

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Mervyn Mawhinney

99: Dromore Methodist Church

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In John Wesley's *Journal* there is only one reference to Dromore, County Down. Of Friday 3 April 1767 he writes, 'At the end of Dromore I met Robert Williams who showed me the way to Newry.'

Methodism began in Dromore as the result of

evangelical outreach from the Lisburn circuit in 1779. A Lisburn preacher, William Myles, came and preached in the street, where he encountered some hostile opposition. Some local people responded to his preaching and they formed the nucleus of a new Dromore

society which immediately formed part of the Lisburn circuit.

One of the converts, Mrs Maria McNeill, 'a poor but respectable widow', opened her home in Meeting Street for Methodist services. By 1804 her house proved too small to accommodate the growing congregation. The Conference agreed to the erection of a new church but as sufficient funds were unavailable the society purchased two small houses in Meeting Street and converted them into a large room where services were held for 11 years.

A church was built in 1815, largely through the inspiration of John Ross, 'the father of Dromore Methodism', a merchant, a local preacher and a class leader. This church remained in use for 56 years. As the number of Methodists

increased a new building became necessary and the present Dromore Methodist Church, built on the site of the original church, was opened for worship on 19 March 1871. Later, because of the numerous applications for pews, a gallery was added, providing accommodation in total for 350 people.

The adjacent manse was built in 1878 and the schoolroom in 1896. The schoolroom is now used as a church hall but it is most inadequate to house the burgeoning youth work in a rapidly growing dormitory town for Belfast. Plans have been made to build a new suite of buildings to promote the Church's mission in Dromore, but, just as in 1804, the cost of such accommodation is proving a heavy burden for a small society.