

ROUND THE CHURCHES

104: St Patrick's United Church, Waterford

Drawing: Sketch of entrance to St Patrick's United Church

Text: John Parkin



St Patrick's Church building in Patrick Street, Waterford, is a former Church of Ireland church built in 1727, but occupying a medieval ecclesiastical location. The building is listed but has no particular architectural merit and is in a state of advanced decrepitude. An overgrown graveyard and high wall add to a somewhat Gothic atmosphere. Thanks to global warming the winter winds blowing through the cracks around the windows are less

chilly than formerly. Since the large stained glass window was removed, to forestall its imminent collapse, worshippers can now watch the trees waving in the wind if the sermon is boring.

Waterford Methodist/Presbyterian Church is part of the alternating ministries scheme. This marriage came about after the Presbyterians almost went with a bang and the Methodists with a whimper. A boiler explosion in the fine-cut stone Presbyterian church in Lady Lane singed the caretaker and caused considerable damage. The building is now the location of a badminton club. The Church of Ireland offered St Patrick's Church to the small congregation. Numbers in the fine-cut stone Methodist church in Grey Friars, off the Quays, were withering away. The building is now an art gallery. The two depleted congregations joined together as the future seemed to offer genteel eclipse.

Waterford has always been a gateway to the world, ever since the Vikings came to trade, pillage, plunder, etc. In recent years members of the St Patrick's congregation have come from Ireland, Scotland, Canada, England, students from Russia, Japan and Korea, nurses from the Philippines, migrant

workers from various parts of the world, and asylum-seekers, mainly from Africa but also from Sri Lanka. Weddings, baptisms and dedications are now part of the pattern of church life. Friendship and understanding are growing between people of widely different backgrounds. Something new is happening in Waterford, and the Church Council and Committee want St Patrick's United Church to be a place of welcome, worship and service to the city.

St Patrick's is located just inside the city wall near the citadel which withstood a siege by Oliver Cromwell, who vowed to take Waterford by hook or by crook. In a sense the congregation still feels under siege, as efforts to find appropriate arrangements to offer facilities for mission and outreach have so far been frustrated. The young children are far too numerous for the space available; the kitchen and toilet arrangements are woeful. It would be good if the building could become an asset for community and cultural events in the city. We are fast reaching the point, like Oliver, of taking an oath that by hook or by crook we will see some change, even if we have to encourage another explosion in the boiler room.