

# ROUND THE CHURCHES 76: Cookstown Methodist Church

Drawing: Dennis Ferguson

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Cookstown was visited by John Wesley on three occasions that he records in his *Journal*. He was travelling either to or

from Londonderry by the scenic mountain road that runs past Lough Fea and through Draperstown. His impression of the route in 1771 was other than scenic: 'Leaving Londonderry, I rode through the wild, dreary mountains to Cookstown.'

His first opinion in 1769 was, 'a town consisting of one street about a mile long directly through a bog'. Thankfully the bog had been drained sufficiently to allow the erection of the present Methodist church at Loy Street in 1858. This was the third Methodist building in the town.

The first was situated, rather inappropriately, in the Brewery Lane! The second was a Primitive Wesleyan building in James Street. A freestone tablet, presumably from that building, is now mounted on the front of the present church and reads, rather wordily, 'Primitive Wesleyan Methodist

Sunday School Bible and Missionary Societi (sic) Meeting House 1825'.

From the drawing it will be seen that the architecture of the present building is similar to several other churches in the Connexion, namely Donegal, Ballymoney and Regent Street, Newtownards. It was built with basement accommodation, which is now used chiefly by the youth club. In the 1970s first a vestry and kitchen and later a hall and extensive car park were provided to the rear of the church.

Following this, access to the church from the lower premises proved to be increasingly difficult. To solve the problem an imaginative scheme in the 1990s provided a lift and comprehensive facilities for the less mobile. These are now greatly valued and used in the activities of a lively and growing congregation.