

Brief History of Mallow Street Hall

Compiled by Peter E. Childs

A Christian church has been meeting in Mallow Street Hall, also known as Mallow Street Gospel Hall, since the mid 19th. century. The building was held under a Christian charitable trust for the use of the church group meeting in the building and other Christian activities from the mid 19th. century. The origins of the Assembly are shrouded in mystery but some things can be gleaned from the history of the Christian Brethren movement, sometimes known as the Plymouth Brethren. In Ireland one of the leaders of this movement was J. N. Darby, a Church of Ireland clergyman, who had become dissatisfied with the traditional churches and went back to the Bible. (See www.johndarby.org/beginning/index.html) He and some likeminded people started meeting to read the Bible around 1826-7, something that was happening in many places in the UK and Ireland in the 1830s. Limerick was one of the first places he visited outside Dublin and he wrote in his Personal Testimony (~1850)

“I left Dublin soon after, but the work immediately began at Limerick, a town in Ireland, and then in other places.” (1828) (www.plymouthbrethren.com/jndthol.htm) He clearly spent time in Limerick and in Co.Clare (see below) and wrote letters from Limerick in 1832 and 1833.

In Roy Coad’s *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Paternoster Press, 1978, p. 82) we read the following:

In October 1832 J.N. Darby was visiting some of the little bodies of which he had heard in Ireland, visiting 2 or 3 places a day to investigate them or preach there.

“.. he reached Limerick. There he stopped for a while.”

Extracts from his letters:

- 1) “we have set up weekly Scripture reading meetings”
- 2) “a little church has been formed, or rather body, like the one at Plymouth, for communion.”

In the following April (1833) apparently after another visit to Plymouth:

“the church at Limerick have so multiplied that they must seek some place of meeting.”

“This a cause of anxiety to me, whilst I wait on the Lord’s will, for I feel the importance of the moral character of the step, for unless called for, it would have the same tendency [i.e. to sectarianism].”

In the same book there are two other mentions of Limerick:

“The Periodical ‘The Christian Witness’ issued from Plymouth quarterly from January 1834 to January 1841 was also on sale in London, Limerick and Dublin.” (p.67), and

“Thomas Maunsell, previously of Limerick, lived at Hereford from 1858 until his death in 1880 (member of the Hereford Assembly).” (p. 74)

J. N. Darby wrote to a friend, "We have set up weekly scripture reading meetings, two of them in the most worldly homes in Limerick. Our only present difficulty is to keep the people out." (Napoleon Noel, "The History of the Brethren". (Denver: W.F. Knapp, 1936) p. 22., quoted in *Our Home Bible Study Heritage* by David Dunlap, www.voicesforchrist.org/written/DunlapDavid/homebib.htm)

He travelled around Ireland looking for similar groups, teaching and encouraging them. Initially the Christians stayed within the Church of Ireland but gradually

became separate and had their own meetings, run on what they saw as New Testament principles, and without fulltime leaders.

By the 1950s the Brethren assembly meeting in the Hall had dwindled to one man and a few ladies. They decided to close down the meeting and offered the building to a similar group then meeting in the Red Cross Hall, just around the block.

In 1958 the Christian group now using the building (now called Mallow Street Christian Fellowship) formally took over the building for its meetings and a new trust deed with new trustees was obtained. By the mid 90s one of these trustees died and the other two had left the church. Consequently in 1998 when the building was extensively renovated and modified, their permission was obtained to close the old Trust down and set up a new Trust with new trustees was obtained. The current trustees are Peter Childs, Charles Ryan and David Stevens, all members of Mallow Street Christian Fellowship, the church which meets in the building under the auspices of the Trust. A copy of this trust deed, drawn up by John McNamara & Associates Solicitors, 28 O'Curry, Street, Limerick is attached, together with a copy of the previous one (1958) on which it was based. A new Trust Deed incorporating the latest legislation was drawn up in 2008.

The church is run by part-time lay leaders, and has no fulltime or paid employees, and depends largely on charitable giving from its members. Since we do not pay rent, as the Trust owns the building, and because we have no full-time employees, the church is able to give away approximately two-thirds of its income for charitable purposes, as described in the annual accounts. The accounts are prepared at the end of a calendar year by the honorary treasurer and presented to the church at a business meeting of church members.

The church that meets in Mallow Street Hall exists to be a witness to Jesus Christ in Limerick, by holding Christian meetings for its members and for anyone who cares to come in, and by doing evangelism and social outreach. The main purposes of the church are:

1. Preaching God's Word and encouraging Christian growth in its members.
2. Meeting for prayer, teaching, breaking of bread and fellowship.
3. Conducting evangelism in Limerick and environs.
4. Pastoral care of the members.
5. Support for Christian work and workers in Ireland and around the world.
6. Involvement in social action and helping the needy in Limerick.

The church (Mallow Street Christian Fellowship) meets under the auspices of the Trust which owns and manages the premises in Upper Mallow Street.