

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Peter Murray

129: Youghal Methodist Church

Text: Robin Roddie



The Methodist congregation in Youghal has the distinction of dating its beginnings to the visit of Charles Wesley to the town in 1748, after which a society was formed which continues to this day.

Youghal itself is an Irish Heritage Port, having been in the 17th century a more important harbour than Cork. Among its notable citizens were Sir Richard Boyle and Sir Walter Raleigh. Walter Raleigh was Mayor of Youghal in 1588 and 1599, and the first potatoes in Europe were planted in his gardens of Myrtle Grove in 1585.

It was 17 years after Charles's visit that John Wesley first came to the town in 1762 and he returned on four further occasions,

the last being in 1787 when he was 84. He died in 1791, the same year the first Methodist Meeting House in Youghal was acquired. Youghal was at the time reaching the zenith of its prosperity. In the 12 years from 1788 to 1800 the number of houses in the town grew from 830 to 1,223.

After the division of 1816, when the Primitive Wesleyans separated from

the Wesleyan Methodists, the Primitives built one of their first chapels in Munster in Youghal on South Main Street in 1818. It was erected by a Mr Taylor at his sole cost.

The Wesleyans, in turn, built a replacement for their 1791 chapel in 1833 in Wesley Place, Meeting-House Lane (later called Chapel Lane). This was superseded by the present church in Friar Street which opened in 1880, and which had in addition a 'commodious' house and school-room.

At least three of the preachers appointed to Youghal died there and are buried at St Mary's Collegiate Church. In 1847 William Richey, during his third and last year on the circuit, died as the result of contracting

'malignant fever' while visiting victims of the potato famine. Robert Geale, who was instrumental in the building of the present church, died in Youghal in 1889 and is interred at St Mary's. A brass plaque to his memory is on the wall in the church.

The Rev Jones Whitla, who had been shot by a British soldier at Enniskillen and had to have his right arm amputated, was appointed to the town in 1921 in the hope that this would help his recuperation. However, he died in 1922 and is buried in Youghal Churchyard. A beautiful stained-glass window was erected to his memory in the church by his cousin, Sir William Whitla.

Much more recently the congregation in Youghal developed a vision which entailed the redevelopment of the, by now dilapidated, hall at the rear of the church. At a cost of €80,000 a renovated hall, new kitchen, vestry and toilets were provided in 2003 for use by the church and the wider community.

In 2008 the circuit staff was strengthened by the appointment in Youghal of Desmond Davis who, with long-standing members and new arrivals, continues the story of Youghal Methodism that is now over 260 years in the making.