

# Bleakley pays tribute to Saidie Patterson

By Sam McAughtry

SHANKILL ROAD Methodist Church was packed to the porch and the crowds spilled out onto the pavement for Saidie Patterson's funeral on Saturday morning. The congregation included hardly any of the big name politicians or senior clergy who attend the television funerals in the North. One of the mourners was Paddy Devlin. The one-time SDLP man stood at ease on the Loyalist Shankill Road, just another man come to pay his respects to a wonderful Protestant woman.

The trade union movement, naturally, was strongly represented.

Saidie Patterson's biographer, David Bleakley, gave the address. The atmosphere in this brand new brightly lit, brightly designed church was so far removed from gloom and so strongly influenced by the cheery person who was at the heart of the service that Bleakley several times drew smiles from his listeners and once caused laughter to ripple right across the church from pulpit to porch. That was when he recalled

Saidie Patterson's dry remark many long trade union years ago: "If the men in the movement pass more pubs and fewer resolutions, we'd be a good deal better off".

She was born and stayed for all of her life on the Shankill Road. When she was only 12, her mother died in childbirth and the young Saidie was brought to her dying mother's bedside and told that she must assume responsibility for her little sister's rearing. She did this and much more besides and when the ministers have done leading the prayers and hymns, David Bleakley, one-time Community Relations Minister at Stormont, leant smiling on the rostrum and in twenty minutes outlined the achievements of a woman who lived her life in the finest Northern Protestant liberal tradition.

She was respected by Mother Theresa who said once of Saidie Patterson that she was a woman who had as irrevocably as any nun, kept vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Unlike Mother Theresa herself, however, Saidie could not go back at the end of the day and draw solace from the other sisters in the order.