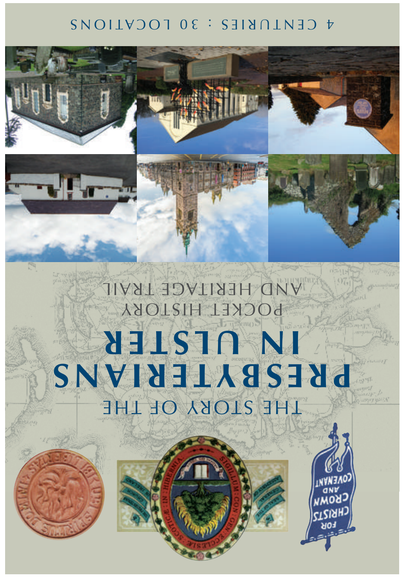


Sculpture of John Knox, Assembly Buildings, Belfast

Brochure for Presbyterian pageant, 1948



Bust of John Sinclair, Sinclair Seamen's Presbyterian Church, Belfast



For four centuries Presbyterians have represented one of the most important elements in the population of Ireland. Their influence has been strongest in the history of the northern province of Ulster where for over 300 years they have constituted a majority of the Protestant population. The origins of the Presbyterian churches in Ireland can be traced to Scotland and to the successive waves of immigration of Scottish families to this island in the 1600s.

This publication looks at the story of Ulster's Presbyterians, highlighting the emergence of the historic Presbyterian denominations, the role of Presbyterians in the 1798 Rebellion and the formation of Northern Ireland, and the contribution of Presbyterians to education and the mission field. It also includes information on 30 sites where you can discover at first hand the richly textured history of Presbyterianism in Ulster.

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND

ULSTER HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Ulster-Scots Agency
Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch

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1 THE FIRST MINISTERS

Early 17th-century Ireland was in a state of transition and in no part of the island was this more apparent than in Ulster. As a result of official and unofficial plantations there was an influx of settlers from England and, in particular, Scotland which transformed the character of much of the province.

Accompanying these settlements was the introduction of Protestantism. The Church of Ireland was the established or state church and was organised along episcopalian lines. However, a number of ministers came to Ulster in this period who dissented from this view of church government, preferring the presbyterian system. In part, their move to Ulster was due to the increasing hostility of the authorities in Scotland to presbyterianism.

The first of these men was **Rev. Edward Brice** who moved from Drymen in Stirlingshire to Ballycarry in County Antrim in 1613. He was followed by, among others, **Rev. Robert Blair** in Bangor, and **Rev. John Livingstone** in Killinchy, both County Down, **Rev. Andrew Stewart** in Donegore, and **Rev. Josias Welsh** in Templepatrick, both County Antrim. To begin with such men were tolerated within the Church of Ireland and there was no separate Presbyterian denomination at this time.

One of the most significant episodes in the development of early presbyterianism in Ulster was the **Six Mile Water Revival** which left a deep impression on the Scottish communities of Antrim and Down in the late 1620s and early 1630s.

In the 1630s the government took steps to bring the Church of Ireland into closer conformity with the Church of England. As a result of these measures, those ministers who were not prepared to renounce their presbyterianism were excommunicated. In 1636 four ministers (Blair, Livingstone, **James Hamilton** and **John McLellan**), with about 140 followers, set sail in the *Eagle Wing* for America with the intention of establishing a Presbyterian colony in New England; they never reached their destination as storms drove the ship back.



Rev. John Livingstone



Memorial to Rev. Andrew Stewart at Donegore Church of Ireland church



Plaque to Rev. Josias Welsh in the old graveyard in Templepatrick

2 THE FIRST PRESBYTERY

In Scotland attempts by Charles I to impose his authority upon the Church provoked a hostile response which eventually led to the **National Covenant** of 1638. This Covenant declared presbyterianism the only true form of church government and bound the nation to the principles of the Reformation.

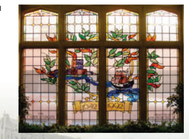
Many people in the north of Ireland also signed this Covenant. In response, the government insisted that all Scots in Ulster over the age of sixteen take an oath – the '**Black Oath**' as it became known – abjuring the Covenant. This had a deeply destabilising effect on the province with many settlers withdrawing to Scotland to avoid taking the oath.

In October 1641 an uprising began in Ulster which was organised by the leading figures in the Gaelic Irish community. This insurrection quickly escalated and resulted in significant loss of life and destruction of property. Many of the Scottish settlers fled for safety to their homeland, while in 1642 an army under the command of Major General Robert Munro was sent to Ireland to protect those who remained.

The regiments in this army were accompanied by ministers who acted as chaplains. They included:

Rev. Hugh Cunningham
Rev. John Baird
Rev. Thomas Peebles
Rev. James Simpson
Rev. John Scott
Rev. John Aird

On 10 June 1642, in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, five of these ministers and four ruling elders, chosen from the four regiments that had formed kirk sessions, came together in what is regarded as the inaugural Irish Presbytery meeting, from which, in a formal sense, today's Presbyterian Church in Ireland descends. This event is commemorated by a sculpture positioned beside **Joymount Presbyterian Church**, Carrickfergus, and by the 'Carrickfergus Window' in **Assembly Buildings**, Belfast.



'Carrickfergus Window', Assembly Buildings, Belfast



The signing of the National Covenant in Greyfriars, Edinburgh, in 1638

3 THE COVENANT AND ULSTER

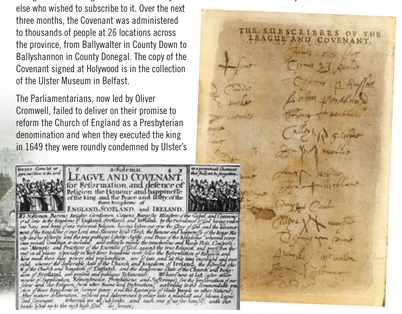
Presbyterians across Ulster looked to the new Presbytery for leadership and spiritual guidance. As kirk sessions were formed and as ministers were appointed to preach in various districts, the Presbyterian Church began to put down deep roots in Ulster.

In response to wider political developments across the three kingdoms, the **Solemn League and Covenant** was prepared in 1643 by Scottish Covenanters and English Parliamentarians. In return for a promise to reform the Church in England and Ireland along presbyterian lines the Scots agreed to provide military support to the Parliamentarians in their conflict with Charles I.

In April 1644 orders were issued from Scotland that the Solemn League and Covenant should be administered to the Scottish army where it was garrisoned throughout Ulster and to anyone else who wished to subscribe to it. Over the next three months, the Covenant was administered to thousands of people at 26 locations across the province, from Ballywalter in County Down to Ballyshannon in County Donegal. The copy of the Covenant signed at Holywood is in the collection of the Ulster Museum in Belfast.

The Parliamentarians, now led by Oliver Cromwell, failed to deliver on their promise to reform the Church of England as a Presbyterian denomination and when they executed the king in 1649 they were roundly condemned by Ulster's Presbyterians. Despite its uneasy and at times fractious relationship with the Cromwellians, the Presbyterian Church continued to grow during the 1650s and many more ministers from Scotland moved to the north of Ireland.

During this decade the structures of the Presbyterian Church developed further with the creation of a number of regional 'meetings', such as the Route in north Antrim and the Laggan in the Foyle Valley. In 1659, at Ballymena, County Antrim, Presbyterians gathered for what has been described as the first synod in Ireland.



Signatories to the Covenant signed in Holywood in 1644

The Solemn League and Covenant

4 THE LATE 17TH CENTURY

Following the Restoration of 1660, ministers who refused to conform to the teachings and episcopal authority of the newly reinstated Church of Ireland were dismissed. One virulent opponent of the Presbyterian ministers was Bishop Jeremy Taylor of Down and Connor who in one day declared vacant 36 parishes in counties Antrim and Down.

In the years that followed there was considerable state hostility towards Presbyterians and at different times ministers were arrested and imprisoned. One particularly notorious incident followed the discovery in 1663 of a conspiracy by **Captain Thomas Blood** to seize Dublin Castle. Around 20 Presbyterian ministers were arrested on suspicion of complicity in this plot, but all were eventually released with the exception of Blood's brother-in-law, **Rev. William Lecky**, who was executed.

In 1684, during another difficult period for Presbyterians, some ministers in County Donegal considered emigrating to America to escape persecution, but in the end did not go ahead with this. Despite these difficulties, Presbyterians continued to form congregations and, having been excluded from parish churches, began to build their own meeting houses.

Many Ulster Presbyterians fought for the Williamite cause at Derry, the Boyne and elsewhere. On 19 June 1690, King William III, while at Hillsborough, issued a proclamation that **Rev. James Porter** of Greyabbey, the only ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church to be put to death in what was widely regarded as a miscarriage of justice. One of the last to be hanged was the most famous Ulster rebel of them all, **Henry Joy McCracken**, a member of the Third Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast.

The aftermath of the Williamite war saw a new influx of thousands of Scots into the north of Ireland, encouraged by harvest crises in their native land and the prospect of new opportunities in Ulster. Around 1700 William King, the bishop of Derry, observed that due to a fresh wave of migration from Scotland, 'the dissenters measure mightily in the north'. By this time Presbyterians comprised a majority of Protestants in Ulster.



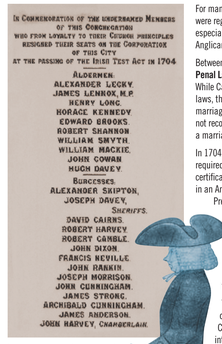
St Columb's Cathedral, Derry, was used by Anglicans and Presbyterians during the Siege of 1689



Plaque at Hillsborough Fort commemorating King William's restoration of the *regium donum* in 1690

5 THE 18TH CENTURY

The prospects for Presbyterians in Ulster at the beginning of the 1690s seemed good. However, very quickly it was apparent that Presbyterians would continue to be denied full access to civil power and the enjoyment of religious freedom. The state church continued to be the Church of Ireland which remained hostile to Presbyterianism.



Inscription on tablet in vestibule of First Derry Presbyterian Church

For many members of the establishment, Presbyterians were regarded as more of a threat than Catholics, especially because of their numerical superiority over Anglicans in Ulster.

Between 1695 and 1728 legislation known as the **Penal Laws** was passed in the Irish Parliament. While Catholics were the principal targets of these laws, they also affected Presbyterians. For example, marriages conducted by a Presbyterian minister were not recognised by the state and children born of such a marriage were regarded as illegitimate.

In 1704 the **Test Act** was introduced in Ireland which required those holding public office to produce a certificate stating that they had received communion in an Anglican church. This effectively disbarred Presbyterians from participation in local government. In 1719, with the passing of the **Toleration Act**, Presbyterians were granted official recognition. Nonetheless, with the levers of power still firmly in the hands of an Anglican elite, and with other restrictions still in force, they continued to feel estranged from the state.



Rev. John Thomson, minister of Carnmoney Presbyterian Church from 1767 to 1828

The relationship with the state was only one of the issues confronting the Presbyterian Church in this period. For the first time a serious internal dispute threatened the unity of the Church. The subscription controversy is looked at in more detail in panel 7.

The Church also faced the challenge of two alternative versions of Presbyterianism in the form of the **Covenanters** and the **Seceders** (see panels 6 and 8). Nonetheless, the Church maintained its position as the dominant Presbyterian denomination on this island.

6 THE COVENANTERS

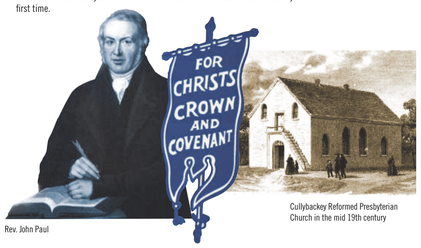
By the 1680s a majority of Presbyterians had come to a position on the Covenants of 1638 and 1643 which could be described as 'respectful remembrance'. That is, they believed that the Covenants had been important documents, but were no longer perpetually binding on them and their descendants.

On the other hand, a minority of Presbyterians continued to believe in the continuing obligation of the Covenants and from them today's Covenanters or **Reformed Presbyterians** descend.

Of the early history of the Covenanters in Ireland very little is known, save that their numbers were small and that they were widely scattered. They maintained close links with fellow Covenanters in Scotland where a Reformed Presbytery was formed in 1743. The first Reformed Presbyterian minister, **Rev. William Martin**, was ordained at The Vow on the River Bann, near Ballymoney, in 1757. Six years later an **Irish Reformed Presbytery** was established. Due to a depleted ministry this was dissolved in 1779, but was re-established in 1792. In 1811, at Cullybackey, County Antrim, a Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church met for the first time.

The 1830s was a decade of dissension within the Reformed Presbyterian Church over issues relating to the denomination's historic position on political dissent and in particular on the powers of the civil magistrate. Eventually, led by **Rev. John Paul** of Loughmourne, County Antrim, those who challenged the accepted view withdrew from the main body of the Church in 1840 and formed the **Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church**. This denomination folded in the early 20th century with most congregations either joining the Presbyterian Church or returning to the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Today there are some 40 congregations, societies and fellowships in the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland with several new causes established in recent years.



Rev. John Paul

Cullybackey Reformed Presbyterian Church in the mid 19th century

7 THE NON-SUBSCRIBERS

In the early 18th century there occurred the first major dispute within Irish Presbyterianism. This was over the issue of subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith which had been made compulsory on all ministers by the Synod of Ulster. Led by **Rev. John Abernethy** of Antrim, those who denied the necessity of subscribing to this work were known as 'New Lights' or 'Non-Subscribers'.

Failing to reach a consensus on the issue, in 1725 the Synod of Ulster placed those who took this stance in the **Presbytery of Antrim** (this did not mean that all of the congregations were in County Antrim). In the following year the Synod voted to exclude the Presbytery of Antrim from the courts of the church.

A century later the issue of subscription again arose and was exacerbated by the division on the issue by conservative and liberal elements within the Synod, the former favouring compulsory subscription. Eventually this led to the withdrawal from the Synod of Ulster of seventeen ministers, led by **Rev. Henry Montgomery** of Dunmurry, and the formation of the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster in 1830, which held its first annual meeting in Belfast in May of that year. In 1835 the Remonstrant Synod, the Presbytery of Antrim and the Synod of Munster came together to form the **Association of Irish Non-Subscribing Presbyterians**.

In 1910 the **General Synod of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church** was formed by the Presbytery of Antrim and Remonstrant Synod. In the 1930s the Synod of Munster also joined this body. Today the 34 congregations of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church are found exclusively in counties Antrim and Down, with the exception of the congregations in Cork and Dublin. The denomination has as its motto, 'Faith guided by reason and conscience'.



Memorial to Rev. Henry Montgomery, Dunmurry Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church

Rev. John Abernethy

8 THE SECEDERS

Following a dispute in the Church of Scotland over the issue of patronage and concerns about doctrinal laxity, a number of ministers seceded (hence their appellation Seceders) in 1733 and formed the Associate Presbytery. The conservative evangelicalism of the Seceders appealed to many Presbyterians in Ulster and from the 1740s onwards Seceder congregations were established here.

As a general rule, it would appear that it was in those areas most strongly affected by the influx of families from Scotland in the years either side of 1700 that the Seceders made the greatest impact.

The first Seceder congregation in Ireland was at **Lylehill**, County Antrim. In 1741 Presbyterians in this district appealed to the Associate Presbytery in Scotland to send them preachers. Occasional preaching supplies were provided for several years before **Isaac Patton**, a native of Myroe, near Limavady, County Londonderry, was ordained their minister in 1746.

The Seceders in Scotland divided over the issue of the Burgess Oath, giving rise to the Burghers and Antiburghers. Though this division had little relevance to Ireland, nonetheless, the Seceders here separated into the two camps. The Burghers established a Synod in 1779 in Monaghan and the Antiburghers did so in 1788 in Belfast.

A growing realisation that what they held in common was far greater than what divided them led to the Burghers and Antiburghers coming together to form the Secession Synod at Cookstown in 1818. In 1840 the great majority of Seceder congregations joined with the Synod of Ulster in forming the **General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.** A few Seceder congregations remained outside of this body, but in time most joined the General Assembly, though a few joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church.



Lylehill Presbyterian Church



Tombstone at Hillsborough to Rev. James Hume, one of the earliest Seceder ministers in Ireland

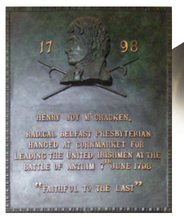
9 PRESBYTERIANS AND THE 1798 REBELLION

The distinguished historian A.T. Q. Stewart famously observed, 'The Presbyterian is happiest when he is being a radical.' Political radicalism was never more obvious than in the 1790s when Presbyterians were instrumental in the creation of the United Irishmen and were heavily involved in the revolutionary activities that led to the 1798 Rebellion.

Influenced by the American and French Revolutions the **Society of United Irishmen** was founded in Belfast in 1791 by a group of Presbyterians led by **Dr William Drennan**, son of a former minister of the First Presbyterian Congregation in the town. Soon afterwards clubs were founded in Dublin and a number of other places. The aims of the Society were parliamentary reform and the elimination of English interference in Irish matters. After efforts to suppress it, the Society reorganised itself as a secret organisation and began to prepare for rebellion.

Following a failed French expedition in December 1796, the repressive measures taken by the government in 1797 severely weakened the United Irishmen in Ulster. Rebellion began in Leinster in late May 1798. On the night of 6-7 June it spread to Ulster when a party of United Irishmen advanced into Larne and forced a contingent of government troops back to their barracks. Soon afterwards Ballymena and Randalstown were taken, but at Antrim Town the rebels were defeated.

In County Down following an initial victory at Saintfield, the rebels were roundly defeated at nearby Ballynahinch on 11 June and the rebellion in Ulster was all but finished. There followed a series of executions including that of **Rev. James Porter** of Greyabbey, the only ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church to be put to death in what was widely regarded as a miscarriage of justice. One of the last to be hanged was the most famous Ulster rebel of them all, **Henry Joy McCracken**, a member of the Third Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast.



Plaque to Henry Joy McCracken, Masonic Hall, Rosemary St, Belfast



Rev. James Porter

10 PRESBYTERIANISM IN THE 1800S

The 19th century was a period of expansion for the Presbyterianism in Ireland with hundreds of new congregations formed, partly in response to the rise in the population in the early 1800s, and also to the expansion of urban centres. This can be seen clearly in the rapidly-expanding industrial city of Belfast where between 1850 and 1900 the Presbyterian population quadrupled, while the number of congregations rose from 15 to 47.

The withdrawal of the liberals in the late 1820s helped to clear the way for the union of the Synod of Ulster and the Secession Synod. In 1840 the ruling bodies of these two denominations came together to form the General Assembly that comprised nearly 450 congregations and some 650,000 members.

The 19th century saw the Presbyterian Church in Ireland establish overseas missions. In 1840 the General Assembly commissioned **Rev. James Glasgow** and **Rev. Alexander Kerr** to go as missionaries to India. Many others would follow as other missions were established in China as well as missions to the Jews and Colonial and Commonwealth missions.

One of the most dramatic events in Irish religious history was the **1859 Revival**. A spiritual awakening, of a depth and power that had never been experienced before, spread through Ulster at a remarkable pace. While the Revival affected Protestants from all denominations, it was particularly associated with the Presbyterian Church.

The position of Presbyterians within wider society was also improving. Most Presbyterians became reconciled to the reality of the union with Britain and were liberal in their political outlook. They welcomed the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland (which also saw the ending of the *regium donum*) and the land reforms that benefitted farmers introduced by the Liberal government at Westminster led by W. E. Gladstone. However, from 1886 onwards Presbyterians overwhelmingly rejected Gladstone's proposals for Home Rule which proposed a devolved parliament in Dublin.



Statue of Rev. Dr Henry Cooke, the self-styled 'champion of orthodoxy', College Square East, Belfast

Detail from the masthead of the Presbyterian newspaper *Banner of Ulster*, 1847

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND

Established in 1956, the Ulster Historical Foundation's mission is to tell the story of the people of the nine counties of the historic province of Ulster. It achieves this through a comprehensive range of professional research, publishing and heritage services. The Foundation is located in the Cora Delargie, 21 Gordon Street, Belfast, where it maintains a library and genealogical and historical research centre. Each year the Foundation conducts an annual lecture tour in North America and organises family history conferences in Ireland, combining opportunities for research in archives with visits to places of historic interest.

www.ancestryireland.com

The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland was founded in 1907. The Society's aims are to preserve and promote the history of the churches of the Presbyterian order in Ireland – the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. The Society maintains a library and archive at 26 College Green, Belfast, and welcomes members and visitors to consult its resources. It also organises outing, and publishes materials relating to the history of Irish Presbyterianism in print and online.

www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com

An independent people is a highly acclaimed three-part series that looks at the story of Ulster's Presbyterians over the last four centuries. Presented by William Crawley, the series was originally commissioned and broadcast by BBC Northern Ireland television.



It has been released on DVD by Authentic Ulster and copies are available from the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland and the Ulster Historical Foundation.

11 PRESBYTERIANISM SINCE 1900

Presbyterians entered the twentieth century with confidence, a clear sense of purpose, and with a pride in their contribution to the modernising of Ulster as well as a strong awareness of their Scottish roots. This was symbolised in the opening of a new headquarters for the Presbyterian Church – the magnificent **Assembly Buildings** – in Belfast in 1905.

During the third Home Rule crisis of 1910–14, unionists drew on the 17th-century Scottish covenants in formulating a document – the **Ulster Covenant** – that would express their deep opposition to proposed changes to their position within the United Kingdom.

The partition of Ireland in 1921 was viewed by Presbyterians as a 'regrettable necessity'. While most Presbyterians now found themselves within the new state of Northern Ireland, a significant minority in the border counties of Ulster and in other parts of the island – some 50,000 – were in the Irish Free State, the forerunner of the Republic of Ireland.

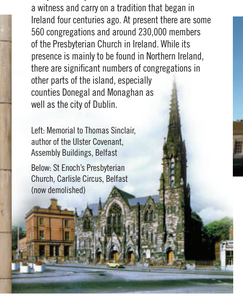
The recent 'Troubles' was a period of intense trial for many Presbyterians. Many Presbyterians died as a result of terrorist atrocities during the conflict and many more were injured.

In the 21st century the Presbyterian Church faces the major challenge of secularism and the increasing disinterest in matters of religion. A number of congregations, especially in inner city Belfast and on the west bank of the River Foyle in Londonderry, have folded, while others are at risk of closure. Nonetheless, in other areas new congregations have been established and existing causes revitalised.

Today the Presbyterian Church continues to maintain a witness and carry on a tradition that began in Ireland four centuries ago. At present there are some 560 congregations and around 230,000 members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. While its presence is mainly to be found in Northern Ireland, there are significant numbers of congregations in other parts of the island, especially counties Donegal and Monaghan as well as the city of Dublin.



Left: Memorial to Thomas Sinclair, author of the Ulster Covenant, Assembly Buildings, Belfast



Below: St Enoch's Presbyterian Church, Carlisle Circus, Belfast (now demolished)

12 PRESBYTERIAN PLACES OF WORSHIP

It was not until the second half of the 17th century that Presbyterians in Ireland began to build their own places of worship. (Prior to this they met in the parish churches of the Established Church.) To begin with Presbyterian meeting houses were built in less conspicuous rural areas or on the edge of towns.

Lacking wealthy patrons, most Presbyterian congregations did not build architecturally distinguished meeting houses. Rather in their design and configuration these places of worship reflected the Presbyterian emphasis on preaching and the need for everyone to hear the message.

The typical 18th-century Presbyterian meeting house was built on the T-plan with the pulpit in the centre of the long wall. If extra room was needed galleries would be added with access to them usually via external staircases. More innovative designs can be seen in the **First Presbyterian Church, Belfast**, and the **Old Congregation, Randalstown**, County Antrim, which are elliptical in plan.

In the 18th and early 19th century the preference for Classicism was a reflection of stylistic influences from Scotland and the rejection of the Gothic of both the Roman Catholic Church and Church of Ireland. Good examples of Classical churches include **May Street, Belfast**, constructed for Rev. Dr Henry Cooke; **Castlereagh**, the first Presbyterian church to be built with a belfry; and **Portaferry**, regarded as one of the finest Neoclassical buildings in Ireland.

Gothic architecture, for long eschewed by Presbyterians, became increasingly popular during the Victorian period and was the preferred style for many new churches built in the second half of the 1800s, e.g. **Fitzroy** and **Fortwilliam** in Belfast. In recent decades a variety of modern styles have been employed on new church buildings, many of which were built in response to new works starting in post-war housing developments.



Portaferry Presbyterian Church (1841)



Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena (2009)



Old Congregation, Randalstown (1790)

13 EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CONCERNS

The Presbyterian Churches have always placed a high premium on education, not only in terms of an educated ministry, but also in having a literate membership. Many Presbyterian ministers organised their own schools. One of the earliest of these was the school established by **Rev. James McAlpine** at Killyleagh, County Down, in 1697 where **Rev. Francis Hutcheson**, later Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, received some of his early education.

In the second half of the 18th century notable academies were found at **Rademon**, County Down, by **Rev. Moses Neilson** and at **Strabane**, County Tyrone, by **Rev. William Crawford**. The driving force behind the opening of **Belfast Academy** in 1786 was a Scotsman, **Rev. Dr James Crombie**, minister of the First Presbyterian Congregation, who wanted to establish a school along the lines of a Scottish collegiate institution.

Prior to the 19th century the overwhelming majority of Presbyterian ministers received their university education in Scotland, for the most part in Glasgow. However, the opening in 1815 of **Belfast Academical Institution** with its collegiate department meant that it was now possible for Presbyterians to receive a higher education without having to travel to Scotland. Later in the 19th century **Assembly's College** was founded to train ministers for the Presbyterian Church, while **Magee College** in Londonderry, founded through the generous bequest of the widow of a Presbyterian minister, offered courses in arts and divinity.

In the 19th century many Presbyterians became actively involved in ventures designed to promote moral improvements in society and reach out to the unchurched. These included the Temperance movement, championed by such figures as **Rev. Dr John Edgar** in Belfast and **Anne Jane Carlile**, the subject of a blue plaque at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Bailieborough, County Cavan. Organisations founded by Presbyterians, or with which they became actively involved, included the Presbyterian Orphan Society (now the Children's Society) and the Belfast Town (later City) Mission.



Anne Jane Carlile



Royal Belfast Academical Institution

Hutcheson blue plaque, Saintfield

14 ULSTER PRESBYTERIANS WORLDWIDE

For more than three centuries Presbyterians from Ulster have been carrying their faith across the globe – to North America, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere – and have founded many congregations and built numerous places of worship.

Emigration to North America by Ulster Presbyterians began in the late 17th century. Immigrants from Ulster made a huge contribution towards the development of Presbyterianism in America, none more so than the Donegal-born **Rev. Francis Makemie** who sailed across the Atlantic in 1683. His pioneering ministry earned him the title, 'Father of American Presbyterianism'.

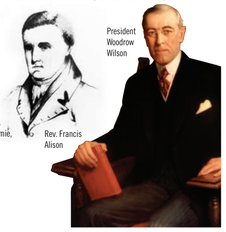
Presbyterian ministers have been key drivers of emigration from Ulster. In 1718 **Rev. James McGregor** of Aghadowey in the Bann Valley led part of his congregation to New England, as did **Rev. James Woodside** of Dunboe. In 1764 **Rev. Thomas Clark** of Cahans, County Monaghan, led 300 Presbyterians to America, while in 1772 **Rev. William Martin** led a major exodus of Covenanter families, mainly from County Antrim, to South Carolina.



Statue of Rev. Francis Makemie, Philadelphia

Regarded as the man who introduced the Scottish Enlightenment to America, **Rev. Francis Alison** was born into a family of relatively modest means at Leck, County Donegal, in 1705. Several of his students would go on to sign the Declaration of Independence. Around the time of the 1798 Rebellion a number of Presbyterian ministers and probationers withdrew to America on account of their support for the United Irishmen. They included **David Bailie Warden** from Bangor who went on to serve as US Consul at Paris.

More than a dozen of the descendants of Ulster Presbyterian migrants succeeded to the presidency of the United States, among them **Andrew Jackson, James Buchanan** and **Woodrow Wilson**. One of the most highly regarded presidents, Wilson was born in the Presbyterian manse in Staunton, Virginia, and grew up very conscious of his heritage. He once said, 'The stern Covenanter tradition that is behind me sends many an echo down the years.'



President Woodrow Wilson
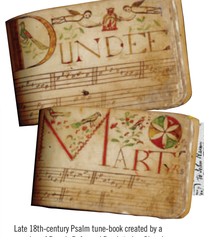
Rev. Francis Alison

15 TRACING PRESBYTERIAN ANCESTORS

Today an ever increasing number of people from around the world are interested in finding out more about their Ulster Presbyterian ancestors. The same challenges that face those researching Irish ancestors in general also apply to those looking specifically for Presbyterian forebears.

Though there are some **registers of baptisms and marriages** (Presbyterian congregations generally did not keep registers of burials/deaths prior to the 20th century) dating from as far back as the late 17th century, most Presbyterian registers survive from the 19th century.

The various levels of church government within the Presbyterian denominations have also created records of use to genealogists. At congregational level the records include **session books** which cover a range of matters, many of which relate to the internal discipline of members. They can also refer to the issuing of transfer certificates to members leaving a congregation, often because they were emigrating overseas.

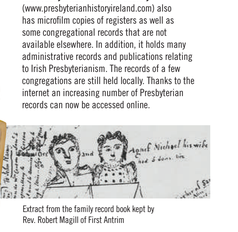


Late 18th-century Psalm tune-book created by a member of Bready Reformed Presbyterian Church

The **financial records** of a congregation range from stipend lists (the stipend being the minister's salary) to pew rent books and account books. **Communicants' lists** were also kept and these can be annotated with additional information, such as when a communicant married, emigrated or died. Occasionally there may be a **congregational census.**

The **Public Record Office of Northern Ireland** (www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni) has registers of baptisms and marriages for the great majority of congregations of the different Presbyterian denominations in the province of Ulster. Usually these records are available on microfilm, though there are some originals.

The **Presbyterian Historical Society** (www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com) also has microfilm copies of registers as well as some congregational records that are not available elsewhere. In addition, it holds many administrative records and publications relating to Irish Presbyterianism. The records of a few congregations are still held locally. Thanks to the internet an increasing number of Presbyterian records can now be accessed online.



Extract from the family record book kept by Rev. Robert Magill of First Antrim

THE PRESBYTERIANS IN ULSTER

HERITAGE TRAIL



1. AGHADOWEY, COUNTY LONDONDERRY

The congregation of Aghadowey dates back to the 1650s. In 1701 Rev. James McGregor was ordained minister. In 1718 he led part of his congregation to New England in what is considered to be the first organised migration from Ulster to the New World. McGregor and many of those who travelled with him settled in New Hampshire, founding a town they renamed Londonderry. In 2014 a blue plaque was placed on Aghadowey Presbyterian Church in memory of McGregor.

Image: Aghadowey Presbyterian Church



2. ANTRIM, COUNTY ANTRIM

Though more of a Puritan than a Presbyterian, Rev. John Ridge, an Englishman who was the first Protestant minister in the parish of Antrim, worked closely with neighbouring Presbyterian ministers and was held in high regard by them. He was actively involved in the Six Mile Water Revival of the late 1620s/early 1630s. Arising out of the Revival, Ridge organised what became known as the 'Antrim Meeting'. Presbyterian ministers in Ulster were invited to this meeting which has been likened to a presbytery.

Image: The Six Mile Water in Antrim Castle Gardens



3. BALLYCARRY, COUNTY ANTRIM

In 1613 Rev. Edward Brice moved from Drymen in Stirlingshire to the parish of Templecorran, where a Scottish settlement had been established by the Edmonstones. Brice is considered to be the first Presbyterian minister in Ireland. He was deposed in 1636 on account of his Presbyterianism and died shortly afterwards. A memorial to him and other members of his family survives within the walls of the ruined church in which he once preached in the village of Ballycarry.

Image: The ruins of Templecorran church



4. BANGOR, COUNTY DOWN

In 1623 Rev. Robert Blair, who had previously been regent of Glasgow University, became minister of Bangor. In 1636, having been deposed by the authorities due to his Presbyterianism, he was one of the organisers of an unsuccessful attempt to establish a colony of Ulster-Scots Presbyterians in America, after which he returned to Scotland. His autobiography provides a valuable record of early Presbyterianism in Ireland. Inside Bangor Abbey is a memorial to his first wife, Beatrix Hamilton (d. 1633).

Image: Bangor Abbey



5. BELFAST: ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS

Assembly Buildings in Fisherwick Place, the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, was opened in 1905, having cost over £70,000 to construct. The General Assembly meets here in June of each year. The crown spire was designed in imitation of St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh. Other interesting features include the 'Carrickfergus Window', which commemorates the formation of the first presbytery in Ireland in 1642, and the window and memorial to Thomas Sinclair (d. 1914), the leading Presbyterian layman of his day.



6. BELFAST: BALMORAL CEMETERY

Following an incident in which a funeral conducted by two Presbyterian ministers was obstructed by a Church of Ireland rector, a number of Presbyterians decided to establish a burial ground of their own. A site was acquired at Balmoral and the new cemetery opened in 1855. Many of Belfast's leading Presbyterians during the Victorian period were buried here, including Rev. Henry Cooke and one of the first missionaries sent by the Presbyterian Church to India, Rev. James Glasgow.

Image: The entrance to Balmoral Cemetery



7. BELFAST: MAY ST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A new church in May Street was built in 1829 for Rev. Henry Cooke, 'the champion of orthodoxy' who had led the campaign against the liberals in the Synod of Ulster. With its fine Ionic portico, the church is a striking example of Classicism applied to a Presbyterian place of worship. This church was the venue for the last gathering of the Synod of Ulster prior to the formation of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1840.



8. BELFAST: FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Of the three Presbyterian churches that once stood in Rosemary Street, this is the only one to survive. It is believed that Presbyterians began to meet for worship on this site some time before the end of the 17th century. Designed by Roger Mulholland, the present building, with its distinctive elliptical plan, was erected in 1783 and is without doubt the finest 18th-century Presbyterian place of worship in Ireland. The ornate interior features monuments to some of Belfast's leading citizens.



9. BELFAST: SINCLAIR SEAMEN'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

This congregation developed from the work of the Seamen's Friend Society in the port of Belfast. Following the death in 1856 of John Sinclair, a wealthy Belfast merchant, his widow and brother Thomas decided to donate £1,000 towards the building of a meeting house for the congregation. Members of the Sinclair family were active in the church for many years. The interior of the church is well known for its many nautical features, including a pulpit shaped like a ship's prow.

Image: Corporation Square, showing the church and Harbour Office



10. BELFAST: UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Designed by Charles Lanyon, the Presbyterian College – also known as Assembly's College – opened in 1853 as an institution training candidates for the ministry. From 1921 to 1932 it was the home of the new Northern Ireland Parliament. The college's Gamble Library has an outstanding collection of books, pamphlets and manuscripts relating to the story of Irish Presbyterianism. The present name of the college was acquired in 1978 after the merger with the theological department of Magee College in Derry.



11. CAHANS, COUNTY MONAGHAN

Cahans Presbyterian Church was established in the mid 1700s, and was originally a Secession congregation. The first minister, Rev. Thomas Clark, a native of Paisley, Scotland, was ordained in 1751. Thirteen years later he led 300 Presbyterians, many of them members of his own congregation, to New York. In 1972 Cahans amalgamated with First Ballybay. The former meeting house has been restored. A blue plaque commemorating Victoria Cross winner David Nelson was placed on the church in 2014.

Image: The old Cahans meeting house



12. CARRICKFERGUS, COUNTY ANTRIM

Carrickfergus was the location of the inaugural meeting of the presbytery formed by five of the chaplains in the Scottish army sent to Ireland in April 1642 and four elders drawn from the regiments that had formed kirk sessions. St Nicholas's Church was the probable venue for this meeting, held on 10 June 1642, and which, in an institutional sense, is considered the birth of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The memorial commemorating this event was recently re-erected beside Joymount Presbyterian Church.

Image: The 1642 Presbytery Memorial



13. CONNOR, COUNTY ANTRIM

Connor was one of the centres of the 1859 Revival – the place where it all began in the view of many. The congregation's minister at this time, Rev. John Hamilton Moore, has been described as 'the friend, guide and encourager of the great Ulster awakening of 1859'. The substantial increase in the numbers of people attending the meeting house eventually led to the formation of a new congregation in neighbouring Kells in 1873.

Image: Connor Presbyterian Church



14. DUNMURRY, COUNTY ANTRIM

The congregation of Dunmurry was founded in the late 17th century. In the early 1700s the minister, Rev. John Malcome, was involved in the subscription controversies and was the first to use the term 'New Light' in print. The present meeting house dates from 1779 and is a very fine example of an 18th-century Presbyterian place of worship. The most famous minister was Rev. Dr Henry Montgomery who led the congregation out of the Synod of Ulster in 1829.

Image: Dunmurry Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church



15. GREYABBEY, COUNTY DOWN

Though the origins of Presbyterianism in Greyabbey can be traced back to the 1600s, it was not until 1733 that a distinct congregation was formed. In 1787 Rev. James Porter was ordained minister. He was executed in 1798 in the wake of the 1798 Rebellion for his alleged complicity in the insurrection and was buried in the graveyard adjoining the ruins of the former Cistercian abbey. Today there are two Presbyterian congregations in the village: Trinity Presbyterian and the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian.

Image: The abbey ruins



Articlave: led by Rev. James Woodside, a section of the congregation of Dunboe emigrated to New England in 1718

Moyarget: birthplace of Rev. George Hill (1810–1900), minister, librarian and eminent historian

Myroe: birthplace of Isaac Patton (1720–99), first Seceder minister in Ireland

Cullybackey: location of the first meeting of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1811

Ballymena: location of the first Presbyterian synod in Ireland, 1659

Grillagh: birthplace of Rev. Dr Henry Cooke (1788–1868), leading figure in the Presbyterian Church in the 19th century

Leck: birthplace of Rev. Francis Alison (1705–79) who introduced the Scottish Enlightenment to America

Ballindrait: birthplace of Rev. James Porter, minister of Greyabbey, executed in 1798.

Killybegs: Rev. Thomas Wilson ministered here before, in 1681, emigrating to America, the first Presbyterian minister from Ireland to do so

Omagh: meeting house built here *c.* 1720 now in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Cookstown: location of the union of the two branches of the Seceders to form the Secession Synod, 1818

Brigh: birthplace of Rev. John Abernethy (1680–1740), leader of the Non-Subscribers in the early 1700s

Doagh: the first Sunday school in Ireland said to have been founded here *c.* 1770 by William Galt

Lylehill: first Seceder congregation in Ireland, 1740s

Millisle: birthplace of Amy Carmichael (1867–1951), missionary, most associated with Dohnavur, India

Lurgan: birthplace of Martha Magee (d. 1846), whose bequest led to the founding of Magee College, Londonderry

Hillsborough: here, in 1690, William III restored and increased the *regium donum* for Presbyterian ministers

Killyleagh: location of the academy founded by Rev. James McAlpine in 1697

Ahory: Rev. Thomas Campbell (1763–1854) ministered here before emigrating to America and founding what became the Disciples of Christ

Ballygorman: birthplace of Rev. Dr John Hall (d. 1898), minister of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City

Rathfriland: birthplace of Margaret Byers, nee Morrow (1832–1912), founder of Victoria College, Belfast

Enniskillen: first Presbyterian church in Ireland where an organ was used in public worship, 1861

Monaghan: birthplace (approximate) of Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell (1804–95), one of the first Irish Presbyterian missionaries

Aghalurcher: location of tombstone of Rev. James Johnston (d. 1665), one of the first Presbyterian ministers in Fermanagh

Killeshandra The oldest Presbyterian congregation in Cavan, established in the 1670s

Anne Jane Carlile Blue plaque at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Ballieborough, to this leading Temperance reformer

Gortin Presbyterian Church

Crumlin Presbyterian Church

'SCOTS CHURCHES' ACROSS IRELAND

More than 20 Presbyterian churches across Ireland have been referred to as the 'Scots Church' (or Scottish Church, Scotch Church, etc). The reasons for the use of this term include a desire to emphasise doctrinal orthodoxy, the involvement of Scots in the foundation of the congregation, or simply because of the denomination's historic links with Scotland.

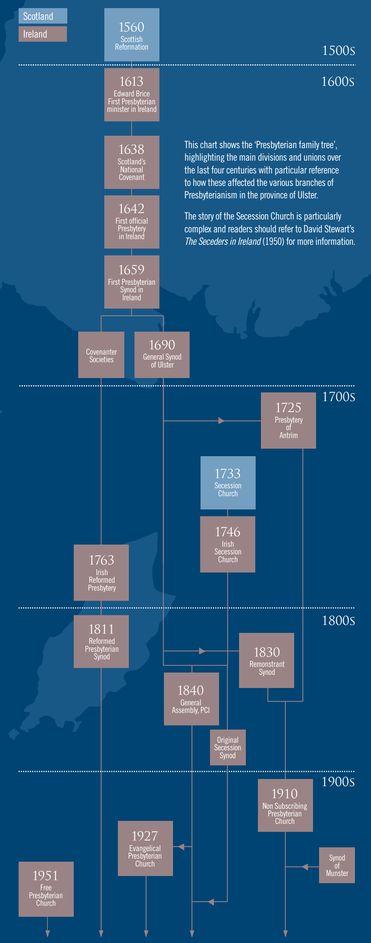
Armagh	Crumlin	Mullingar
Benburb	Dublin	Ramelton
Carlow	Dun	Raphoe
Castlederg	Laoghaire	Richhill
Cavan	Enniskillen	Tipperary
Clonmel	Gortin	Waterford
Cobh	Irvinestown	
Cork	Londonderry	



'Some of our friends came out of Ireland,and dwelt in Stranraer; and at the communions, twice in the year, great numbers used to come – at one time five hundred persons. At one time I baptized twenty-eight children brought out of Ireland'

'LIFE OF MR JOHN LIVINGSTONE' *c.* 1638

PRESBYTERIAN FAMILY TREE 1560–PRESENT



This chart shows the 'Presbyterian family tree', highlighting the main divisions and unions over the last four centuries with particular reference to how these affected the various branches of Presbyterianism in the province of Ulster.

The story of the Secession Church is particularly complex and readers should refer to David Stewart's *The Seceders in Ireland* (1950) for more information.

16. GROOMSPORT, COUNTY DOWN

Now a picturesque seaside village, Groomsport is generally regarded as the place from where the *Eagle Wing* set sail for America in the autumn of 1636 with 140 men, women and children on board. The ship had been built for a group of Presbyterian ministers in Ulster who wanted to emigrate to New England where they hoped to enjoy religious freedom. Frustratingly for them, the ship never made it to America. After eight weeks at sea severe storms forced the ship to return to Ireland.

Image: The harbour and Cockle Row cottages



17. HOLYWOOD, COUNTY DOWN

The first Protestant minister, Rev. Robert Cunningham, settled in Holywood in 1615 and preached in the Priory Church. Because of his Presbyterianism, Cunningham was eventually deposed by the authorities and returned to Scotland. In 1644 year the Solemn League and Covenant was brought to the town where it was signed by the local populace. A copy of this Covenant is on display in the Ulster Museum. A 19th-century minister, Rev. Henry Henderson, wrote a newspaper column under the pseudonym 'Ulster Scot'.

Image: The old priory church



18. KELLSWATER, COUNTY ANTRIM

In the late 1600s, Covenanters living in Mid Antrim met regularly on Ferniskey Hill, south of Kells, where Rev. David Houston preached to them. In 1760 Rev. William Martin based himself in this area and a former mill building by the banks of the Kells Water was converted to a meeting house. Because of its historical importance Kellswater has been described as the 'Capital of Covenanting'. The present building dates from 1806 and retains many of its original features.

Image: Kellswater Reformed Presbyterian Church



19. LONDONDERRY: FIRST DERRY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Following the lifting of the Siege in 1689, Queen Mary gave a generous donation to the Presbyterians of Derry to construct a new meeting house. The present building, erected in the 1770s, stands on this site, the impressive portico was added in 1903. The former Blue Coat School to the rear of the church has been renovated as a visitor centre that tells the story of the many ways in which Presbyterians have contributed to the development of Derry.



20. LONDONDERRY: MAGEE COLLEGE

Magee College was established using the generous bequest of £20,000 by Martha Magee, the widow of Rev. William Magee of Lurgan. It opened in 1865 and offered courses in both arts and theology. Though established as a Presbyterian institution focused on preparing men for the ministry, it accepted students from all backgrounds. In the 20th century the arts and theological departments separated with the former becoming part of what is now Ulster University and the latter merging with Assembly's College, Belfast.



21. MONREAGH, COUNTY DONEGAL

Monreagh Presbyterian Church was the earliest congregation to be formed in County Donegal – over its main door is inscribed the year 1644. The 18th-century meeting house, on the traditional T-plan, contains many of interesting features. Across the road in the former manse is the Monreagh Heritage Centre which tells the story of the area, with a strong emphasis on the history of Presbyterianism in the region, and the links that exist between East Donegal and the wider world.

Image: Monreagh Heritage Centre



22. PEDEN MEMORIAL, COUNTY ANTRIM

Ayrshire-born Rev. Alexander Peden was one of the key figures in the story of the Covenanters in late 17th-century Ireland. He has associations with a number of places in Ulster, where he sought refuge from persecution in Scotland on several occasions, but most especially with the Glenwherry district of County Antrim where in 1682 he lodged with the Steel family. Today a visitor to the site of his former refuge will see a monument commemorating his time there.

Image: Peden memorial, Douglas Road, Glenwherry



23. RADEMON, COUNTY DOWN

The congregation was formed in 1713 and is also known as First Kilmore. The solidly-built, T-plan meeting house is one of the finest examples of a Presbyterian place of worship built in the vernacular style. It was erected in 1787 during the ministry of the Rev. Moses Neilson, a fluent Irish speaker. Neilson established a successful academy at Rademon. His son William also became a Presbyterian minister and was one of the foremost scholars of the Irish language of his day.

Image: Rademon Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church



24. RAMELTON, COUNTY DONEGAL

Ramelton was one of the early centres of Presbyterianism in Donegal. The Solemn League and Covenant was brought here in 1644 and ten years later the first Presbyterian minister was ordained. The Old Meeting House in Ramelton (no longer used as a church), parts of which may date from the end of the 1600s, features a blue plaque to Rev. Francis Makemie, the 'Father of American Presbyterianism', who, after emigrating to the New World in 1683, conducted an influential and pioneering ministry.

Image: The Old Meeting House



25. SAINTFIELD, COUNTY DOWN

A congregation was formed in Saintfield in the 1650s and the first minister was Rev. Alexander Hutcheson. He was the grandfather of the celebrated Francis Hutcheson, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University and widely regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of the modern era. In 2003 a blue plaque in recognition of life and legacy was unveiled at the Guildhall. To the rear of First Saintfield is a Memorial Garden which tells the story of the Battle of Saintfield in 1798.

Image: The Guildhall beside First Saintfield Presbyterian Church

'I perceived the Lord welcomed me to that land. I behoved to stay a little, a mile about Carrickfergus, and, lying upon the grass, to rejoice in the Lord, who was the same in Ireland which he was to me in Scotland.'

REV. ROBERT BLAIR OF BANGOR, 1623

'The large majority of us here today look back to a Scottish ancestry; we cherish the same faith and hold the same doctrines.'

REV. DR HENRY MONTGOMERY, MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ULSTER DAY 1912

'The stronghold of Ulster Protestantism has always been the Presbyterian Church, rooted in the Scottish Reformation and maintaining close and continuous contact with Scotland.'

PROFESSOR T. W. MOODY, TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

'... the Presbyterian system was born in opposition, and its adherents have never been inclined to minimize the sacrifices made for principle.'

DR A. T. Q. STEWART, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONS 1642

Immediately after the first Irish Presbytery was formed in Carrickfergus in June 1642, Presbyterian communities in east Ulster began to look to it for leadership and guidance and sent requests for ministers to preach to them. In response the Presbytery:

... moved that there should be elderships erected with the consent of these congregations, and that by their help a present supply might be procured, and in due time ministers be settled among them. This motion of the Presbytery was very acceptable to these congregations, as appeared by their immediate and earnest address to the Presbytery for ministers to be sent for that effect, which also was readily done by the Presbytery, who sent ministers to divers congregations who were first in a case for elderships ... And, the elderships being erected in these places, there began a little appearance of a formed church in the country.

(Adair's *True Narrative*, p. 96)



SOLEMN LEAGUE & COVENANT 1644

In the spring and early summer of 1644 the Solemn League and Covenant was signed at 26 locations across Ulster. On 25 May 1644 a report was sent to the General Assembly in Scotland that 'the persons of age and standing in these parts, who have already embraced the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms with much zeal and forwardness, are above sixteen thousand'.

The Solemn League and Covenant gave a strong sense of identity to Ulster's Presbyterians and was one of the foundational episodes in the emergence of a distinct Presbyterian denomination.



PRESBYTERIAN MINISTERS EJECTED 1661

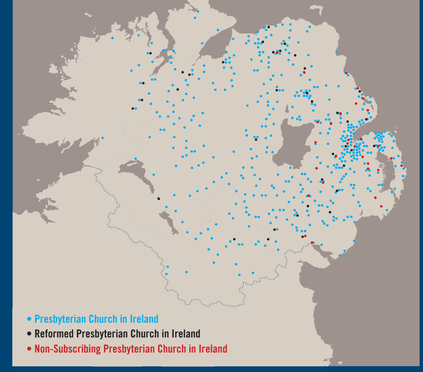
In 1661, following the Restoration, ministers who refused to accept the episcopal form of church government were dismissed. The overwhelming majority of Presbyterian ministers remained true to their convictions and were ejected.



Tablet at Ballyrashane Presbyterian Church recording the forcible removal of Rev. Robert Hogsherd in 1661

CONGREGATIONS TODAY

Today there are over 500 congregations of the three historic Presbyterian denominations in the province of Ulster with several dozen more in other parts of the island.



- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church in Ireland

26. SENTRY HILL, COUNTY ANTRIM

Now in the care of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and open to the public, Sentry Hill was the home of the Presbyterian McKinney family for over 150 years. As the dwelling changed very little in the 20th century, it still has the very strong feel of a Victorian farmhouse. The best known member of the family to live here was William Fee McKinney who created a remarkable collection of photographs depicting rural life in Ulster and was an avid collector of artefacts.



27. SIXMILECROSS, COUNTY TYRONE

The congregation of Sixmilecross was established by the Seceders as early as 1764 and was originally known as Termon. The most famous son of this congregation, as well as its minister from 1916 to 1929, was W. F. Marshall. He was a renowned writer and became a leading authority on Ulster dialect. He was buried at Sixmilecross in the burial ground beside the Presbyterian Church – the 'plain old house of God' – as he referred to it in one of his poems.

Image: Sixmilecross Presbyterian Church



28. ULSTER-AMERICAN FOLK PARK, COUNTY TYRONE

The Ulster-American Folk Park has a number of buildings with Presbyterian associations, including the Mellon Homestead which was the boyhood home of Thomas Mellon who went on to enjoy success in America in law and banking. The 'Meeting House' is a replica of the Presbyterian place of worship at nearby Mountjoy which was attended by the Mellon family. Thomas Mellon remembered that it was a 'venerable old structure built in the shape of a T and roofed with straw thatch'.

Image: The Mellon Homestead



29. ULSTER FOLK AND TRANSPORT MUSEUM, COUNTY DOWN

The Folk Museum opened in 1964 and contains a range of reconstructed buildings from across Ulster. The Presbyterian meeting house originally stood in Omagh, County Tyrone, and was built in the early 18th century during the ministry of Rev. James Maxwell. It was superseded by a new church in the late 19th century, but thankfully was not demolished. Prior to its reconstruction in the museum's fictional village of 'Ballycultra' in 2004, it had been used as a printing works.

Image: The Presbyterian meeting house



30. THE VOW, COUNTY ANTRIM

A ferry crossing point on the River Bann, The Vow, near Ballymoney, was the location of the ordination in 1757 of the first Reformed Presbyterian minister in Ireland, Rev. William Martin. Six years later the inaugural Irish Reformed Presbytery met here. In 1772 Martin led a major exodus of Covenanter families, mainly from County Antrim, to South Carolina. In 2007 a memorial stone was erected close to the old Vow graveyard commemorating Martin's ordination and his subsequent emigration to America.

