

ROUND THE CHURCHES 111: Newtownkelly Methodist Church

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The year was 1924 when Robert McIlroy, a boy of seven, travelled three miles on the bar of his father's bicycle from his home at Laghey, on the Dungannon circuit, to Newtownkelly, Coalisland. A new Methodist church hall to be known as Newtownkelly Methodist Church was being opened and many Methodists

from the locality wanted to be there.

Robert remembers four people on the platform at the front of the church; one was the Superintendent Minister, the Rev W P Moran, but one man, Sir Samuel Kelly, who took the chair that day, stands out in his memory. Samuel Kelly made ambitious attempts

to mine coal on a large scale in County Tyrone near the town of Coalisland that grew up around the small coalfield.

Housing in a new estate called Newtownkelly was erected for the 200 miners brought over from Cumberland and Scotland.

Indeed in the optimistic early days Samuel Kelly anticipated that 'before long over 1,000 workmen would be employed in connection with the mining operation. As part of the development the Newtownkelly church was built to meet the religious and social needs of the rapidly-growing mining population.

Although 1926 saw the complete cessation of mining at Sir Samuel Kelly's coalpit owing to unforeseen geological conditions and the return of

many miners to England and Scotland, the church continued in the church hall.

Sadly, in 1982 the hall was destroyed in an arson attack. The present church hall was opened in 1983 by Mrs Patricia Dowse, wife of the then Dungannon Circuit Superintendent, the Rev John Dowse. A flower festival is being held to mark the 25th birthday of this event in May when the small congregation plans to reach out to the local community who will be invited to join in the celebration.

Visitors to Newtownkelly Church often comment on the warmth of the welcome found there. Many over the years have come to faith in this little church and so the celebration will be a time of thanksgiving to God for his abiding and sustaining grace.