

Castlerock Presbyterian Church



Centenary
1870-1970

Minister:

Rev. J. A. McFarland, **M.A.**

Castlerock Presbyterian Church

OUR CHURCH WAS OPENED FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP

ON 17th JULY, 1870, BY THE

REV. PROFESSOR J. L. PORTER, of Assembly's College, Belfast.

He was the son-in-law of Dr. Henry Cooke and later was appointed the first President of Queen's University, Belfast.

On 19th July, 1970, a Centenary Service was conducted by

THE MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

REV. PROFESSOR J. L. M. HAIRE

who preached from the text: 2 Thess. Chap. 2 verse 15, on being loyal to the traditions of our church.

The Evening Service was conducted by

REV. J. A. M'FARLAND, M.A.

The offerings on this occasion were given to the fund for building a new hall.

On 26th July, 1970, Rev. J. A. McFarland, preaching on the text

John Chap. 4 verse 38, gave a short sketch of the history of the congregation.

Afterwards the Session met and requested that the sermon should be published.

ALBERT J. HAIRE,

(Clerk of Session).

John 4, 38: "Other men laboured and we are entered into their labours."

About the name of our village there are different theories. To me the most likely one is this: The village was first called "The Rock " because of a large mass of rock which stuck up on the beach and is now submerged with sand. Then after the castle was built on the hill, it was called "Castlerock."

We must remember that about 130 years ago there was no village here, only one small thatched cottage near the beach occupied by a man called Daniel M'Keeman. The people from Dunboe came down to bathe in the "smooth sandy beach."

The Cloth Workers Company of London at that time owned all the land around here. They opened up a road from Liffock to the beach which made it easier for people to get there. Some years afterwards in 1860 the railway came through. I have learned that this was the last section of the railway to be built. It was difficult to build a bridge over the Bann on one side, and it was difficult to construct the tunnels on the other side, so this section of the railway was held up. However it came through eventually in 1860. We read "it soon brought an abundance of visitors to this place, especially on the Sabbath. And to counteract the Sabbath desecration occasioned by this, the Rev. William Lyle, then minister of 1st Dunboe, used to come down and hold occasional services on the beach on the Sabbath evenings." In this he was helped by other members of the Coleraine Presbytery.

The attendances at these services were large and encouraging, only at times they were interrupted by rain, so there was talk of providing a large tent or wooden shelter in which to hold them. But we read "the resident Presbyterians were too spirited to be content with such makeshifts, that they resolved to attempt to build a house of worship."

Dr. Marshall also writes "that they were stimulated to move in this direction by the decision of Sir Hervey Bruce and the Clothworkers Company to erect an Episcopal church."

The Coleraine Presbytery was approached for its approval. It appointed a Committee to co-operate with the local people for this purpose. A subscription list was opened, which at first amounted to £100. They then approached/ the Clothworkers Company to give them a free site for a church and a good subscription to help to build it. But the Company, reasonably enough, replied the sum was too small, not only to build the church, much less to supply it with regular services. The people weren't daunted, they doubled their efforts and got nearly £ 300 with a promise of £ 150 from the General Assembly and also the promise of a good subscription from Sir Hervey, when it got under way. Another application was then made, along with the plans for a church which they said might be "an ornament to the rising village and creditable to those by whom it had been projected."

So the Clothworkers Company offered them a free site which I understand was about "Bests Corner." This didn't please your Committee, which said they would sooner pay for a site and pick their own rather than take that one. However, eventually, this site on which we now are, was agreed upon and the Company gave it free of charge with a subscription of £50 and the promise of another £50 when the building was completed. At this time too, the Company were building an hotel where the Golf Clubhouse now is, and they gave the congregation the use of their offices, in which to hold services before the church was built. This was greatly appreciated by the committee. I might say in all these negotiations, the secretary of the Clothworkers Company, Captain Stronge, was very sympathetic with what this congregation was

doing and very helpful to it.

A man who was most active at this time in leading the congregation and furthering its interests was Mr. S. M. Greer, in whose memory the tower of the church was built and which was subscribed to by all classes and creeds of the community: also Mr. William Warke, who was chairman of the Committee, who entertained all visiting ministers, and who also entertained to dinner members of the Clothworkers Company, who visited Castlerock for what was described as an "excellent agricultural exhibition " on Thursday, 15th September, 1870. While they were here, these members also inspected the Church and expressed their utmost satisfaction at its external appearance, commanding site, and the beauty and neatness of its internal structure and arrangements. They also gave the £50 grant they promised on completion of the building.

On the following year, 1871, Sir Hervey Bruce bought over the interests of the Clothworkers Company and on their leaving the district, they gave another £100 towards helping the work of the church. It was with Sir Hervey then that the site for the manse was later negotiated.

In this same year, 1871, when he must only have been in his teens, the name of John Andrews appears on the Committee of the church. His widow is still alive and with us, she is fit and well and with all her faculties, she is our oldest member and can still read without glasses. Her son, Robert, is one of our elders. I hope that she too, like this church, will celebrate her centenary in the future.

Another member of ours who is up in years, who has worked hard for this congregation and who is still with us is Miss Meta Taylor, whom we are glad to see in our congregation this morning. Everyone who has been associated with Castlerock knows her. Whenever I am talking to the Lord Chief Justice, Lord McDermott, he always inquires how Meta Taylor is doing and Robert Gardiner. She became a Sunday School teacher in 1909 and was an active teacher for some 51 years. She and her father were secretary and treasurer of the church for a number of years and after her father died, she herself was treasurer for 11 years. When she retired, she received a Bible from the Sabbath School society for long service, a gift from the teachers and a presentation from the Committee. We hope she too may celebrate her Centenary.

A further name who has also given splendid voluntary service to this congregation I must mention, and that is Miss Jeannie Watson. She was the first organist when the organ was introduced in 1909 and continued with only a short break until she retired in 1905. She cannot be with us today but our best wishes go out to her. She also received tokens of acknowledgment from the Committee.

There are others, who also gave good service to this church, but they are too many to mention individually.

After the church was built, only Summer Services were held for a while, until at the General Assembly of 1874, Castlerock was recognised as a congregation and given leave to "call" a minister. On 21st September, 1874, a "call" was made out to Rev. William Irwin, minister of Bandon, County Cork. (Only 30 members were eligible to vote at that time).

He was installed on 2nd March, 1875, and for 33 years exercised a faithful and fruitful ministry in this place. He received the Doctor of Divinity degree from the Theological faculty of the Church. The stained glass window at the back of the

church, the pulpit, Communion table and chairs are worthy tributes to the memory of the first minister of this place.

Dr. Irwin was succeeded by the Rev. J. B. Woodburn, minister of Rostrevor, who was installed here on 8th December, 1908. He ministered for eight years when he was called to Fitzroy Avenue congregation, Belfast. He was an eminent historian and a Moderator of the General Assembly.

Rev. W. J. Farley succeeded Rev. J. B. Woodburn and came from 2nd Kilrea in 1917. He ministered here for 10 years and built up the congregation until he was called to be a Professor in Magee University College, Londonderry, in 1927.

Rev. W. F. Marshall was called from Sixmilecross congregation and was installed here on 4th May, 1928. He ministered for 26 years until he retired on 31st December, 1954. Dr. Marshall was widely known as a scholar, writer and broadcaster. Above all other gifts and graces for which he was renowned, he was known as a preacher- "A Master Craftsman in the ministry of the Word." The Theological Faculty conferred the degree of D.D. upon him in 1954. He died on 25th January, 1959.

Rev. Ian Graeme-Cook was ordained here on 1st September, 1955, after having been with H.M. Forces and serving in the Intelligence Corps in the Far East from 1944 to 1947. He died on 20th August, 1959.

Your present minister was installed here on 3rd March, 1960, having been called from Sinclair Seamen's congregation, Belfast.

I might say here that two ministers of 1st Dunboe were tremendously interested and helpful in getting this congregation started and in encouraging it on its way: they were Rev. William Lyle and his successor, Rev. John Mark.

So it can be truly said "other men laboured and ye have entered into their labours.' We are debtors to those who have gone before us. Debtors to their vision, their faithfulness, to all they have done. We reap the Harvest of the seed they have sown. They worked and we enjoy the fruits of their work.

This speaks to us of three things:

- (a) It reminds us of the historic facts of the past;
- (b) It reminds us of our opportunities for the present;
- (c) It reminds us of our responsibility for the future.
 - (a) The historic facts of the past. I have just given you some of the outstanding ones.
 - (b) Our opportunities for the present:

As we commence this Second Century of our existence, we would remind ourselves for what the Church of Jesus Christ really stands. It is more than the fabric or the building, it is the Body of Christ, that body of believing people who honour Him, who are loyal to Him, who try to extend His Kingdom on earth and to make this world a better place because of their presence in it. Men and women make up the real Church of Christ; men and women committed to Him, who have got a faith they believe in, a faith which makes them strong and able to face the most difficult things in life with confidence and poise. It was to keep such a faith as that alive, that this Church was built 100 years ago.

(c) Our responsibility for the future is to hand it on, burning brighter and better than we have found it:

The Moderator speaking to us said: " The tradition of the Christian Church is to make new men and women: men and women with a new spirit, converted to the way and the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

This is the greatest cause any human being can be interested in, the cause that lifts men and women from grovelling in the things of earth and makes them new people with new ambitions, aims, desires, spirits worthy of the fellowship of the living Christ. Jesus says we are to be the "salt of the earth," preserving it from going to the bad; the light of the world, leading it in the way of light and life, not in the way of darkness and death.

That being the case Christian people should always endeavour to change things for the better, leaving them better than they found them. This should be their ambition and it is a worthy one.

This generation, however, found this church, just as it was built, nothing having been built around it to improve its facilities or to cater for its young people. We haven't even got a "car park" at the present time. If we are going to meet the needs of the rising generation, we need somewhere to hold a Children's Church. Many of the people who come here on holidays are used to their little ones going to a Children's Church after the children's address. They cannot sit through the whole service and one of the first questions they ask when they come to our door, is: "Have you got a Children's Church?" If we don't provide for this, we are going to lose out.

So as we start out on our second hundred years these are our needs and there is our challenge for the seventies. This is why we have got a Hall Building Fund at the present time.

Let us give ourselves then, to equip our church to meet the needs of our time: To provide the facilities which will enable us the better to influence our youth for God and to hand on the torch of truth and the light of faith, undimmed and unsullied to those coming after us.

Let us be worthy of the emblem of our Church, the Burning Bush, which speaks to us of burning but going strong. Burning in our love and devotion to God and going strong for Him.

These are opportunities for the present and our responsibilities for the future.

"Other men laboured and we are entered into their labours." "Our fathers sowed where we have reaped."

Let us also sow that others too may reap, that generations to come may call us blessed.

" Giving heart and soul and mind and strength. To serve the King of Kings."