

Groomsport Presbyterian Church



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Before there was even a church building in this central location of the village, official records from the Presbytery of Bangor, soon to become the Presbytery of Ards, makes reference to the fact that, as early as October 1839 and even for some time before, monthly Sunday Services for the 150 Presbyterians in the “Preaching Station” of Groomsport, were being conducted, and pastoral care given, by neighbouring ministers and Student Probationers awaiting Ordination.

Number 17 Main Street, sadly no longer here, the home of Mr James Kennedy, a Presbyterian, became the first place of meeting for Worship.



17 Main Street, Groomsport

Anxious to be formed into an officially recognised congregation of the Presbyterian Church and have a Minister of their own, a wish wholeheartedly supported by the Professor of Church History, James Seaton Reid, a regular summer visitor, their request was granted by the Presbytery and on

10th August 1841, their first Minister, Rev Isaac Mack was ordained in a marquee on the Village Green (or Holme Field), as it was the only place with space for a large gathering.

With a further wish for a church building, Presbytery deputations to the two local landlords, John Waring Maxwell and Lord Dufferin, to discuss the possibility of their willingness to sell, rent or give a piece of their land for such a purpose, received negative responses. The situation seemed hopeless until it was discovered that right in the centre of the village, there was a tenement held in perpetuity by the widow of a Presbyterian Minister who was willing to part with it on reasonable terms. Groomsport Presbyterian Church took possession of it on 28th June 1841. Nothing is known of the transaction, demolition or new building costs or actual date of completion. But it was commonly reported that the church was “opened for worship about two years after Mr Mack’s Ordination, possibly in 1843”.

The tower and Clock were added to the simple “Meeting House” style of architecture in 1863 by a former member, now a successful businessman in London, Mr William McMurray in “affectionate remembrance of his ancestors who had resided here [Groomsport] for many generations”.

A property in what is now the Church Car Pak, once owned also by Mr James Kennedy of 17 Main Street was purchased and demolished in 1863 also, in its place another was built. Divided into two, the entrance door facing sideways to the church in today’s car park became known as “The Side Manse” where Mr Mack, the Minister lived. The other entrance facing the street became the “rented out” section, the proceeds of which kept the church free of debt.

Noteworthy extensions to the Church itself with new rooms at the rear, and the total refurbishment of the roof, interior and exterior, including the demolition of long unused Side Manse, were completed in 1970/71 and 1990/91- its 150th Anniversary during the ministry of the Rev Dr David Irwin – with appropriate landscaping all around, to add to its unique harbour and sea view setting.

On both occasions, the Moderators of the General Assembly, both Principals of the Presbyterian Theological College at the time, Prof James Haire and Prof Finlay Holmes, conducted the Service of Dedication with, in the first, “the cutting of the Re-Opening Tape”, so to speak, by The Right Honourable Brian Faulkner, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, who with his parents had grown up as a member of the congregation. As a sign of the times in 1971, at the height of “The Troubles” he and his wife and parents had to have an armed escort as they had dinner in the Manse afterwards.

Rev Dr David Irwin
January 2023

Photographs supplied by Perry Moore