

# One Manse and four Manse Families: From the age of Victoria to the year of Prince George.



In 1869 a young couple moved into a new house in Ballywalter. Rev. John Rogers was ordained on 3rd June as minister of Second Ballywalter Presbyterian Church. His new wife was the daughter of a wealthy shipyard owning family and we have no record of her thoughts about moving from the expanding urban prosperity of Belfast to the remote shores of Ballywalter. Twenty-first century Belfast people still think that the village is quite far away! It is said that her father came down to inspect the new residence and proclaimed that he would not have his daughter live in a 'salt box'. At his expense, the house, with its two gables acquired the bay windows on either side that are a feature of the manse today.

Other building work followed as the family asked the congregational committee for permission to add a new maid's bedroom or governess's sitting room. So began the history of the residence that would be home to four ministers in the space of 145 years.

We can see immediately that the first family to occupy what is now Ballywalter Presbyterian manse lived in a very different world. This was the high Victorian period of stiff formality and wide social divisions. Captain Gibson of the army in India, son of John Roger's controversial predecessor, had left the princely sum of £500 to be distributed among 'seven of the blind deserving decrepit poor'. £500 went a long way back then! (He also mischievously scandalised the congregation by dressing up in Indian clothes and turning up outside the church as people were leaving after the morning service).

Later, the wealthy widow of Rev. Henry Gamble, Rev. Duff Gibson's successor, would have £500 to spare to fund the steeple of the new church built after 20 years of John Roger's ministry. A minister in those days would have had an elevated place in the social hierarchy with all the advantages that education, social connections and comparative wealth could bring. Mrs Alexander's famous hymn has a verse describing the not 'so bright and beautiful' that has disappeared from our hymn books:

The rich man in his castle  
The poor man at his gate  
God made them high and lowly  
And ordered their estate.

However, that is what Victorian society believed and many influential middle class Presbyterians were working hard at trade and industry with the ambition of owning an impressive house, if not a castle. This was the age of the expansion of Belfast, the growth of shipbuilding and engineering together with trade. The Presbyterian merchants whose prosperity replaced the old meeting house in Portaferry with the replica of a Greek temple were steadily abandoning the old port for the newly dredged facilities of Belfast Lough.

The culture of top hats and large drawing rooms required maids and a variety of other servants. Accompanying all of this was a dramatic political change. In 1870, as John Rogers was settling into his ministry, the Church of Ireland lost its position as the established national church. Presbyterians could now hold public office, have access to Irish university education and play an equal part in every area of civic life. Presbyterian ministers had as much status as their Anglican colleagues and often lost no time in emphasising their elevated position in the new social order.

Sadly, we have no record of how these developments were expressed in the village of Ballywalter and its surrounding community. Either minutes of Kirk Session and Congregational Committee were considered unnecessary or they have been lost. As a result we can't transport ourselves into the routines of Second Ballywalter Presbyterian Church and the role of the manse family during the 20 years before the building of the new church.

However, we can use informed imagination. Much of the minister's time would have been spent in visiting his congregation. It would have been expected that the way he conducted those visits would express his awareness of the subtle distinctions of social life. A call with a poor family would often involve seeking ways of making life just a little easier. Sharing the love of Christ called for material help as well as spiritual encouragement. In an age where universal health care and social services were still the dreams of political idealists, part of the minister's role was to give help to the poorest, find opportunities for the able and bring some form of social compassion to those at the bottom of the community.

By contrast, other visits were more formal, with tea in china cups in a room which expressed where its owners thought they were in the order of things. Notice of the visit was given beforehand so that the minister would find the family sitting in their Sabbath

clothes. It was importantly that he too should be appropriately dressed, never without a hat, to express the dignity of his office and his respect for those he had come to see as well as recognition of their status.

Manse life would have reflected this as well. There were those who would, naturally call at the front door and be received into the formal reception rooms. For others the correct entrance would be at the back negotiating with maids and servants before, perhaps, a conversation standing in the kitchen.

It is interesting to speculate how connections were maintained between the manse family and their relatives in Belfast where the big events were happening and culture was at its height. There must have been at least a temptation to see the manse as an outpost of civilization in the midst of a largely backward community.

However, there was a sense that things were on the move. Historians have described the Victorian era as "the age of progress" and in the report of what was said at the laying of the foundation stone of the new church on 1st January 1889 we can see why.

In his speech Sir J. P. Corry, MP is reported as declaring: 'He was very happy to be able to say that, so far as the Presbyterian Church was concerned, its influence was steadily increasing and the edifices were improving every year. When first he began to take an interest in its affairs things were not as prosperous as they were at present. The church which was about to be erected in their midst would be a very great improvement on the building in which they had worshiped for such a long time, both as regards architecture and accommodation. He was not one of those who thought that in regards to architectural design they should remain where they

were two hundred years ago. He was in favour of progress, and he thought that where there was room for improvement there ought to be improvement'

Replying on behalf of Mrs Workman, who had laid the foundation stone of the new church Mr Thomas Workman, JP told the assembled company that, 'It was pleasing to see Presbyterian Churches rising throughout the land. In all things they found that there must be either progress or going back and every indication pointed to the fact that Presbyterianism was on the increase'.

When the congregation of Second Ballywalter met on Thursday evening 27th December to take farewell to their old church it is reported that there were 700 present! The gathering was treated to 'an instructive address on "Chinese Manners and Customs and on Mission Work in China" followed by 'interesting speeches' on "a Social Evening", "Christmas", "The History of the Congregation", "Farewell", "Evergreens" and "the New Year", from a series of Reverend gentlemen. (We are also told that 'hymns and anthems were skilfully rendered by the choir' and we might wonder if they ever featured in the church services of the time).

We have this impression of an era of optimism and the urge to make everything better as well as to acquire knowledge and gain an enlarged view of the world - even as far away as China. Again, it would be interesting to know how far all of this was reflected in sermons preached Sunday by Sunday as they played their part in moulding the thoughts and expectations of the congregation.

Although this reflection centres on the manse and the present church building we should not forget the parallel development of First Ballywalter Presbyterian Church - the continuation of a congregation formed by people who chose loyalty to the wider church over support for Rev John Duff Gibson as minister. Not to

be left behind, they built their Lecture Hall and Manse in the Main Street, a property which has become our present Village Hall and Post Office.

Rev John Rogers retired in 1897 after 28 years of ministry. His successor was another Victorian, Rev George Heron whose ministry would extend until 1944, with a continuing influence as senior minister until his death in 1959. He was to serve through a period of dramatic historical events and change when the assumptions of progress would be shattered by two world wars and the island of Ireland that Ballywalter Presbyterians saw as their home would be partitioned into two separate states. George Heron also witnessed the introduction of motor cars, aeroplanes, the invention of radio and he must have watched TV, albeit in black and white, before he died. Perhaps he had even heard of Elvis Presley and wondered what the world was coming to. For Presbyterians of Ballywalter the most important event must have been the amalgamation of the two congregations in 1925.

During the Edwardian period of the early 1900s the manse was beginning to show its age as the Committee minutes show. Indeed, perhaps they had to take responsibility for maintenance that the previous manse family had looked after themselves. In 1898 'it was stated that the manse had no need of anything except a new kitchen range'. The range was fitted in December 1898 and I am sure the manse family were glad to have it for Christmas! However the optimism about the condition of the house was short lived. The manse was painted in 1901, in 1902 the committee sought a tender to 'make right the WC in the manse, in 1903 the minister was authorised to 'make some small improvements in the manse. On 22nd September 1904 the committee decided on new tiles for the manse kitchen and then on 2 December discussed repairs to the roof. At the Committee meeting on the 30th January 1905 'Rev George Heron reported that the roof of the manse had been

repaired and was now keeping out the rain'. Perhaps they also had that done in time for Christmas! In 1906 there was a new grate and a room was papered. In 1906 we read of how Rev G. Heron and James Morrison were appointed to get a drain opened in John Robb's field to take sewage from the manse. One shrinks from speculating what the previous arrangements had been! In the following years the manse continues to be painted, plumbing repairs carried out, the drawing room fixed up. We read again of the 'cesspool and sewer' in 1928 when work is approved to 'abate a nuisance there'. And so the work of repairing and patching continues until the radical renovations around 1980.

The records give us few clues about the social history of the manse at that time but we do know that community structures were slow to change. I find it fascinating to consider what is not mentioned. Minister and congregation must have had some opinions about Home Rule, the Ulster Covenant, the First World War, the Irish War of Independence, the economic collapse of the 1930s, the rise of Nazism and Fascism, the Second World War, but the Session minutes are sporadic and perfunctory, and the committee minutes stick doggedly to matters of finance and property. We might wonder how George Heron's sermons reflected the changes that were happening all around him. Did he address a Christian response to the politics of his time or the Church's responsibility towards economic distress and poverty? What impact had the wars and the 'hungry thirties' have on his pastoral work among the congregation and within the village? How did he relate his work the increasing number of holiday makers from Belfast as they came to the coast to camp for the summer? What contact did he have with the airmen and soldiers who were drafted into the aerodrome at Ballyhalbert? Nowadays such issues would be discussed at Kirk Session as the leadership of the congregation would prayerfully think them through together. Back then it would seem that they were considered to be the lonely responsibility of the minister. The

printed order for the Memorial Service to Rev George Heron includes the quotation 'I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do' - the words of Jesus in his prayer to the Father in John 17:4. The window in his memory expresses 'thankfulness for his devoted life and faithful ministry in the congregation' and features a stylised depiction from the period of Jesus among children with the quotation from Mark 10:16 'And he took them up in his arms ... and blessed them.' I am sure we can be confident that George Heron's ministry was faithful and compassionate, but with regret that we no longer have

access to what he said and did.

Rev. Samuel McIlveen was ordained as Rev. George Heron's successor in 1944, just at the time when it was becoming clear that the war would end in victory for the allies. Sam McIlveen was from a very different era than his predecessor. Born in 1912 his formative years were the 1920s and 1930s. He and his wife Kathleen were from the Kells area of County Antrim but they brought a fresh breadth of experience that must have been a challenge to the congregation after the established routines of a long ministry. Kathleen was a primary school teacher, but, unusually she had trained in England rather than Ireland and her subject was PE. Even in old age it was easy to spot the athleticism of her youth. Sammy, as he was known by many friends, had initially followed many of his contemporaries from school into the textile industry. However, his local minister saw a potential for a very different career. Rev W J Thompson must have observed some clues that the young Samuel McIlveen was being prompted with a sense of call to be a Presbyterian minister and he gave him every encouragement. After the usual studies and time in college Sam was appointed as assistant minister in Mersey Street Mission in East Belfast. During that time Rev. W J Thompson had also moved to College Square and he continued to have a formative input to Sam's thinking and



ministry. Mr Thompson had a particular interest in boys clubs and the Christian formation of young men. It is a tribute to his work and influence within our church and beyond that the present Thompson House which ' aims to provide temporary accommodation for offenders with the purpose of reducing the risk of re-offending/harm to the community and by managed resettlement to prepare for move on to permanent accommodation' was named his memory. Sam was well placed to relate to boys and young men. Rather than engaging with the Rugby of the professional classes he was an accomplished and talented footballer who had played for Larne. He was even an amateur international player for Ireland. It would seem that his usual mild manner was transformed into something to be feared when he ran on to the soccer pitch! I never took the chance to ask him what his hopes and ambitions were when he accepted the call to Ballywalter. However I would be surprised if his expectations for ministry had not been focused on work among the young and less privileged of the community he had come to serve.

Today it can be difficult for us to believe that even in 1944 there were people in places like Ballywalter living in the kind of poverty we associate with the Third World. Families still had to carry water in buckets, often for quite a distance, for the basics of cooking and washing. Wages for manual work and farm labour were low. Legacies invested for the provision of basic necessities for the poor could still make a tremendous difference during a cold hard winter. There were many young people in the village and surrounding community who led hard lives with very few of the list of amenities and opportunities we consider essential human rights. Conversation over the years has suggested to me that Sam was frustrated in his ambition to do more. There were expectations that the Presbyterian establishment had of its minister that, I suspect, thwarted much of the idealism that Sam brought from his experience in Belfast. For various reasons, some unavoidable, our

Presbyterian congregations have tended to be the preserve of the better off. Today, Ballywalter congregation struggles with the life and culture of much of the village. I wonder how different the development of our church might have been if there have been more encouragement for Sam to follow what his experience in Belfast and among his fellow sportsmen had taught him so well. One of my disadvantages in life has been a lack of interest and skill in sport. I envy Sam's potential to engage at a level where I know I have been less successful.

As the years went by, Kathleen taught in Dunover School and Sam carried out his ministry among the congregation. We know that he performed that ministry conscientiously and well. The war ended, the gray austerity of the late 40's and early 50s gave way to the 'you've never had it so good' era and the unsuspected surge of youth culture and music of the 60s. The Session minutes, which fade away during the 30s and 40s were revived with the beginning of Sam's ministry. During the 50s these are confined to recording routine business, the reception of new members, arrangements

for services, the election of new elders etc. There is a brief mention of a mission in 1955, but no details are given. It is interesting to note that a couple of contingents of new elders got away with subscribing to the Shorter Catechism rather than the Confession of Faith - but none of them are alive for Presbytery to do anything about it!

We see signs of change in the 1960s, but, perhaps predictably, the Session minutes merely give us clues to the underlying developments. There are more contacts with organisations from the wider church, a 'teaching mission' in 1962, quite a bit of discussion concerning elders' visitation and, significantly, an increasing mention of youth within the congregation. In 1962 the minister suggested that a Girls' Life Brigade Company should be

started by the church. In 1963 there is discussion of a Christian Endeavour, and, later those representatives of youth organisations being asked to confer with the Session 'after Presbytery's finding on the question of youth'. Eventually it is agreed to begin a C.E. 'confined to members of the Established Churches'. Various missions and meetings are mentioned but there is no discussion of their outcome. It would be interesting to know what became of the small committee suggested in 1965 by the Select Vestry of the Church of Ireland congregation 'for the purposes of considering some of the problems of the faith'. In 1966 a survey sheet prompted a suggestion that the Session would meet with the youth leaders. This was obviously a move too far from some and half the members voted that any problems should be presented through the moderator. The moderator obviously decided that he would not take sides on the issue - so the business lapsed! By 1966 Session are discussing visiting the congregation 'with regard to getting the young people out to communion'. They also agreed 'that the members of Session would be willing to stand down and let the youth collect the offering on Sundays.

For their adult members Ballywalter Presbyterians followed the example of many congregations at the time by starting their own bowling club with its own continuing history and influence on the dynamics of congregational life.

April 1967 saw the first issue of Ballywalter Presbyterian Church Magazine. Mr McIlveen wrote in his first minister's letter: 'A copy will be delivered to your door every quarter. I hope you will read it and find it interesting'. We still have the same hopes for our present version - now with colour photographs!

There used to be a group called the 'Revellers' who played and sang Christian music in the pop idiom of the day. They received numerous bookings from congregations who hoped they would be

the answer to the demands of youth for more contemporary expressions of the faith. Ballywalter got its turn in 1967 and it was suggested that the Church of Ireland be invited to the service. The Revellers came back again in 1969

The Visitation of Presbytery in 1969 drew the attention of the Session to the expanding holiday population in the caravan sites. We learn that in 1969 that there was a youth club in connection with the church, but only because the Session received the resignation of some of the leaders. A meeting in 1970 received a report from one of the young people on a youth conference held in Portrush.

It was in 1970 that the elders considered permitting the Sunday School to meeting during the morning service. The evening service on 6 December was suspended because of a youth service in Kircubbin. There was a move for a 'young wives' club to be started. In 1971 there is discussion about an 11+ club.

The story of Christian Aid dates from the 1940s when the organisation began as Christian

Reconstruction in Europe working among the destruction, homelessness and extensive human that the Second World War had inflicted on so many millions of people. After it became a department of the British Council of Churches, it was eventually renamed the Department of Interchurch Aid and Refugee Service. By the 1950s when conditions in Europe were improving and reconstruction was well under way the organisation expanded its remit to support development work in newly independent nations in Africa and Asia, and respond to emergencies worldwide. Back in the 40s and 50s we can be fairly sure that most people were too concerned about rebuilding the economy and way of life back home to be overly aware of need in the wider world. In Ballywalter, as in

many communities the plight of refugees must have seemed remote and obscure. Christian Aid week was begun in 1957 and in 1964 the organisation changed its name to 'Christian Aid'. As affluence in our community increased it must have become more evident to church members that the privileges of prosperity are accompanied by a responsibility to help the poor. The severe famines in Pakistan, Sudan and Ethiopia in the 1970s prompted a huge rise in public support for aid. The resulting publicity must have had its effect on Ballywalter. The familiar red envelopes began to be distributed in 1971. Christian Aid Week is now firmly established, together with the soup and cheese lunches held in May each year.

The 'Troubles' get their first and only mention in 1972 with the complaint that 'the voice of our Church' is not being heard through the media. Issues about the new hymn book and retention of old tunes get the inevitable airing. Session contemplated the prospect of sending a copy of a new translation of the Luke's gospel to every home in the community or just to members of the congregation. The 'Flame 74' mission event received extensive discussion and favourable response.

One of the recent and continuing debates within the church concerns worship. As always there are the extremes. The radicals, who would consign the old patterns of worship to history, replace the old hymns with new songs, the old rhythms with the pounding of drums and bass guitars, and traditional orders of service with a studied informality. If they are right, the future is with 'Cafe Church' or 'Messy Church' pioneered by the 'Emergent Church'. On the other hand, the traditionalists refuse to negotiate the ways of the past yearning for the language of King James I, the metrical psalms and paraphrases and the ambiance of the church as it was when they were young. Perhaps some of them see the church as somewhere that should be a bastion of ageless stability in a world of bewildering change where all the old certainties are open to

question and rejection. This is not the place for my contribution to the discussion. However, the truth is that worship in our church has been quietly developing since 1869. Back then, services (and sermons!) were long, music was unaccompanied and raised by a precenter with the help of a tuning fork and hymns were a questionable novelty which might be sung at home, in a mission hall or by people like the Methodists. They had no place in Presbyterian worship. Slowly things began to change. The Choir got a new organ in 1900, presumably just for practice! The new Communion Service in 1908 must have marked the transition from the use of a common cup to the present glass thimbles. By 1918 the members of the choir are asking that 'a suitable organ be purchased to assist them in the praise service of the church'. After a meeting of the congregation in 1919 the decision was made and Evans and Barr 'Ideal', single manual pipe organ was installed. It was the basic model, cheap and serviceable and the company must have sold hundreds of them. Having a single keyboard and six stops it could be mastered by anyone competent enough to play hymn tunes on the piano. The only extra requirement was for someone to pump the bellows. The location of the lever to work the mechanism was concealed enough for a young organ blower to discretely read the 'Beano' instead of listening to the sermon, or so I have been told. It is interesting that the General Assembly, after a series of debates in the late 19th century never came to a conclusion about permitting instrumental accompaniment to worship but any misgivings have been long overtaken by events. The Church of Scotland produced a hymn book in 1898. This was followed by the Revised Church Hymnary of 1927 combined with the Irish metrical Psalter. It's the blue hymn book that many of us will remember from the 60s and early 70s. Our Church co-operated with the Church of Scotland to

produce the Church Hymnary, third edition (CH3) which was issued in 1973 - the red book that we used when I came in 1980. The first

copies were bought for the choir in 1973 but Session decided to defer purchase for the congregation until the Irish edition with the Psalms and Paraphrases was available. It was still a hymn book for choirs and organs but many of the old, more sentimental, Victorian hymns had disappeared and tunes were changed for others that were more musically robust. It could be argued that the selection might have hints of musical snobbery. Some congregations of our church refused to make the change. It was not long afterwards that Ballywalter congregation was offered the finance for a replacement organ which, after some debate, was installed in 1975. There was some irritation in the Kirk Session that the Presbyterian Herald had omitted to give a report of the service of dedication! The new instrument was more demanding to play but proved to be more versatile in accompanying the choir and congregation. Stops with associated ranks of pipes have been added over the years and it still seems to perform very effectively for today's worship. Change came again in 2004 with the latest book, this time, with the old versification rewritten in contemporary English and the inclusion of a number of more recent hymns and songs. Some might argue that it is already out of date! Regularly the playing of the organ is supplemented by the guitars, flutes and piano of the praise band. Change has been gradual but real and perhaps that can continue without the radical clamour for revolution that has caused dissension elsewhere.

The Committee minutes will give details of the preparation for converting the old bus depot into the present Church Hall which was opened in 1978. There was a growing realisation that the facilities of the old lecture hall, built by the old First Ballywalter Congregation were not adequate for the needs of a modern congregation. Meetings for lectures had long given way to youth organisations, bowling and events that required more accessibility and room. The new hall was obviously a dramatic addition to the facilities of the congregation. Members soon took the opportunity

to add a badminton club to the congregation's weekly activities. Naturally Session saw it as their responsibility to set out the conditions under which the hall could be left to outside organisations.

During the time of the McIlveen ministry the manse remained much the same. The austerity years of the 1930s and 1940s must have taken their toll on maintenance. By 1969 the property was 100 years old. In 1977 the Presbytery Visitation report would state: 'There are certain matters which require immediate attention, especially in the manse'. There is no doubt that the McIlveens had been very tolerant during their time in the manse but the time had come after years of palliative care for something more radical to be done. However the work would have to wait until their retirement.

Rev Samuel McIlveen preached his last sermon on 30 December 1979. It speaks volumes about his ministry that, after his death in 1984, the congregation fitted a stained glass window in his memory with the caption 'The Good Shepherd'. The pew bibles we use every Sunday were a memorial gift from the McIlveen family.

For various reasons the congregation remained vacant for over two years until 11th March 1982. By that time the old extension to the manse had been demolished and replaced, the house had been re-roofed, rewired and generally refurbished for the beginning of a new ministry.

My reflections on the next thirty-one + years will be shorter. I will leave it for someone else to peruse the minutes and chart the changes in detail. Marbeth and I have spent almost all of our married life in Ballywalter. Each of our new born daughters was brought home to the manse which we will remember as a very happy family home, just as I believe it was for those families in the past.



Together, as minister and congregation, many of us have lived through the later years of killing and destruction in Northern Ireland, we have witnessed the results of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, the era of the property boom and the aftermath of the banking crisis. We have lived through the period of Mrs Thatcher, the Falklands War, John Major, New Labour, Tony Blair

and Gordon Brown and now the coalition government of Cameron and Clegg. Our lingering images from the past include the destruction of the World Trade Center as well as from warfare in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa. We have seen the Spice Girls turn into mature women, wondered what sort of grandmother Princess Diana might have been and casually use everyday technology that was close to science fiction when our ministry here began. And I use the plural because ministry is a family affair. Like my colleagues of the past my role as minister of Ballywalter Presbytery Church has been radically influenced by the encouragement, support as well as the honest assessments of my wife who has willingly made work in this congregation part of her life.

However the work of a minister would be impossible without the support the people he or she is called to serve. I won't use this article to mention names for each one would prompt an additional paragraph or two. I am thankful to so many folk who have given me support over the years and have given their time and hard work for so many aspects of our congregation's life and mission. Some of them have gone to join that 'great cloud of witnesses' and the heritage they left behind is still being built on for the future. Others continue to be deeply committed as we prayerfully respond to the challenges of the present and preparations for the future.

One further development for Ballywalter has been the appearance of our assistant ministers. Molly Deatherage certainly left her

mark here. Born and brought up in Oregon, USA she spent many years in mission work in Germany, before moving to China and Nepal. Inevitably she brought a whole new approach to our community. With her move to Ballina has given us a new insight and concern for the church in the West of Ireland. Keith Ward is now our Licentiate Assistant and we anticipate that his ministry here will continue for some months after my retirement. Coming from West Church, Bangor he has introduced the ideas and approach of a large and expanding congregation. As we saw even back in 1869, Ballywalter had its connections with the wider world. Perhaps there were times when the congregations withdrew into preoccupation with themselves but it is good to see how the tradition of concern for others has continued in recent years.

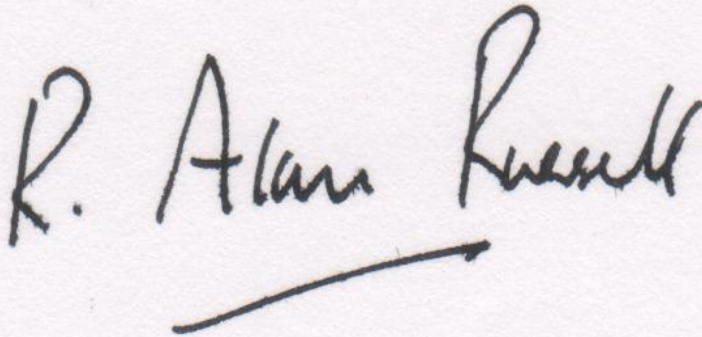
When we came to Ballywalter it was taken for granted that ministers would wear robes, we sang from the still 'new' hymnbook. There were still people who were uncomfortable that we had left behind the King James translation of the Bible. There was no sound system so ministers had to project their voices. I remember a series of evening sermons which I entitled Moral Problems of our Time, during which I addressed issues of human sexuality. There was a quiet word from an elder afterwards on behalf of those who considered that things like that should not be mentioned in church! My request for an overhead projector was met with a response that we had done without such things to the present - so why did we need one now? I wonder what folk back then would have thought of our data projection, the latest new hymnbook our praise band and the greater informality of our service with people lingering afterwards for tea and coffee. As a whole church we've been called to reflect, assess and plan much more than we did in the past as we seek to reach out to a community where people no longer feel the social compulsion to come to church.

I suggest one major difference from the lives of my predecessors is the evidence I have left behind me. Someone in the future might draw conclusions from the more than 120 letters I have written for the Church Magazine, there are various CDs of church services over the years, and more photographs than we have time to look at. I suspect that Session minutes are more revealing than they might have been in the past.

The Manse that has connected the ministry of four men together with their wives and families that have served in Ballywalter since 1869. I'm sure the Victorians would find us scandalously informal. Every trace of the era of maids and servants has disappeared. If you come to see us you're likely to end up in the kitchen with a mug of coffee rather than in the drawing room with a china cup and saucer (we'd have to make a special effort to produce them!) . And as our retirement draws near the old house is due for yet another makeover to meet the standards of a new century.

However, there are important realities that no movement of social change or technological revolution can ever dislodge. The Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever, continues to be the way the truth and the life. He is the only hope for forgiveness, salvation, peace and eternity for sinful human beings whether they lived in the optimism of the Victorians era or the depression of an infinitely more prosperous austerity United Kingdom. It is our commitment to Jesus Christ that gives significance to this progression of events. If the account of Ballywalter Presbyterian Church is merely part of community history, however interesting, in the end it doesn't matter all that much. Importance comes when we realise that we are talking about the continuing story of the community of Jesus Christ, who, with all the faults of their generation, have been part of his presence, holding out the word of life to surrounding society.

The range of recipes in this book also reflect the social changes that have taken place since Victorian times. Many of us are old enough to remember the first time we encountered pasta or discovered you could do more with rice than make a pudding. We can think, with a smile, of a time when Chinese restaurants were too exotic for anyone but the brave, and curry was strictly for the Indians. Like our awareness of the fellowship of the church our food has become less parochial and more representative of the world around us. Our supermarkets contain an international variety that would have astounded and bewildered earlier generations. Perhaps, as we leaf through the pages we can associate the recipes we see with people we have known, times we can remember and make some connection with the story which tells the developing history of Ballywalter's community and make some connection with the story which tells the developing history of Ballywalter's community and Presbyterian Church.



R. Alan Russell