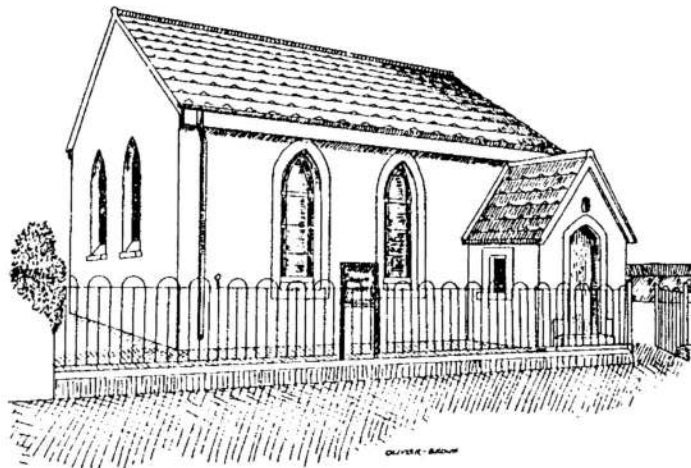


ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Oliver Brown

29: Derrygonnelly Methodist Church

Text: William K Parke



In 1800 Derrygonnelly did not exist as a village; the little hamlet consisted of a corn mill, a tuck mill and a few thatched cottages, and a Roman Catholic chapel stood nearby. The corn mill stood at the Western end of the village where the Tir Navar complex stands and on the farm owned by the Kittson brothers who also operated the mill and Post Office. Just across the Sillees river stood a farm house owned by Willie Kittson. Both these Kittson families were to

play an important role in the development of Methodism in the area.

On 26 December 1800 Charles Graham arrived in Derrygonnelly to preach and, according to Crookshank, 'on the last day of the year, 31 December 1800, about thirty were converted.

In 1812 a young man named Adam Ford from Lisbellaw came to the area as a parish schoolmaster and he obtained a room in Kittsons' corn mill where

he established a class and in 1817 he obtained a space in Willie Kittson's farmyard where he erected a small preaching house.

In 1835 the Kittson family of the mill farm gave a site to erect a permanent preaching house and work commenced. When the building was almost finished some wood chips ignited either by accident or design and the building burned down. Undaunted, rebuilding work commenced immediately and on 17 December 1837 the little preaching house was opened and dedicated by the Rev Adam Averell, president of the Primitive Wesleyan Conference.

Primitive Methodism was very strong in West Fermanagh; the main centres were Springfield, Derrygonnelly and Cosbystown; in fact it was the largest Primitive circuit in Ireland with almost seven hundred members. Their services were held on Sunday afternoons so as not to clash with the Anglican morning services.

In 1878 the two strands of Methodism merged and became the Methodist Church in Ireland

and so Churchill, Cosbystown, Derrygonnelly and Springfield became a circuit.

The Rev Thomas Ford was appointed to the circuit in 1880. He took an active part in the Land League campaign in Derrygonnelly where the movement had more Protestant members than Roman Catholics. He addressed a crowd of two thousand in the village. He reckoned that nine-tenths of his congregation were in the movement and he relayed their pleas, 'we want fair rents and honest rents'. The Breen family of Aghakeeran and Derryvary were prominent in the Land League and in the Derrygonnelly congregation where the family is still going strong. One hundred years after the opening the little church in 1937 was newly renovated, decorated and rededicated. In July 1946 it again underwent a major renovation when a vestry room was added, and again in 1960 the roof and ceiling replaced and new furnishings installed.

Today we have a membership of twelve families.