

# *Presbyterianism in the Fethard area (1690-1919):*

## *Part II\**

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By David Butler

The last resident minister of Fethard, Rev. James Wilson, came from Limavady, and was ordained at Fethard on September 30, 1873, just eight years after the completion of the new church building on Main Street. Almost immediately, based on the report of 1873 and correspondence of the new minister with Belfast, the frequency of visitation by Presbytery increased. In August 1875 Charles Wilson (elder) and John Henderson (congregational rep.) were interviewed.

By this time, the Sunday evening service had been given up and replaced by two week-night ones per month. The average attendance in summer was now just twenty persons, and in winter "not so many". The Communicants Roll was reduced by one-third to thirty persons, and a further visitation in 1877 returned a further reduction of three.<sup>14</sup> Despite declining membership, income remained considerable at £57 per annum, mostly based on endowments.

However, there was a threshold membership below which the services of a resident minister were then deemed unnecessary, and at a special joint meeting of the Cork and Munster Presbyteries, held at Clonmel on May 23, 1878, it was resolved that "due to the peculiar circumstances of Fethard Congregation, owing to declining population, Fethard and Clonmel should be united under the present minister of Fethard, and Clonmel will leave Cork Presbytery for the Presbytery of Munster".<sup>15</sup> Fethard, despite its considerable income from endowments, was now considered too small, and the work potential too limited to continue its independence. As a result of this downgrading, Presbyterian service was now held on Sunday afternoons.

In contrast, Fethard Church of Ireland, besides having a resident minister, had three services (two morning and one evening) each Sunday, and also occasional weekday services to offer. Presbyterian children had already been attending at St. Johnstown, Fethard and Kilcooley Church of Ireland Parochial Schools, so the transition to full family membership of that church was quite natural. This was a trend affecting all dissenting denominations in Ireland in the 1850 to 1900 period, where their members found the Church of Ireland increasingly socially attractive.

The remaining membership of Fethard Presbyterian Church quickly gave up on their cause, in protest at the loss of a resident minister for the first time since 1739. Fethard had been involuntarily returned to the circuit supply system of the 1728-39 period, despite guaranteed annual income of £25, a quantity of endowment neither Clonmel or Tipperary congregations enjoyed, and members probably believed they deserved more than an afternoon service. It seems that some sort of personality clash may have existed between them and the Rev. Wilson.

The Presbyterian Church authorities hoped that events would settle in time, but by

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\* Part I appeared in the *Tipperary Historical Journal* 2000, pp. 64-72. Numbering of footnotes in Part II is continued from Part I. – Editor.





*Mobarnane, located at Mogorban, midway between Cashel and Fethard, a mid-18th century seat of the Jacob family, incorporates an older house to the back.*

September 1879 the boycott had been so complete and sustained that another crisis council was held. A special committee meeting of the Presbytery of Munster resolved "after much difficult deliberation that we could not shut up so ancient a church as Fethard, thus forfeiting annual endowment income of £25 10s for the maintenance of a Presbyterian Minister there, and abandoning the church so recently after the Union with Clonmel".<sup>16</sup> Rev. Mr. Wilson was ordered to maintain regular services, which it seems he had been keen to let drop, while the state of Fethard was being considered by the Supreme Court of the Presbyterian Church.

A further visitation of Fethard in March 1881 is most revealing. "No Elders or Congregational Representatives turned up. There are no young people. Nine families profess connection, but average attendance is only three persons. Thirteen are listed on the Communicants Roll, the average attendance being eight at quarterly Communion. Service is held fortnightly at 2.30 p.m. It is depressing. Our cause is in a very low state here – no regular service is held by Wilson, despite the recommendations of both Presbytery and Mission Board. Many are now attending the English Church. There will be a weekly service from now on, to draw the sympathy of the people to our church and its work".<sup>17</sup>

However, a further visit that July found no congregation or desire for separate services. By March 1882 some semblance of a congregation was gathered together, drawing from seven families, none of whom contributed to the ministerial stipend. (Thirty Presbyterians were returned for the area in the Census of 1881, including soldiers.) There were eleven communicants, and interestingly, there had been one baptism in the past year. There were still marriage and baptism registers to keep in this period, but while two copies of the former have survived, the latter appears to have been lost. It is likely that this last recorded baptism at Fethard was the child of a military or police official.



Despite the request for weekly services, by 1887 service was on the first Sunday of each month, at 2 p.m., while communion was administered quarterly to the six remaining communicants. Messrs. Going and Young, both associated with Clonmel congregation, were the congregational representatives and it was noted that of the six families still in connection, one lived in Fethard, two lived one mile away and three lived ten miles away at Kilcooley. The church building was in good order, and there was a free residence for the sexton.<sup>18</sup>

By 1891, of the sixteen members returned in the Census of that year, twelve lived at Kilcooley/Ballingarry, with just four living within four miles of the church. Rev. Wilson was called to Carlow congregation late that year, and his enthusiastic successor, Rev. Robert Reid Rentoul, succeeded in May 1892. At his installation, Presbytery was informed that Fethard congregation was presently extinct, but as conflicting reports were received, a deputation was sent there.

Rentoul was installed as minister of Fethard in July, so that the endowments could be continued, but at this stage it was purely a matter of keeping up appearances. In March 1894 a visitation could not be held at Fethard, as no member of the congregation presented themselves. However, Rev. Rentoul revealed there were thirteen on the Communion Roll, and there were fifteen families of members or adherents in the district available to attend the two Sunday services held each month, which opened the interesting angle of non-Presbyterian families occasionally attending service, but returning themselves under their own denomination in each census.

Some printed annual financial reports survive for Clonmel and Fethard congregations from the 1894 to 1902 period.<sup>19</sup> Of the nine subscribers listed for Fethard in 1894, just four resided at Fethard, the remainder being attached to Clonmel. Those living at Fethard were Mrs. A. J.



*Pepperstown House, seat of the Hendersons, strong tenant farmers, who were in residence by 1766. An older house exists behind the 19th century facade.*



Burland, L. Begg, Miss Edgar, D. Greer R.I.C. Their £1 10s subscription, with five Clonmel associated (£2) and annuities (£27 7s 5d), combined to give an annual sum of £31, far more proportionately than the £100 gathered at Clonmel through subscription. Of the Fethard subscribers, only Mrs. Burland endured throughout this period, although a Sergt. D. McCulla R.I.C. was present from 1896 to 1900.

At no stage in this period was there any subscriber from the Kilcooley area, or from any of the original Presbyterian families of the district listed in the church accounts. In the final visitation of Fethard, dated July 1901, Rev. Rentoul reported that so few Presbyterian families lived near the church that services were discontinued since the previous March, but that it was hoped to resume them in the autumn. No further information is available from Presbyterian sources, but the Census of 1901, conducted about the time, returned twenty-nine Presbyterians in the district, of whom only eight resided around Kilcooley, the remainder living close to Fethard. This increase was doubtless caused by the arrival of short-term members, such as domestic servants or members of the police or military, and would have been sufficient to revive monthly services in the town, as was the case by late that year. However, numbers decreased sixty per cent to eleven persons by 1911, of whom seven lived close by Fethard.

It is likely that services at Fethard had all but ceased by this time, but there was still at least one annual service, in order to keep the endowments active. In April 1910 a bid of £34 was received for the church building, but no further comment made on the offer. In 1911 it was revealed that the neighbouring Roman Catholic church authorities were most anxious to obtain the building as a reading room, but no move was made beyond this.

Rev. Rentoul continued to attend occasionally at Fethard until his retirement in September 1919. The St. Johnstown chalice of 1724 was then deposited at the Presbyterian Historical Society Rooms in Belfast, where it still remains. All Fethard endowments then fell into abeyance, as they were non-transferrable. In April 1921 the Fethard property was sold for £700 gross (£645 net), which was expended on essential repairs at Clonmel church. The minister of Clonmel continued to have responsibility for Fethard Mission District until 1923, when Tipperary congregation was united to Clonmel and Cahir.

An agreement was then entered into with the Methodist minister of Clonmel, whereby both ministers shared responsibility for the joint Presbyterian-Methodist Mission Station at Bawnlea, Kilcooley. In 1926, the ten Presbyterians remaining in the Fethard district all lived at Kilcooley, and there were still seven members there as late as 1936. The Methodists had about twenty members (besides adherents) attached to their chapel there in 1946, but Presbyterianism was by then extinct in the area.

## APPENDIX

An examination of maps and directories from the 1777 to 1814 period gives an interesting insight into the changing location of Presbyterian gentry seats in Fethard and district. The earliest available source in this category, Taylor and Skinner's *Maps of the Roads of Ireland 1777-83*, gives precise locations of gentry seats of Ireland in relation to postroads. It is quite comprehensive, and on surname analysis the following Fethard Presbyterians are noted:

|               |              |              |              |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| St. Johnstown | Jacob, Esq.  | Mobarnane    | Jacob, Esq.  |
| Coolmore      | Sankey, Esq. | Ballysheehan | Letham, Esq. |
| Knockbrack    | Letham, Esq. | Meldrum      | Letham, Esq. |

W. Wilson, in *The Post-Chaise Companion* (1804), compiled during 1803, noted only one change



in the above, in that the main Letham seat of Meldrum, near Cashel, was now let to a Mr. Lloyd. Further changes and additions were noted by A. Leet, in his *Directory of Gentry Seats* (1814), compiled during 1813.

|                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Coolmore, Fethard            | John Butler Esq.            |
| Mobarnane, Fethard           | Samuel Jacob, Esq.          |
| Peppardstown, Fethard        | Mathew Henderson, Esq.*     |
| St. Johnstown, Fethard       | Mathew J. Pennefather, Esq. |
| Helenpark, Killenaule        | Oliver Latham, Esq.         |
| Lismortagh, Killenaule       | Matthew N. Sankey, Esq.     |
| Mortlestown Cas., Killenaule | Capt. James G. Jacob        |

Griffith's Valuation of 1850 records that Coolmore was no longer leased out. \*By this time, the Jacob, Sankey and Latham families had lapsed from the Presbyterian faith, the Hendersons alone continuing in its support.

While it is recorded in Presbytery Visitations that both baptism and marriage registers were kept for Fethard Presbyterian Congregation, only the latter has survived. An Act of Parliament which became effective on 1 April 1845 required that all Protestant marriages be registered with the State, with one copy register deposited with the County Registrar of Protestant Marriages, and the other remaining with the minister of the congregation. Many congregations had been keeping records from the later eighteenth century, and by 1830 few congregations were without such records. However, this was more true of the Church of Ireland than the other Protestant Churches, and many dissenting congregations only began keeping records when required to do so by the State in 1845.

Fethard Presbyterian Church Marriage Register, the only surviving document of consequence relating to that congregation, records eighteen marriages performed between December 1845 and February 1885. The last marriage was performed thirteen years after the previous one, and the contracting parties were not of local stock, but the other entries give a very interesting insight into family linkages in Fethard Presbyterianism in the nineteenth century, with clues to those of the eighteenth century also.

The Protestant manner of naming children was similar to that of the Roman Catholics, in that the eldest son was normally named after his paternal grandfather and the eldest daughter after her maternal grandmother, but it included another important geneological detail. Many children had their mother's surname inserted as their second or third Christian name, and examples of this practice can be seen in the father's name in several of the contracting parties listed here.

The Allen name which occurs in conjunction with the Henderson surname indicates an intermarrying between the offspring of Rev. James Allen, minister of Fethard between 1776 and 1824, and the Hendersons, a strong tenant farming family. Similarly, the surname Walsh would normally be associated exclusively with families of the Roman Catholic tradition, but for the prefix Roe, indicating intermarriage with the family of that name, stalwards of the Presbyterian Church in Tipperary town. In addition, the details required by the Registrar of Marriages allows some information on the geographical location and social profile of the contracting parties to filter through.

**Dec. 29 1845** Lily Susanna Wilson of John Wilson, Merchant, Fethard.  
Adam Magill of Boniva, Co. Derry, Presbyterian Minister  
Witnesses: Charles Wilson, George Bradshaw, Francis C. Brigh, Mathew W. Biggs.



- July 13 1847** Marian Henderson of Lieut. James Allen Henderson, 10th Reg., Lismoynan.  
Isaac Bradley of Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny, Farmer.  
Witnesses: Matthew Henderson, James Allen Henderson, two Bradleys.
- Oct. 21 1848** Samuel Henderson, of Matthew Henderson, Peppardstown, Farmer.  
Sophia Daniel, of Matthew Daniel, Fethard, Saddler.  
Witnesses: John Daniel, D. Millett Henderson, James Allen Henderson, J.A. Lamphier.
- Feb. 15 1850** Alex Elles of Alex Elles, Fethard, Carpenter.  
Margaret Goggin of David Goggin, Fethard, Gardiner.  
Witnesses: James Yardley, Thomas Holly, Coleward Milne.
- July 11 1850** William Scott, Soldier & Mary Carew, Servant, of Michael Carew, Fethard.
- Oct. 20 1852** Margaret Ferris, of late Rev. Robert Ferris, Minister of Fethard.  
Isiagh Breakey, Minister of Fethard. (He died in 1854 of smallpox).  
Witnesses: Two brothers of Rev. Breakey.
- Feb 2 1854** Matthew Armstrong Henderson, of Lieut James Allen Henderson, Lismoynan.  
Margaret H. McNeilie, of Dr. Alex McNeilie, M.D., Heathview.  
Witnesses: Mark Douglas, Samuel Henderson.
- Mar 6 1855** Michael Henderson of Cloneen, Farmer, of Michael Henderson, Merchant  
Lucinda Maunsell, of John Maunsell, Shopkeeper, Fethard.
- Mar 20 1855** Thomas Campbell, Servant, Mobarnane, Mogorban, Fethard.  
Elizabeth Logan, Servant, Mobarnane, Mogorban, Fethard.  
Witnesses: John Tennant, John Orr.
- Oct. 17 1861** Samuel Henderson, of Matthew Henderson, Farmer, Lisnamrock.  
Fanny Henderson, of James Allen Henderson, Lieut., Lismoynan.  
Witnesses: David Hunter, Josiah Gripsier.
- May 27 1865** Spence Bristin, Gardiner, Barna (Kilcooley)  
Mary Pickinn, Servant.  
Witnesses: James Henderson, Elizabeth Henderson.
- Mar. 9 1866** John Armstrong Henderson, of Lieut. James Alan Henderson, Lismoynan.  
Dorothea Walsh, lady, of Andrew Roe Walsh, gentleman, Brookfield.  
Witnesses: James Hazlett, Jeremiah Walsh.
- July 11 1871** John Meek, R.I.C. Constable, Ballycahill, Thurles.  
Mary Ann Cook, Bonlea, Kilcooley, of Henry Cooke, Farmer.  
Witnesses: John Adrinn, Eliza Cook.
- Oct 11 1871** John Graham Purser, Gentleman, Corbetstown, of Joseph Edgery Purser.  
Jane Susan Theodoria Wilson, of Charles Wilson, agent, Fethard.  
Witnesses: John Thomas Going, John Purser.



**Sept. 14 1872** James McConnell, of Alex McConnell, Farmer, Cashel.  
 Caroline Murray of Robert Murray, Steward, Gaile, Cashel.  
 Witnesses: Jane Murray, Whilemina Murray.

**Dec. 10 1872** George Wilson Craigie, Builder, Dublin.  
 James Wright, of John Wright, Farmer, Bawnmore.  
 Witnesses: Richard James Arthur Wright, Mary Wright.

**Feb. 11 1885** George Phelan, Vet. Surgeon, Cork & Hannah Scott, Clonmel.

It is also of interest to examine **Griffith's Valuation of August 1850**, in the context of the families covered by the above Marriage Registry, in combination with landowners of known Presbyterian heritage, some no longer resident in the area by that date. In this way, the overall influence of Presbyterianism on land and property in Fethard and district can be discerned. Many of the families resided in affluent dwellings, considering £ 14 as the minimum threshold for "Big House" status.

| Tenant   | Description of Property   | Annual Valuation |
|--|---|------------------|
| <b>Spitalfield, parish of Fethard:</b>   |   |                  |
| Rev. Robert Ferris   | Manse (£9), offices & 11 acres  | £23              |
| <b>Peppardstown, parish of Peppardstown: (Matthew Jacob Estate)</b>                |   |                  |
| Samuel Henderson   | House (£11), offices & 197 acres  | £181             |
| <b>Lismoynan, parish of St. Johnstown (Stephen C. Moore Estate)</b>                |   |                  |
| James Henderson  | 33 acres & House (£1 5s – let out)  | £17-05-0         |
| Matthew Henderson  | 10 acres & 2 Houses (13s; 14s – let out)  | £07-08-0         |
| James A. Henderson   | House (£5 3s) & 32 acres; House & 15a at Modeshill (Sankey) = 2 houses & 46 acres | £35-00-0         |
| William A. Henderson   | 3 acres in Modeshill (Sankey)   | £03-00-0         |
|  | <b>Total Henderson Holdings: 336a &amp; 9 houses</b>                              | <b>£243-13-0</b> |
| <b>Brodeen, parish of Redcity: (Viscount Lismore &amp; William Barton Estates)</b> |   |                  |
| Charles Wilson   | 9 acres & 20 acres from Matthew Jacob   | £30-00-0         |
|  | Resides in townhouse, Main St., Fethard.  | £27-00-0         |
|  | Rents house to fellow Presbyterian, Jn. Daniel                                    |                  |
| Mrs. Elizabeth Wilson  | Owens Mill (£24) & 3 houses in The Valley   | £27-00-0         |
|  | Lives in townhouse, Moor Street, Jacob Estate                                     | £17-00-0         |
|  | Rents 10 acres of land and offices  | £19-00-0         |
|  | <b>Total Wilson Holdings: 39 acres, 6 hses, &amp; mill</b>                        | <b>£120-00-0</b> |
| <b>Coolmoynne, parish of Tullamain:</b>  |   |                  |
| John Maunsell Esq.   | House (£7) & 104 acres, own use   | £091             |
|  | Rents out 13 houses & 272 acres   | £191             |
|  | <b>Total Maunsell Estate: 376 acres &amp; 14 houses</b>                           | <b>£282</b>      |



### Absentees, converts to C.I & Descendants:

#### The Latham Family:

|   |  |              |
|---|--|--------------|
| Oliver Latham Esq.  | 602 acres, Meldrum & Killistafford townlands, parish of Brickendown. Former Seat (£26) let.  | £543         |
| William Latham Esq.   | 716 acres & 6 houses<br>Fethard (10 acres & 6 houses, Mill),<br>Cloneen (16 acres), Magowry (569 acres),<br>Peppardstown (121 acres) | £675         |
| <b>Total Latham Estates: 1,312 acres, mill &amp; 7 houses</b> |  | <b>£1218</b> |

#### The Jacob Family:

|   |  |               |
|---|--|---------------|
| Robert Jacob Esq.                                       | 877 acres, parish of Cooleagh: townlands of Kilbreedy (175 acres); Mortlestown (702 acres)   | £794          |
| Capt. Matt Jacob  | 642 acres & 13 houses, Moor St., incl. Presbyterian Meeting House, Magowry (170 acres), Peppardstown (292 acres), Roan House (£19) & townland (146 acres), Fethard (24 acres), Mobarnan (10 acres) | £814          |
| Samuel Jacob  | 837 acres & 19 houses:<br>Entire Townlands of Mobarnane (537 acres) & £38 House, Knockbrit (298 acres);<br>Fethard (2 acres)   | £837          |
| <b>Total Jacob Estates: 2,356 acres &amp; 32 houses</b> |  | <b>£2,445</b> |

#### The Sankey Families:

|  |   |               |
|--|---|---------------|
| Capt. Jacob Sankey                                       | 1,032 acres & 11 houses - four entire townlands in parishes of Cooleagh (51 acres), Modeshill (315 acres) & Rathcool (475 acres) incl. Coolmore House (£38) | £1,058        |
| William Sankey Esq.                                      | 337 acres & houses: townland of Modehill (Sankey), parish of Modeshill.   | £200          |
| <b>Total Sankey Estates: 1,369 acres &amp; 18 houses</b> |   | <b>£1,258</b> |

#### The Hemphill Families: (Rev. Samuel Hemphill was 1st Minister of Fethard, (1728-1761))

|  |   |             |
|--|---|-------------|
| Richard Hemphill   | 509 acres & 10 houses, Buffana, Kilconnell Parish | £400        |
| John Hemphill  | 60 acres in Buffana, parish of Kilconnell         | £050        |
| Samuel Hemphill  | 127 acres & 2 houses, Springhill, Killenaule      | £124        |
| Charles H. Hemphill  | 424 acres & 15 houses, Rathkenny, Peppardstown    | £280        |
| <b>Total Hemphill Estates: 1,120 acres &amp; 27 houses</b> |   | <b>£854</b> |

The total land in the hands of the above families, rented or otherwise, totalled 6,932 acres, which at an annual valuation (incl. buildings) of £6,945, amounted to a very considerable sum. Only 339 of these acres were leased from families which had no Presbyterian heritage, which is indicative of an originally close-knit kinship community. However, by the time Griffith's Valuation was carried out in 1850, many of the mainstay families (Latham, Jacob, Sankey, Hemphill) had been lost to the Church of Ireland for many decades past, a church which better reflected their landed gentry status.



Members of these families living in the area no longer attended or subscribed to the Presbyterian cause by 1825, leaving the sustenance of the local meeting to the tenant farmers and merchants. In 1850 these individuals, predominantly carrying the surnames of Henderson, Maunsell & Wilson, held some 982 acres, valued at £726, between them a mere 14% of the land and 10% of the income at the disposal of the original Presbyterian community before dispersal and defection to the established church. By the 1870s this acreage too was going the way of the gentry acreage before it, as the local Church of Ireland community increased in wealth and number, at the expense of the Presbyterians.

#### ENDNOTES

14. Minute Book of Presbytery of Munster, Vol. 1, Visitation of Fethard Congregation, Aug. 3. 1875.
15. Ibid., Report of Presbytery, May 23 1878.
16. Ibid., Visitation of Fethard, Sept. 23 1879.
17. Ibid., Visitations of Fethard, March 15 1881; July 19 1881.
18. Ibid., Visitation of Clonmel – Special Report of Presbytery on Fethard, Sept. 13 1887.
19. Printed Financial Reports of the Presbyterian congregations of Clonmel, Cahir and Fethard for the years 1894 to 1902, in the possession of the author.

(The foregoing articles are based on a talk given to Fethard Historical Society on 23 April, 1999, at Abymill Theatre, Fethard).



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