

ROUND THE CHURCHES

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84: Portlaoise Methodist Church

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It was not until 1775 that John Wesley made his first visit to Portlaoise, then called Maryborough. He was welcomed by the local rector, Thomas Jenkins, who invited him to preach in the parish church. The society here was small, and met in a barn in Bull Lane. The first chapel was built in 1798 on a site in Church Street. It was described as a bare, ill-shaped building, with uncomfortable benches and a high-pitched pulpit. Nevertheless it was the scene of successful labours by the circuit preachers and by notable visiting evangelists.

In 1883 the present church was built to a design by a Mr Morley and cost about £1,650. For a time the old

building was used as a hall. The Maryborough society was then growing in importance, and was the head of a circuit which had other chapels at Stradbally, Mountrath, Mountsaalem, Ballyfin, Ballyhupahaun and Mountmellick. Of these only the last two remain in use.

Emigration greatly reduced the number of Methodists in the area, and the smaller churches were sold, as was also the hall in Portlaoise itself. In recent years the tide has turned, and the society has found new forms of service in the community. It again felt the need of a hall, and one was built in the grounds of the church just a few years ago.

The congregation again looks to the future with faith and a sense of purpose.