Covenant Day Celebration at Mourne Presbyterian Church Hall

By Maynard Hanna

On September 28 1912 Mourne Presbyterian Church’s Lecture Hall was the main venue for the signing of the Covenant in Kilkeel, Co Down. To mark the centenary of the signing the Church organised an exhibition in the Lecture Hall on Friday September 28 past.

The exhibition included a superb display of photographic images and other relevant literature from the 1912 document. Visitors to the event also visited the Public Record Office for Northern Ireland’s Ulster Covenant website to search for the names of their family members from the local church congregation that the elders and committee had gathered in that very Lecture Hall site 100 years ago to sign the Covenant on its 100th anniversary.

By signing they proclaimed that they would surrender neither their ‘civil and religious freedom’ nor ‘their cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom’. Through photos and illustrations from the period, this book tells the story of that event 100 years on, and the determination and self-discipline aroused by the government’s Home Rule Bill. The book is £7.99 and available from all good bookshops. The book is also available from www.booksni.com.

On September 28 1912, over 470,000 men and women signed Ulster’s Solemn League and Covenant. Their journey on Covenant Day had started through the town of Kilkeel, continuing to Ballynahinch before boarding transportation specially booked to take the congregation to Belfast where they duly signed the Covenant at Belfast City Hall.

Also, as part of the centenary celebrations a pamphlet that had been produced in October 1912 by the Rev. Dr. William McMordie, the minister of Mourne Presbyterian Church congregation in Kilkeel at that time, was re-produced by the Ulster-Scots Agency and presented to all those in attendance at the event.

Music on the evening was provided by the Schomberg Society. Their life and drum ensemble walked through the town commemorating the route that the elders and committee members from the local church congregations had walked in 1912.

incumbent of Mourne Presbyterian Church, the Rev William Bingham by the late Miss Jane Orr. Consequently, Rev Bingham approached the Ulster-Scots Agency to request for this historic document to be reprinted and for the re-printed pamphlet to be used as the centrepiece for Kilkeel’s celebrations marking the centenary of the signing of the Covenant.

On Covenant Sunday in 1912, following the preaching of Dr McMordie’s sermon, 586 men and 360 women made their way to Mourne Presbyterian Church Lecture Hall to sign the Covenant and Declaration respectively.

On the Sunday following the Covenant Day Celebration at Mourne Presbyterian Church Hall, September 30 2012, one thousand copies of the re-print of Dr McMordie’s pamphlet were distributed to all in attendance at the morning and evening Church services.

Maynard Hanna is Ulster-Scots Agency development officer


Firm-leagued we face the future, tho’ the road be dark and steep,
The road that leads of honour is the lonely road we keep,
And, though all the world forsake us, this is the course we hold,
The course our fathers followed in the Covenant days of old.

We faint would look for comfort to the land from whence we came,
Where still abide our kith and kin and clansmen of our name,
Where lies were deemed of small account by valiant men and true,
For Christ, His Crown, His Covenant and the war-worn folds of blue.

Long years have been and faded since the old-time banner waved,
So! Hoe it flutters once again ere dangers must be braved.
The Covenant oath we now will swear that Britain may be told,
We stand for faith and freedom and the memories of old.

For all they died for gladly in the homeland o’er the sea,
For blood-won rights that still are ours as Ulsterborn and free,
For the land we came to dwell in, and the martyr’s faith we hold,
God grant we be as leal to these as were the men of old!

Further reading:
The life, work and legacy of Rev W.F Marshall, published by the Ulster-Scots Community Network
Understanding the Ulster Covenant - The Leaders, published by the Ulster-Scots Community Network
Understanding the Ulster Covenant published by the Ulster-Scots Community Network