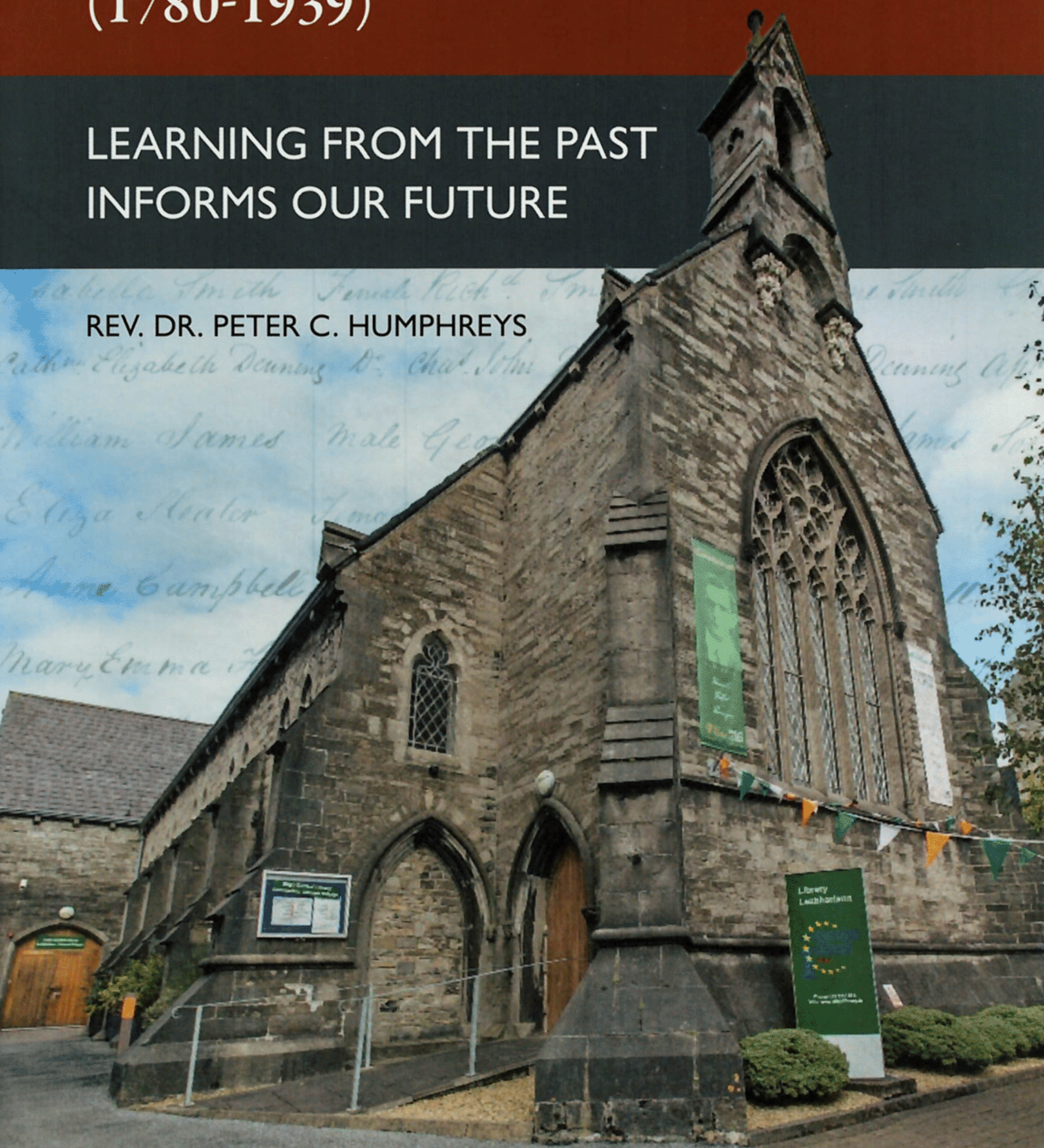


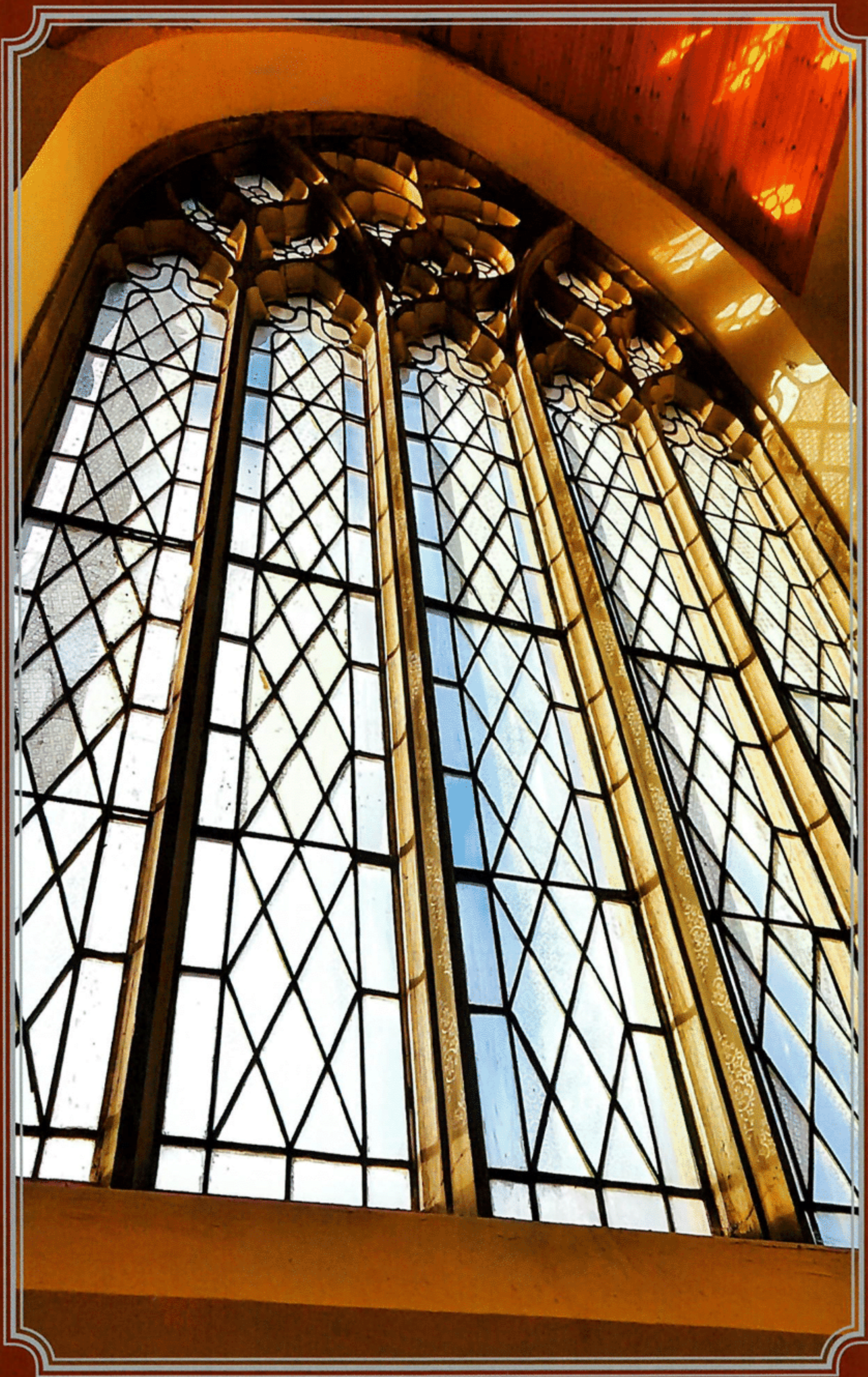
# THE STORY OF SLIGO CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH (1780-1939)

LEARNING FROM THE PAST  
INFORMS OUR FUTURE

REV. DR. PETER C. HUMPHREYS









# LEARNING FROM THE PAST INFORMS OUR FUTURE

A collection of five books and documents related to the Glasgow Free Church. The books include 'The Monthly Record' (open, showing text and a title page for Rev Noble Shepperd), 'Monthly Record' (black cover), 'Authentic Report of the Glasgow Free Church' (orange cover), 'The Bible' (yellow cover), and 'The Glasgow Free Church' (open, showing handwritten text).





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*Photo: Corbel Heads adorning the entrance to the former Sligo Congregational Church, Stephen St, Sligo*



# Foreword

The realisation of this publication which documents the history of a building but of more importance, the history of a Community now lost to Sligo is to be welcomed. In the past when students came to the Library seeking information on the history of the congregation or the building they tended to leave disappointed on discovering that there were no resources or history of either.

A chance meeting over 20 years ago with a member of the church resulted in the acquisition of a priceless archive of material for Sligo Library's local studies collection. The Independent Congregational Church Archive documents the day to day administration of the church and its ministry along with insights into the history of Sligo.

Likewise the recent visit of Rev. Dr Peter C. Humphries to Sligo completed the circle. Dr Humphries, who over the years has written extensively on the history of the Independent Congregational Churches, was approached to undertake the task to write the history of the Sligo Congregational Church utilising the archive collection. He agreed without hesitation.

In Dr Humphries Sligo Library service had secured an author who not only had the empathy and insight of the subject matter but also was able to take the primary sources and distil the information into a readable and accurate history.

I congratulate Rev. Dr. Humphries on his work. I am certain that as the body of local history publications increases over the coming years, many based upon Sligo Library's local studies collection, that with the willingness, ability and effort of local historians to delve into local history primary sources, we will continue to colour in the various pictures of Sligo's past.

**Donal Tinney**

**County Librarian**



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,  
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán  
Department of Tourism, Culture,  
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



# Introduction

This short study of the Congregational Church building in Sligo was written to support the Library staff and enquiring visitors by writing a brief, but hopefully, interesting story of the life of this lovely old building, before it became the County Library some years ago. Because I had previously done a similar study of Kilmainham Congregational Church, in Dublin, and my home city of Liverpool which was published in 2018, I happily offered to sketch out what turned out to be a fascinating story of a small part of Sligo's history which would easily be overlooked.

Often old papers relating to churches, that are no longer with us, are too often thrown away. However, in this case, though incomplete, much valuable archived material is carefully held at the County Library. Of course, with most church records, they are fragmentary, especially in the earlier years, e.g. pre-1850s. I am indebted to the County Library, and especially Dónal Tinney (County Librarian) and Michèle Cashman (Librarian, Local Studies), for their great patience in dealing with my enquiries to piece together a 'living' story. If you would like to find out more, especially with regard to Congregational/Independent churches more generally, do drop me a line at [sligocongregational@gmail.com](mailto:sligocongregational@gmail.com). I have left the details I used in the short bibliography at the end of this booklet, as well as a list of ministers who served Sligo and its cause. I hope you enjoy the story, with my best wishes,

**Peter**

**Rev. Dr. Peter C. Humphreys, B.A. (Hons.), M.A.,  
Ph.D., Lic. Theol., M.Th. (Church History).**

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## Author

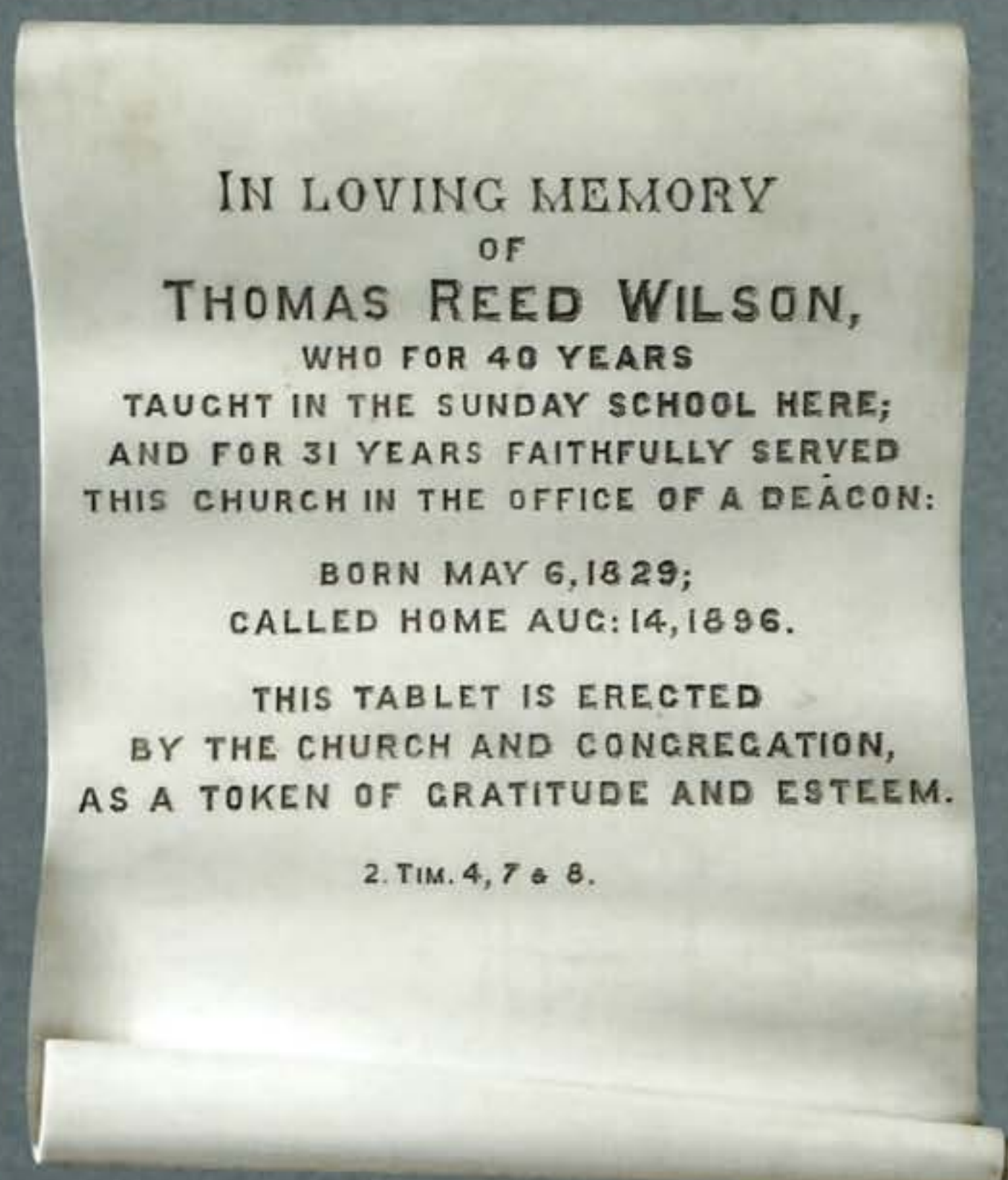
After studying at the Universities of Liverpool, Reading and University College London, as well as over 30 years work as a senior professional researcher for the Irish and British Governments, my career has been foreshortened by a serious, long-term medical condition. Since then though, I have completed undergraduate and postgraduates' degrees in Theology and Church History, with the University of Wales (Lampeter). I am a preacher at, and member of, the Wavertree Congregational Church in Liverpool but have lived in Ireland, with my wife and family, for over 30 years. I was Deputy Pastor at Kilmainham Congregational Church up to its closure. We both now worship locally at Rathgar Methodist Church (Dublin).



Figure 1



Figure 2





# The Story of Sligo Congregational Church (1780-1939)

## LEARNING FROM THE PAST INFORMS OUR FUTURE

How many of us, walking, cycling or driving along Stephen Street today (maybe slowly in a traffic jam!) wonder why the County Library is in what looks like an old church? Perhaps you wonder a bit more, when inside the Library, about the people mentioned on the memorials on the wall; who were they and what was a Congregational Church anyway? Well, if you bear with me in this short story, I will do my best to answer these questions and also to tell you an important part of the social history of Sligo that is not well known.

Going back nearly 400 years, Wood-Martin (1889), in his detailed history of Sligo, tells us that back in 1660, a minister of St. John's Church (Church of Ireland) was evicted from his post because he did not agree with how the church was being run and having to use only the one approved Prayer Book<sup>1</sup>. Some of the congregation followed him but the 'independent church' they formed does not seem to have lived long. Things did, however, take a positive turn with the arrival in Sligo in 1780 of a Scottish linen merchant called Andrew Maiban who decided to begin a simple religious service with a few like-minded folk<sup>2</sup>. He was probably used to such independent churches in Scotland. Such churches are independent of any church hierarchy, quite like the Quakers (Society of Friends), and seek to live to their Christian principles. The efforts of Mr. Maiban bore fruit.

During the early years, a local man named Albert Blest worked very hard to keep the new cause going. Indeed, during the 1798 Rebellion, while the major battle at Collooney resulted in the French diverting away from Sligo, Albert Blest rallied and led the remaining 300 males in the town to form barricades to hold up the feared 'invasion' should it have overcome the regular troops! In those days, I suppose skill with a musket was a useful addition to the duties of the church deacon! A change from mending the roof anyway!! In 1791, there were enough members to find somewhere to meet on Sundays, with the help of funds from a lady called the Countess of Huntingdon<sup>3</sup>.

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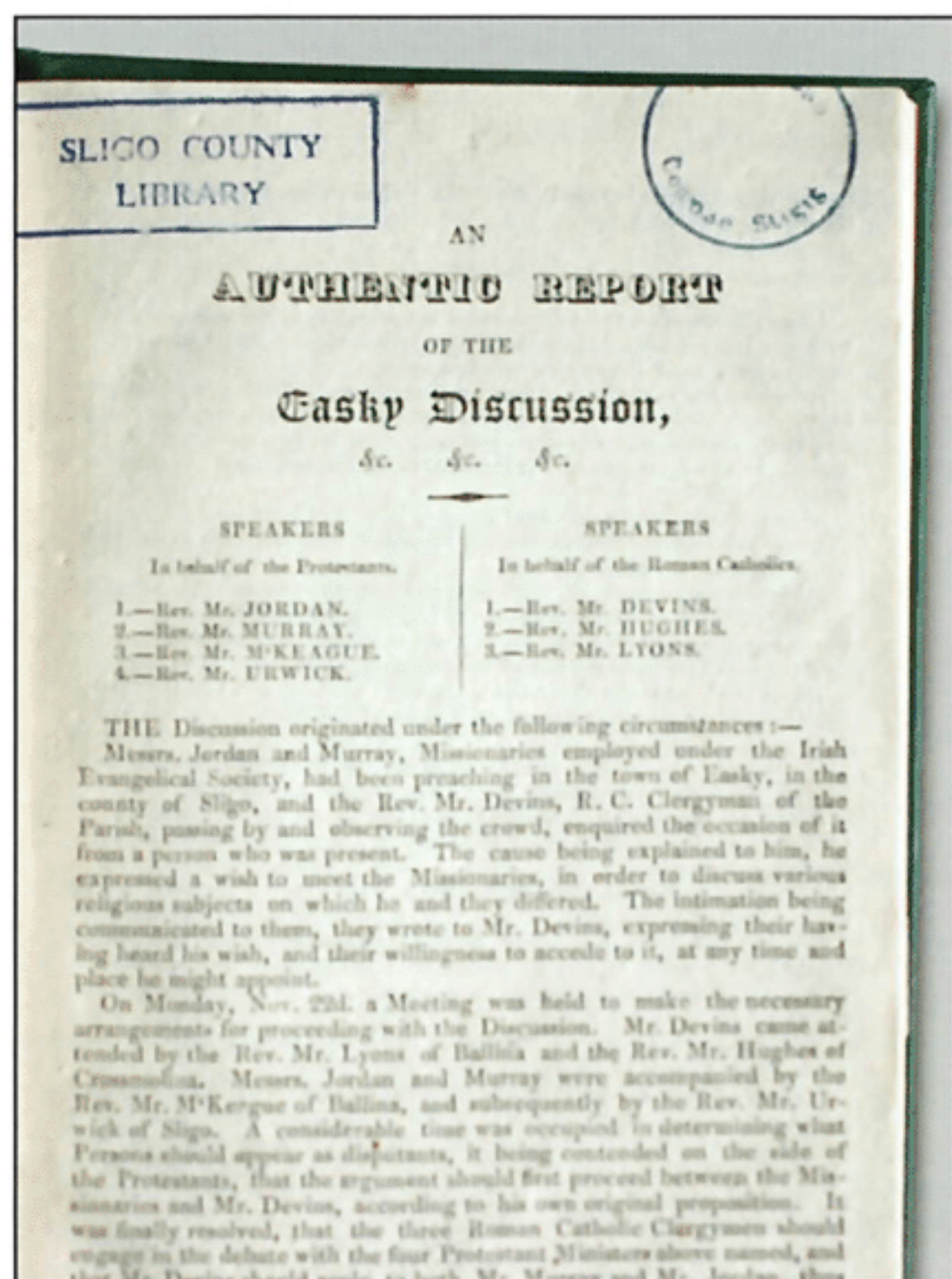
<sup>1</sup> Many ministers were evicted, at this time, from their parishes and became 'Dissenters' or 'Non-conformists'.

<sup>2</sup> At that time, the Independent or Congregational tradition was growing strongly across the Irish Sea as well as in North America, when people came together for Christian worship, they, rather than any 'building,' are the 'church'. A deacon is someone who helps keep the fellowship going. They are elected every five years or so by the congregation.

<sup>3</sup> This lady, whose real name was Selina Hastings, put her life's work into training Methodist and Independent preachers to new causes in England, Ireland and Wales.



The original building was called 'Union Chapel,' it was located on Harmony Hill<sup>4</sup> and could accommodate up to 400 people for worship. Several student pastors came to Sligo but none stayed any length of time, partly because of the apparent 'remoteness' of the location and partly because the small congregation could not see that the students offering to become church pastor had the qualities necessary to make a go of it<sup>5</sup>. In 1801, Rev. Claudius Morrison was appointed, as their first settled preacher, and remained so for ten years, until his health failed. Following Morrison, a preacher was called and accepted, straight out of college. He was to become very-well known throughout Ireland and Britain for many years. He was Rev. William Urwick<sup>6</sup>. In his letters, he speaks of first impressions, and how hazardous the journey was crossing the Menai Straights to Anglesey by small boat and then by a sailing sloop "with but scant accommodation" in heavy winds to Dublin. This was then followed by a two-day journey "across bleak and boggy country" to Sligo. He wasn't though a man easily discouraged because he ministered for 10 years here in Sligo and a further 40 years in Dublin, as minister at York Street (just off Stephen's Green).



When he was ordained as Minister in 1816, "the chapel was crowded to excess. There never was such a thing known in Sligo before." Although described as an 'obscure building', the church provided a basis for many activities and growth. Dr. Urwick was not a man to avoid open and lively discussion. He held a two-day debate with the local Catholic priests in Easky and elsewhere. In truth though, it is difficult to know if such discussions helped or hindered understanding between the two traditions. During Dr Urwick's ministry, two very respected and trusted missionaries, Jeremiah Murray and Thomas Jordon, worked extremely hard, up and down the western coast, often using the Irish language. Understandably

though, there was a real sense of rejection amongst Sligo members when Urwick responded to a call from the York Street Church in Dublin. At that time, York Street was regarded as the premier Congregational Church on the island of Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> See Feehily, Padraic. (2016)

<sup>5</sup> A list of ministers at Sligo Church is given at the end of the booklet.

<sup>6</sup> Together with Urwick, who graduated at the Hoxton Academy (London), were John Burnett (Cork) and Charles Townley (Limerick), who were ordained in the same year.



However, Sligo did not give up and the subsequent ministers, especially Rev. E.H. Noble<sup>7</sup> and then Rev. Noble Shepperd,<sup>8</sup> continued to minister to the church through unforeseen tragedies. Mr. Shepperd had spent the first seven years of his ministry in Newry and that experience was invaluable in the 40 years of ministry he now started at Sligo.

One of the huge tasks that Mr. Sheppard undertook was the raising and distribution of funds across Ireland to relieve suffering caused by potato famine, poverty and fever that went with it. Looking back over the early 19th century, and indeed every century before, Sligo suffered from pestilence, famine and emigration<sup>9</sup>. Its openness as a port may not have helped with sailors coming from many directions. For example, smallpox had ravaged the population in 1816 and 1817. In 1822, the area was hit by a 'pestilence' that debilitated the place. Indeed, potato failures were also frequent, as in 1802, 1812, 1816, 1817 and 1821. However, these events were of little preparation for what was to follow: the absolute horror of the Great Famine in Sligo. Overall, the population of the County fell by a third between 1841 and 1851 from 180,886 to 128,500 from starvation, fever and emigration<sup>10</sup>. Between 1841 and 1851, an estimated 34,190 emigrants sailed from Sligo, often to Canada and to a lesser extent the United States of America (USA). Data from these times have to be treated with a degree of caution but, between 1847 and 1851, 24,557 passengers sailed in 162 vessels from Sligo and adjoining counties. Over the period 1846-1848, a total of nearly £9.5 thousands was collected, from Congregational and other churches, throughout the United Kingdom (UK), for famine relief across the 32 Counties. The funds were sent out from Union Chapel (Sligo) to local churches to distribute according to greatest need.

It is simply impossible to know, with absolute certainty; the extent that all these funds were administered fairly, at local level, but what can be sure is that the efforts of Union Chapel were sincere<sup>11</sup>. Having said that, the many accounts of the behaviour of local landlords, including Lord Palmerston (Cliffoney Estate) and Sir Rupert Gore-Booth (Lissadell Estate), both members of the Church of Ireland, that sought the opportunity to evict tenants in order to exploit their estates more effectively. Victims of such treatment had to endure unspeakable distress, homelessness, poverty and exposure to the spread of malignant fevers.

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<sup>7</sup> Mr. Noble stayed for four years, after graduating from the Dublin Academy, and was very helpful in the immediate post-Urwick years.

<sup>8</sup> You might like to look at the memorial stone on the church/library wall which expresses the gratitude of the congregation for the 40 years of Mr. Shepperd's ministry in 1875. See Fig. 1 p. 5. There is a similar plaque to Thomas Reed Wilson who served as a Sunday school teacher and Deacon for 40 years. See Fig. 2 p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> See Wood-Martin, W.G. (1892).

<sup>10</sup> There are many accounts of the Great Hunger in Ireland. For specifically Sligo centred studies see Wood-Martin, W.G. (1892) and *Cuimhneachán an Ghorta Mhóir: Co. Sligo Commemoration of The Great Irish Famine*: Sligo, July 27, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> There is a wealth of material addressing the issue of 'souperism', which is beyond this small study. Although quite old now, I have always found Bowen (1970) helpful, especially pp. 183-212.



## NAME OF FILM:

NAME OF CHILD	SEX	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE
John Brown	Male	Sept. 18, 1840	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Oct. 1, 1841	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Nov. 1, 1842	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Dec. 1, 1843	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Jan. 1, 1844	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Feb. 1, 1845	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Mar. 1, 1846	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Apr. 1, 1847	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	May 1, 1848	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	June 1, 1849	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	July 1, 1850	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Aug. 1, 1851	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Sept. 1, 1852	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Oct. 1, 1853	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Nov. 1, 1854	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Dec. 1, 1855	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Jan. 1, 1856	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Feb. 1, 1857	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Mar. 1, 1858	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Apr. 1, 1859	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	May 1, 1860	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	June 1, 1861	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	July 1, 1862	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Aug. 1, 1863	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Sept. 1, 1864	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Oct. 1, 1865	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Nov. 1, 1866	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Dec. 1, 1867	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Jan. 1, 1868	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Feb. 1, 1869	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Mar. 1, 1870	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Apr. 1, 1871	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	May 1, 1872	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	June 1, 1873	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	July 1, 1874	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Aug. 1, 1875	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Sept. 1, 1876	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Oct. 1, 1877	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Nov. 1, 1878	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Dec. 1, 1879	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Jan. 1, 1880	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Feb. 1, 1881	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Mar. 1, 1882	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Apr. 1, 1883	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	May 1, 1884	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	June 1, 1885	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	July 1, 1886	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Aug. 1, 1887	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Sept. 1, 1888	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Oct. 1, 1889	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Nov. 1, 1890	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Dec. 1, 1891	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Jan. 1, 1892	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Feb. 1, 1893	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Mar. 1, 1894	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Apr. 1, 1895	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	May 1, 1896	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	June 1, 1897	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	July 1, 1898	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Aug. 1, 1899	Chambersburg
John Brown	Male	Sept. 1, 1900	Chambersburg

2000-2001

NUMBER	DATE	NAME	AMOUNT	REMARKS
1	1890	John Doe	100.00	For rent
2	1891	John Doe	200.00	For rent
3	1892	John Doe	300.00	For rent
4	1893	John Doe	400.00	For rent
5	1894	John Doe	500.00	For rent
6	1895	John Doe	600.00	For rent
7	1896	John Doe	700.00	For rent
8	1897	John Doe	800.00	For rent
9	1898	John Doe	900.00	For rent
10	1899	John Doe	1000.00	For rent

DATE OF REMARKS.	NAME AND SERVICE.	AGE.	EDUCATION.	DATE OF REMARKS.
Oct 2/99	John H. Fitzgerald State Engineer	53	High School & College	1900
		55	Spokane	
Sept 1/99	James H. Davis City Engineer	25	High School & College	1900
		26	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	William H. Davis State Engineer	27	High School & College	1900
		28	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	29	High School & College	1900
		30	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	31	High School & College	1900
		32	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	33	High School & College	1900
		34	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	35	High School & College	1900
		36	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	37	High School & College	1900
		38	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	39	High School & College	1900
		40	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	41	High School & College	1900
		42	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	43	High School & College	1900
		44	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	45	High School & College	1900
		46	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	47	High School & College	1900
		48	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	49	High School & College	1900
		50	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	51	High School & College	1900
		52	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	53	High School & College	1900
		54	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	55	High School & College	1900
		56	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	57	High School & College	1900
		58	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	59	High School & College	1900
		60	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	61	High School & College	1900
		62	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	63	High School & College	1900
		64	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	65	High School & College	1900
		66	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	67	High School & College	1900
		68	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	69	High School & College	1900
		70	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	71	High School & College	1900
		72	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	73	High School & College	1900
		74	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	75	High School & College	1900
		76	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	77	High School & College	1900
		78	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	79	High School & College	1900
		80	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	81	High School & College	1900
		82	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	83	High School & College	1900
		84	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	85	High School & College	1900
		86	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	87	High School & College	1900
		88	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	89	High School & College	1900
		90	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	91	High School & College	1900
		92	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	93	High School & College	1900
		94	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	95	High School & College	1900
		96	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	97	High School & College	1900
		98	Spokane	
Oct 1/99	James H. Davis State Engineer	99	High School & College	1900
		100	Spokane	

... ..

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In reflecting upon the victims of such policies, it must be remembered that, whilst a minority, non-Catholic tenants endured this 'Shoveling Out' treatment too.

On a brighter note, in 1850 under the leadership of Noble Shepperd, the foundation stone was laid for a new church building, rectory and school room here on Stephen Street<sup>12</sup>. This was a new stage in the life of Congregationalists in Sligo<sup>13</sup>. This reflected also the activities of the port, improved buildings in the town for grain, lively markets and so on. A well-built set of buildings, prominently placed on a major road in town; aspirations were high as to the congregation growing. To add to his commitments and support for positive developments in Sligo, "the Rev. Noble Shepperd, Minister of the Congregational Church, Stephen Street, was one of the most prominent library campaigners at the time and ninety years later his very building was to become the final home of the library" (Michael Moran, *Sligo Champion* 05.12.1980, page 20).

In 1859, an Evangelical Revival was especially strong in Ulster but Sligo was also affected. It was a major but inevitable blow, when Mr Shepperd passed away. His contribution was acknowledged by the tablet still evident in the Library (Figure 1). Likewise, there is a wall plaque devoted to Thomas Reed Wilson, who served as Sunday School leader for

<sup>12</sup> In 1846, in Sligo, the church school was converted into a Ragged School, supplying the children with food. After the Great Famine, the school was re-established until the opening of the Model School.

<sup>13</sup> In both Dublin and Liverpool, the period from 1850-1899 was often the most fruitful in the history of Congregationalism (see Humphreys 2015 and 2016).



40 years and 31 years as a Church Deacon (Figure 2). Such voluntary church workers were essential for the continuation of the fellowship and all it did. Between 1868 and 1910, twelve weddings took place, as recorded by the Marriage Register. The Baptismal Register (1852-1906) shows that 90 baptisms took place in the church. The small number of marriages may well, in part at least, reflect the impact of *Ne Temere* (1906), requiring both parties to be married in the Roman Catholic faith and to bring up any children thus.

After a brief vacancy, Rev. James Stirling was appointed in 1875 and kept the cause going well for nine years before moving on to Scotland. In 1881, at the Annual Meeting of the Congregational Union of Ireland, the Rev. John White expressed concern about "The frequent changes and long vacancies in Pastorates ... cause us to lose every year many that, not from choice, but necessity go to other churches". In 1885, Rev. H. E. Bennett was selected and served for a further seven years before moving on to London. Next was Rev. William Newman Hall who served the church well and at difficult times<sup>14</sup>. During Newman Hall's ministry, the church had experienced hostile attacks by 'rowdy mobs', with which the local Constabulary were initially reluctant to engage. Such a mob attacked the church building severely with stones that broke windows, damaged the organ within, as well as the houses of members of the congregation. It was assumed that, because the church had begun to commence street preaching outside, an extreme reaction resulted, from a small number of ruffians. Sligo was not alone in experiencing such hostilities. In the late 1870s onward, there was recorded evidence of hostility growing towards the non-Catholic churches and their people<sup>15</sup>. After serving the Sligo congregation for four years, he moved to the safer surroundings of York Street (Dublin). The duration of ministry by individual preachers began to shorten. In 1897, Rev. W.E. Ireland commenced his ministry but church members had already begun to decline to 41 at the turn of the century. He left to return to England in 1904. The last permanent and committed pastor was the Rev. Gordan MacLachan. He served the fellowship with considerable devotion for 18 years, until he returned to Scotland in 1922. By now, declining numbers had an adverse effect upon church resources. The *Manuscript Records of Income and Expenditure* (1912-1933) record both slowly declining income and pew rents, together with increasing repair needs as the church buildings became significantly older. The records for April 19, 1912 give a good indication of the seemingly never-ending need for resources. These include repairing gas pipe, timing the organ, work in the manse, Poor Rates, Fire Insurance, Employers Liability, the Borough Rate, Waste

<sup>14</sup> Newman Hall eventually moved on to serve York Street (Dublin) as pastor.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. Hall repeated the basic Constitution of Congregationalism, in efforts to attract new members. "As a Congregational Church, it knows no ecclesiastical authority outside itself but regards the Lord Jesus Christ as its immediate Head and ever-present Lord. It elects its own officers, determines its own mode of worship, regards the Word of God (the Holy Bible) as its only statute book and welcomes Members all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."



## THE MONTHLY RECORD.

take all the pleasant, bright things of life, and transmute them into immortal in our own souls. And if the poet says and is true, it is not too much to say that the most noble of men can do this, how much more noble the human creature himself to add and have all things, and being the presence of the supernatural face to him with us in our daily work? Faith becomes to us, if we thus think, making but the garden of the land, and every flower being to us, and we are in it, a beautiful and rapid gain."—*The Edinburgh Review*.

### REVIGOROUS HALL. A DAWDLE RECIPE.

**H**er vocal recital, however, Miss Margaret Bennett, who is, I understand, a pupil of Mr. Oscar Panizza, proved that she has many of the necessary qualities for a public singer. Her technique is firm and brilliant, and she has much freedom of feeling. You cannot help expect to young an artist to enter deeply into the meaning of Beethoven's notes, or even of Chopin's great C-sharp minor scherzo. Miss Bennett did not realize all that these composers said in these particular works. But she did not, at any rate, make them say anything they had no intention of saying. Her best achievement, for the reason already we have, was in the playing of Mendelssohn's Scherzo in C-sharp minor, a work which is, but seldom heard at public recitals in London. Miss Bennett should certainly have a house, as a young artist, of her own should be to cultivate a greater variety of work."—*The Times*.

### MR. JAMES BURKE.

It is with much regret that we have to chronicle the dropping out of the ranks of a familiar figure as one of the friends of the

closing days of the year. On the 2nd of December Mr. James Burke, who had been the caretaker of the Church for many years, passed away after a short illness. Constant to all, and ever ready to oblige, he is much regretted both in the church and in the city. The Church porch seems lonely without his welcoming smile on Sunday mornings, and everywhere about the place we miss his steady presence.

### THE WELSH REVIVAL.

The story of the remarkable religious revival now going on in Wales is one that will be read with the deepest interest by all Christians. It is by no means the first movement of the kind in the Peninsula, and it presents many of the features which have been made familiar. "The word is being spread far and wide. The effect is not only in religious character and character, but in religious character and character. There can be no doubt that the movement is of God, but as with many of God's gifts it is upon to grow alone, and now is very cautiously and reverently dealt with, judging of it as a whole some allowance must be made for the Celtic temperament, for a hope that no attempt will be made to make a wrong use of the revival. The danger of more emotionalism is to be feared, and the efforts of the revival must be carefully guarded against. 'The revival is not to be a revival,' is the true motto, 'to work of this kind.' So far as we are to be able to do, and there is no reason why they should not continue to be so. We have every hope that the movement will be a wonderful way of spreading, and it is a good thing to see good things—*The Times*.

## THE MONTHLY RECORD.

FEBRUARY, 1905.

### THE MOST INTERESTING EVENT OF THE MONTH IS THE



WELCOME  
TO  
MR. MACLACHLAN.

A society being assembled on Friday evening to welcome the Rev. Gordon MacLachlan to the pastorate of the Church. After tea in the School-room (at which friends from the various churches in the town were present) the Service began at 8 o'clock at the Church. The Rev. C. Richardson, M.A., of Glasgow, Secretary of the Scotch Congregational Union, the Rev. J. Lyon, of Carlisle, Secretary of the Irish Congregational Union, the Rev. E. E. Harris and the Rev. E. J. Elliott, of the Methodist Church, and Rev. W. Arnold, of the Presbyterian Church, Sligo, were all present, also Mr. Matthew Kirk, of Glasgow, an old friend of the Sligo Church, and through whom Mr. MacLachlan's very hearty welcome to the Sligo Church was formally given to welcome Mr. MacLachlan to his pastorate.

Mr. J. White, J.P., then took the chair, and, having read a number of religious and congratulatory letters, which we great pleasure, duly performed the ceremony of "installing" the new minister. The Chairman gave Mr. MacLachlan a very hearty welcome in the name of the Church, and pointed out especially how anxious they had been in having him to the pastorate.

Rate and Technical Insurance and Pulpit supply. Records of members emigrating to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA continue to reduce the active membership.

There is often a wide-spread belief that all Protestants were rich and associated with the ruling, ascendancy figures, largely in the Church of Ireland. That was not true when it came to Methodists, Quakers, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Brethren and so on. The 1911 Census of Population shows some helpful and interesting details of the occupations of the Sligo Congregational church members. These included farmers, draper and grocers' assistants, a dress-maker, bakers and confectioners, commercial clerks, solicitors' clerks, school teachers, clerk of Petty Sessions, a post-mistress, a surgeon and apothecary, an Income Tax surveyor, a brick-burner, a master book binder and umbrella-maker, a drapers' merchant, a Custom and Excise officer, a nurse and domestic servant. Many of these came to work in Sligo from England and Scotland, but it is important to note that the 1911 Census indicated that some members were born and reared locally. It is important to remember that some members travelled for worship from Ballincarr, Coolaney and Tobercurry.



Sadly, after the move of Mr. MacLachan, there was no continuous ministry in Sligo. The congregation was served, as and when, by ministers from the Congregational Union when it could. Ageing members found it increasingly difficult to keep attending. The issue of 'rotating' ministers was a common problem that has been identified in other studies and leaves the remaining congregation beginning to wonder about the future<sup>16</sup>. For younger members, the problem of finding a partner who shared their Protestant faith was becoming near impossible. The establishment of the Free State also led to the departure of many, who otherwise would have stayed. Slowly, the incidence of services diminished during the 1930s.

The history of the change of ownership from the Congregational Church to Sligo County Council Library is interesting in itself. As the population grew, and with it the demands upon the Library Service, the various accommodations and facilities acquired by the Council over time became limiting in meeting the library services needed by the population. It also became evident that the fine buildings in Stephen Street were scarcely used for their original purpose. In May 1940, initial enquiries were made by the Council regarding the potential purchase or renting of the Congregational Church for its purposes as a County Library. Six years later, when the property came on the market, the Council expressed its interest in buying the property but were extremely disappointed when a local property syndicate stepped in and purchased the building. However, they were unable to get planning permission from the Council for what they wanted to build. Sligo County Council then purchased the building and the library moved in to the former Church in 1952<sup>17</sup>. The former Manse, adjacent to the church building, was converted into the Sligo County Museum and opened in 1955.

So now, as we pass by or come to use the Library for some of its many services, do spare a thought for those that have gone before and, most importantly, the opportunities that knowledge gives to the young and not so young, like myself. I like to think that Rev. Noble Shepperd would have been pleased that the church is still a community building, where all are welcome and all can find joy, passion and intellectual fulfilment amongst its shelves.

I wish you happy reading, Rev. Dr. Peter Humphreys.

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<sup>16</sup> See Humphreys 2014, 2015 and 2018.

<sup>17</sup> See Moran 1980 for a more thorough account of these and earlier Library developments.



## A PROVISIONAL LIST OF MINISTERS AT SLIGO CHURCH (1780-1939)

1780 – 1790	Mr. Andrew Maiban and Mr. Albert Best - Lay Preachers
1791 – 1800	Student Placements – funded by Countess of Huntingdon
1801 – 1810	Rev. Claudius Morrison
1816 – 1826	Rev. Dr. Urwick, plus Jeremiah Murray and Thomas Jordan (Missionaries)
1826 - 1830	Rev. E. H. Noble
1830 – 1870	Rev. Noble Sheppard
1875 – 1884	Rev. James Stirling
1885 – 1892	Rev. H. E. Bennett
1892 – 1897	Rev. William Newman Hall
1897 – 1904	Rev. W. E. Ireland
1904 – 1922	Rev. Gordan MacLachan
1923 – 1939	Independent Preachers/Pulpit Supply



## Primary Sources on Sligo Congregational Church: Sligo County Library – Local Studies' Department

*Church Meeting Minutes* (1907-40). (Library Call No. Par 002)

Records of the Congregational Church Stephen St, containing *Church minutes* (1851-1906), *Baptismal Register* 1851-1904, *Marriage Register* 1868-1910, *Burial Register* 1851-1918, and *Roll of Church Members* 1835-1918. (Library Call No. Par 003)

*The Monthly Record* (1902). (Library Call No. Rel. 118)

*Manuscript Records of Income and Expenditure: 1912-1933*. (Library Call No. Bio 042)

*List of Contributors to a Fund for the Relief of the Distressed Poor in Ireland 1846-1848*. (Library Call No. Soc 58)

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*"Finally to end as I as I began on a historical note, one of the pioneers of the public library movement in Sligo in the early 1870's, was the Rev. Noble Shepperd who was Minister of this – the former Congregational Church."*

*From a speech made by the former Co Librarian, Mr John C. McTernan, 1980*

*"The Press also played their part in the campaign for the library and the trade committee also put renewed effort into the campaign. Ironically the Rev. Noble Shepperd, Minister of the Congregational Church, Stephen Street, was one of the most prominent campaigners at the time. Ninety years later his very building was to become the library."*

*Sligo Champion, 5th December 1980*





An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,  
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán  
Department of Tourism, Culture,  
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media