

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Peter Murray



For those travelling along Belfast's A55 ring road at Upper Knockbreda Road, it is hard to imagine a time when the area occupied by Glenburn Methodist Church had, as its only dwellings, a row of labourers' cottages and cows grazed up to garden fences in nearby paddocks.

However, in the late 1940s Glenburn was one of the areas of Belfast designated for development, and the new dwellings provided first-time house buyers with affordable accommodation in the post-war years of austerity.

It was particularly attractive to the employees of Short Brothers Aircraft Factory and it was noted, that at a time when building sites and materials were strictly controlled, Methodists seemed to find favour, so that every other householder seemed to be a Methodist in this early stage of the Glenburn Estate.

The first Methodist services in the area were held in what became known as the 'New Room', a large front room in the Glenburn Estate builders' office, at the top of Stirling Avenue. It was dedicated on 17 November 1950 and had a capacity of

125: Glenburn Methodist Church

Text: Robin Roddie

60 seats for Sunday evening services and also accommodated a Sunday School. It was situated in what would now be a spot in the middle of the Knockbreda dual carriageway.

In addition, the directors of the Glenburn Estates Ltd, Messrs W H Robb and Robert Stewart, gave a free site for a church and hall, and within a year of the infant church starting in the New Room it was found necessary in November 1951 to erect a temporary wooden hall on the free site.

Those involved recall the sense of a pioneering spirit, of being in at something important for the future. The average age of the adult members was below 30 and sometimes they got things wrong, but more often they got it right as they improvised – juggling seating for worship on Sundays and social occasions during the week.

By September 1955 sufficient funds had been raised to be able to open a new

dual-purpose hall and worship centre at Glensharragh. The debt incurred was eliminated by 1962, in large part through the generosity of Cregagh, Glenburn's mother church, which contributed £1,000 a year, and, in addition, contributions from the Rank Trust, Lady Kelly and the Church Extension Committee.

The young church responded well to the challenges. Soon its Sunday School became the largest in Irish Methodism and its youth organisations were so popular that before long the suite of buildings proved inadequate.

The decision to build again was taken and in June 1972 the present church was opened.

For almost 60 years Glenburn Methodist Church has provided a spiritual home for its members and the wider community, and just as it was the offspring of Cregagh Methodist Church so it, too, has given much in return to the circuit and the whole Connexion.