

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Donald McBride



Methodism in the Ards peninsula began in Donaghadee. The churches in Newtownards, Bangor, Glastry and Portaferry were later developments. Around the year 1790 there were a few Methodists in Donaghadee and in 1813 the first Methodist Church was built, largely as the result of the faithfulness and

commitment of a young woman named Mary Carey. Crookshank in his 'History of Methodism' says, 'No sooner did she realise a conscious sense of sins forgiven, than she joined the little band of Methodists'. Prior to 1813 the place of meeting was a barn, believed to be once situated near the entrance to the present Church car-park. John Wesley passed through Donaghadee on a number of occasions on his way from Scotland on the cross-channel boats, particularly in 1765 and 1767, although there appears to be no written record of his having preached in the town.

A Methodist school was built in 1846, adjoining the Church and when the school closed, this later became the 'Wesley Hall'. In 1882 the Church was re-roofed, painted and renovated, at an outlay of £125. In 1908-09 the Church and school were rebuilt under the ministry of the Revd James Smyth. Sadly, on 23 June 1976, when work was being carried out on the Church roof, the roof, Church and halls were badly damaged by fire

20: Donaghadee Methodist Church

and the Church premises had to be vacated for approximately a year. On 4 June 1977, the Church was re-opened by Mr James Moreland, then Chairman of the Property Board, and re-dedicated by the late Revd Richard Greenwood, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland. From 1993-95 the house next the Wesley Hall and ground to the rear of the Church were purchased. On the 29 June 1996, following alteration and renovation to the adjoining premises, they were officially opened by the late Mr Gordon Campbell and provide very useful additional meeting rooms.

The Church at present has embarked on a 'Clearing our Vision' programme. This has helped formulate a Purpose and Vision statement and clarified aims for the new Millennium. The Church gives thanks to God for more than 186 years of faithful witness and looks to the guidance of the unerring Holy Spirit for the future.

JBG