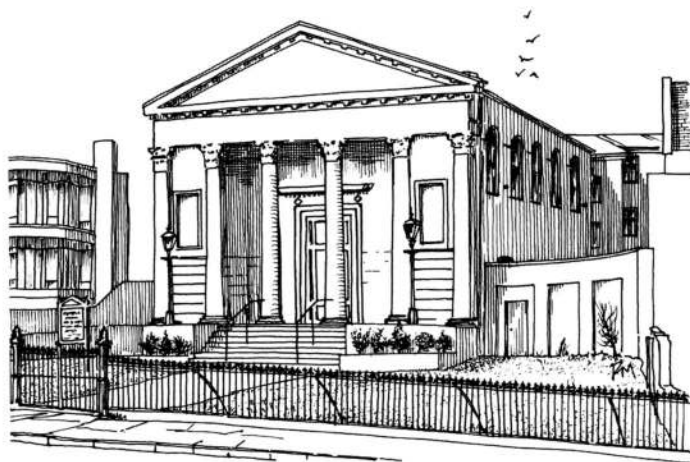


ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Peter Murray

124: Coleraine Methodist Church

Text: Robin Roddie



The present Methodist church in Coleraine is the third place of worship for the town's Methodist people since the first society was established in 1774.

It was designed by the Dublin Methodist architect, Isaac Farrell, who also designed the churches at Donegall Square, Belfast, and both Stephen's Green and Charleston Road, Dublin. Coleraine is now the only one of the four still used for worship.

The first of Coleraine's preaching places was obtained

in 1777 through the conversion of a disused military barracks and which also provided sleeping accommodation for visiting preachers.

A year later, John Wesley made the first of four visits to the town and among those he met were two sisters who had recently joined the society. One of these was Anne (Nancy) Young who would later marry Henry Moore, one of Wesley's Irish itinerants. She became a great favourite of Wesley's, and in his closing years he requested

that she, who by this time was with Henry in London, would attend to him at his death.

Wesley's final visit to Coleraine was in June 1789. By this time Methodism was well established in the town. John Gault, an influential merchant, had established a Sunday school in 1785, which today has the distinction of claiming to be the oldest continuing Sunday school in Ireland.

It was John Gault also who in 1801, encouraged by Adam Averell, provided the site for a new church to replace the inadequate Bridge Street premises. This was on what was then known as The Lane, later as Preaching House Street and later still Queen Street.

Fifty years later, in 1850, it was decided that the work of Methodism in the town required better premises, and the present site at the rear of the old building was obtained. The church was officially opened on 8 September 1854.

Over the years, repairs and improvements to the building have included a new roof in 1952, three stained glass windows and complete

re-decoration in 1960.

In 1988, it was discovered that there were serious defects in the structure of the church, and in 1992 there was a complete restoration or replacement of roof, ceiling, floor, plaster, doors, windows and pews.

While the work was being carried out, there was an arson attack, and damage totalling £24,000 was caused to the church hall which the congregation was using for worship. This was compounded by further damage to the premises by a later bomb in the town centre.

Most recently the congregation has taken back for church use part of their property which had been let commercially. It has opened a welcome centre for the wider community. As a first step a drop-in centre, where second hand books are also sold, is now operating.

The sanctuary has recently been fitted with two remotely operated screens to the front and a plasma screen to the back. There are also plans to paint the church in a new colour scheme this summer.