

Heritage

Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland



Spring 2019

Hello and welcome!

You are holding a magazine that deals with history! But please don't let that frighten you. Sadly for many the thought of history revives old school nightmares of memorising names and dates.

This is different. This is history as a story – HIS story. The story Christ working through the church of the church, particularly the story of Presbyterianism in Ireland. That story can be read quickly and superficially if that is what you want, or parts can be studied in more depth if you have an interest in a particular subject or era.

Presbyterianism in Ireland is dated from 1613 when the Rev Edward Brice from Dunbarton in Scotland, came to Broadisland (Ballycarry). However there were Presbyterians in Dublin before that, especially in Trinity College. So there is a good, long history which has taken many twists and turns since then. There are many surprises, and not a few disappointments, not to mention scandals. These all go into the mix that makes us who we are today. Stubborn, radical, straight-laced? Perhaps at times, but much, much more. It is a story worth telling and hearing, and the Society wants to tell it and wants you to hear it.

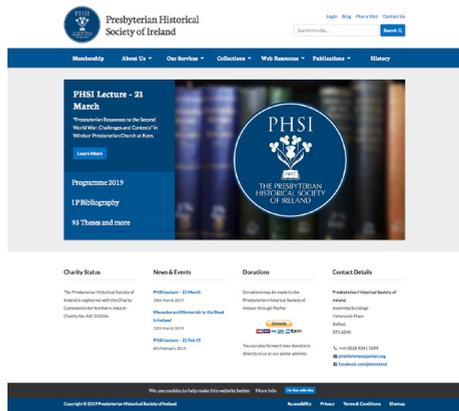
The idea of *Heritage* is to give you a flavour of that story by retelling the story of past events and people, giving you information, or helping you find more information. In other words while we want to make the story more accessible, the main component in all of this is YOU. You are part of this story, just as your forbearers were and as you children will be. And we want you to feel part of it.

The church suffers and is impoverished when it loses sight of where it has come from. If you have questions or suggestions we are always happy to hear from you. So read and enjoy, and do feel free to contact us on anything to do with the story of our past (the details are on the back page.)

PHSI Website

The Society's extensive and growing website has a great deal of information concerning Presbyterianism in Ireland:

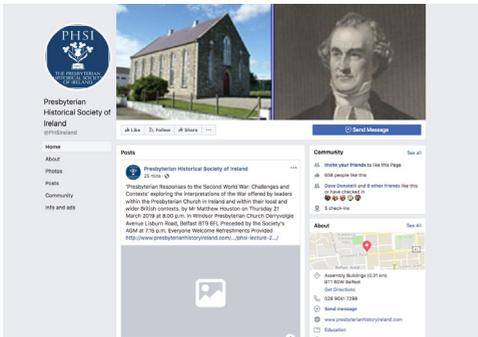
- The History of Congregations which includes details of records and congregational histories which have been written;
- A list of the Society's publications which can be ordered through the on-line bookstore;
- Second hand books;
- Digitised copies of some of the early Presbyterian magazines.



While some of the material is restricted to members only, there is much that can be accessed by all visitors.

The number of website visits has increased each year and in 2014 we had 16,465 visits. In 2015 this had risen to 19,865 visits and by 2016 the figure had reached 22,139 visits and 2017 it was 25,687.

Why not give it a try and see what is there – www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com



We now have over 600 Facebook followers – why not join the Facebook community and keep up-to-date with what is going on in the Society.

You can also keep in contact via the blog at www.phsireland.org

I didn't know that!

There are probably things about Presbyterianism that will surprise you. You might have heard that the Penal Laws were introduced to suppress Roman Catholics in Ireland. Partly true. They were introduced in Britain and Ireland to protect the Church of England and the Church of Ireland. For example among a range of prohibitions, only their members could hold public office.

But did you know that Presbyterians also fell under such prohibitions? The Test Act meant that if you did not take Communion according to the Church of Ireland way, you were in trouble! Presbyterians were considered second class citizens. Their marriages were not recognised – hence children were illegitimate and could not inherit property.



Prof Finlay Holmes writes that Bishops of the established church “did all they could to destroy this alternative or rival church system ... Presbyterians suffered considerable penalties, particularly financial, as result of episcopal aggression.”

Jonathan Swift, the author of Gulliver's Travels, was a Church of Ireland Rector and an opponent of toleration of dissenters (as Presbyterians were known). Sir Edward Semour whose lands were around Lisburn considered getting rid of Presbyterian tenants altogether because they paid more attention to their minister and Kirk Session. At times ministers were ejected from their pulpits and had to flee the country.



Thankfully Presbyterians are accepted more readily today, and have the freedom to worship God according to their own traditions.

How God used a poor preacher!

The Rev James Glendinning was the rather eccentric minister of Oldstone (Templepatrick).

He was limited in his preaching ability for it is said he could only preach “the terrors of the law”. However God used him in the Sixmilewater Revival in 1625. Many were convicted and converted from their ungodly ways to Christ. Glendinning was unable to teach them the gospel in all its fullness so neighbouring ministers supplied solid teaching at the monthly ‘Antrim Meetings’.

Is there anything we could learn from that about evangelism or follow-up work?

The Six Mile Water Revival of 1625
by W.D. Bailie
is available through the PHSI online bookstore price £2 + p&p



The Porter Family

Irish Presbyterianism has known many clerical dynasties, sometimes stretching down across several generations and sometimes, as in this case, father and several sons.

The dynasty begins with the Rev William Porter (1774-1843). Educated at Glasgow and Edinburgh he was Licensed by the Presbytery of Strabane in 1797 and Ordained at Limavady by the same Presbytery as Assistant and Successor to the Rev Joseph Osborne. He served as Clerk of the General Synod of Ulster from 1816 until 1830. As a 'Non-Subscriber' he joined the Remonstrance and became the first Moderator of the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster 1830-1831 and thus, for a very brief period, was simultaneously Clerk of the General Synod and Moderator of the Remonstrant Synod. He retired, on the appointment of an Assistant and Successor in 1840 and died at his home 'Bessfield', Limavady on 7th September 1843.

The Rev John Scott Porter (1801-1880) eldest son of the Rev William Porter. Licensed by the Presbytery of Bangor in 1824, Minister of Carter Lane congregation, London 1826-1831. Installed by the Presbytery of Antrim on 2nd February 1832 in First Belfast as successor to Dr William Bruce and as a Colleague to his son, the Rev William Bruce. A notable scholar, especially in biblical languages, he served as Professor of Theology to the Association of Irish Non-Subscribing Presbyterians from 1838. He was the sole minister of First Belfast, and after the death of William Bruce in 1868, until his own death in 1880.



The Rev Classon Emmet Porter (1813-1885) third son of the Rev William Porter. Educated for the ministry at Belfast Academical Institution and at Manchester New College York. 2nd July 1834 Ordained and Installed as minister of Larne by the Presbytery of Antrim. A notable historian specialising in Ulster history, 1798 and Irish Presbyterianism, he published many articles and papers. Retired in 1875 and died at home, Ballygally Castle in 1885.

The Rev James Nixon Porter, son of the Rev William Porter. Educated for the ministry at Manchester College York. Ordained at Carrickfergus on 4th October 1838 by the Remonstrant Presbytery of Templepatrick. Remained in this charge until 1861 when he removed to England to serve as minister at Warrington from 1862 until his retirement in 1872. Died 1875.

Marianne Porter, sister and daughter of the above, was married to Francis Dalzell Finlay, owner, publisher and sometime editor of the *Northern Whig*.

What happens when people move away?

Have you ever been in Roscommon? In the Town Square is a building that looks like a good old Presbyterian Church, with a Manse next door. Nowadays it is called the Dr John Harrison Memorial Hall, and it is operated as the county museum.

The building was erected as a Presbyterian Church in the 1860s by a local man whose family owned the town's notorious old gaol! The central window over the entrance door looks like the Star of David, but was intended to be a symbol of the Holy Trinity. The house next door, now known as Gleeson's Townhouse, is a well-known eating place and guest house where dinner is served in the Manse Restaurant.



The Presbyterian cause in the area first began in Creggs, and a church building was opened there in 1863 by the Rev Dr John Edgar. The congregation of Roscommon was organised in 1867 and the two congregations were joined in 1873. In 1925 they were linked to Athlone. After 1938 a new Union was formed of Ballinasloe, Athlone and Roscommon. By 1943 however the last resident minister in Athlone resigned. The number of Presbyterians in the area continued to decline. By the early 1960s Athlone became a Stated Supply under the Rev A Stanley Hill of Tullamore and Birr. Services ceased to be held in the church, and were held in the local Methodist church for a time, but by 1970 Athlone was no longer listed in the records of the General Assembly.

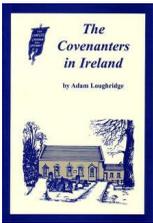
All this raises some interesting questions for the Presbyterian Church in our own time. Across Ireland, north, south, east and west are towns and localities with redundant church buildings. We thank God for towns where churches are growing, and new churches have been planted!

There are also places where other churches and groups of Christians exist in more flexible ways to provide for the spiritual needs of a new and secular Ireland, seeking to provide for the spiritual needs of communities where so many now live with no clear knowledge of Jesus and his gospel of grace. Often they do so with little financial support, but with a bold vision, and a great deal of personal commitment and sacrifice. Do we need to rethink how we do mission, and to set before our people a fresh vision as to how we might do Christ's work more effectively for the Ireland of our time?

Discover more about the history of the Covenanters

The Reformed Presbyterian Church is one of the historic strands of Irish Presbyterianism. Its members are often referred to as Covenanters because of their adherence to the Covenants of 1638 and 1643.

Though a small denomination – there are some 40 congregations, fellowships and societies – many people within the broader Presbyterian family have a connection of one form or another with the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The Church is represented on the Council of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland and in addition has its own Church History Committee as well as a Historical Library at Knockbracken, on the outskirts of Belfast.



For those who wish to find out more about the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church a detailed study of the denomination is available, *The Covenanters in Ireland* (1984) by the late Rev Prof Adam Loughridge, a former Hon Secretary of the Presbyterian Historical Society and an indefatigable chronicler of Reformed Presbyterian history. A shorter and well-illustrated volume of interest is *Covenanters in Ireland, Introducing the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (2012),

which focuses in particular on the seventeenth-century background to the denomination.



Much more substantial than either of these is *The Covenanters in Ireland, A History of the Congregations* (2010), which contains a wealth of information on the denomination. Running to more than 450 pages, the book represents the work of many hands, and was edited by Rev Geoffrey Allen. The largest section comprises short histories of each of the congregations in the denomination, including congregations no longer in existence. Arranged by presbytery – Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western – each of them includes details on the origin of the congregation, the succession of ministers,

the place of worship (including photographs), and the names of elders.

Shorter sections cover the Presbytery of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the Presbytery of Australia, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in England, the Irish Mission, the Foreign Mission and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in France. A series of biographies focuses on five important figures in Covenanter history. Brief biographical details of those who have served in the denomination's ministry are given, as are Irish-born ministers in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Reformed Presbyterian of North America, as well as the ministers of the short-lived Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland (1842-1902). Short sections on congregational records and published histories are also included.

These books and others may be purchased from the Covenanter Book Centre at 37 Knockbracken Road, Belfast, BT8 6SE, <https://covenanterbooks.com>).

An exciting new beginning – History of Mullingar Presbyterian Church

What do singer Joe Dolan, boxer John Joe Nevin and One Direction’s Niall Horan have in common? They all hail from Mullingar.

For some who live in the heartland of Presbyterianism in Ireland, the congregations of the west and centre of the island might seem somewhat remote. Yet in these, usually small congregations, the life of the church is lived in circumstances similar to all who are called to follow the Lord Jesus. Presbyterians will travel along the east and west coasts of Ireland but not many will pass through County Westmeath. Mullingar lies about 50 miles from Dublin on the N4 to Sligo, almost in the centre of Ireland. Although the majority of the 20,000 population is Roman Catholic, there is a body of Presbyterians bearing witness to the gospel of Christ.



Dr John Lockington has chronicled the journey of Presbyterians in the town and district in a congregational history. Outlining the development of the district from the time of the town’s founding at the end of the twelfth century, he paints a colourful landscape of local people and events.

This book does not just dwell in the past. What of the present and the future? During the last half of the twentieth century Mullingar quadrupled in size with over fifty nationalities represented and the Union Commission noted that “Mullingar was one of the fastest growing towns in Ireland and the congregation had seen some exciting developments. The church had been made into a more flexible worship space and efforts were being made to reach out into the rapidly expanding community.”

The congregation benefited from this influx and numbers grew so that more space was needed especially for the work among young people. When planning permission for increase the size of the building was refused it was decided to sell the meeting house, with the final service being held on 15th April 2012.

The Board of Mission in Ireland of PCI purchased land for a new building which was opened in 2015 and continues to flourish as it presents the gospel in a new situation but with the same fervour.

So while one door closes God has another ready to open.

Exciting future for the society as new premises open

After some years of uncertainty and planning the Society has moved into new, modern premises at Assembly Buildings in the centre of Belfast and these were opened and dedicated by the Moderator of the General Assembly, Rt Rev Dr Charles McMullan last March.

Convenient to Great Victoria Street train and bus stations and car parks, the accommodation is bright and welcoming. There you will find our Librarian and Archivist Miss Valerie Adams, who will answer your questions or direct your research.



There is an extensive library of books and microfilm and a display of artefacts all relating to Presbyterianism, and an hour (or three) passes all too quickly when you become engrossed in the story. So do call in – the resources are of no use sitting there feeling lonely!

There is a poem written in the 19th century about the establishment of the first Presbytery in Carrickfergus on 10 June 1642:

*Two hundred years ago there came from Scotland's storied land
To Carrick's old and fortified town a Presbyterian band!
They planted on the castle wall the banner of the blue
And worshipped God in simple form as Presbyterians do.
O hallowed be their memory who in our land did sow
The goodly seed of Gospel truth two hundred years ago.*

By the way, what shade is Presbyterian blue?

The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland

Assembly Buildings, Fisherwick Place, Belfast BT1 6DW

Hours of opening:

Tuesday and Wednesday 9.30am-1.00pm; 1.30pm-4.30pm;

Thursday 9.30am-1.00pm

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