

## NELSON MEMORIAL CONGREGATION

Nelson Memorial Presbyterian Church was opened for worship on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May 1896. The special preachers were the Reverend W.J. McCaughan and the Reverend Henry Montgomery. Gifted by Miss Elizabeth Nelson as a memorial to her brother, the Reverend Isaac Nelson, born 1802 son of a grocer, Francis Nelson, whose premises were located in Barrack Street. The young man was educated at Belfast Academical Institution he excelled in the classics and served as a tutor for some nine years. He became a student for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church, licenced to preach in 1838 and ordained as Assistant and then Minister of Comber Congregation. In 1842 he received a call to Donegall Street Presbyterian Church where he remained until 1880 when he surprisingly resigned to become embroiled in politics. He was returned as Member for County Mayo. He seems to have adopted an anti-establishment stand not only in his church life, but also his political career. He retained his seat in the House of Commons until the General Election of 1885. Some sources suggest that his embitterment with mainstream Presbyterianism largely stems from his disappointment at not being supported in his application for the Chair of Ecclesiastical Greek at Magee College, Londonderry. From that time on being sometimes referred to as the Ismael (outcast) of Irish Presbyterianism. Isaac Nelson died on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1888 aged 86 after a long illness. Both he and his sister were buried in Shankill Graveyard, where a large headstone adorns the back wall of the cemetery. The church itself was designed and built by the Architect William J Gilliland, some of his other responsibilities were, Crumlin Road Methodist, the Co-Operative Bakery, Ravenhill Avenue, the Bank of Ireland in High Street. A commodious building occupying Nelson Square, in craftsmanship, the interior of the Church is amongst the finest in the city, with four aisles, two spacious vestibules, two front staircases leading to the gallery and two staircases giving exits at the rear. The Church seats approximately 1,200 and an earlier record tells us that in 1930 there were 700-800 at the morning services and over 1,300 in the evening. The Ministers at Nelson Memorial and their years of service are as follows:-

Reverend Thomas Alexander Forbes 1896 - 1912

Reverend George William Smyth 1912 - 1929

Reverend Robert Milford 1929 - 1959

Reverend James Wilson McAuley 1960 - 1967

Reverend Ivan James Wilson 1967 - 1970

Reverend Noel Matthew Williamson 1971 - 1974

Reverend Alfred Wesley Williamson 1974 - 1990

Since 1990, after the retirement of the Reverend A.W. Williamson the congregation has been vacant apart from two terms of Stated Supply –

Reverend Thomas Wilson Gordon and

Reverend Brian Hughes

We have appreciated the Ministry of all these Men of God and the “Supply Preachers”. All left their mark on many lives. Together with Organisation Leaders, many came to a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and serving Christ in a variety of ways. Our Church Fellowship came to a close on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2014, but not the witness for that continues on in the lives of the members. Amalgamating with Immanuel Congregation, we rejoice in the warmth of welcome we received, being made to feel part of God’s Family in Immanuel.

The two Memorial Plaques 1914-1918, 1939-1945 containing the names of those who served and those who made the supreme sacrifice, these, along with the pedestal bust executed by a competent Italian sculptor with its plinth inscribed as follows, "As a token of respect to their learned, upright and evangelical Pastor the Reverend Isaac Nelson, the Presbyterian Congregation of Donegall Street has dedicated this bust 1852", have been lodged in the keeping of the Spectrum Centre, Shankill Road.