

Kilwarlin Moravian Church and Battlefield Garden

Chris McCollum, 2015

LOCATION

Kilwarlin Moravian Church is located in the townland of Corcreeny, Hillsborough Co Down, OS Map reference 183-8 and Irish Grid reference J2100 5887. The Church sits on an east-west axis towards the rear of the site. On its west end it abuts its Manse which in turn is sandwiched between the Church building and Church Hall. There is an attached building to the rear of the Hall which was built to accommodate a Sunday School (now empty) and beyond along the north boundary a carriage shed now in ruins. Sitting behind and to the north of the Church is a burial ground and immediately to the north and west of the Church a Battle Garden intended to reproduce the terrain of the battle of Thermopylae. To the west of the Hall is a raised flat grass area and abutting this is a now failed Dam wall and reservoir (which once fed the pond within the Battle Garden). At the south boundary is a stone gate screen with cast iron gates and sitting behind a ruined single storey building perhaps once a school. Completing the form and on the other side of the gate screen is a heavily altered gate lodge (perhaps a caretakers cottage) now in private ownership.

HISTORY

The Moravian Church is an ancient episcopal Protestant Church founded in Bohemia and Moravia, (Czech Republic) from among the followers of the reformer John Hus. Hus was martyred in 1415 and by 1457 following a failed attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church a new Unity of Brethren Church was founded. The Church produced a protestant hymn book in 1501 and the Kralitz Bible in 1579 (translation of the Bible into Czech). Persecution followed in the early 17th century and the Church only survived through a small group of refugees who found shelter in western Europe on the estate of a German Count Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf in 1727.

The arrival of the Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland coincided with the 18th century evangelical revival. In 1745 the preacher and Hymn writer John Cennick was invited to Ireland and within two years had founded the first Moravian Congregation in Dublin. Within the next few years there were societies throughout Ulster and Moravian congregations in Ballinderry, Kilwarlin, Gracefield and Gracehill in modern-day Northern Ireland. Cennick was a contemporary of John Wesley.

The first mention of Kilwarlin is in Cennick's diary, May 27th 1752 when a religious service was held in the house of a James Titterington. In August of that year a Church building was completed on ground provided by a Robert Turner (owned by the Marquis of Downshire who's country estate was located at Hillsborough, now a Royal Palace, Hillsborough Castle). A burial ground was consecrated in 1759. John Cennick died in 1755. The original congregation numbered about 80 but by 1798 this had fallen and the minister was

withdrawn with preachers from Gracehill and the sacrament administered by the minister from Ballinderry. In 1805 the Manse became a day and boarding school and by 1834 Ordnance Survey records state the Church and manse were in ruins with a congregation of six. The map shows two separate buildings.

BASIL PATRAS ZULA

In 1834 Basil Patras Zula and his wife Ann arrived as an assistant to Ballinderry and a revival of the Church began. Basil Patras Zula was a Greek Noble born around 1800 and a soldier in the independence struggle against the Ottoman Empire. He was a clan leader aged 11 and for his role against the Empire had a bounty placed on his head. He fought and was one of only 2000 (from an original 12000) who survived the siege of Missolonghi during the Greek war of Independence. War appalled Zula and after befriending the Englishman Sir William Eden he arrived in Ireland in 1828. In Dublin he came to know the Moravian Church founded by Cennick and began to worship there. It was there that he met his future wife Ann Linfoot. He offered himself for training in the ministry, receiving instruction at Gracehill. In 1834 he and his wife arrived at Kilwarlin. On Zula's arrival the old school house was prepared for worship and the Church and manse demolished and rebuilt (work began on 13th October 1834). The new Church was consecrated by Br. T Mallalieu of Gracehill on 22 March 1835 when twenty six new members were received. Shortly after a school house was built at the entrance gate. Ordnance Survey Memoirs of the period record that the reconstruction of the site was carried out at the expense of Basil Zula.

By 1837 numbers had increased to allow a congregation to be formed and Zula became an ordained minister with his ordination carried out in January 1837 by Right Reverend Hans Peter Hallbeck. The Grandfather clock within the Church dates from that time as a gift from the Congregation. By 1844 there were 251 in the congregation. Records from 1834 held at Gracehill include a comment that Zula was building a new church, dwelling house and a garden laid out in the plan of the Battle of Thermopylae. The garden which looks at first glance as a series of dramatic humps and bumps in the landscape intends to reproduce the terrain of the battleground of Thermopylae fought in 480 BC when the Spartan army saved Athens from attack by the Persians.

The reason for the garden is not entirely clear as the concept of a Battle garden, to commemorating famous battles had been popular in the 18th century but by the time this one was constructed the idea had fallen out of favour. Foy suggests that the garden was a project carried out to provide work just before the Irish famine and certainly many follies were constructed in Ireland at that time for exactly this purpose. James Stephen Curl believes the garden to be symbolic rather than representational and concludes that Zula attributed "curious protective symbolism" to the garden (supported by his design for the Manse which contained two doors to each room to allow escape in the event that the Turks travelled to Ireland to pursue him). Jo Day suggests that the garden was to lift Zula's homesickness and the choice of Thermopylae was a link to his homeland which was just

gaining independence at the time and Thermopylae was seen as one of the finest moments of Greek history. The Moravian Church feels that Zula constructed it as a means of drawing attention to the Church at Kilwarlin. In any event it is widely accepted that it is extraordinarily difficult to reconcile a map of the actual battle with the garden layout but it is also widely accepted it is one of the most extraordinary gardens in Ireland.

AFTER ZULA

Zula died of fever while visiting Dublin on 04 October 1844 (Moravian sources say in the company of some mysterious foreign gentlemen). It is accepted he is buried in the adjoining burial ground, despite a rumour that his coffin was filled with stones with no sign of him!. In 1846 a new wing was added to the Manse and a ladies' day and boarding school was opened by Ann Zula. A separate girls' Sunday school was built but by 1888 the congregation had fallen to 157 and by 1920 the congregation again formed a unit with Ballinderry. The Hall was vacant by 1889 but by 1917 it was a Sunday School. In 1971 the congregation formed a unit with Belfast University Road and by 1977 Bishop Foy assumed responsibility for Kilwarlin. In 1996 the Congregation at Belfast Cliftonville was included in the unit and in 2007 Kilwarlin again formed a unit with Ballinderry.

The Church was restored in 1987 and the hall extended in 1998. In 2015 Kilwarlin Moravian Church has 15 families who continue to use the Church for Christian Worship, the Manse is rented to a family from the Congregation and the Hall and site is used for Church activities including bowls and an annual garden party. The current minister, Rev Dr Livingstone Thompson assumed pastoral charge (September 2015) and one of his stated priorities is to grow the congregation, develop the historic site and build ecumenical relations.

Today the Moravian Church stands firmly with the mainstream of Christianity and is ecumenical in outlook and practice. Its international nature means that there are settlements worldwide membership of just over one million. The Church has a long tradition of missionary work and continuous to place a high value on ecumenism, piety and music. The Church's emblem is the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) with the flag of victory, surrounded by the Latin inscription: Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur (Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him).

SIGNIFICANCE

This is undoubtedly a significant group of historic buildings sitting in a very significant landscape. The site has first and foremost a clear spiritual significance celebrated in 1992 during a special service in this Church to record the 250th anniversary of the coming of the Moravian Church to Britain and Ireland. There is a direct connection between this site and John Cennick the evangelist who worked with John and Charles Wesley the founders of Methodism and who founded this Moravian Church in 1755. This spiritual significance has continued from that time and looks to the future with the appointment of its new Minister.

This spiritual significance is mixed with an historical one with its connection to another Minister, Rev Zula who arrived at this Church in the early 19th century. The story of this man, his resistance to the Ottoman Empire during the Greek War of Independence is fascinating and his role in the rebirth of the Moravian faith in this part of Ulster remarkable. The publication "Historic Ulster Churches" considers Rev Zula's appointment as a "halcyon period of Moravian fortunes at Kilwarlin".

The historical development of the site is significant in that the Manse was extended in 1846 as a boarding school for girls. Before that Zula had construed a school and even at the time of the first Ordnance Survey (1834) when the Church was in a "very ruinous state" there was a school. The Moravians were renowned for their high standards of education centred on the 17th century Moravian Bishop John Amos Comenius who encouraged education for all regardless of sex and class.

The interconnected plan with a physical connection between Church, Manse and Hall is significant by its rarity. The history of the Rev Zula again adds to this significance as the Manse is specifically designed to have an alternative means of escape from each ground floor room and an escape hatch at first floor level (to escape any Turks who meant him harm). These features all remain to this day.