

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Peter Murray



John Wesley did not intend to establish a new Church; he hoped that Methodism would flourish as a spiritual catalyst within the Established Church of England, of which he was a member. Methodists, both in England and Ireland, continued to receive the Sacraments within the Anglican Church from which most of them originated.

In 1795 the Lisburn Society requested the Irish Conference to permit Methodist preachers to administer the Sacraments, as was occasionally occurring in England: this request was refused. An independent spirit

must have been abroad in Lisburn because in 1798 thirty-two members of the Society requested Conference, which consisted entirely of Methodist preachers, to allow lay participation. Not only was the request refused, the Lisburn leaders were expelled for daring to make such a suggestion.

The leaders thus expelled formed a new society and became affiliated to the Methodist New Connexion in England - a body formed under similar circumstances in that country. So in 1998 we celebrate the bicentenary of the establishment of the Methodist New

8: Broomhedge Methodist Church

Connexion in Ireland. This branch of the Methodist Church in Ireland established a foothold, mainly in the North Down and Lagan Valley Areas. It continued to exist until it was formally amalgamated with mainstream Irish Methodism in 1905.

Two of the six churches of the Lisburn and Dromore Circuit, Broomhedge and Priesthill Zion, belonged originally to the Methodist New Connexion community. There has been a Methodist Church on the Broomhedge site since 1830 when a church (the present lecture hall) was opened. The present church was opened in May 1897. At the first three Sunday services the preachers were the Rev James Grubb, a Wesleyan minister from Belfast, the Rev WE Sproule, a Presbyterian minister from Lurgan and the Rev JE Mein, a Methodist New Connexion minister from Bangor – an interesting example of acumenism.

Broomhedge Church situated almost equi-distant from Lisburn and Moira, continues to serve the local area. The small congregation includes several families who are descendants of those who heard Mr Wesley preach on his visits to the area.

George E Orr