

ROUND THE CHURCHES

59: Christ Church, Sandymount

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The Methodists in Sandymount first met for worship in 1857 in the disused local courthouse, rented by the Centenary congregation as an outreach project. With a population increase in this pleasant seaside village south of Dublin the need for more accommodation was met by the building of a 'New Wesleyan Chapel' in the garden of a large Victorian house, which became the first manse. The new building was opened in 1864, of simple rectangular layout. Transepts were added in 1872, a pipe organ in 1909 and

an attractive porch in 1911. From a redevelopment of the original stables ancillary buildings grew to comprise a suite including a large lecture hall and the Coade Memorial Room, the latter built in 1924. A new manse on the same site replaced the old manse and its adjoining neighbouring house in 1942.

The church contains some fine stained glass windows, including two by Evie Hone, and one by A E Child. Another by E Rhind commemorates Bessie Oak Dench, a former member, and the grandmother of actress

Dame Judi Dench.

During the first half of the 20th century the district became a primary housing area for the expanding city, and the congregation flourished. Inevitably, most available land was eventually utilised, and with newly-weds now settling in outer suburban areas, numbers declined. The local Presbyterians were experiencing the same conditions, and in 1975 the two congregations united under the Alternating Ministry Scheme. It has been a happy union under the new name of Christ Church, Sandymount.

In 1993 the congregation accepted the Dublin Central Mission's proposal to build their new Mount Tabor Care Centre on the site. The redevelopment required the replacement of all the existing buildings except the Church, and opened in 1998. It was stipulated that the design for the Care Centre and the new church halls should harmonise with the Church; the result

has been most pleasing. The inception of the Care Centre has added a new dimension to the focus of the congregation, and utilised valuable dormant land for the benefit of the entire Church.

The congregation has in recent years welcomed new members from the sheltered housing developments and retirement homes in the district, and also from among incomers to Ireland for work or study. Especially pleasing are indications that younger people are again finding ways to reside locally despite the very high property prices in the Dublin 4 area. Some find their spiritual home at Christ Church.

On a strategic site at the eastern corner of Sandymount Green, the 19th century building designed by Alfred G Jones and built in a back garden has recently been refurbished to meet the needs of 21st century worshippers. May it have a bright and useful future.