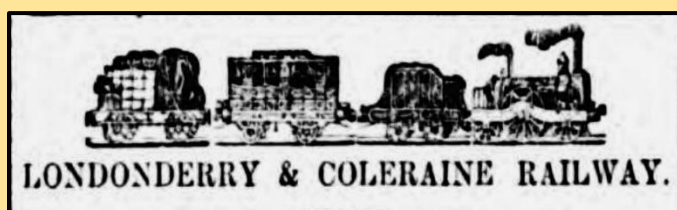


A Summer to Remember, The Opening of Castlerock Presbyterian Church

Prior to the middle of the 19th century, not much existed on the site of the modern village of Castlerock. The name derives from a large outcrop of rock resembling a castle and now obscured by drifting sand which used to have some prominence on the beach just below Guysmere.

Early development of the village began with the arrival of the railway in 1853. The railway also brought an abundance of visitors, especially on a Sunday with many of them coming from Derry.



Northern Counties and Derry and Coleraine Railways.

EXCURSIONS

**FROM DERRY and NEWTOWN-
LIMAVADY to CASTLEROCK, PORT-
STEWART, PORTRUSH and GIANTS' CAUSE-
WAY, commencing 1st JUNE, 1864.**

On FRIDAYS and SATURDAYS First and Second Class RETURN TICKETS will be issued from Derry and Newtownlimavady to Castlerock, Portstewart and Portrush, at about SINGLE FARES, available for Return up to the following Monday Evening. Ordinary Return Tickets will be available for Seven Days after date of Issue. A Four-horse Omnibus runs from Portstewart Station to Portstewart. Fare—Inside, 4d; Outside, 2d.

CHEAP EXCURSION TICKETS will be issued daily from Londonderry and Newtownlimavady, available for Return on date of issue only.

To Castlerock and Back—10.30 a.m., 2.45 p.m., or 5 p.m., on Week Days; 7 a.m. and 3 p.m., on Sundays. From Newtownlimavady—1st Class, 1s; 2d Class, 9d; 3d Class, 6d. From Londonderry—1st Class, 2s 6d; 2d Class, 1s 6d; 3d Class, 1s.

To Portrush and Back—7 a.m. and 10.30 a.m., on Week Days; 7 a.m. and 3 p.m., on Sundays. From Newtownlimavady—1st Class, 2s; 2d Class, 1s 6d; 3d Class, 1s. From Londonderry—1st Class, 3s; 2d Class, 2s 6d; 3d Class, 1s 6d.

MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION TICKETS are issued from Londonderry at the following Rates:—

	1st Class.	2d Class.
To Castlerock.....	30s	25s
To Portstewart or Portrush.....	42s	35s

PRIVILEGES TO SUBSCRIBERS.—Members of Subscribers' Families will be conveyed for Half-Fares on the Return journey, and during their stay will be allowed to proceed to Londonderry and Back at single Fares. Railway Fares paid in selecting uses will be returned. Children under six, Free. Parcels exceeding 1 cwt. per day, will only be charged a booking of 2d per package. EDWARD J. COTTON, Manager.
Belfast, May 16th, 1864.

1864, The NCC Railway offers excursion tickets to Castlerock, including on Sundays

In 1862, concerned about desecration of the Sabbath by these “*railway excursionists and parties residing at Castlerock for the benefit of sea bathing*”, the Rev W. Lyle, Minister of First Dunboe, sought permission from Presbytery to hold services on Sabbath evenings during the summer months. He was soon being assisted by other members of the Coleraine Presbytery, many of whom volunteered to officiate there in the evenings after conducting public worship in their own churches.

THE COLERAINE CHRONICLE, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1862.

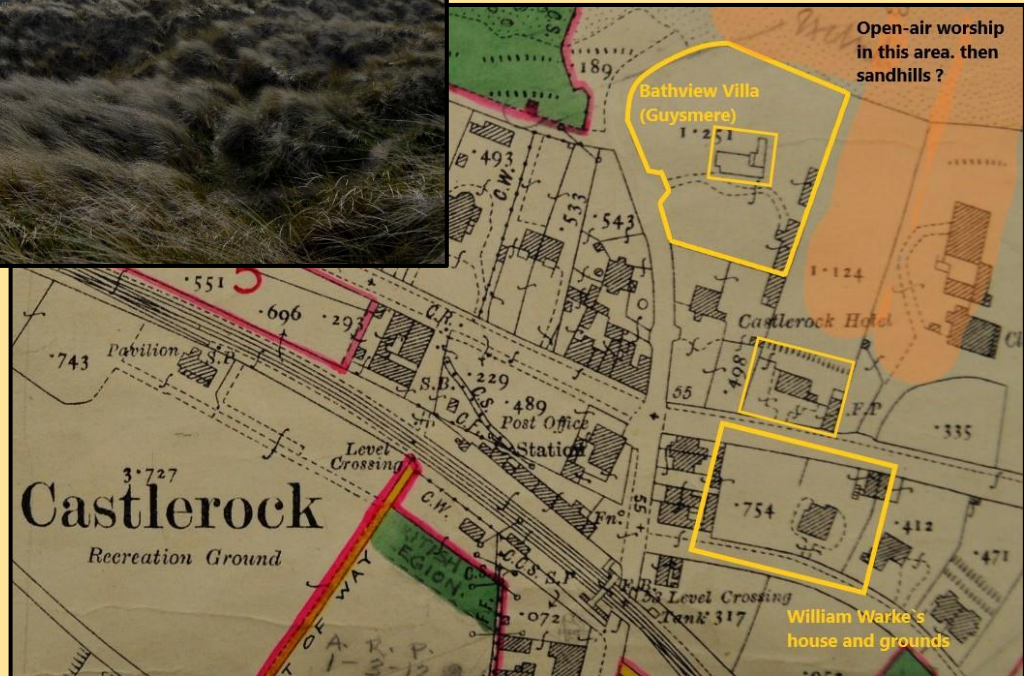
OPEN-AIR PREACHING AT CASTLEROCK.—It may not be known to some of our readers, that for some time past, Sabbath-evening services in the open open air have been conducted at Castlerock by different members of the Coleraine Presbytery. The weather, since the commencement of the services has been everything that could have been desired. The audiences have been invariably large. Last Sabbath evening we were present at one of these services. The weather was highly propitious. The sun-light was flooding hill and dale. Everything around was fitted to impress the mind; the murmurs of the ocean falling upon the ear simultaneously with the speaker's words. It was intensely interesting to see so many persons seated upon the green sward, and listening with rapt attention to the words of life. The thanks of Presbyterians are due to our townsman—W. Warke, Esq., J.P., for the kindness evinced by him since the open-air services began. The beautiful enclosed space around his villa has been at their disposal whenever they chose to meet us in his walls. It is but justice to Mr. Warke to state, as we can do from personal experience, that after the services were concluded, he was no niggard of his kindness to the ministers and other friends who were present.

PREACHING AT CASTLEROCK.

The Rev. Mr. Lyle asked and obtained the sanction of the Presbytery to hold evening meetings for public worship at Castlerock, on Sabbaths during the Summer, the officiating ministers to be selected from the younger members of Presbytery.

A Committee, consisting of the Revds. Lyle, Canning, and Fleming, were appointed, with power, should it be considered necessary, to devise means for the erection of a temporary place of worship, to accommodate the people in the event of unfavourable weather precluding open air preaching at the place.

May 1864, Rev Lyle from Dunboe renews his request to Presbytery to hold evening worship on Sabbaths during the summer with younger ministers officiating



When the open-air services commenced, we are told they were held in the sandhills.

The entrance to the beach then was much as it is nowadays and the officiating ministers, who would in some cases have travelled quite a distance to Castlerock by pony and trap (not wishing to use the train on the Sabbath) would most likely have not wanted to then journey further along the strand.

William Warke lived in Castlerock House, now renamed and the home of the McConkey family. He was an active supporter of the services and we are told he would on occasion, offer the use of the spacious grounds around his villa.

The visitors would in all likelihood have congregated in those areas close to the station and the hotel and having given these matters some thought, I am inclined to believe the open-air services took place in that area adjacent to the boundary of Guysmere and perhaps stretching up to Circular Road through the ground now occupied by the Golf Club which did not then exist (it was not established until 1901)

Both local newspapers and the Committee Minutes report how attendances at these open-air services were frequently large and encouraging. However, the weather in those days was as unpredictable as it is now and there was much inconvenience and disappointment when it was particularly wet and windy.

In 1864, at around the same time Rev Lyle made his further request to Presbytery, a committee was established to investigate building a hut or wooden house. Samuel Greer tells it was in 1867 that it was determined to attempt the building of a House of Worship in the village.

A subscription fund was commenced, and the project given the approval of the Presbytery of Coleraine.

CASTLEROCK,—At a visitation meeting of the Coleraine Presbytery, on 7th inst., it was resolved that a Committee be appointed to take steps to effect the erection of a permanent Presbyterian place of worship in Castlerock. The following were appointed for the purpose:—Rev. Messrs. Macdonnell, Fleming, and Wallace, with Dr. Cavin, and Messrs. John Matthews, Joseph Cuthbert, Hugh Bellas, Robert Nevin, Wm. Warke, and John Lusk, Coleraine; S. M. Greer, and Jos. Anderson, Springvale; Peter Robertson, Downhill; Joseph Cochrane, Quilly; Hugh Hezlett, Liffock; Robert Wray, Quilly; Dr. Moorhead, Articlave; James Pollock, Dunalis; James Smith, Ardeena, &c. The Presbytery of Coleraine has occupied Castlerock as a preaching station for several years, with the view of having a Presbyterian house of worship in connection with the Presbytery of Coleraine established there.

Londonderry
Standard

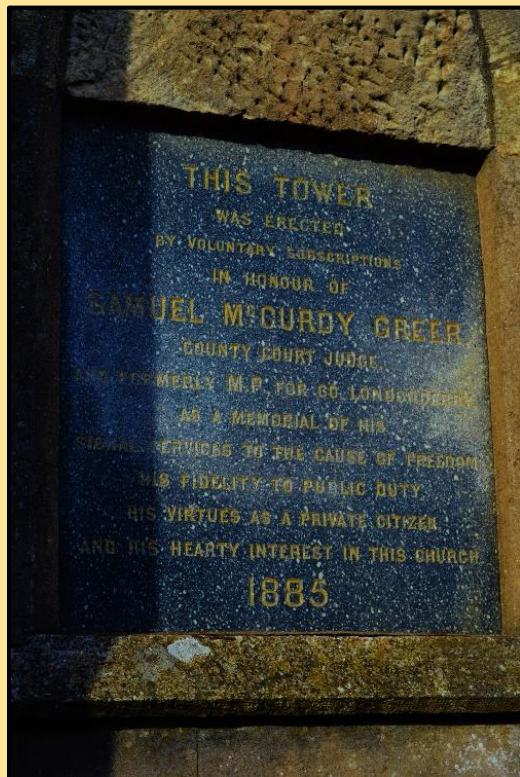
15th May 1867

The General Assembly, in June 1868, recommended the care of the preaching station at Castlerock to the Board of Missionary Directors. The Rev Lyle, who had initiated open-air worship at Castlerock and had continued to take such an interest died in 1867. The Rev John Mark who succeeded him was not so enthusiastic and did not take any of the evening services there.

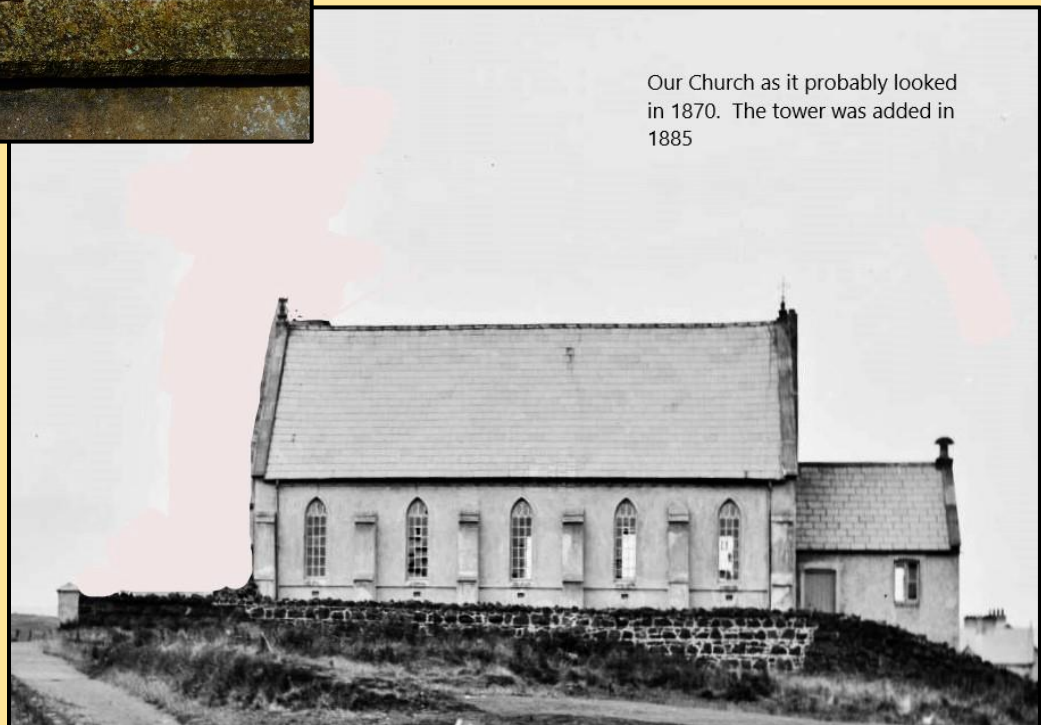
In October 1868, the Company of Clothworkers wrote to the Presbytery agreeing to grant a site and £100 towards costs. The proposed site however, lay at the bottom end of Circular Road (the Committee Minutes note this as `Best`s Corner,` now the location of the Community Centre) and it did not meet with the approval of Samuel Greer nor the Presbytery Committee. They wrote to the Clothworkers intimating they would rather buy a site of their choosing than accept an unsuitable one gratuitously. The Clothworkers were open to persuasion and after a further meeting the present site at the top of the hill was agreed upon.

In the meantime, a plan and specification for the new church had been drawn up by a surveyor, Mr Bray, to satisfy the General Assembly`s Church and Manse Building Committee. These were sent to the Clothworkers in London for approval and in August 1869 their architect, Frederick William Porter, sent revised plans with suggestions for improvements to Samuel McCurdy Greer. These allowed for a chimney flue and a redesigned entrance door that did not face to the west. Porter was an experienced architect and was very conscious the Committee of the Castlerock Preaching Station had chosen an exposed situation and he emphasised that more than ordinary care should be taken to secure a strong sound roof and he hoped double walls would be employed to keep the rain from driving through.

Greer`s account in the Committee Book tells us that some of Porter`s plans were taken into consideration by the Building Committee and only some parts of them adopted, along with those of Mr Bray, to form the basis of a building contract. Advertisements were then published seeking tenders. That of Messrs. Thornton and Graham was accepted, with work to start before Christmas 1869 and to be completed by 1st May 1870. Greer describes the work as progressing vigorously but nonetheless, the building was not completed by the agreed date.



For those unfamiliar with the history of our church, it should be perhaps mentioned at this stage that the tower we are now so familiar with was not part of original building. It was added in 1885 in memory of Samuel Greer who had worked without stint of time or strength or money to organize the congregation and erect the church.



Our Church as it probably looked in 1870. The tower was added in 1885

By June 1870, though the building work though not complete, it was deemed far enough advanced to allow worship to take place and preparations were set in hand for an opening date of 17th July. In the interim, two pre-opening evening services were arranged for 3rd and 10th July.

It so happened that Christchurch along Main Street was also under construction and like its Presbyterian counterpart, nearing completion.

I would like to think that it was not a race to be first to open the doors, and rather that it was through prior and friendly arrangement, but both churches held public worship on the same day in July 1870. The Rev Samuel Robinson from Macosquin preaching in the Presbyterian church, and the Rev Armstrong in the Episcopalian church.

CHURCH EXTENSION AT CASTLE- R O C K .

AMONGST the many pleasing proofs of the progress of this delightful little watering place, none are more attractive or gratifying than the new Churches, now almost completed, for the use of the Presbyterian and Episcopalian residents of the district, and their numerous summer visitors. Though neither has been fully finished, nor formally opened, divine service was celebrated in both on Sunday last—Rev. Samuel Robinson, Macosquin, preaching in the Presbyterian edifice, and the Rev. Mr. Armstrong officiating to a pretty large congregation in the Episcopal building. As the product of the greater opulence of the subscribers to the building of the Episcopal Church, it is, of course, the

Contemporary reports emphasised that no expense had been spared at Christchurch. The Coleraine Chronicle on 2 July 1970 was at pains to point out however

“The Presbyterian community of the place have no reason to envy their richer neighbours and the success of their really spirited effort aided by the princely generosity of people at a distance. The Presbyterian Church has, we should say, been erected to supply a real want, the urgency of which the success of Castlerock as a Mission Station amply proved. It is of neat proportions, while the work is of a substantial and durable character. When finished it will, as we have said, be one of the attractions of the village – attesting at once the piety, the zeal, and the hopefulness of those by whom it was projected and carried so near to completion.”

323.

Sabbath Collections.

On the 3rd & 10th July 1870 Divine service was performed in the new Church in the evening by Rev W. Fleming & Rev S. Robinson respectively. But the building was not then quite completed & no Collection was taken up.

First Committee Minute Book, page 323,

‘3rd and 10th July’

Various newspapers on or around 29th June, 1870 carried reports that Rev Samuel Robinson had conducted evening worship on Sunday evening, the use of past tense implying Sunday 26th June.

I am inclined to believe that these reports had been placed with the press in anticipation of events to come rather than what had already taken place.

The 3rd and 10th July are given in two separate parts of the first Committee book as being the dates when the evening, and first, services were held in the as yet uncompleted church.

NEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT CASTLEROCK.—This building is now almost finished, and Divine service was conducted in it on Sunday evening by the Rev. Samuel Robinson, of Macosquin, who preached an eloquent sermon on the occasion. The church is on the Clothworkers' estate, and the work is of a substantial character. In its unfinished state one can hardly judge of the appearance that the building is likely to present ; but we believe that it will be made comfortable, and that it will provide for all the requirements of Castlerock.

... the prop sum of £55.9.7 was received. Evening services had been previously held in the Church on the 3rd & 10th July respectively by the Rev. R. W. Fleming & the Rev. S. Robinson respectively.

First Committee Minute Book, p 17

Recorded by Samuel McCurdy Greer

“ the 3rd & 10th July respectively by the Rev R.W. Fleming & the Rev S. Robinson

Rev Robert Fleming was minister of 1st Coleraine and Rev Samuel Robinson, minister of Macosquin

The Formal Opening, 17th July 1870

In the week leading up to 17th July 1870, notices were placed in local newspapers in Coleraine and Derry



Formal Opening

Sunday 17th July, 1870 at twelve o'clock,
noon

Rev. J.L. Porter, D.D., LL.D.

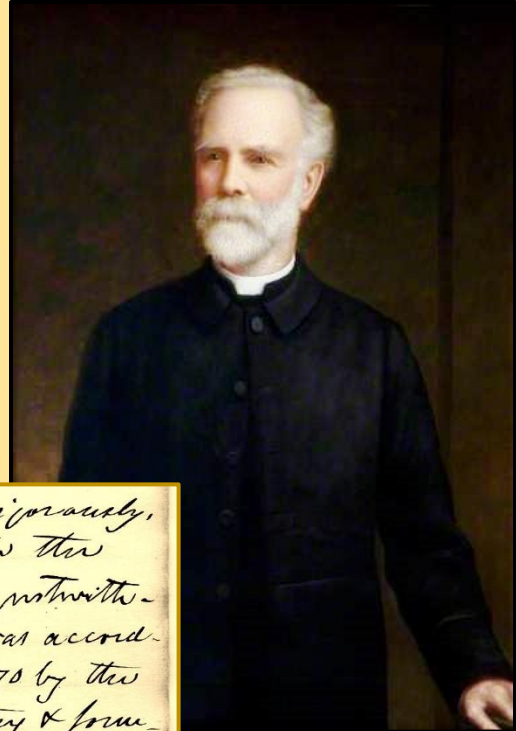


Image from Wikipedia

The work was proceeded with vigorously, but was not thoroughly completed in the time specified. But it was pushed notwithstanding to open the Church, which was accordingly done (formally) on the 17th July 1870 by the Rev. Dr. Porter, Professor of Church History & formerly Missionary to the Jews. On the evening of the same day a service was held in the Rev. R. W. Fleming's Church Coleraine; & at both services, the gross sum of £55.9.7 was received. Dr.

CASTLEROCK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.—The opening services, in connexion with the new Presbyterian Church at Castlerock, were conducted on Sunday last, the 17th inst., by the Rev. J. L. Porter, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Theology, in Belfast College. The learned Professor preached in the new church at the noon service, and in the evening he lectured in the First Presbyterian Church, Coleraine, his subject being "Palestine," of which he was able to speak from personal experience. On each occasion there was a large and most respectable congregation, and Dr. Porter acquitted himself with his customary ability and eloquence. The Castlerock Presbyterian Church, as we noticed on a former occasion, supplies a want that has been long felt by the Presbyterian visitors to that agreeable and improving watering-place.

The opening service was conducted by the Rev Dr Porter, Professor of Church History, and a former Missionary to the Jews. That evening, a service was also held at 1st Coleraine and the collections taken at both services went towards reducing the remaining debt on the church.

The Rev R.W. Fleming had organised William Fleming, a Belfast Licentiate and William Thompson of Ballymoney to supply preaching over the summer.

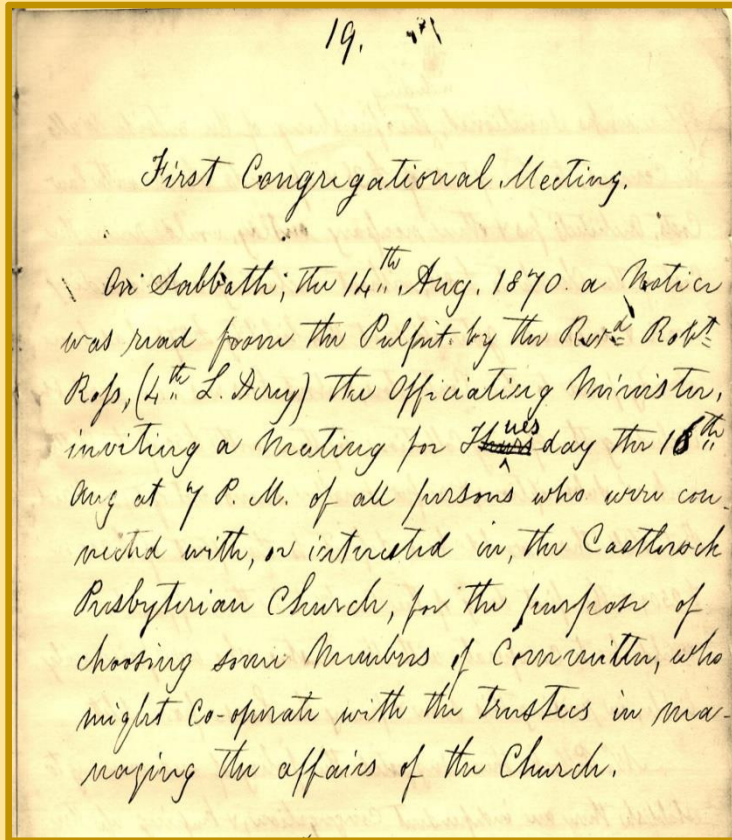
After the opening, we know from the record of Sabbath collections made that first summer that services were held morning and evening right up to 1st October by which time, Samuel Greer tells us, most of the visitors had gone home.

324

Sabbath Collections 1870

July 21 st	Morning, Rev. Fleming, Prob.	£ 0. 11. 0
—	Evening, do.	0. 0. 0
— 31 st	Morning, do.	0. 14. 0
—	Evening, do.	0. 7. 0
Aug. 7 th	Morning, do.	0. 19. 0
—	Evening, do.	0. 9. 0
— 14 th	Morning, Rev. R. Pops (L. Derry)	0. 19. 0
—	Evening Rev. Hawthorn Kirkcubbin	0. 12. 0
	Donation from W. M. Leane, L. Derry	5. 0. 0
Aug. 21 st	Rev. Dr. McEa, Magee College	1. 2. 0
—	Evening, Rev. W. Hunter, Ballylunan	1. 7. 0
— 28 th	Morning - Rev. W. Thompson, Prob.	19. 0. 0
—	Evening - do.	12. 0. 0
Sept. 4 th	Morning - Rev. S. Robinson	10. 0. 0
—	Evening - do.	5. 0. 0
— 11 th	Morning, Rev. W. M. Ham	10. 0. 0
—	Evening do.	4. 0. 0
— 18 th	Morning, Rev. J. Thompson	9. 0. 0
—	Evening, do.	7. 0. 0
— 25 th	Morning, Rev. W. M. Chare	9. 0. 0
—	Evening, do.	7. 0. 0
Oct 1 st	M & Evng - Rev. W. Thompson & 2 (3 rd with J. M. H.)	11. 0. 0
		£ 12. 18. 0

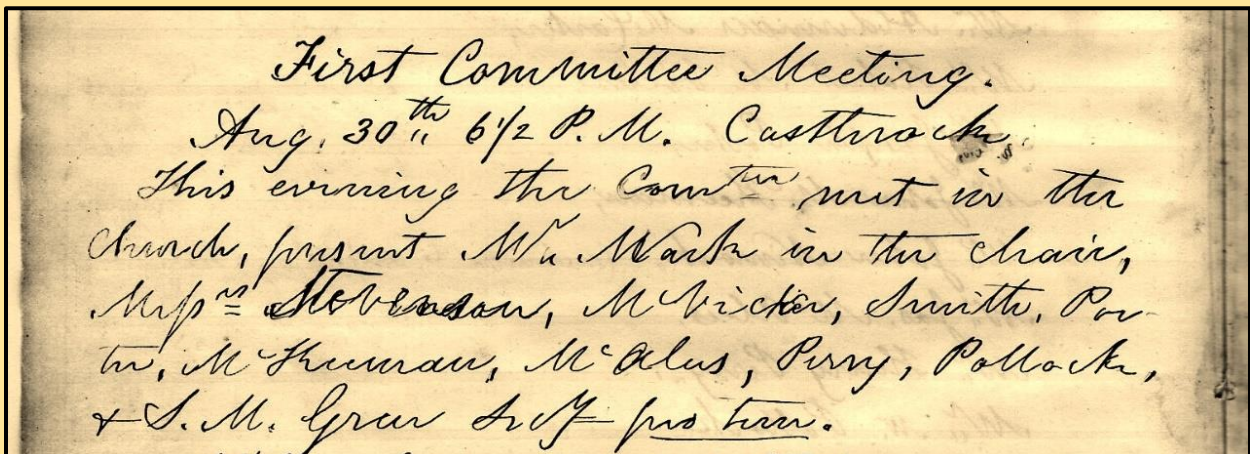
The First Congregational Meeting



On 14th August 1870, a notice was made from the pulpit inviting a meeting of all persons who were connected with or interested in Castlerock Presbyterian Church for the purposes of choosing some members of Committee who might cooperate with the trustees in managing the affairs of the church. And so it was that the first congregational meeting took place on Tuesday 16th August 1870, followed twelve days later by the first Committee meeting on August 30th.

The First Committee Meeting

On Tuesday August, 30th 1870 at 6.30 p.m. the first meeting of the Committee was held in the church



The following persons were then appointed to act as a Committee, if they will undertake to act:

Mr. William Marke, Trustee, to be Chairman of Committee.

Mr. Robert Stevenson, Trustee,

Mr. Jas. M. Anderson, Trustee,

Mr. S. M. Gray,

Mr. Saml^r Smith,

Mr. Alderman McCarter,

Mr. Robert M. Vicker,

Mr. Joseph Porter,

Mr. John McKeenman,

Mr. John Nimrock, (declined to act).

Mr. Jas. McAlees,

Mr. Henry Perry, &

Mr. W. Pollock

with power to add to their number.

There was much to discuss including the outstanding work needed to complete the church. It still remained to finish the outside walls in cement and construct a surrounding wall and entrance gate. Architect and legal fees had to be serviced along with other debts.

They were an optimistic group of people though. The church had been built as a summer preaching station and even at this first committee meeting and in spite of their problems, their thoughts turned to the future and how they might endeavour to establish an independent congregation.

Castlerock Presbyterian Church.

The Committee of the Coleraine Presbytery in charge of the Preaching Station at Castlerock have succeeded in obtaining from the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers, London, a suitable site for a Place of Worship, which is now vested by Fee Farm Grant, at a nominal rent, for ever, in Robert Stevenson, William Warke, and Joseph M. Anderson, Esqrs., as Trustees. The Clothworkers have also subscribed the liberal sum of £100 towards the Building Fund. Of this amount one-half is not to be paid till the Building is completed. But the Committee have already received £50; and they have also to acknowledge, with gratitude, a donation of £150, received from the General Assembly's Church and Manse Building Fund. With the help of these generous contributions, they have been enabled to raise the sum of £513 1s 3d towards building a neat and commodious little Church, which will be sufficient for the accommodation of Castlerock and its visitors for many years to come. But the contract for erecting this Church on the most economical scale amounted to £720, and this sum is now increased to a total of £795 by the addition of some extra works, architect's fees, law and other expenses, so that when the Clothworkers' deferred donation, and some other subscriptions not yet received, amounting to £10 or £15, shall be paid, there will be a debt of some £220 still to be provided for.

To meet this liability, the Committee are obliged to appeal again to the public to aid them in their good work. They take this opportunity of returning their heartfelt thanks to all who have already contributed towards the building of the Castlerock Presbyterian Church, (of whom a list is subjoined), as well as to those who contributed at the opening services, conducted by the Rev. Dr. PORTER, of the General Assembly's College, Belfast, when a nett sum of £53 11s 4d was realised. Subjoined is also given an account of the sums already received and expended, and of the liabilities still to be met. The Committee trust that some of those under whose notice this statement may be brought will feel it their duty to assist in completing the work; and, perhaps, some who have already contributed, may be induced to give further assistance. For so far, the enterprise has been very successful. The Church occupies a commanding position towards the East of Castlerock. It is now nearly quite finished; and since it was formally opened on the 17th July last, the attendance has varied from 100 to 300, or thereabouts, and all who have visited it seem to be pleased with its appearance and its services.

(Signed, on behalf of the Committee),

ROBERT WALLACE, 2nd Coleraine, Chairman;

R. W. FLEMING, 1st Coleraine, Secretary.

Coleraine, 23rd August, 1870.

The Clothworkers Visit

On Thursday 15th September, a deputation from the Clothworker`s Company visited Coleraine to inspect their Co Londonderry estate. They took the opportunity to drive to Castlerock to see the annual agricultural exhibition there, and also to visit the Presbyterian church to which they had contributed generously.

CASTLEROCK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.—On Thursday last, the deputation from the Clothworkers' Company, now on a visit to their Irish estate, drove to Castlerock to see the excellent agricultural Exhibition, that day held there. Immediately on their arrival they paid a visit to the Presbyterian church, now nearly completed, and expressed the utmost satisfaction at its external appearance and commanding site, and the beauty and neatness of its internal structure and arrangements. The deputation were here waited upon by William Warke, Robert Thomson, and Joseph M. Anderson, Esqrs., the trustees of the church, and also by the Rev. R. Wallace, S. M. Greer, D. Taylor, and Joseph Cuthbert, Esqrs., members of the committee of the Coleraine Presbytery in charge of Castlerock station, and by R. M'Vicker, and J. Porter, Esqrs., of Londonderry, and Messrs. John M'Keeman and Henry Perry, members of the local committee of management. Mr. Warke read an address to the deputation on behalf of the trustees, acknowledging the generosity of the Clothworkers' Company, in granting a free site for the church, and £100 towards the building fund, and praying for a further grant towards paying off the debt of more than £200 which has been already incurred, and raising another £100 still required to complete the undertaking. The Master of the Company, C. J. Bloxham, Esq., and the other members of the deputation, expressed themselves highly pleased with the appearance and beauty of the church, and promised, on their return to London, to recommend a further grant in aid of the building fund. Mr. Warke afterwards entertained his co-trustees, and the members of committee who supported them, to a substantial *dejeuner*.

In July 1874, Castlerock was recognised as a congregation by the General Assembly and in March 1875, the Rev William Irwin was installed as minister.

