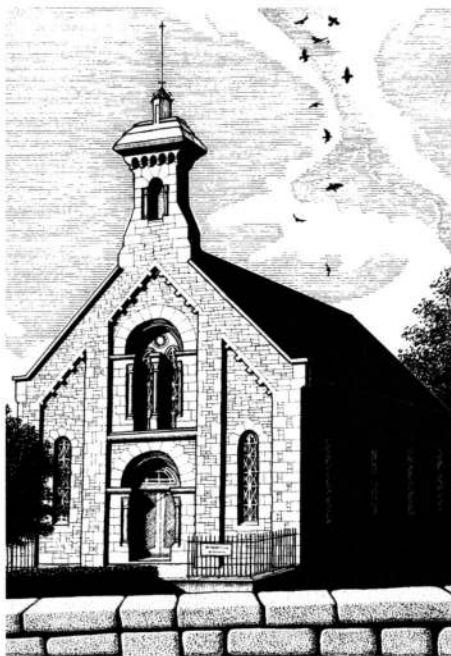


ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Barry Britton



Donegal Methodist Church is interesting in its own right and also because it is a rare example in Irish Methodism of a 'pattern' church. It was based on plans by James

Wilson of Bath as are the churches at Regent Street, Newtownards (1854) and Cookstown (1858) which are almost identical in external details. The Donegal church was built in stages. The basement was opened in 1857 and the new church completed in 1859.

Methodism was established in Co Donegal by Matthew Stuart an ex soldier who was personally appointed as missionary by John Wesley in 1786. 'Go to that country,' said Wesley in his letter to Stuart, 'and see what you can do. When you have spent the enclosed (five guineas) and stand in need of more, apply to your affectionate friend, J Wesley.'

Stuart's work was largely in the Ardara and Glenties area and Methodism was comparatively late in coming to Donegal town. In 1808, two preachers, Matthew Stewart and James Olliffe were appointed to the Donegal and Tyrone mission. Conditions then were such that parts of Donegal were described as 'the region and shadow of death'. The preachers travelled over bogs and mountains 'to find ignorance and wickedness apparent everywhere.'

In the town itself Methodism did not take root until 1820 with the arrival of Richard Corscadden who had encountered and been

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convicted by the preaching of Methodist preachers in the open air in Londonderry and later in Ballyederlan chapel near Dunkineely. On settling in Donegal town he opened his home to the preachers and his drawing-room became a sanctuary. Within eight years, in 1828, the first church was built and as was the custom at the time men and women sat on different sides of the chapel. Although it held over 100 persons, it quickly became too small.

During the ministry of Edward Best and his colleague James Edwards in 1856 there was a period of sustained growth during which the congregation increased rapidly and it became a matter of urgency that a new building be erected. The church which they were instrumental in having built still serves Methodism in the town and has been kept in excellent condition by the local Society.

Donegal over the years has suffered more than most from the consequences of emigration and population change but the congregation remain in good heart. They are always glad to welcome those who come to Donegal as visitors or who are returning to settle in a country which is showing new signs of life.

Robin Roddie