

The following paragraphs are from *In Old Corglass*, “an outline of 250 years in First Bailieboro’ Presbyterian Church” written by the Rev. Warren Porter, B.D. who was minister of Corglass from July 1960 to January 1963 (he had also been the “stated supply” from 1958). The booklet was published in 1964 with a foreword written by “T. Byers”.

The foreword, reprinted here, is followed on Page 2 by the Rev. Porter’s paragraphs on the Rev. Thomas Byers. The main interest here is the fourth paragraph with its memories of times past.

FOREWORD

I confidently commend this excellent brochure concerning one of our congregations situate on the extreme outpost of the older Ulster; and congratulate Rev. Warren Porter, B.D., on his patient research, his praise-worthy skill and judgment in selecting the material, and his effectiveness in putting the best of it before the reader.

Those who are even superficially acquainted with the history of our Church are aware of how careless our forefathers were in keeping the records – even the minutes of meetings of Committees, Deacons’ Courts and Sessions, and what a stumbling-block and disadvantage is thus placed in the path of the historian. Mr. Porter has got round much of this.

I feel assured that he who dips into the early pages of this booklet will not lay it down till he has reached its end.

I speak with some knowledge on this subject, not only because I have covered this historic ground on more than one occasion through the written page, but because I belong by birth to this district and oft listened to grandfather and father, who were long attached to and faithful elders of the neighbouring congregation. They spoke of the “whimsicalities” of the “hard” landlord, the “tyrannical” factor, the “overbearing” bishop, the “obsequious” rector and the “grabbing flunkeyism” of the Presbyterian who verted to the Episcopal Church. Wherever there was an individual with a special characteristic, like the Greeks, they had a name for it. They laid stress on the long-sufferings of the Presbyterians, their prosecution at the bishops’ courts for marrying their own people, the fines imposed, etc. They talked of their loyalty to the Crown and their ardent attachment to duty.

But if there was an unworthy Presbyterian he came in for their reprobation and they agreed to speak to him to alter his ways and not bring dishonour upon the Presbyterian community. One, with these memories, was driven to many a volume to see how much truth was in these statements.

Two hundred and fifty years is a long span and Mr. Porter has covered the whole of it with painstaking success. Those who read his pages will feel an urge to turn to other tracts and volumes and thus the effects will not be ephemeral but lasting. So let it be, is the wish of

T. BYERS

The Rev. Thomas Byers

Following Mr. Magill came the **Rev. Thomas Byers**. Minister of Strand Church, Belfast, Mr. Byers accepted a call to 1st Bailieborough and on the 16th March, 1921, he was installed therein. Mr. Byers, as he then was, came back to his native county at a very critical period. The country around was still in the throes of bitter political disturbances. Something very like guerilla war was being waged in large areas of the county and the forces of law and order were helpless in many places. In the Rev. Thomas Byers the people of Corglass found one whose courage and coolness made him an ideal leader for such a time of peril. When two young men, members of his flock, were kidnapped (a common enough happening in those days) it was Mr. Byers who took such strong and prompt action as resulted in the restoration of the youths to their home again.

As pastor, preacher, teacher and friend, the Rev. Tom proved to be outstanding, and a proof of his merit is seen in the exceedingly high regard in which he is still held in Bailieborough although his ministry there lasted only four years.

During his ministry an organ was introduced as an aid to the congregational praise. As so often happened in such cases, there were those who resented the innovation, but with Christian gentleness and common-sense Mr. Byers won his opponents' hearts so that there was no lasting division as a result of the change. During Mr. Byers' ministry also a very suitable war memorial tablet was unveiled and dedicated at a most impressive service. Those who had served and sacrificed during the 1914-1918 conflict were thus worthily recognised.

In spite of the political upheavals of the time, Corglass still prospered as a congregation. In 1924 there was an average attendance of 190 at the half-yearly communion, eight babies had been baptised and sixteen new communicants had been admitted to the Lord's Supper. The annual income from all sources was £488 and the minister received stipend to the amount of £120.

The end of 1924 also saw the end of Mr. Byers' ministry in Bailieborough for at a special meeting of Presbytery on the 3rd December he accepted a call to Ormond Quay Church in the City of Dublin. The Presbytery and congregation regretfully released him, loath to lose one of whom they had been able to say: "The Presbytery are very much pleased with the testimony borne to the fidelity and acceptance with which he ... preaches the doctrines of the Gospel ... they are much pleased to hear of the deep interest which he takes in the young people and of the large amount of work he does on their behalf ..." Twenty-two years later the General Assembly was to show its concurrence in this high opinion of Mr. Byers, by calling him to the Moderatorial chair; and the University of Dublin was to pay its tribute in the form of a Doctorate of Divinity *Jure Dignitatis*.