

ST COLMAN'S PARISH CHURCH, DUNMURRY

FOREWORD

Very few people in the village of Dunmurry and surrounding district truly appreciate how fortunate we are to have a building as fine as St. Colman's Church sitting in our midst.

Stop for a minute in your busy life and look towards our Church, a wonderful monument to God — and our forefathers. Take the time to marvel at the ingenuity of those men from the distant past who had the presence of mind, the faith of God and the physical strength to undertake the construction of God's House, not only for their own use, but for the continued use of God's people to this day and for many, many years to come. What a legacy!

Gaze at the building as you stand in Church Avenue for a few short minutes and cast your mind back to the vision required by those who undertook such a project. Take your mind forward a little to the actual construction of the building. Can you visualise those involved — the local tradesmen and craftsmen — perhaps your forefathers and mine. Not for the men of yesteryear the luxury of to-day's labour saving devices.

The stones had to be quarried all those years ago by hand, with the construction of the church and its tower without the use of cranes and other such machinery. Such hard work! Such dedication! Take time to think about it.

Step inside now. Your eyes will immediately be drawn to our beautiful

West Window. Could you ever imagine such beauty in a little village church? Sunday after Sunday it still looks fresh and new and beautiful and marvellous— a tribute to God's Word, a tribute to those who sourced it, planned it, funded it, provided it. It is a true work of art.. Spare a while to study each and every one of our beautiful windows, each one telling a wonderful story. It is worth your while.

Stay a little longer. Notice our long aisle covered in a red carpet, leading all the way up to the altar, our baptismal font, the ornate pulpit, the beautiful lectern from where the Word of God is read, and the prayer desks. Take note of our wonderful organ, our memorial plaques, our Roll of Honour— there are many, many stories in each of these, all faithfully recorded in our Parish History over the last one hundred years.

As you exit the main door, gaze up towards the sky towards the tower with it's bell which rings out calling us to worship each Sunday

Come around to the back of our Church and admire our Cremation Plot— an oasis of calm amidst the speed of the 21st Century. Wander around and read the name plaques on each of the plots, each telling of past lives led to the full, each with a connection to St. Colman's Church.

As we celebrate 100 years of history in this parish, we marvel at the beautiful Church building we have, which we hope will provide a lasting legacy as we look forward to the next 100 years.

Finally, a big thank you to the Centenary Committee, Bob Common, George Orr, Chris Cusdin and John Williams who have worked tirelessly to plan the Centenary events.

John Williams
(Chairperson of the Centenary Committee)

THE BIRTH OF A CHURCH ST COLMAN'S PARISH CHURCH DUNMURRY

We learn from an article written by the late Rev Canon R C Ellis (former Rector of the Parish) that just over 100 years ago, Dunmurry was merely a tiny hamlet, just over 4 miles from the outskirts of Belfast. At the time there were only a few families in Dunmurry, and if they wanted to go to their own denomination, they had to walk or drive to one of the neighbouring churches. The nearest and most popular was Drumbeg. About 1870, when the Church of Ireland was disestablished, a new enthusiasm was born throughout the country, and a feeling grew in the district that there should be some building set apart for religious and other meetings for the small community. The leaders were Miss Charley and her sister Mrs Stevenson who lived in a house named "Huntley", situated in a country lane known today as Lower Dunmurry Lane (this house is still standing). The villagers were asked to take up shares to raise money in order that a suitable hall could be built. This building known as the Assembly Rooms was completed in 1874 and made ready for use. It would appear that Miss Charley and her sister bought in all the shares and inaugurated a Sunday School and an Evening service in the new hall. Miss Stevenson directed that upon her decease, the hall should go to the Parish of Drumbeg, and she bequeathed a sum of money which would bring in £7 a year towards its upkeep. How money values have changed! It is this very hall which is known today as our own Parochial Hall.

However, there was still no Church of Ireland Church in the village of Dunmurry, and the villagers were very unhappy about this state of affairs,

especially since there was no suggestion from the Bishop or the Diocesan Authorities to provide a suitable building for worship. So the idea to build a church came from the Dunmurry people themselves. They still had to go to Drumbeg for Baptisms, Marriages and Holy Communion. Therefore, a meeting of the Dunmurry people was called to take place in the Assembly Rooms on Friday evening, 1st June 1906. Only 15 persons were present and it is stated why the meeting had been called:

“to consider what means should be adopted to provide Church accommodation for the members of the Church of Ireland in and around Dunmurry”.

Mr Victor Coates the then owner of Rathmore had offered a site on the main Belfast / Lisburn Road and his offer had been gratefully received and a committee was appointed.

On 6th June, the committee held its first meeting. It was a lay-persons movement, and by the twentieth of the month, some £418.3.0 was promised for the building of a Church. A letter was written to the Rev Canon Ryder (the Rector of the Parish) to meet a deputation from the Committee; but when they got there they found that the Rector and Select Vestry were opposed to the plan. The necessity for a Church for Dunmurry was questioned, but the representatives from the village were determined, so the Rector suggested an alternative plan – that the Assembly Rooms should be turned into a Church Hall. This, he pointed out, would cost less money; but the deputation would not accept the idea. They wanted a Church to be used exclusively for the worship of Almighty God, and Mr Coates offered a free site in a good position on the main road.

Then there came another snag – a protest from the Select Vestry of the Parish of Upper Falls because they felt that the building of a Church on this site was likely to interfere with their own congregation. Eventually, the present site which belonged to the Northern Bank was offered, and Canon Ryder backed by the Select Vestry refused to give his consent for the building of a Church unless this site was chosen. The site was accepted and bought for £100. Mr & Mrs Coates generously promised £50 in lieu of the site they had already offered.

The Bishop of the Diocese gave his consent, and the architect who was appointed was a local man, Mr P Morgan Jury, who eventually became Diocesan Architect. The foundation stone as laid by the Rev J A Stewart MA, who resided at Ballymacash. Without any comment the following sentence appears in the minutes of the Building Committee

“It was proposed by Dr Gaussan and seconded by Mr Herde that the new Church be called St Colman’s Church Dunmurry”

The building of the Church took its course and the day appointed for the consecration was St. Mark’s day, Saturday 25th April 1908. The Church was consecrated by the Rt. Reverend John Baptist Crozier, Lord Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, who also preached the sermon. Afterwards there was great rejoicing by the parishioners and tea was provided in the Assembly Rooms through the generosity of Mrs Coates of “Rathmore”. In the ancient Parish of Drumbeg a daughter was born due to the faith and determination of the people of Dunmurry.

During the period 1908 – 1932, Dunmurry still remained linked with Drumbeg Parish. In 1932, Canon R C Ellis was appointed as Curate – in – Charge and he was made Rector in 1945. Canon Ellis remained Rector until his retirement in 1978. He was succeeded by the following Rectors:

Canon J T R Rogers (1979 – 1994)

Rev. M J McCann (1994 – 1999)

Rev. T H Priestly (1999 – 2007)

At the time of the 75th Anniversary in April 1983 many gifts and donations of money were given by parishioners in gratitude for their Church. So it might seem that with all these gifts and donations the Church had now been put in good order. But in the next 25 years more problems arose to which the congregation always generously responded, also donating many gifts and money to enhance the loveliness of the Church. One of these gifts must be mentioned – a large stained glass window at the west end.

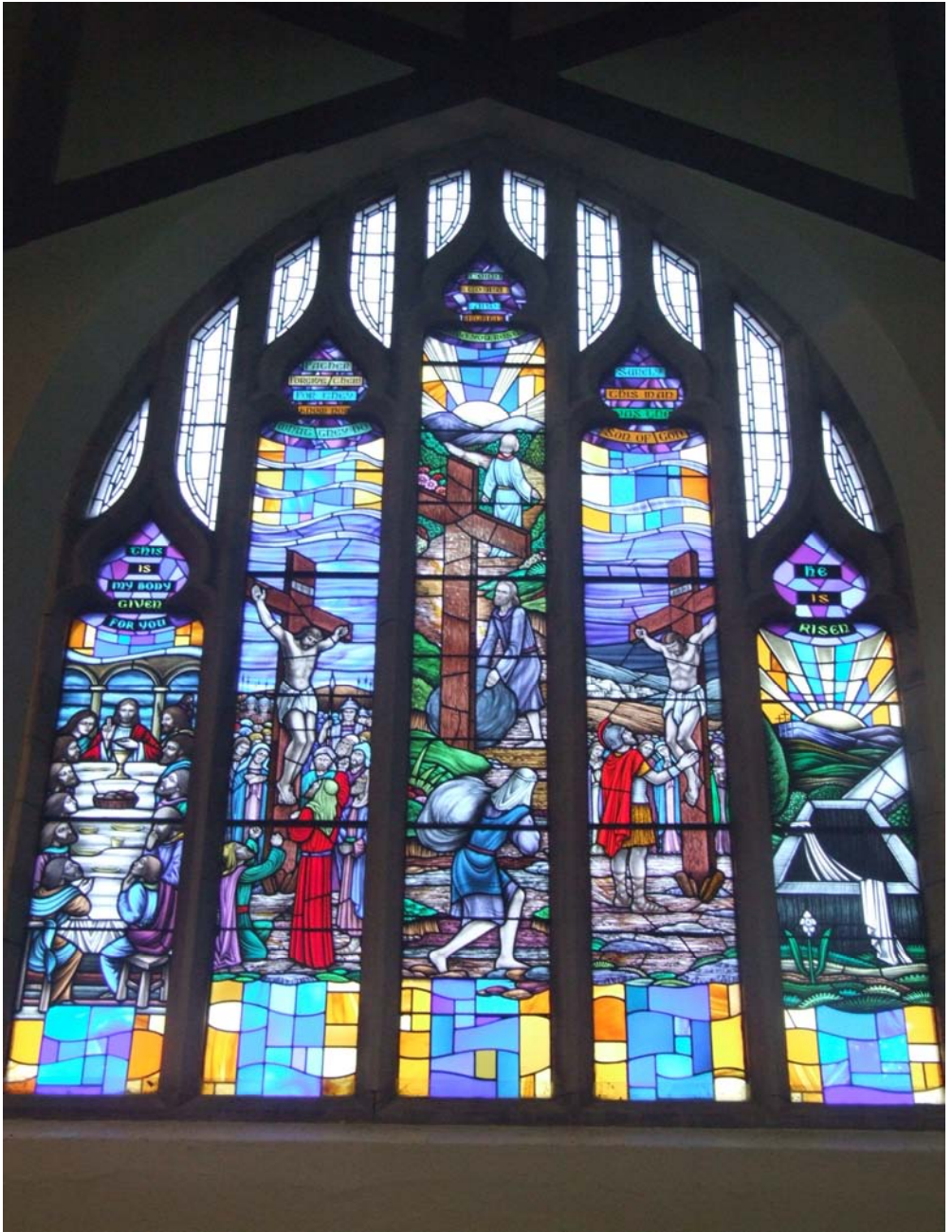
In the past number of years there have been several changes within the

community of Dunmurry. A movement of parishioners out of the village has resulted in a reduced number of young people and as a consequence of both this and the inability to recruit leaders the Girls Friendly Society and the Church Lads Brigade have had to close. As with several other parishes, the congregation is also reduced in numbers. However, the choir is maintained by a dedicated group of ladies and one man. It is heartening to note that the Sunday School, the Mothers Union and the Bowling Club are still functioning. Two new groups have also arisen and are proving to be a great asset to the Parish, namely a Luncheon Group which serves lunch to friends and parishioners once a month. This group also supplies carry-out lunches to those who are housebound. The men of the parish have also organised a Working Group which does essential repairs and improvements to the Church and Parochial Hall resulting in a large saving of money. A Church like St. Colman's needs regular work to maintain the building in good condition. The stonework would need cleaning and repair and as always the parishioners will surely work together to achieve this end, not only for their own benefit but for generations as yet unborn.

It is hoped that at the 100th Anniversary there will be a revival of faith in the Parish. This is the response which is asked from the non-attending members of the Parish together with an ever-deepening commitment from those who attend regularly.

**“I was glad when they said to me
Let us go to the House of the Lord”
(Psalm 122 v.1)**

**Canon J.T.R.Rodgers
(Based on an original article by the Rev. Canon R.C. Ellis, M.A.)**



.THE WEST WINDOW



From St. Colman's Marriage Records

Analysis

1908-1935 A total of 50 marriages occurred in these years. 84% of the grooms were in the 20-30 age group while 16% were in the 30-40 age group.

86% of the brides were in the 20-30 age group, 4% were in the 30-40 age group, and 10% were under 20 years old.

39% of the couples lived in Dunmurry, while 57% had one member resident in Dunmurry. The highest annual total was 10, in 1916. No weddings were carried out in 1910, 1926, 1927, 1929 and 1930.

1935-1954 100 marriages were recorded in this period (17 world war two weddings involved H.M.service personnel and 3 were U.S. troops).

77% of the grooms were in the 20-30 age group, 21% were in the 30-40 age group and 1% was in the 40 and over group.

Likewise, only 1% were under 20 years old.

70% of the brides were in the 20-30 age group, 15% were in the 30-40 age group, 3% were in the 40 and over age group and 12% were under 20 years old.

16% of the couples lived in Dunmurry, whereas 80% had one member resident in Dunmurry. The highest annual total was 9 in 1942, and the lowest annual total was 1 in 1935. The Rev. R Ellis conducted 87 of the ceremonies.

1954-1963 There were 100 marriages in this period. 76% of the grooms were in the 20-30 age group, 12% were in the 30-40 age group and 5% were in the 40 and over group. 7% were under 20 years old.

73% of the brides were in the 20-30 age group, 8% were in the 30-40 age group, and 3% were aged 40 or over. 16% were under 20 years of age.

20% of the couples lived in Dunmurry, whereas 78% had one member resident in Dunmurry. The highest annual total was 19 in 1962. The lowest annual total was 5 in 1954. The Rev. R Ellis performed 94 of these ceremonies

1963-1969 100 marriages took place in this period. 80% of the grooms were in the 20-30 age group, 7% were in the 30-40 age group and 3% were aged 40 or over. 10% were under 20 years old.

73% of the brides were in the 20-30 age group, 5% were in the 30-40 age group and 3% were 4 years and over. 19% were under 20 years old.

18% of the couples lived in Dunmurry while 81% had one member resident in Dunmurry. The highest annual total was 23 in 1968, and the lowest annual total was 7 in 1963. The Rev. R Ellis was present at 94 ceremonies.

1969-1980 There were 100 marriages in this period. 88% of the grooms were in the 20-30 age group, 3% were in the 30-40 age group, and 2% were aged 40 or over. 7% were under 20 years old.

69% of the brides were in the 20-30 age group, 2% were in the 30-40 age group, and 3% were 40 years and over. 26% were under 20 years old.

32% of the couples lived in Dunmurry, and 64% had one member resident in Dunmurry. The highest annual total was 14 in 1971 and the lowest annual total occurred in 1974 and 1978. The Rev. R Ellis attended 79 of the marriages and the Rev. T Rodgers attended 10.

1980-1986 50 marriages were recorded. 86% of the grooms were in the 20-30 age group, 10% in the 30-40 age group, 2% in the 40 age group and 2% were under 20 years old.

78% of the brides were in the 20-30 age group, 6% in the 30-40 group, 2% in the over 40 age group and 14% were under 20 years old.

32% of the couples lived in Dunmurry while 58% had only one member resident. The highest annual total was 19 in 1985 and the lowest total was 3 in 1982. The Rev T Rodgers performed 48 ceremonies.

1986-2004 95 weddings were recorded. 73% of grooms were in the 20-30 age group, 20% in the 30-4 group, and 5% were 40 years or over. 2% were under 20 years old.

80% of brides were in the 20-30 age group, 10% in the 30-40 age group and 4% were aged 40 years or more. 6% were under 20 years old.

21% of the couples lived in Dunmurry whilst 44% had only one member resident here. The highest annual total was 10 in 199 and the lowest was 1 in 2000. Rev. T Rodgers performed at 56 and Rev. T Priestly at 15 of the weddings.

2004-2006 11 marriages were recorded. 54% of grooms were in the 20-30 age group, 36% in the 30-40 age group, and 10% in the 40 years and over group.

10% of couples lived in Dunmurry whilst 26% had only one member living in Dunmurry. The highest annual total was 4 in 2005 and 2006, and the lowest annual total was 3 in 2004. Rev. T Priestly conducted 8 of the ceremonies.

OBSERVATIONS

The dominance of brides and grooms in the 20-30 age group is noteworthy.

The number of brides aged less than 20 years old between 1954 and 1980 was a marked feature in the records.

Since 1980 there has been a trend for couples living outside Dunmurry to be married in St Colman's.

Non-resident clergy were often involved in these marriage services.

From St Colman's Baptismal Records

Analysis

1908-1933 353 baptisms occurred. 87% of the children had parental abodes in Dunmurry, while 9% lived in Finaghy. The greatest number of baptisms in a year was recorded in 1913, involving 24 children. The lowest annual total came in 1909 when 6 were baptized. The highest monthly total was 6 in December 1920.

Children for baptism came from homes in Belfast, Lisburn, Coleraine and Killyleagh.

1934-1959 524 baptisms took place. 95% of the children lived in Dunmurry and 1% in Finaghy. The highest total of baptisms in a year occurred in 1958 when 28 was recorded. The lowest annual total was 9 in 1936, and the highest monthly total was 6 in September 1957.

Children for baptism were brought from addresses in Belfast, Lisburn, Dromara and Carrickfergus.

1960-1984 607 baptisms were recorded. 79% had parental abodes in Dunmurry, but Lisburn, Belfast and Finaghy collectively accounted for 16% of the children's homes. The greatest number of baptisms in a year occurred in 1968 when 42 were recorded. The lowest annual total was 6 in 1979. The highest monthly total was 9 in September 1966.

Children for baptism came from homes in Bangor, Moira, Newtownabbey, Jordanstown, Dungannon, Portadown and Antrim.

1985-2006 197 baptisms were recorded, 45% of the children lived in Dunmurry, whilst 34% had homes in Lisburn. The highest number of baptisms in a year came in 1990 when 20 were recorded. In 1999 the lowest annual total of 1 was recorded. The largest monthly total came in 1991 when 6 were registered.

Children for baptism came from a wider spread of places than previously, including Moira, Bangor, Dromara, Newtownards and Jordanstown

OBSERVATIONS

An inspection of the baptismal records suggests that most baptismal services took place in the Spring and Autumn seasons. Private baptisms were soon noted in the records.

Rev. R Ellis and Rev. T Rodgers carried out almost two thirds of the baptisms between them; (Rev. Ellis 1932-1979 totalled 912, and Rev. Rodgers 1974-1994 totalled 193). Non-resident clergy were involved at intervals, in each of the periods summarized.

Increased personal mobility through car ownership is reflected in the records from 1960 onwards.

From St Colman's Funeral Records (which began in 1935 with parochial status)

Analysis

1935-1959 412 funerals took place of which 84% of the deceased lived in Dunmurry. The highest annual total came in 1956 with 28 persons. The lowest annual total was 7 recorded in 1935.

7% of the deceased were under 5 years old and 65% were 60 years or more. The oldest deceased was 97 years old and died in January 1951.

Burial paces selected in this period were 27% Drumbeg, 17% Derriaghy, 11% Belfast, 10% Lisburn and 8% Dunmurry N.S.

86% of the funerals involved Rev. R Ellis.

1960-1984 655 were recorded. Dunmurry was the abode of 76% of the deceased. The highest annual total was 42 in 1977 and the lowest annual total of 14 occurred in 1982.

3% of the deceased were under 5 years old, while 76% were 60 years and over. The oldest deceased was 103 years old and died in July 1974.

Selected burial places in this period were 10% Drumbeg, 7% Derriaghy, 26% Belfast, 26% Lisburn, and 4% Dunmurry N.S.

Rev. R Ellis attended 73% and Rev. T Rodgers 17% of these services.

1985-2006 404 funerals took place. 69% of the deceased were Dunmurry residents. The highest annual total occurred in 1999 and 2002, each with 27 persons. The lowest annual total was 10 in 1996. Deceased under 5 years old was less than 1% but deceased aged 60 years or more now amounted to 83%. The oldest deceased was 98 years old and died in January 1991.

Selected burial places in this period were St Colman's 30%, Lisburn 24%, Belfast 13%, and Drumbeg, Derriaghy and Dunmurry N.S. collectively 10%.

Rev. T Rodgers took 44% of these services, while Rev. T Priestly officiated at 33% of them.

***** Still born children are not included in these figures *****

OBSERVATIONS

The gradual decline in funeral services for children under 5 years old and the increased percentage of deceased aged 60 and over are noteworthy

Changes in local population numbers and increased personal mobility have influenced choice of burial places in recent years.

From 1960 extra burial facilities became available at Blaris (Lisburn), and Roselawn (Belfast). Burial plots also became available at St. Colman's during 1962.

Non resident clergy were often involved in the funeral services.

OBSERVATIONS ON CONFIRMATION

Most of the candidates for Confirmation dwelt in Dunmurry. Significant numbers have also come from Lisburn, Lambeg, Derriaghy and Hilden.

The number of candidates in each decade has fluctuated, and since 1980 adult candidates have become more frequent.

Candidates mostly come from the 13-18 age group and especially the 13-16 group. In recent years, female candidates have tended to outnumber the male ones.

OBSERVATIONS ON AVERAGE CHURCH SERVICE ATTENDANCES

Information shows the congregation's preference to attend Sunday morning services.

The highest average attendances seem to have occurred in both the 1950's and 1960's.

Decline in attendances set in seriously during the 1970 decade, in step with the general decline of church members

OBSERVATIONS ON SUNDAY SCHOOL ROLLS

Decline in the average Sunday School rolls, by decade, has been noteworthy since the 1950's.

Nevertheless, percentage attendances by pupils have been commendable over time (frequently over 70%).

Records inspected indicate that Sunday School attendance was already a feature of Dunmurry life before St Colman's was established in 1908.

OBSERVATIONS OF C of I PEOPLE IN THE PARISH RECORDS

It must be remembered that both the town land and the village population of Dunmurry have grown considerably since 1900 and especially since 1960.

The average number of church people and their families first peaked in the 1950 and 1960 decade, and then to a lesser extent in 1970. Although numbers have subsequently declined, the number of our accustomed members has increased.

Despite changes in family sizes and public attitudes, our records indicate that St. Colman's church and clergy have provided a commendable continuity in the services offered to this community during the last 100 years.

Dr. Bob Common