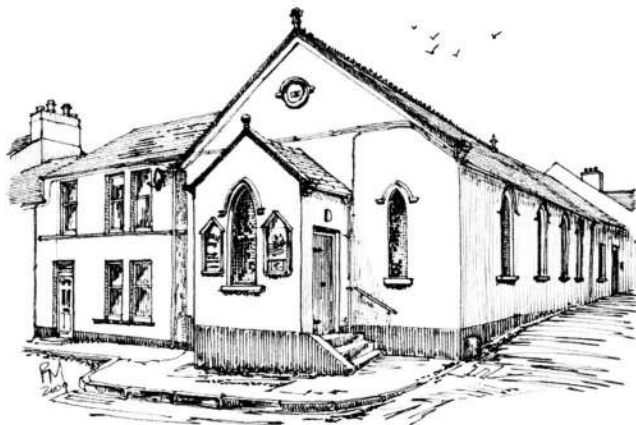


# ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Peter Murray

## 128: Portaferry Methodist Church

Text: Robin Roddie



The little Methodist church at Portaferry dates from 1780, making it one of the oldest buildings still in use in the Connexion. It has to be said, however, that the original structure has been renovated and virtually rebuilt several times.

Portaferry was included twice on Wesley's Irish itinerary. On the first occasion, in 1778, it seems as if Wesley merely passed through the fishing village of Portaferry on his way to Strangford. However, on the second occasion, in 1789, he arrived on Tuesday 9 June, and both that evening and the next morning, was granted the use of the Presbyterian Meeting

House which, he said, held twice or three times as many people as the recently opened Methodist House. Those who came were 'a serious and well-behaved congregation'.

The first major renovation to the chapel took place during the ministry of Matthew Lanktree who, in a variety of capacities between 1815 and 1823, committed all his

considerable energies into developing the work in the area. He persuaded Conference to appoint John Hill, later known as 'the Great Apostle of Ards', as a colleague and together they witnessed a period of religious revival and growth in membership. In 1817 he got the friends to commence the work of repairing, or rather rebuilding, the Portaferry chapel, which was in a dilapidated condition

In the earlier years Portaferry, was used as a day-school during the week, and as a preaching house on Sundays, the preacher having to qualify for the dual position of teacher and local preacher. Some who served

in this capacity went on to make their mark far beyond Irish shores, men such as Dr Wm Butler of Dublin (1818-99), founder of missions in both India and Mexico and Dr J Boyd Brady of Larne (1845-1912), who became one of the foremost preachers in America.

One of the features of work in Portaferry and the Ards peninsula over 200 years has been the commitment of lay workers. None more so than Hans Morrison (1836-98) who for many years did the work of a second minister on the circuit. His diary represents him as having preached 2,747 sermons in 31 years.

Shortly after Hans Morrison's death, the next major renovation to the Portaferry church took place. In 1903 when under the leadership of James Elliott, JP, whose home was 'home from home' for all preachers, the congregation practically rebuilt the church at a cost of about £250, and added a new lecture hall at a cost of £120.

It is good to know that innovation and enterprise is still a feature of Portaferry and in 2006 the Methodist congregation opened a bright, warm and well-furnished building called 'Cuan Mews' for the use of the whole community. It cost £77,000. Times and costs may have changed but not the commitment of the Portaferry Methodist Society.