

Christ Church, Bessbrook – Press Release

For release week commencing Monday 20 March 2017

CHRIST CHURCH, BESSBROOK, CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

The parishioners of the Church of Ireland Parish Church of Christ Church in Bessbrook, Co. Armagh are looking forward with great anticipation as they prepare to celebrate the 150th anniversary of their Parish Church.

The church in Bessbrook was built in 1868 as a direct replacement for the smaller and less convenient Camlough Parish Church of St. Jude's, situated 2 miles away in the South Armagh village of Camlough.

Retaining the parochial identity of Camlough Parish, The Church of Christ The Redeemer, to give its full title, was passed to be built at a special Easter Vestry meeting of St. Jude's in 1864.

Some two years passed before a suitable site could be found and in 1866, as an extract of the September Vestry Meeting resolves, *"our most grateful thanks be respectfully presented to the Rt Hon The Earl of Charlemont for his generous kindness in granting a site, rent free, and in perpetuity for the erection of a new and larger Parish Church to accommodate our greatly increased numbers"* and that this resolution be entered in the Vestry Book as a record of the Earl of Charlemont's munificence.

The corner-stone of the new Parish Church was laid at Maghernahely, Bessbrook, on Saturday 18 May 1867 at 4.00pm by the Rev Alexander Irwin, MA, Rector of Killeavy, Precentor of Armagh Cathedral and Chaplain to the Lord Primate, in the presence of Rev J B Frith, Incumbent, the Rev H W Lett, Officiating Curate, Robert Ross and William Joseph Wonfor, Churchwardens, along with various visiting clergy from the neighbouring Church of Ireland parishes.

The construction work continued throughout until its consecration, on Tuesday 22 September 1868, by His Grace, The Most Rev Marcus Gervais Beresford DD. The style of the architecture was the early English and it was built from local granite and brickwork, at a total cost of £3014-19-7.

The officials of the newly consecrated Church were:

Incumbent: Rev John Brien Frith, BA
Curate: Rev Henry William Lett, BA
Churchwardens: Robert Ross and William Joseph Wonfor

The church has continued as a place of worship over the last 150 years for the local Church of Ireland congregation.

Today, while the Parish is currently vacant of a full-time rector, the Priest-in-charge, Rev William McCracken, has led a strong committee in the planning of their 150th anniversary programme.

First discussed at the Easter Vestry in 2015, it wasn't long before the inspirations of the local parishioners established a list of events which are due to run from May 2017 through to September 2018, the exact time-scale it took to build the church 150 years ago.

Some 12 different events have been planned to be held over the 17-month period, which include a Favourite Hymns Service, local garden tour, visits to Cathedrals in Armagh, Londonderry and Dublin, concerts, table quiz, a family fun day and a culminating weekend-long Flower Festival in September 2018. The church has also produced a 2-year calendar, covering 2017 & 2018, at a cost of £10.00 which is still available to purchase.

The parishioners of Christ Church have been greatly encouraged by the support of the local community as they prepare to celebrate 150 years of worship, none more so than the local business community, who have been very generous in their support of the church's celebrations.

The programme of events will be officially launched at a special event this coming Saturday evening, 25 March, in Bessbrook Parish Hall, when His Grace, The Most Reverend Dr Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh, will lead the parishioners towards the beginning of one of the most anticipated projects in their recent history. Other participating clergy include the Archdeacon of Armagh, Venerable Terry Scott, Mullabrack Rural Dean, Rev Canon Neville Hughes and Rev William McCracken.

If anyone, especially past-parishioners, wishes to avail of further information on the 150th anniversary programme of Christ Church should visit the parish website at www.christchurchbessbrook.co.uk or contact the Select Vestry Hon. Secretary on (028) 30 839 041.

*Note to the editor:
Church Contact Details*

*Trevor Kinnin
21 Fountain Street
Bessbrook
BT35 7DE*

Tel (028) 30 839 041 or email: kinnin@hotmail.co.uk

Photograph of church sent as additional jpg attachment