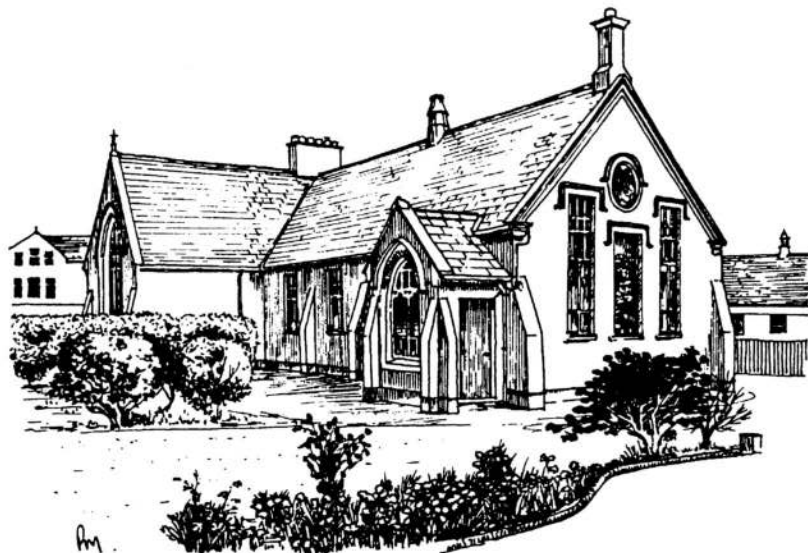


ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Peter Murray

27: Whitehead Methodist Church

Text: Elaine Barnett



Until 1870 Whitehead remained a small community comprising a few houses and the Coastguard Station. Lavish expenditure by the old Belfast and Northern Railway Company on advertising Whitehead's amenities soon enabled the growing town to become one of the most popular seaside resorts in the north of Ireland. Growth was encouraged

further by the popular practice of granting free railway tickets for ten years to the occupier of each new dwelling constructed in the immediate area!

In 1876 visiting clergy initiated the first inter-denominational evening services in Whitehead and established a Sunday School. In 1896, encouraged by these

developments, the Rev J W Jones of Carrickfergus Methodist Church entered into negotiations to lease land on a central site. Building work began on the new Methodist School-Chapel in January 1899, and on Saturday 23 June 1900, the President of the Conference, the Rev Frederick W Mac Donald, performed the opening ceremony, assisted by Bishop Hendrick of the

Episcopal Church of America. The *Christian Advocate* of 25 June 1900 reported, '*In the afternoon the new School-Chapel at Whitehead was dedicated in the presence of a very large number of Connexional friends, most of whom travelled from Belfast by special train, leaving York Road at a quarter to three o'clock. The afternoon was beautifully fine and the only*

drawback was that the building was far too small to contain the worshippers'.

At the dawn of this new century the church is challenged to present the message of God's love to an increasingly secular society. In reaching out to this society a recent project undertaken by the church, in co-operation with other churches in Whitehead, has been to support 'Genesis', a youth drop-in centre in the town. This support includes volunteers working in the centre and an on-going financial commitment. The Monday evening Christian Endeavour, having members with no Methodist, or any church, connection, also provides a means of outreach to the community. With a desire for enriched worship and continuing programmes of community witness, the members of Whitehead Methodist Church are seeking ways to face today's challenges, hopefully following the example of vision and faith shown by those who founded the church 100 years ago.