

# ROUND THE CHURCHES

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## 116: Dungannon Church

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In some ways Methodism was slow to take root in Dungannon. John Wesley visited the town for the first time on 16 April 1767. He came again in 1775 but it wasn't until 1785 that the first class meeting was held in the town. The preachers had been visiting Dungannon and preaching in the open-air for nearly 20 years, but had no house in which to meet.

It was a Castlecaulfield member, Hercules Hall, who first formed a class for new converts in the house of Michael Cross in Irish Street.

That first class consisted of seven members and the leader. As it grew in size

it became necessary to rent a room in the house of a Dr Temple in Market Square. The membership increased to 30 and in a few months to 80, among them 'some of the most abandoned characters, in the town'.

A storm of persecution and misrepresentation erupted. The Methodist preachers were accused by the ministers of the town as false prophets, and many of the members suffered abuse.

Wesley again visited the town in 1787 and the work continued to prosper to the extent that a chapel was built. Wesley visited the town for the last time in 1789.

In 1797 Dr Thomas Coke was granted the use of the Presbyterian meeting-house which had been refused Mr Wesley ten years before. Lorenzo Dow visited Dungannon in 1801, and was followed by Graham and Ouseley in 1803.

By the late 1820s relationships between Protestant churches had largely improved while those between Catholic and Protestant communities became strained. Unhappily, however, relationships within Methodism suffered greatly, not least in the Dungannon/Charlemont area.

Charlemont became one of the strong centres of Primitive Wesleyan Methodism and what became known as 'The Dungannon Committee' led the counter-attack by (Wesleyan) Methodism to retain its preaching-houses.

Co-operation between the churches became particularly marked during the period of the 1859 revival. In Dungannon meetings were held on alternate nights in the Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist churches. The Temperance Movement also helped foster friendlier feelings between the churches as they sought to combat what they saw as a common threat to the well-being of the community.

In more recent times Dungannon was one of the centres where the issue of membership of the World Council of Churches led to the formation of the Independent Methodist Fellowship.

The present Methodist church was built in 1850 on the site of the original chapel in Perry Street. The Primitive Wesleyan Methodists had their building in Thomas Street and it was sold to the Orange Order in 1879.

Over the years many have entered the ministry from Dungannon and many more have served their ministerial apprenticeship on the circuit.

Today there is a worshipping congregation of about 100 in the church, using both contemporary and traditional forms of praise and a range of fellowship meetings and social activities to cater for all age groups in the congregation and local community.