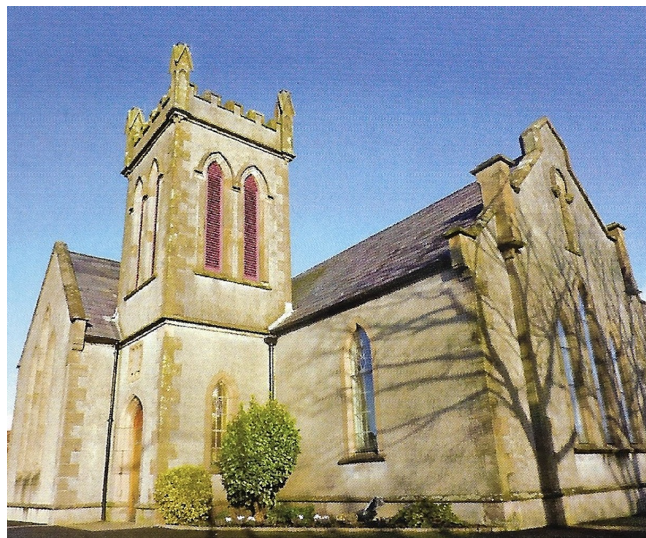


Groomsport Parish Church



Photograph from “To This You Belong!”

Groomsport Church was one of 16 churches built by the Down and Connor Diocese Church Accommodation Society and was a “Chapel of Ease” within Bangor Parish. Chapels of Ease were built to facilitate attendance at worship by those who lived at some distance from the Parish Church – in this case, Bangor Abbey.

The ground on which the church was built was donated by John Waring Maxwell, of Finnebrogue, Downpatrick, the local landowner. He also contributed to the building costs.

When John Waring Maxwell gifted the site, it was on condition that “*burials are expressly prohibited either in the Church or the Churchyard*”. Another condition imposed was “*That the Church shall be called Groomsport Church*”. Because of this, the church has never been dedicated to a Saint, unlike most churches in the Church of Ireland.

On 16 October 1841, the Belfast Commercial Chronicle reported that 300 to 400 people had attended the laying of the foundation stone of the church by John Waring Maxwell.

The first service was held in the church on 11 December 1842, but the Church was not consecrated until April 03 1850.

The Rev. Ralph Wilde, A.B., late Curate of Tarleton, Lancashire, has been appointed to the Incumbency of Groomsport, in this Diocese—Patron, J. W. Maxwell, Esq., Finnebrogue. The consecration of Groomsport Church, by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese, took place on Wednesday. The new Incumbent and the Rev. R. Binney were the officiating Ministers. In addition to granting the site, and contributing to the erection of the building, Mr. Maxwell has handsomely endowed the Church with £100 per annum.

Newry Telegraph 09 April 1850

From 1842 until 1853 the services in Groomsport Church were conducted by a curate of the Parish of Bangor.

In 1853, the Parish of Groomsport was created from the eastern part of the Parish of Bangor. The new parish comprised 3,252 acres and included all of the townlands of Ballymacormick, Groomsport, Balloo Lower, Ballyminetragh, Orlock, Portavoe and Ballyfotherly as well as the Copeland Islands. The boundary of the parish is shown on the following map.



Map from <https://groomsportparishchurch.org/history/>

At that time Groomsport Church became known as Groomsport Parish Church, apparently without breaching John Waring Maxwell's stipulation about the name of the church.

Groomsport is a trustee parish of the Church of Ireland. The following clergy have served as Rectors of Groomsport:

- 1853-1880: Abraham Hillhouse McCausland.
- 1880-1892: Frederick John Hearne.
- 1892-1894: William Lawrence Twist-Whatham.
- 1894-1913: Samuel Stephen Holmes.
- 1913-1938: Ernest Musgrave Harris
- 1938-1944: George Freeman.
- 1944-1968: Charles Hay Walsh.
- 1968 -1975: James Edward Moore.
- 1975-2000: James Derrick Tyney.
- 2000-2022: Duncan Pollock.

The Church Building



A drawing of Groomsport Church in its original form, showing the Spires.

From <https://groomsportparishchurch.org/history/>

The architect was the famous designer Sir Charles Lanyon, architect of many public buildings including the then Queen's College (which later became Queen's University), Belfast Customs House and Crumlin Road Jail and Courthouse. Lanyon gave his services free of charge. The cost of building the church was £700.

The original church was a simple building with a rectangular nave and a tower. Originally the tower had four tall pinnacles but these proved to be unstable and were removed.

John Waring Maxwell presented the church with the bell which is still in use today. The bell was cast in London in 1843, at a cost of £36 18s 3d, by the company that also cast the bell for Big Ben in London and the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

In 1909, in memory of Major Robert Perceval-Maxwell (1813-1905), the chancel was erected at a cost of £340.

By the 1930's the church, which had seating for 130 people, was regularly attracting 150 parishioners for services. It was decided to build two transepts which provided an extra 86 seats. The transepts were designed by James A Hanna. Local stone, quarried in Conlig, was used and the work cost £1,300. As a result of these extensions, Colin Crozier suggests that the church had become a "miniature cathedral"

The vestry was enlarged in 1955 and baby-changing and accessible toilet facilities were added in 2011.

The church underwent a major refurbishment in 2018. The church was closed for several months and services were held in the Parish Halls.

The church was given a new roof and some stonework was either repaired or replaced. A new underfloor heating system was installed. The church was rewired and new lighting was installed. A new 3-manual digital organ was also installed.

The church contains several fine stained-glass windows. Some of these, and other items in the church, are memorials to members of the Perceval-Maxwell family.

The photograph, below, shows the considerable additions that were made to the original 1842 building, depicted in the drawing on the previous page.

Chancel built in 1909

Transepts built in 1932



Photograph by Amanda McWhinney

Peter Gibson
January 2023

Sources:

Groomsport Parish website: <https://groomsportparishchurch.org/history/>

"To This You Belong!" by Colin Crozier, Groomsport Parish Church

Newspaper reports accessed at the Irish Newspapers Archive of www.findmypast.co.uk