

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: H Ewart



Blackwatertown was once a place of considerable commercial importance. John Wesley found time to visit on four occasions, the first being in June 1771 during his thirteenth visit to Ireland at the age of 68. His other visits were in June 1775, 1 June 1785 and 16 June 1789, aged 86. The third time he preached in 'Mr Roe's yard to a large and elegant congregation'. Here it is thought that a preaching house was erected soon after the visit of Wesley, however if or when this was built is uncertain.

Even though Methodist meetings had been held in Blackwatertown since the 18th century, the Society of Blackwatertown was not started until December 1880 with a starting membership of six. By April 1898

when the church was opened the membership had increased to 28. The present society numbers 24 adults and 14 children.

James Beattie was a devoted member who served Blackwatertown as a Sunday School Superintendent and the Charlemont Circuit as a Circuit Steward and a Local Preacher towards the end of the 1800s. Mr Beattie ranks amongst the staunchest of friends of Methodism. He was a Local Preacher for

more than 50 years, often walking more than 15 miles on a Sunday to take services. Thanks to his foresight and generosity, a Methodist day-school was established in Blackwatertown around 1880 that continued in use until 1968 when the building was handed back to the church by the education authorities. It was renovated and opened as a church hall in June 1969. Eventually it was sold and a new hall was built on the church site.

For some time James Beattie had the desire to build a Methodist Church in the town and to this end he offered a large disused grain store that was on his property, free of cost for that purpose. The Quarterly Meeting of the Charlemont Circuit, of which

21: Blackwatertown Methodist Church

Blackwatertown is a part, at its meeting of June 1896, passed a resolution giving Mr Beattie permission to go to the August District meeting for liberty to build a church in Blackwatertown. Permission was given and the vision began to become a reality.

When the church was opened on 22 April 1898 at a cost of £500 it was free of debt. Previously Methodist services had taken place in the day school which was not really suitable for the purpose. The present church, while not large, is 'exceedingly neat and comfortable'. It is a monument to Mr Beattie's persevering and self-denying efforts and to his foresight, generosity and dedicated service to God.

In March 1975 land was given by a Mr Brown to the church for the making of a car park and the building of toilets. A major extension was completed on 2 May 1992, giving the church a new hall, kitchen, and vestry.

The outside of the church has recently been renovated and repainted. There remains however much work still to be done. Later this year the windows will have to be replaced, the church treated for woodworm and extensive re-plastering done inside the church. The members of this small church are very proud of their heritage and are dedicated to maintaining the life and worship of their lovely little church.