

ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Colin Turner



'A new church for the new century': that was the inspiring phrase chosen by the founding leaders of Rostrevor Methodist Church to advertise the opening of their premises in January 1901. Believed to be the first Methodist Church built in Ireland in the 20th Century, it has a fascinating history which is worth recalling in this, its centenary year.

Whilst Methodism has a long and distinguished record in the Newry and Warrenpoint area, no Methodist church existed in the village of Rostrevor until the present building was erected in 1901.

The full name of the church, 'The Gilcriest Memorial', gives an indication of the society's origins. The Rev John Gilcriest, a son of the manse, served as a Methodist minister in a wide variety of circuits throughout Ireland before retiring to Warrenpoint in 1890. Whilst officially a 'Supernumerary', he continued to work throughout his retirement. In addition to having pastoral care of the Warrenpoint congregation, Mr Gilcriest began work in the neighbouring village of Rostrevor. Monthly services were held in the village Lecture Hall and interest

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Text: Janet Unsworth

began to develop.

Mr Gilcriest's sudden and unexpected death in 1899 might have halted any further growth of Methodism in Rostrevor. However, his widow, Sarah, and friends from the area were determined that his work would not be in vain. Accordingly, they set about raising funds and making all necessary plans in order to erect a Methodist church in Rostrevor, to be named in memory of John Gilcriest. Their efforts came to fruition in January 1901 when the Gilcriest Memorial Methodist Church was opened and dedicated by the Rev Wesley Guard.

From its earliest years, the Rostrevor congregation has always been small in number. However, the dedication, commitment and faithfulness of its members is demonstrated by the fact that, one hundred years after its foundation, the church still continues to serve in and witness to the community of Rostrevor and surrounding areas.

Nestling at the foot of the Mournes, near the shores of Carlingford Lough, the little church reflects something of the

simple but striking beauty of its surroundings. Structurally, it has changed very little during the past one hundred years. The prevailing atmosphere within the sanctuary is one of prayerful peace, restfulness and simplicity. In recent years, the dedicated group of leaders have installed central heating, rewired the building and repainted it internally and externally. In its one-hundredth year, it remains a beautiful, peaceful and welcoming house of worship.

Over the years, the church and its hall have provided a place of welcome, recreation and service for a range of groups in the community. The Methodists are respected and valued as partners in ministry with all the other churches in the village. In the spring and summer months, the congregation benefits from the support of holidaymakers staying in the Kilkeel, Cranfield and Rostrevor areas. It is now part of the Newry circuit, and a growing sense of partnership and mutual support across the circuit augurs well for the continued ministry of this small, but committed, society.