

Are We Worshipping at the Right Shrine? Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin

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Donald Akenson, in his book *Discovering the End of Time*, suggests that the house of Francis Synge Hutchinson in Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, where some of the early Brethren began meeting in November 1829, has become something close to being a Brethren shrine.¹ This is because it is considered to be the first regular Brethren meeting, although some of the group had previously been meeting at the house of Edward Cronin nearby at 13 Lower Pembroke Street.²

The address of Hutchinson's house has traditionally been given as 9 Fitzwilliam Square. Although he may have been quoting earlier sources, this is the address given by Andrew Miller writing in around 1879 and has been simply copied by later writers both popular and academic.³ This is the house that participants on the Eighth International Brethren History Conference in July 2017 dutifully went to look at. The house, originally built sometime between 1815

1. Donald Harman Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time: Irish Evangelicals in the Age of Daniel O'Connell* (Montreal & Kingston, 2016), 74n82.

2. Exactly when the group at Cronin's house began meeting is uncertain and J. N. Darby later denied knowledge of it. Peter L. Embley, 'The Origins and Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren', St. Paul's College, Cheltenham, PhD Thesis, 1966, 40-4. Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time*, 274.

3. Andrew Miller, *The Brethren: A Brief Sketch of Their Origin, Progress, and Testimony* (London, n.d. [c.1879]), 11. Available online at <<http://bibletruthpublishers.com/andrew-miller/the-brethren-a-brief-sketch-of-their-origin-progress-and-testimony/a-miller/lub76-15063>>, accessed 11/08/2017 (the pagination in this version is not the same as the original printed book); T. S. Veitch, *The Story of the Brethren Movement* (London, [c.1925]), 15; Embley, 'Origins and Early Development', 41.

and 1822, is distinctive because of the large picture window that has replaced the original ground floor window, presumably when the house was remodelled in 1895.⁴



**No 9 Fitzwilliam Square.
Built 1815-22;
photograph, July 2017.**



**No 45 Fitzwilliam Square.
Built 1807-15;
photograph, Aug. 2017.**

However, this identification is wrong, for two reasons. Doubts are first raised by an inspection of house numbering shown on the 1847

⁴ Veitch, *Brethren Movement*, opp.16. Christine Casey, *The Buildings of Ireland: Dublin* (New Haven, CT, 2005), 571-2.

five feet to one mile (1:1056) Ordnance Survey plan of Dublin.⁵ This shows that at that date the Square was numbered separately on each side, so there was a 9 East, 9 South, 9 West, and 9 North. At some time subsequently, certainly by 1862, it has been renumbered so there is one sequence numbering round the east side, south, west and then north, so the current number 9 was originally 9 Fitzwilliam Square East.⁶

The second doubt comes from Akenson who again in his book *Discovering the End of Time* states the house was not number 9 but number 8, although without saying anything about which side of the Square it was on.⁷ Akenson is in fact simply quoting a paper written by W. J. McCormack, who adds the information that the occupant of Number 9 at this time was a Robert Blakeney, but again says nothing about which side of the Square.⁸ Not surprisingly, McCormack references Dublin directories for this information, although he does not list the specific directories referred to.⁹

Fortunately, Wilson's *Dublin Directory for the Year 1830* is available on-line.¹⁰ This does indeed list, under 'Nobility and Gentry', both 'Hutchinson (F. S. esq) 8 Fitzw-sq.W'—in other words, 8 Fitzwilliam Square West—and also 'Blakeney (Robt. esq) 9, Fitzw-sq.W'.¹¹ So unfortunately many Brethren over the years have indeed

⁵ The relevant section of this map showing Fitzwilliam Square will be found in Frank Cullen, *Dublin 1847: City of the Ordnance Survey* (Dublin, 2015), 64–5.

⁶ This renumbering had taken place by 1862, see Thom's Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1862 (available on-line at <<http://www.libraryireland.com/Dublin-Street-Directory-1862/Home.php>>, accessed 11/08/2017).

⁷ Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time*, 74.

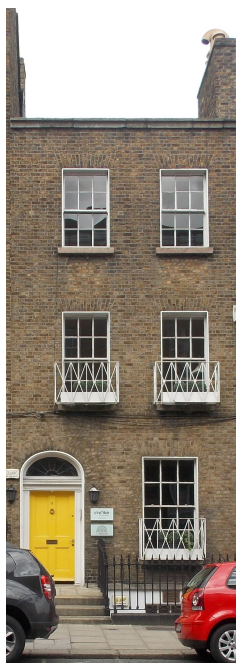
⁸ W. J. McCormack, 'The "Plymouth" Brethren? Prologomena to the Re-Writing of J. M. Synge's Biography', *Religion and Literature*, 28 (1996), 83–96, spec.86, 95 n.7.

⁹ No doubt he consulted the extensive collection of Dublin directories held by the Dublin City Library. The Guildhall Library in London also has holdings of Dublin directories.

¹⁰ 'books.google.co.uk' (the full URL is too long and complex to quote: to find this item simply type "Wilson's Dublin Directory for the Year 1830" into the search window. Accessed 11/08/2017).

¹¹ *Wilson's Dublin Directory for the Year 1830* (Dublin, 1830), 19, 28.

been worshipping at the wrong shrine. The current house at 9 Fitzwilliam Square is the wrong number on the wrong side of the square. Fitzwilliam Square West runs directly into Lower Pembroke Street, so it was a shorter walk for Cronin than if Hutchinson had been on the east side of the Square. Andrew Miller was writing after the renumbering and presumably he, or his source, was unaware of this. The '9' is likely to be an erroneous transcription by someone or a typo.



13 Lower Pembroke Street. Built c.1812; photograph, July 2017.



11 Aungier Street, now demolished. Photograph, T. S. Veitch, *The Story of the Brethren Movement* [1925].

So which is the correct house? Not much has happened in Fitzwilliam Square since it was mapped in 1847. Indeed, the gardens in the centre are essentially the same as when they were laid out in

1813.¹² There has not been any demolition and little rebuilding of the houses, which are now mostly in commercial use. Comparing the 1847 map with current large scale mapping, it is fairly certain therefore that the correct house is the current 45 Fitzwilliam Square.¹³ These houses on the west side are somewhat earlier than those on the east side, being built 1807–15.¹⁴ The house at number 45 is typical for the houses in the Square, including number 9, being of three storeys plus attic and basement in height, two bays in width with a doorway flanked by ionic columns. At number 45 the Georgian fanlight over the doorway, seen in other houses in the Square, has been replaced by plain glass. The attic storey would have provided accommodation for the servants. By contrast, Cronin's house at 13 Lower Pembroke Street is smaller in plan, does not have an attic storey and the doorway lacks the ionic columns. Hutchinson's house therefore suggests greater wealth than Cronin's, although appearances may of course be deceptive.

In May 1830, the emerging Dublin assembly moved to a large rented auction room over a cabinet-maker in the lower social class Aungier Street.¹⁵ This place was used for a number of years, and became known in Dublin as the Brethren's room. According to Miller: 'This strange-looking place for the holy service of the Lord may be taken as a sample of what Brethren's rooms have been in all parts of the country ever since.'¹⁶

¹² Cullen, *Dublin*, 65.

¹³ The Ordnance Survey Ireland on-line historic maps viewer (<<http://maps.osi.ie/publicviewer>>, accessed 11/08/2017) allows historic mapping to be overlaid on current large scale-mapping, although this only has later 1:2500 mapping, which does not show street numbers, and not the 1:1056 1847 plan of Dublin. The current mapping does show street numbers.

¹⁴ Casey, *Dublin*, 571.

¹⁵ Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time*, 275.

¹⁶ Miller, *The Brethren*, 19. Miller dates the move to either the winter of 1829 or the spring of 1830.