peaked in the late 1970s, it still has over 900 members. At its opening it was described as “a centre of light and blessing in the neighbourhood” and now, almost a hundred years later, through Alpha Courses and a Rob Frost Seed Team, the faith of the congregation is being strengthened and the gospel proclaimed to the surrounding area.

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