



Hazelbank Presbyterian Church

Church History (up to 1998)

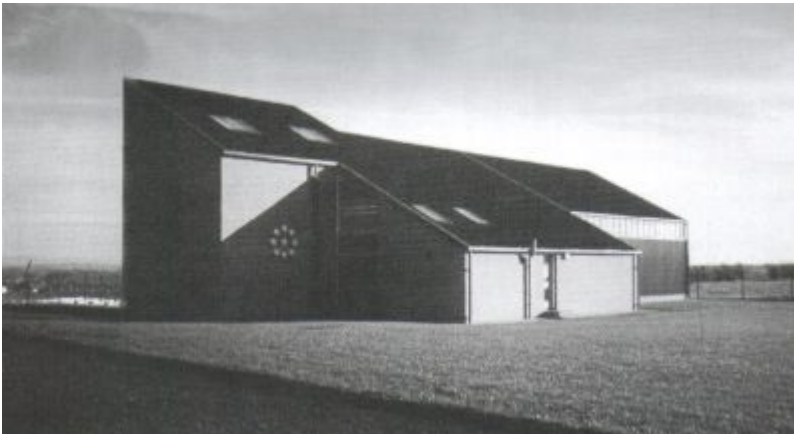
When the local congregation moved from Waterside to Terrace Row in 1834, there was no Presbyterian church left in Coleraine on the West side the River Bann. One hundred and thirty-nine years would pass before another Presbyterian church would appear again in that part of the town.

The First Twenty-Five Years - 1973 – 1998 by Rev SJ Millar, MA (abridged)

Prior to 1970 the Presbytery of Coleraine had discussed the possibility of extending its work into the new housing areas west of the Bann. A number of different locations were considered before a site was purchased at Churchlands from Robert Aiken, a local farmer.

The Presbytery's Hazelbank Commission met for the first time in February 1971, and the Rev W P Addley agreed to become Stated Supply.

In 1972 the Synod of Ballymena and Coleraine fixed the parish boundaries. At a meeting of the Commission in June of that year, the site and drawings of a lightweight building were tabled. These plans were updated at a further meeting in September, and the new work was given the name "Hazelbank Church Extension".



Original Church Extension Building 1973

The first services in the new building took place on 17th February 1973, with 220 worshippers attending. The Rev WP Addley said he had been *"most encouraged by the attendance, which augured well for the future of the new congregation"*. At the close of the first service a large number of worshippers filled in forms signifying their intention to join the new congregation. It was announced that the official opening service would take place on 31st March 1973.

On that day history was made as the Coleraine Chronicle declared

"Hazelbank was the first church in 100 years to be opened and dedicated to the Glory of God by the Presbytery of Coleraine"

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A very large congregation attended, including clergy from the four main denominations in the town. The ceremony was performed by the Moderator of the General Assembly Rev Dr RVA Lynas who also preached the sermon. Mr AE Martin, Joint Convenor of the Church Extension Committee of the General Assembly opened the doors and presented the keys to Dr Lynas, petitioning him to receive them in the service of God. A very happy congregation went home that day determined to work for the building up of Hazelbank Church in the years to come.

The first minuted meeting of the Interim Session took place on 3rd May 1973 at 8.30pm. The Rev W P Addley took the Chair, and those present included: Rev T H Mullan, J Beck, Dr R N Caswell, J Douglas, R A Millar, J Millen and R G Ussher.

At the next Interim Session meeting in October it was reported that membership stood at 88 families with 119 persons contributing to Freewill Offering. A Committee of 10 persons was appointed: Mrs Louise Caswell, Mrs Mary Leckey, Messrs R Aiken, J Bradley, E Buick, H Cupples, W Doherty, J Lyons, A Stuart, and J J Stuart.

The bowling club that was formed in October of that year has gone from strength to strength over the period and still offers recreation and fellowship each Tuesday and Saturday to more than 30 members of various ages from 11 to 90.

If 1973 was the year of beginnings, 1974 was to herald a year of change and continued expansion. The excellent work and wise leadership of Rev W P Addley and his wife Ruth were reflected in his report of 15th January 1974: *"94 families, a total of 330 persons were now connected to the congregation, 89 names had been added to the Communion Roll, 19 young people were attending Bible Class and there had been 7 baptisms"*. Mr Addley's clear presentation of the Gospel in his own unique style and the friendly and outgoing manner of his wife and family endeared him to the growing congregation and helped to create a good atmosphere in the church, which was to account for the accelerating growth. On the 21st February 1974 the Interim Clerk Session counted the first votes of the Congregation and the following were elected to serve on a new Working Committee: Messrs R Aiken, J Bradley, E Buick, H Cupples, N Finlay, J Lyons, D McAllister, D Macauley, A Stuart, J Stuart, Mrs M Leckey and Mrs E Tolson.

The surprise of 1974 was the resignation of the Rev W P Addley as Presbyterian Chaplain to the University of Ulster at Coleraine, and Stated Supply at Hazelbank. He was installed as the Minister of Ebrington Congregation, Londonderry, in October 1974 and was replaced in Hazelbank by Rev S J Millar and his wife Della and their young children Samuel and Judith.

Mr Millar was also charged by the Assembly's Church Extension Committee to commence work on a second Extension front in Burnside Orange Hall, Portstewart. That work commenced on the first Sunday of November 1974.

The work of Hazelbank Church and its expansion gathered pace. At the May and October Communions of 1975, a total of 44 persons transferred from other churches. This figure does not include those who were not communicants and had come from other churches.

A strategy for the new ministry both short term and long term evolved along the following lines:-

- The preaching and exposition of Scripture as the central feature of all worship.

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- A structured programme of pastoral visitation carried out methodically by the Minister.
- Worship, praise and thanksgivings in prayer is an integral part of the Church's worship pattern.
- Mid-week fellowships based around discussional Bible study and prayer is to be encouraged.
- Outreach into new housing areas was to be major strategy to maintain growth.
- Youth Ministries:- Sunday School, Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade, Youth Club and Youth Fellowship, were initiated and staffed by believers.

The implementing of these vital aspects of strategy with the help of a growing number of prayer groups in the Church resulted in numbers of people turning to Christ within the congregations of Hazelbank and Burnside (Portstewart), where the work also prospered in a wave of the Spirit's outpouring.



Extended Building incorporating New Sanctuary 1978

Less than three years after Rev Millar's arrival the growing congregation had decided, in principle, to erect a new church building 1978 the Foundation Stone . On Saturday, 25th March was laid by the Rev Dr T H Mullin who had been Church Extension Convenor to the Presbytery of Coleraine. Dr Hugh and Miss Julia Mullin had always been keen supporters of the work at Hazelbank. The new Church Sanctuary and its furnishings were opened and dedicated by the Rev W P Addley, Hazelbank's first minister, and the Moderator of the General Assembly Rt Rev Dr D Burke preached and brought the greetings of the General Assembly.

All concerned in the building of this sanctuary were blessed and upheld in the growing spirit of prayer and joy. Many long hours of voluntary service were gladly given in the furnishing of the building inside and out. Through prayer the Lord opened a door to Scotland and from the mother Kirk came gifts of pews, stained glass windows, a font and a bell. Gladly did we live and work in God's house. The names of those who helped are too many to mention, but they never will be forgotten.

In January 1979 an Outreach Mission was held to celebrate God's goodness and grace to the congregation and as W Speedy Moore wrote in his column of the Coleraine Chronicle that week

"The new church was the venue for a most inspiring mission which was conducted by the Rev David McKee, from the Christian Renewal Centre in Rostrevor. In spite of inclement weather large crowds attended from near and far, and many souls found peace and salvation through his ministry"

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Indeed some of those converted in this mission, and subsequent missions later became leaders in the Church.

In June 1980 the Rev Howard Cromie, Convenor of Church Extension along with Mr J Kernoghan, Deputy Convenor, and Rev T Simpson, Deputy Clerk of the Assembly met the Interim Kirk Session and representatives of the Church Committee to discuss the erection of the congregation to full independent status. A suitable memorial was drawn up and presented to General Assembly on 4th June 1982. The Rev John Girvan in his sermon said *"it was without question, vision which had initiated the project at Hazelbank, but it was hard work which had brought it to realisation."* He described the service as *"the end of the beginning" in that it was the close of one chapter and the beginning of another, and he went on: "the demands which will be made on those who will write this and subsequent chapters will not be less than the demands on those who wrote the early chapter."*

The leaves of the new chapter were being turned even more quickly for on 21st January 1982 Mr Millar, the Minister appointed by Church Extension to build up the Church, was elected by the Congregation of Hazelbank and installed by the Presbytery of Coleraine. Mr J Hillis speaking on behalf of the congregation said *"We extend to you a hearty welcome as the first Minister of the recently erected Hazelbank Church and as our pastor and friend assure you of our love, kindness and support as you endeavour day by day to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ and to extend His Kingdom."*

On 21st March 1982 the following ten elders were elected to take over from the Interim Kirk Session: William Johnston, James Hillis, Hamilton Houston, Dr Hugh Montgomery, Noel Finlay, Ian Mairs, Robert Blair, Desmond McMurray, Robin Workman, and Wavell Moore.

The first meeting of the new Kirk Session was held on 30th March 1982. The Kirk Session unanimously elected Mr William Johnston as Clerk of Session, and placed on record the valuable work and service of the Interim Kirk Session for the period 1973-1982.

The call to deepen the spiritual life of the congregation was taken seriously by the Kirk Session and all types of initiatives were discussed and implemented. Elders' districts were established, and in addition to their visitation duties, many elders continued to work in those areas where they had previously been involved: Sunday School, Boys Brigade, Bible Study and Prayer Groups.

In September 1983 Rev TP Robertson from Dundee was the guest speaker at an Autumn Outreach Mission, also speaking at the Elders' Annual Retreat. The services were well attended, especially on the Lord's Day, with numerous visitors present.

During 1983 a Summer Holiday Bible Club was commenced; John and Beth McLean, who had given good service to the Lord in their joint role as superintendents of the Sunday School, helped get the Holiday Bible Club started by hosting prayer meetings in preparation for the event. Also that year a United New Years Service was held in Killowen Parish Church. This service was later expanded to include Coleraine Methodist Church, and was conducted on a rota basis. This service continues to be a source of blessing and fellowship each year.

The 4th Coleraine Boys' Brigade Company had been formed as early as 1975 and was a joint Company of boys from Hazelbank and Killowen Parish Church. The first Captain was Derek Creighton who later entered the Church of Ireland ministry. He was followed by

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Desmond Moore who served for over twenty years as Captain, during which time the Company flourished.

The 271st Company of the Girls' Brigade was inaugurated on 28th April 1976 in Hazelbank Church Hall and was formally affiliated on 13th October 1976.

Since its formation, the company has gone from strength to strength with yearly average membership of 100, including the Chaplain, Rev SJ Millar, the Captain, and five Lieutenants. The Company meets regularly on Thursday evenings from September to April; membership ranges in age from 4 years and upwards and is made up of girls from various churches in the area.

With continued growth of the elders' districts, the Kirk Session agreed to ask the congregation to elect new elders, and the following were ordained and installed in January 1984: Kenneth Ford, James Gallagher, Ronald McKee, John McLean, Norman Thompson, William Wilkinson.

With increased membership of the Kirk Session, attention was given to the scheduled mission of 16th-30th September. Elders visited most homes in the congregation. The guest evangelist was Mr Michael Perrot MA, Director of Evangelism in the City of Belfast YMCA. This was a time of spiritual refreshment and the practical application of the Christian faith into such areas as marriage, family and the workplace.

In May 1985 the Presbytery visited Hazelbank for the first time since its erection to full congregational status. Their finding stated that the congregation had enjoyed sustained growth, but if this was to be consolidated a strong fellowship would be essential. The members of Hazelbank were urged to be fully dedicated to the fellowship of their church, faithful in their attendance, and willing to give themselves wholly to the work.

In June the church was honoured by a special visit from the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Rt Rev David Smith, whose parents had originated from the Garvagh area. Mr Desmond Lamont, a member of the congregation, piped Dr Smith into the church. The pulpit from which he preached, had been the gift of Lethan St Mark's Church, Perth.

1986 saw the visit of Dr Billy Graham to the British Isles, and as part of the church's Holy Week Outreach, video presentations of his Mission England Campaign were shown. This resulted in several people seeking counselling.

It was reported at a Session meeting held on 21st April 1986 that two of our able young men had offered themselves for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Robert Buick and Ian Mairs were accepted by the Presbytery of Coleraine and the General Assembly's Interviewing Panel for Theological Studies in the Union College. The Kirk Session immediately set up a Students' Fund to support them and their families. After completion of their studies at Union, they became Assistant Ministers at Glengormley and First Ballymena churches. In 1991 they were called to charges of their own - Rev Robert Buick to Stewartstown, Brigh and Albany in the Tyrone Presbytery - Rev Ian Mairs to Mountjoy and Drumlegagh in the Omagh Presbytery. They with their wives and families have since served the church with distinction, leading many souls to Christ.

It was also significant that in 1986 the Kirk Session set up a Church Missionary committee with Mr John McLean as acting Convenor. Also in this year Mr Robin Workman, one of our elders was commissioned by Session to attend a *2:7 Course* for discipleship training

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organised by the Navigators, an organisation which prepared potential future leaders for the church.

Six new elders were ordained and installed in 1987. They were: Paul Chesney, Ken Cunningham, Hugh Guy, Norman McMullan, Noble Boggs, John McClure.

The guest speaker at the Elders' Retreat that year held at Mrs Craig's Guest House, Myroe, was Miss Pamela Lockie from Church House, who spoke on the General Assembly's Social Outreach programme. This was a particularly good day of shared ideas and fellowship. There was a manifestation of power and unity in the prayer times. A healing service conducted by the Rev Roy Lester was held in the church and several who came forward for prayer testified to receiving help and blessing. Positive prayer for healing became a regular feature both in church services and on private pastoral visitations

In 1986 ground was purchased on the upper Castlerock Road for the building of a new modern bungalow which would be Hazelbank Manse. This well designed and comfortable building was completed in the summer of 1987.

The autumn mission of 1987 was conducted by the Rev Dr John Girvan, and although apathy from considerable numbers was evident, Mr Johnston, Clerk of Session, could write in the Minutes *"the members were much in praise of the blessing received from Dr Girvan's ministry"*.

The spiritual highlight of 1989 was the Billy Graham "Live Link" in Coleraine. All the churches participated and many responded to the Gospel message including some from Hazelbank. A follow-up series of seminars was held in Hazelbank in November conducted by Rev Desmond Maxwell from Belfast, who spoke on the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

John McClean, one of our young elders, reported to Session that he was offering himself as a candidate for the ministry of the Church of Scotland. The Kirk Session rejoiced and took immediate steps to activate the Students Support Fund to assist John and his family. After theological studies at New College, Edinburgh, John was assigned his Assistantship to a church in Dunfermline, and is today Minister of a large church, St Margarets Glenrothes, Fife, where God is blessing John and Beth in their innovative and faithful ministry.

At this time the Session decided to establish a monthly Prayer Meeting to be held the first Saturday of each month. A Family Service was introduced into Morning Worship. This occasional service proved to be very popular with many.

This was also the year in which Mrs Adela Mary Millar, wife of the Minister, was elected to serve as President of the Presbyterian Women's Association of Ireland for three years. For Mrs Millar this proved to be a very busy and stimulating position, which brought its own spiritual rewards. A PWA branch had been formed in Hazelbank by Mrs Ruth Addley in 1973, and under Mrs Millar's Presidency it has grown, with some of the founding members continuing to support it to this day.

In the April Session meeting of 1990 the Moderator informed the Session that Miss Ruby Gamble, an esteemed member of the congregation, had been accepted by the Overseas Board of our Church to serve in North India as a teaching missionary. A special Service of Commissioning was held on Sunday, 2nd September 1990, during which the Minister

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declared, "*We are met here as a congregation of Christ's people to recognise the fact that one of our members Miss Ruby Gamble BA BD Dip ED, has been appointed by the Overseas Board as a short term missionary to Mussoorie, North India. We rejoice with you Ruby that God has called you to this work*". Miss Gamble was faithful to her Saviour and her work in India, and having completed her term of service in India and returned to the fellowship of Hazelbank Church.

1991 saw the election of three new elders by the Commission of Presbytery: Ivor Campbell, Adrian Devenney and David Kane who were ordained on 23rd June. A family weekend was held in September at Castlewellan Castle, which was a great success and blessing.

The 1992 Holy Week services were conducted by the Rev Desmond Maxwell, from Belfast Bible College, and were preceded by a day of prayer and fasting for the needs of the congregation and our country. In September a special Youth Mission was conducted by Rev TP Fleming, from St Johnstone in Co Donegal. This was a well planned and organised mission which strengthened many young people in their faith. The elders' conference that autumn in the Ramona Guest House, Portrush, was felt by all present to have been a great success and a time of renewal and friendship.

The spiritual outreach for 1993 concentrated on Holy Week services conducted by Rev Jack Selfridge from Inverness. It was a time of simple and profound Bible teaching, and a few sought counsel and prayer. Mr Selfridge who had been a missionary in Malawi and Central Africa for twenty years received financial gifts from Hazelbank to enable him on his next visit to Malawi to purchase bicycles for pastors living in remote areas.

From 1993 onwards much thought and prayer was given by Session to the proposal for a major extension to our church property.

A new Committee of twenty members was elected, and five new elders ordained and installed by Presbytery on 8th May 1994: Christopher Alexander, David Brownlow, James McAllister, Kenneth McBride and Aubrey McElhinney.

Mr William Johnston who had been Clerk of Session resigned his position. The Kirk Session accepted his resignation with regret and thanked him for his commitment and service to Christ over the formative years at Hazelbank. Mr Hugh Guy was elected by the Kirk Session to succeed Mr Johnston, and it was agreed to review the position of Clerk of Session every 5 years.

This was a period of heightened activity and stress in the life of the congregation and in Session and Committee in particular. Large sums of money would be needed to pay for the extensive restoration and extension of the existing church halls plus a new entrance to the church and the provision of a bell tower.

A very active sub-committee consisting of: Hamilton Houston, James Henry, Noel Finlay, Drew Stuart and the late Hugh Cupples helped supervise the work of the builder and kept the Committee informed. Everyone worked extremely hard to realise a project which would provide for the future needs of the church for many years ahead.

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Church Hall Extension incorporating New Entrance 1995

The vision was realised when the new extension was completed and opened on the glorious 25th June 1995 by former Moderator of the General Assembly the Rt Rev David McCaughey. The Clerk of the General Assembly, Rev S Hutchinson was also present along with visiting clergy from the four major denominations in the town, and friends from Hazelbank.

The work of the Sunday School is of vital importance in the history of any congregation, and Hazelbank is no exception. The numbers of children on the roll of the Sunday School since the 1980s to the late 1990s have ranged from 140 to the present total of 170. A dedicated staff of teachers from within the congregation has served the Lord with great faithfulness. Following the commencement of the Sunday School by Rev Bill and Ruth Addley, from 1975 to 1988 John and Beth McLean further developed the work, serving in the role of Superintendent.

The following served as Superintendents over the past 25 years:

1973-1974 : Rev Bill and Ruth Addley
1975-1988 : John and Beth McLean
1988-____ : Robin Workman
1989-1992 : John McClure
1992-1995 : William Wilkinson
1995-1997 : Robert Blair and James Gallagher
1997-____ : James Gallagher

During the past 25 years 371 children have been baptised, and 92 wedding ceremonies performed in the church.

Praise has always been an integral part of the Church's worship. An organ fund had been set up in 1974, and later in the year an Allen organ was purchased. Mr H Gillespie agreed to play the organ on a temporary basis; later Mrs Hezlett took the post of Church organist. Mrs Hezlett resigned and Miss Heather Smyth took up her duties. Heather's skills helped develop the praise of the choir as the Church grew in numbers. Following Miss Smyth's resignation, Mr Ivan Thompson became organist for a short time, before going on to study for the Ordained Ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Mr Ian Bell succeeded Mr Thompson as organist and choirmaster. He had a lot of flair and creativity, and the choir grew and the church music further developed under his leadership. When Ian resigned in 1983, Miss Elaine Rodgers took the position. Mrs Shirley Ballantine took over from Elaine

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in 1985, continuing as church organist until her resignation in 1988. From 1989 until the present time church music has been shared voluntarily on a rota basis between Mrs Margaret Blair and Dr Hugh Montgomery; Mrs Rosemary Ford has also contributed by playing the piano. A church orchestra has been set up and developed by Mrs Blair.

A copyright licence was obtained to enable the congregation to learn more modern praise. The Mission Praise hymn-book has been used along with the Church hymn-book and a Youth Praise Group has developed out of the Youth Fellowship.

In conclusion, over the past two years (1996 and 1997) the Session has been looking into all areas of our church's life, seeking to know God's will and God's speed in promotion of the Gospel in the next Millennium. The vision of what might come to pass was greatly enhanced by the 20/20 Assembly held in the University of Ulster in Coleraine in August 1997. The delegates brought back enthusiastic reports and these have resulted in ongoing seminars and discussion groups to look at areas of witness that could be improved. Through all this discussion which is ongoing, five basic objectives for the future of the congregation have emerged:

1. The absolute supremacy of Christ-centred preaching and teaching of the Word in the context of relevant and inclusive worship, through all member participation and the use of old and new praise material in a range of musical styles.
2. Sharing the Gospel in word and deed with those around us, through training members to explain their faith, through following up fringe members and contacting families with no church connection who come to live within our parish bounds.
3. Fully participating in the missionary strategy of our Presbyterian Church in Ireland and other relevant missionary societies promoting short term opportunities for young people and providing financial support for Christian agencies carrying out relief work throughout the World.
4. Developing Prayer and Bible Study in order to encourage believers to a deeper commitment in their personal devotional lives, to see the power of prayer at work within the congregation to pray regularly and unitedly for local, national and international concerns, under the leading of the Spirit of God.
5. Caring for one another's spiritual, emotional and physical needs and fostering a friendly and caring attitude in all our public gatherings and meetings for worship.

As we come to celebrate Hazelbank's 25th Anniversary we stop to reflect and give thanks to God for all the ways He has brought us and all that He has taught us.

Let us set forth into the new millennium with strengthened faith.

Psalm 77, vs 10 & 11:

*I will remember the deeds of the Lord,
Yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago
I will meditate on all your works
and consider all your mighty deeds.*

Samuel John Millar
March 1998