

ROUND THE CHURCHES 55: Thomas St Methodist Church

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The present church was opened for worship in 1860. The previous church was situated on the west side of Thomas Street and remains virtually unchanged, with the date stone 1832 on its façade. It was for many years the warehouse of A & D Thornton. It is of interest that the first Methodist church was opened in Portadown in 1802. It was situated behind the present St Mark's parish church and was the first church of any

denomination in the town.

Thomas Street was built as a result of the need for a larger church following the revival of 1858-59 and linked with the rapidly increasing population. The present church, with manses, is situated on the east side of Thomas Street and bordered by Portmore Street, and is a fine building in the classical style. The crowning glory of the church is its interior, with the symmetry of its continuous oval gallery,

the organ at one end, and the mahogany pedestal pulpit below. The lofty ceiling, with mouldings painted in shades of turquoise, maroon and gold, gives a light and airy effect.

Methodists were always interested in high standards of education, and a primary school was started in 1862, using the church buildings for classrooms. In 1909 a purpose built school was erected behind the church halls, and continued under Methodist management until eventually taken over by the County Armagh Education Committee in 1960. The school building reverted to the Methodist Church, and was used for youth work until 1993, when the site was cleared and new imposing church halls erected.

For 142 years Thomas Street church has stood four square to wind and weather, has suffered from, and been treated for, dry and wet rot on several occasions,

and from terrorist bomb damage to windows and ceiling. Yet the church has survived, and will serve its people for generations still to come.

Today the church continues its witness in Portadown with a wide-ranging programme of activity for young and old. Services now reflect traditional and contemporary worship styles, with new members joining and people coming to personal faith. It has large youth organisations, and recently acquired the services of a youth pastor. The members reach into the whole community with the gospel, seeking to offer hope and reconciliation to a divided community, showing examples of good neighbourliness across the divide. We cannot but believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to restore broken relationships and give forgiveness and hope.