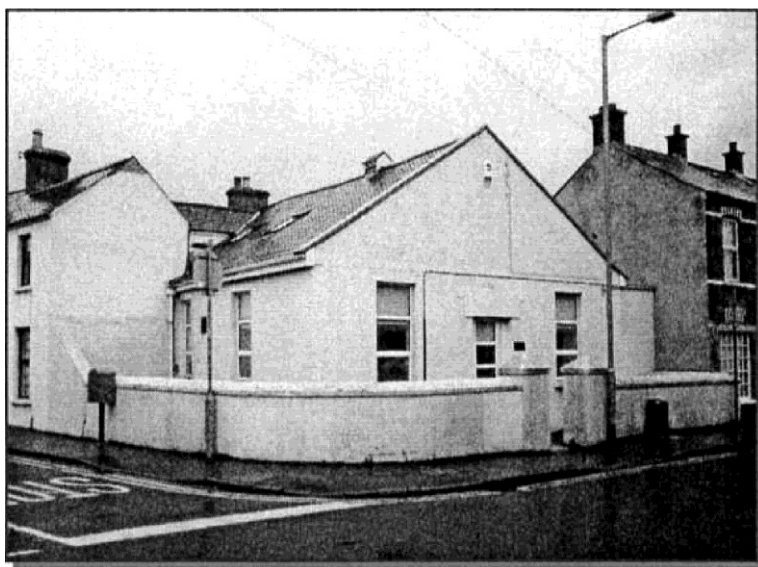
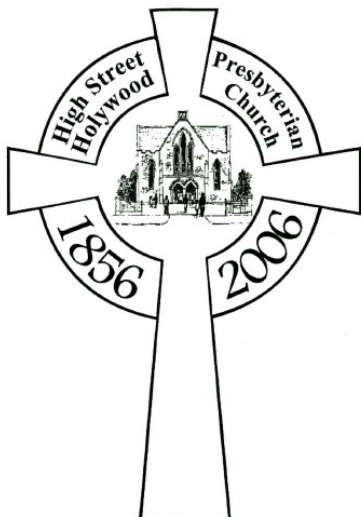


# THE HISTORY OF HIGH STREET HOLYWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## SECTION ONE OF THREE <sup>1</sup>

### MARKING THE SESQUICENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY, 1856-2006.

#### A BEGINNING FOR HIGH STREET HOLYWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH <sup>2</sup>



**Mr Johnston's House, Downshire Road, Hollywood**

Before the coming of the railway, Hollywood was little more than a fishing village. However, the opening of the Belfast and County Down Railway on 4 August 1848 heralded a significant increase in the town's population. By 1855 the first Presbyterian Church, Bangor Road, was starting to become overcrowded so the heads of 52 families sought permission from the Belfast Presbytery to establish a second Presbyterian congregation. Permission having been granted, the new congregation called Second Hollywood started meeting in a small Mission Hall—originally Mr Johnston's house, then the Loan Fund Office, and later used by the Golden Age Club. This building, at the lower end of Downshire Road, is now used as a structural engineer's office. In September 1858 the Rev. J. S. Denham was called to be the first minister and in December of that year the congregation celebrated its first communion.

The ground on the South side of High Street, where the present Church stands, was bought in 1857. A row of old dwellings fronting the street was removed and work began in May of that year. When it was opened for worship in February 1858, a collection taken for it in Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church Belfast raised £275. Built of dark grey stone in the early English style at a cost of £1,000 the architect was Robert Young, later to establish the well-known firm of Young and MacKenzie, and himself a former assistant to Charles Lanyon. The builder was Samuel Moore of Morrow's Lane and the plasterwork, rather fine and delicate in itself, was the work of William

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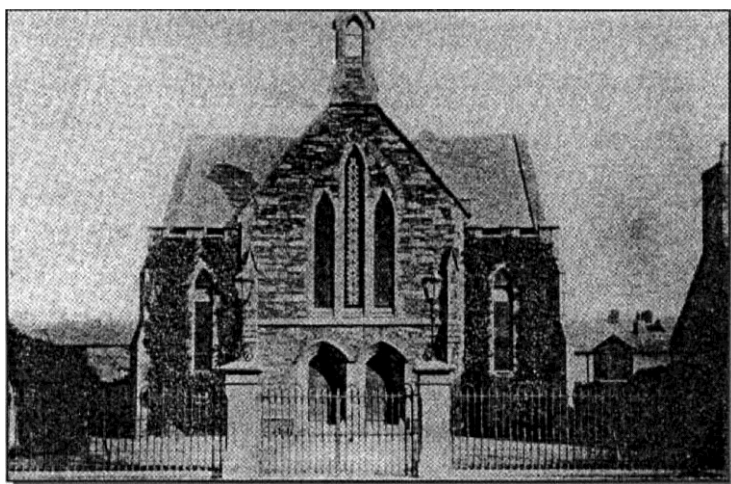
<sup>1</sup> Section 1 Pages 1-2 Marking the sesquicentennial anniversary 1856-2006.

Section 2 Pages 3-6 Gallery and Pen Portraits of the Ministers of Second Hollywood (High Street Presbyterian Church)

Section 3 Pages 7-11 Early History of Second Hollywood (High Street Presbyterian Church) c. 1855-1865

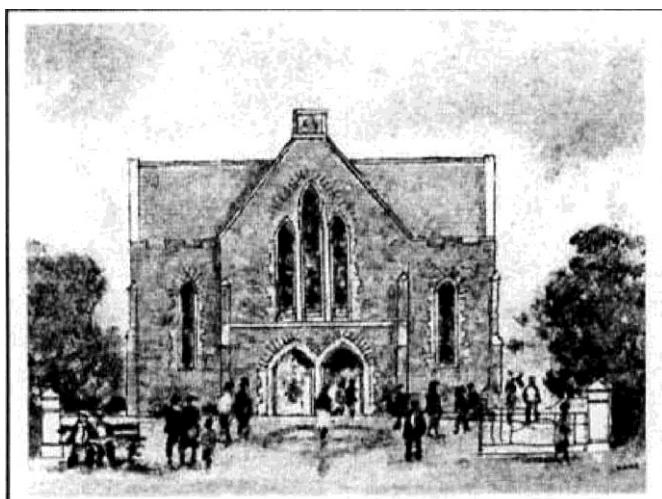
<sup>2</sup> Extracted from the church pamphlet produced by John Cochrane

Hayes of Marino. Set well back from the street the front gable was topped by a distinctive bell-cote which accidentally fell down while the church was being extensively renovated in 1956. Gas lighting was installed in 1860 and in 1864 the gallery was added increasing the number of pews from 70 to 106. The organ was built in 1903 and electric lighting was installed in 1937.



**High Street Presbyterian Church in about 1910, built 1858**

After the early death of Rev. James Denham in 1862 and the installation of Rev. Henry Osborne, such was the growth of the Sabbath School that in 1866 the committee of the Church were urged to build a school on the grounds adjoining the Church. With the completion of the new Schoolhouse and Lecture Room the connection with Mr Johnston's house ceased.



In 2007, to celebrate the sesquicentennial anniversary, Tom Kerr, a member of the congregation and well known artist produced this painting of the church.

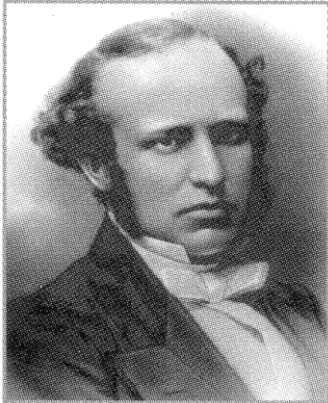


Metal Communion Tokens dated 1855, are on display in the upstairs gallery. As the first Communion is recorded as having taken place in December 1856, the formation of a second congregation must never have been in doubt!

To mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our congregation a commemorative plaque listing the Ministers of the church has been placed in the welcome area and can be viewed there.

## SECTION TWO OF THREE

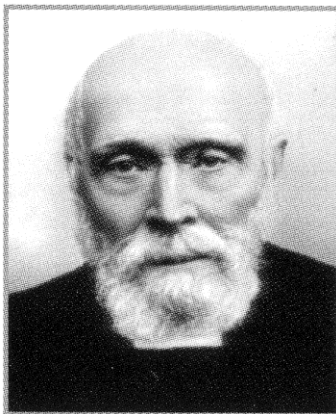
### GALLERY<sup>3</sup> AND PEN PORTRAITS<sup>4</sup> OF THE MINISTERS OF SECOND HOLYWOOD (HIGH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH)



#### **Rev. James S. Denham (1856-1862)**

James Denham was licensed by the Belfast Presbytery, and ordained in Holywood on 6 November 1856. The first services were held in the hall at the bottom end of Downshire Road for the first two years of his ministry. The present church was formally opened in 1858.

Mr Denham sadly died at the young age of 28 on 17 January 1862.



#### **Rev. Henry Osborne (1862-1890)**

Rev. Henry Osborne from the congregation of 1<sup>st</sup> Rathfriland was installed on 20 August 1862. By 1863 there were 120 families connected with the Church, more than double the number in 1856. The extra numbers were accommodated by building a gallery and side-wings in 1864. The Sunday School, which had occupied James Johnston's house on Downshire Road, moved to a purpose-built new school house within the grounds of the Church in 1866. Further extensions to the school house were needed in 1870 and 1876 when attendances increased, mainly due to the energy and vision of William

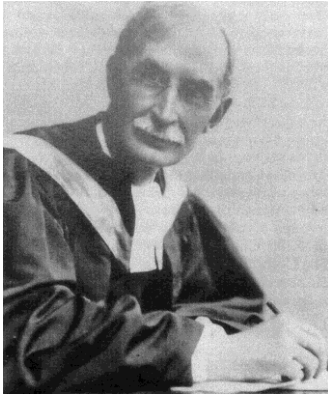
and Charlotte Shaw of Marmion, Holywood. William Shaw was a Waringstown linen merchant who had lived in Staten Island, New York for 33 years. His church, Mercer Street Presbyterian in New York supported High Street's fledgling Sunday School by donating 350 books and William Shaw served 13 years as Superintendent of the Sunday School. Henry Osborne had a flair for writing and publishing prose and poetry and contributed to many Christian publications of the time. He retired in November 1890 and died on 3 June 1922 aged 93 years.

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<sup>3</sup> Collated by John Cochrane and Janet Taylor. Obtained from archives and old newspapers.

<sup>4</sup> By Janet Taylor, extracted by kind permission from the book 'Presbyterianism in Ulster 1613-c. 1865' by James Robinson, published 2015.

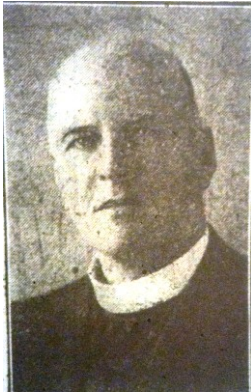




**Rev. John Irwin (1891-1899)**

On 10 March 1891, Rev. John Irwin from 1<sup>st</sup> Strabane was installed in High Street. During his ministry, a Presbyterian Young Peoples' Guild was begun and the first Church Hymnary of the Presbyterian Church, produced in 1898, was warmly received by the High Street Congregation.

John Irwin accepted a call to Windsor Congregation, Belfast in April 1899.



**Rev. Andrew Gilchrist (1899-1909)**

Rev. Andrew Gilchrist was called from the Congregation of Downpatrick and installed on 29 June 1899. He established a Bible Class for senior scholars and adults on Sunday mornings and for many years was Convener of the Young Peoples' Guild of the Presbyterian Church.

By 1900, a harmonium was being played at Sunday services by Miss Maggie Rodman and in 1903, an organ costing £1,100 was installed, with the choir members seated above and behind the pulpit and affectionately known as the "Angels". High Street was one of the earliest congregations in North Down to

introduce instrumental music to their worship.

Andrew Gilchrist is credited with forming the first Scout Troop in Holywood in 1908 with the first Scoutmaster Martyn Downing. The troop later took the name of "Sir Robert Kennedy's Own" when Sir Robert gave the troop a hut in the grounds of Cultra Manor.

In June 1909 Andrew Gilchrist resigned to take up a call to Newington United Free Church, Edinburgh.

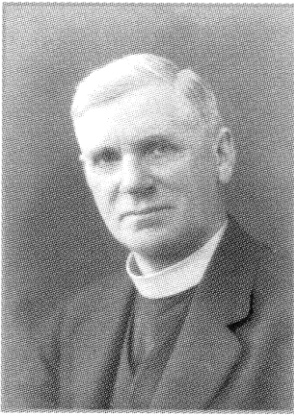


**Rev. William John Archer (1909-1916)**

High Street Congregation next called Rev. William John Archer from Helen's Bay Congregation and he was installed on 2 November 1909.

With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, 17 Sunday School pupils enlisted for the defence for their country.

In January 1916, William Archer left to go to the U.S.A.



**Rev. David Hugh Maconachie (1916-1937)**

Strean Congregation, Newtownards supplied the next minister, Rev. David Hugh Maconachie who was installed on 9 May 1916. Electric light was introduced and the lecture hall buildings enlarged.

During the War years 1918 and 1919, Rev. J.B. Woodburn of Bangor Road Congregation and David Maconachie of High Street both served as Padres to the troops in Germany at different times and each took charge of both congregations in the other's absence. The same pattern for covering summer holidays was established in 1921 and continues to this day.

A Boys' Brigade Company was formed in 1932 and a Women's Club in 1933.

David Maconachie retired in May 1937. He was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree in 1940 by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland and died on 24 June 1958 aged 92.

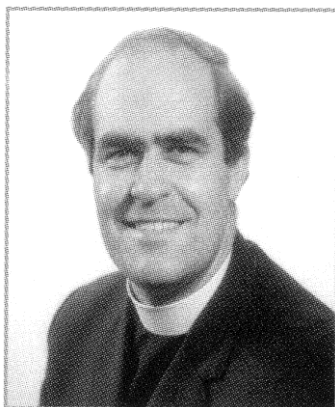


**Rev. James Ross Gamble (1937-1976)**

Rev. J. Ross Gamble from Buckna was installed on 25 November 1937 and had the longest ministry of 39 years of active service.

Between 1954 and 1956 the church was largely rebuilt and the manse repaired. Several stained glass windows were installed as memorials to former members and the presence of these windows continues to enhance the beauty and sense of worship of the Sanctuary. During the renovations in 1956, the distinctive bell-cote on the front gable accidentally fell down though the bell itself had been removed long since in November 1918.

Ross Gamble retired on 31 March 1976 and died on 9 April 1989.



**Rev. Dr. John Ross (1976-2000)**

Rev. John Ross from Christ Church, Dundonald was installed on 22 September 1976. He had previously served as a missionary in Malawi and also served for 10 years as Joint Convener of the Foreign Mission and later the Overseas Board of the Presbyterian Church. In 1995, John Ross was elected Moderator of the General Assembly. During his ministry several Alpha courses were successfully run and the Crossways lunch and fellowship group was established.

John Ross retired in September 2000 and died on 31 August 2015.

**Rev. Norman Harrison (2001-15)**

Rev. Norman Harrison, from the Congregation of Clogherney, was installed on 14 June 2001.

He had a keen interest in hospice care and introducing the arts into worship. In 2006, a new welcome area was created, staircases replaced and the forecourt enlarged and paved, making the Church's appearance on the High Street of Holywood open and welcoming to all. The refurbishment of the rest of the Sanctuary was completed in March 2010 with repairs to exterior stone-work, replacement of the floor, new

heating, lighting and audio systems and introduction of flexible seating. These features were designed to make High Street's buildings fit for the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> Century outreach and Christian service to the community of Holywood.

In June 2015 Norman Harrison resigned to take up the position of Presbyterian Chaplain at the Royal Victoria Hospital (Royal Group of Hospitals), Belfast, where he has developed art as therapy, encouragement and witness.<sup>5</sup>

**Rev. James Michael Warburton (2017-)**

Rev. Jimmy Warburton was ordained and installed as Minister of High Street Holywood on 27 January 2017. He trained in Union Theological College and spent 3 years as Assistant Minister in Whiteabbey Presbyterian Church. He accepted the call to High Street Presbyterian Church in November 2016.

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<sup>5</sup> See Mission Connect section of July/August's Presbyterian Herald, 2017.

## SECTION THREE OF THREE

### EARLY HISTORY OF SECOND HOLYWOOD

#### (HIGH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH) C. 1855-1865 <sup>6</sup>

The year 1854 was a busy one for Rev. Henry Henderson, minister of First Holywood (Bangor Road) congregation. Asiatic cholera had returned to Belfast in late 1854, supposedly carried by emigrants on board ships moored in Belfast Lough. Previous cholera outbreaks in 1832 and 1847-48 had caused high death rates in all classes of society, but especially among the poor and destitute who lived in overcrowded and insanitary conditions.

The 1854-55 outbreak, while not so severe as others, nevertheless focussed the attention of doctors, clergy and Town Councillors on the urgency of improving sanitation and tackling overcrowding in Belfast and surrounding districts.

A report in the *Belfast Newsletter* (22 September 1854) remarked; “We are happy to say that yesterday there were no new cases of cholera in the town of Holywood. The most vigorous steps have been taken to have the town kept in as perfect a sanitary position as possible. At Connswater Bridge, Ballymacarrett, there were some new cases, not of a very serious nature. Dr. Young [George H. Young of the Holywood Dispensary and a member of Henry Henderson’s congregation] and Rev. Henry Henderson in the course of the day inspected all the houses and their premises in the district, and the relieving officer was instructed by them to employ the most prompt means to have a number of dangerous nuisances removed. Dr. Young and his assistant, Dr. Greenfield, visited Connswater three times daily.”

Henry Henderson’s work among the poor and destitute was widely acknowledged as was his support and patronage of the local Holywood schools (Knocknagoney [1811], Creighton’s Green [1847] and Ballymiscaw [1855] ).

In February 1855 Henry Henderson published a book entitled *Unitarianism Refuted*, based on two sermons he had preached in defence of Trinitarian doctrine the previous November. This was in response to an ongoing public controversy involving Rev. Dr. Charles Reichel of Queen’s College who had preached in Holywood Parish Church the previous year and Rev. C. J. McAlester of the Holywood Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church. Each congregation encouraged its minister to publish his theological views for a wider audience. Henry Henderson, in promoting his views, while being determined to “refrain from uttering any offensive personal expressions towards those who are supporters of that [i.e., Unitarian] system” may have unwittingly alienated some Holywood residents in doing this. However relations among the clergy remained cordial in an era when theological opinions were robustly debated in public.

At the monthly meeting of the Belfast Presbytery on 7 August 1855, a memorial, signed by 52 heads of families was presented by Robert Gardiner and James Johnston from Holywood. It followed a

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<sup>6</sup> By Janet Taylor, extracted by kind permission from the book ‘Presbyterianism in Ulster 1613-c. 1865’ by James Robinson, Published 2015.

meeting of 250 residents in the town in which the need for a new Meeting House had been expressed. They informed the Presbytery that a Town Mission House had been in use for the previous 18 months in which John Poole, a retired Presbyterian minister from Lismore, Co. Wexford and others, including Henry Henderson, had conducted services on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings for the benefit of the destitute poor. They estimated that there were approximately 405 Presbyterian families in the town and adjoining district but only 640 sittings in Henry Henderson's Meeting House and that Holywood, as a rapidly growing town, could support another congregation.

The Presbytery inquired as to the means of support for any new congregation and James Johnston, an accountant and clerk of the Holywood Loan Fund (a private bank that loaned money mainly to small farmers) promised that a stipend of £52-17s could be raised by the petitioners. This extraordinarily generous sum stretched the credulity of the famous Rev. Dr. Henry Cooke who asked, "Do you truly stand before us to say that they will continue to pay this sum?" To which James Johnston replied, "I do; and will guarantee the payment of it all myself."

A counter-memorial from the Bangor Road congregation questioned the statistics used and produced evidence in support of effective spiritual and physical support for the poor of the Parish. Henry Henderson protested that James Johnston had canvassed names not only from his own congregation but also from the Episcopalians and the Unitarians. In reply James Johnston assured the Presbytery that the subscribers had signed voluntarily and promised to become members.

The Presbytery agreed to send a committee to assess the viability of a new congregation and Henry Henderson, in a change of heart, graciously gave his support, adding that "nothing would give him greater satisfaction than to have a fellow- labourer in Holywood."

Following Presbytery's visit to Holywood on 31 August 1855, at which 150 attended, James Johnston offered the use of the former Loan Fund's Office (the lease of which he had acquired) for congregational services. It was situated on Morrow's Lane (lower Downshire Road, picture on page 1) at the junction with Church View and could accommodate 250-300. The building has been occupied since by the Golden Age Club and most recently by a structural and civil engineer. Supply preachers were sent for the next few months and among those who preached was a young licentiate, James Stevenson Denham, from a farming family of Northbrook, Aughrim, Co. Gaiway. He was educated at Queen's College and Assembly's College, Belfast. As a young student, James Denham had been taken under the wing of Rev. James S. Morgan of Fisherwick Place Congregation where he attended as a Sunday School scholar and later as a teacher.

In August 1856, the new Second Congregation called James S. Denham as their minister offering a stipend of £100 per annum. His ordination in Holywood took place on 6 November 1856. Just before the first Communion on 14 December 1856, there were 53 names on the Communicants' Roll—16 men and 37 women. Of the men, there were 6 farmers, 4 labourers, 1 publican, 1 caretaker, 1 blacksmith, 1 merchant, 1 shopkeeper and 1 accountant (James Johnston Jun., clerk of the Loan Fund and prime mover in the formation of the Second Congregation). Of the women, there were 14 wives, 6 servants, 1 shopkeeper, 1 milliner, 1 washerwoman and 14 others who were



unmarried daughters living at home, widows or single women of independent means—an average cross-section of Holywood society. Of these 53 founding members, only nine can be positively identified as moving from Henry Henderson's Congregation, including James Johnston and John Stewart, a labourer and the first precentor. Ten members came from four congregations in the North Down and Ards district, eight from five Belfast congregations, three from other congregations, seven by profession of faith but the majority (15) came from Fisherwick Place Congregation where James Denham had attended throughout his student days under the ministry of James Morgan.

These merchants, farmers, traders, artisans and servants making up Holywood's Second Congregation reflected the demographic changes of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century as Holywood drew wealthy merchants and families with their attendant staff to the attractive and health-promoting town, made all the more accessible by the arrival of the railway in 1848. The congregation continued to meet in the former Loan Fund Office at Morrow's Lane until a new Church was built and opened on 28 February 1858, on its present site on the South side of High Street. The architect was Robert Young of Belfast, the builder Samuel Moore of Holywood and the plasterer William Hayes of Marino—the latter two men both joining the Congregation some years later.

Membership had nearly doubled by February 1858 and, as more merchant and professional families settled in and around the town, traders, artisans and a retinue of servants, cooks, gardeners, coachmen, nurses and governesses followed in their wake—all reflected in the Communicants' Roll Book of the new congregation. Among the prominent mercantile names that appear in first few years of the congregation were Heyn, Pirrie and Munster of shipping fame, Finlay, soap producer and chandler and Linden of Corn Market, confectioners to the Queen.

The first sexton was James Geddis, a letter-carrier or postman who lived in High Street and the first precentor was John Stewart, a labourer, also of High Street and a possible relative of Hugh Stewart the precentor of Bangor Road congregation. By March 1860 John Stewart's duties had extended to training a choir to lead the psalm singing, for which he received an increase in salary of 20 shillings per year. A year later cushions were provided for the comfort of the choir members!

During the year 1859 and into the spring of 1860, as the spiritual Revival or "Awakening" took hold in Belfast and in Co. Down, James Denham joined with his fellow-ministers at a weekly Union Prayer Meeting in Belfast and with Henry Henderson in Holywood. The *Belfast Newsletter* of 23 June 1860 reported on the presentation of a purse of sovereigns to Hugh Stewart, the precentor of Bangor Road Congregation, for his tireless musical ministry during the recent spiritual awakening in the Congregation. It concluded by reporting that: "numerous cases of prostration, we have been informed, have occurred in Holywood (in the country districts) during the last 2 months."

Throughout his ministry James Denham saw a steady rise in the number of members joining the High Street congregation until by November 1861, 153 were on the Communicants' Roll. The relationship between Henry Henderson and James Denham was warm and deepened as together they saw their ministries prosper under God's hand.

On Christmas morning 1861 James Denham and Rev. S.D. Burnside of Carryduff, on deputation from the Belfast Presbytery, came to Bangor Road Sunday School to conduct the very first examination of about 200 children. Amidst the decorations of holly and ivy, they asked questions of the children, distributed books as prizes and joined the children afterwards for a feast of fruit, cakes and merriment. In January 1862, Henry Henderson and James Denham agreed to conduct united daily evening services between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month, alternating pulpits.

Sadly and unexpectedly, James Denham fell ill during that week and was unable to preach. His condition worsened on Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> and he died in the early evening. He was only 28 years old. The congregation, in shock and sorrow, was overcome with grief, as was his friend and colleague Henry Henderson who received the news even as he was preaching in High Street's pulpit. Speaking later at the Presbytery meeting in February, he said, "I have lost a warm friend and one who was a zealous fellow-worker with me in the ministry of Christ's Church."

Rev. William Johnston of Townsend Street Presbyterian Church, paying tribute at the same Presbytery meeting, described "the amiable, independent, thoroughly pious and brotherly spirit which Mr. Denham ever manifested. He was a Christian and a gentleman."

On 21 January 1862, James Denham was laid to rest in a grave within the grounds of the Church and a memorial was erected shortly afterwards. On 1 August 1864, a son was born to John Hunter, a yarn merchant and commission agent and his wife Jemina Cordukes of Martello Terrace. The child was called James Denham Hunter in honour of the Hunters' late pastor and friend.

The young pastor's ministry was tragically short, lasting just over 5 years. Now, after more than 150 years have passed, it is difficult to imagine the character and voice of James Denham. But picture him at play with children at the recent Christmas Sunday School party, later perhaps visiting the bedside of a sick labourer, being equally at home ministering to the family of a wealthy merchant living at 'High Holywood' and then going downstairs to be fed by the cook in the kitchen, surrounded by servants and kitchen maids. After all, James Denham had been Holywood's most eligible bachelor!

We hear his voice in a surprisingly modern way in a letter of his published in the *Belfast Newsletter* on 3 January 1861. It was written in response to a visit to Belfast by a Rev. Dr. R.G. Cather, travelling secretary of a new organisation with the unwieldy title of the *British Systematic Beneficence Society*, which promoted the practice of tithing by Christians to support charitable and missionary needs. While not disapproving of the principle of tithing, James Denham thought that the Society had not been totally forthcoming in the presentation of its aims and operating expenses. He wrote:

In common with many others, I would like to know somewhat more of a society which thus claims public attention, and solicits public favours. I would like to know where are its headquarters, and who are its responsible managers; what are the objects it proposes to accomplish, the agencies it employs, and the tangible practical results it has effected. I presume, like every other society, it needs funds for its support, for paying its officers, and for carrying on its operations. In the present day, some people think that many of our religious societies expend too much of their

income in managing their business—paying officials, and keeping their machinery in motion...

A prophetic voice indeed, expressed long before the introduction of a Charities' Commissioner or a 21<sup>st</sup> century Freedom of Information Act and perhaps an example of the independence of thought, of which William Johnston spoke in tribute to James Denham.

After a vacancy of 7 months, Rev. Henry Osborne, from the Congregation of 1<sup>st</sup> Rathfriland, was installed on 20 August 1862 and the ministry to the High Street congregation continued to fulfil its calling "to glorify God in the High Street."

*Sources used for the History of Second Holywood (High Street Presbyterian Church), c. 1855-1865 and Pen Portraits of Ministers:*

1. Minute Books, Communion Rolls and Annual Reports of High Street Church
2. Minutes of the Belfast Presbytery in Presbyterian Church House, Belfast
3. Belfast Newsletter and Banner of Ulster newspapers for reports of the Belfast Presbytery and events in Holywood
4. Unpublished notes of the late Alexander Hugh Finlay of Holywood (1899-1985)