

Introduction

Trinity College Library is the oldest and by far the largest library in Ireland and one of the most important university libraries in Europe. It is unique in the variety of roles it performs. Its special collections, built up over 400 years, combined with its right to claim copies of books and journals published in both Ireland and the United Kingdom, under legal-deposit legislation, have made it a quasi-national library and a research resource of international importance. As home to the Book of Kells, which is housed in the magnificent setting of the Old Library, it is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Ireland and, unusually for an academic library, provides a significant income for its parent institution.

In many ways, the Library is the College's greatest asset. Certainly, when the name of Trinity College is mentioned outside its walls, more often than not it is the Library that springs to mind. The speed with which it was established, in the first few decades after the foundation of the College in 1592, was remarkable, and the early Fellows were clear that its purpose was to support Trinity's principal function of promoting 'civility, learning and Protestant piety' among the youth of Ireland.¹ Until the nineteenth century, its role was essentially a custodial one and in this respect it differed little from other university libraries, where 'collections were acquired, catalogued, gloated over and admired'.² Yet much of its history is characterised by periods of relative neglect, interspersed with bursts of activity initiated by individual energetic and efficient Librarians. The Fellows as a whole showed little interest in the running of the Library and its development, which, for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, owed more to the influence of external forces than to internal planning. Indeed, until the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of the manuscript treasures and great collections arrived as the result of donations or bequests, with little active intervention on the part of the College: Ussher's library came as a gift from the Irish House of Commons, sanctioned by Charles II; Claudius Gilbert's library was a bequest; and the Fagel collection was

¹ McDowell and Webb, p. 5.

² Peter Freshwater, 'Books and universities', in *Cambridge history*, vol. II, pp. 345–70 (p. 358).

bought for the College by the Erasmus Smith Trust. Even the Library's legal-deposit status was an incidental result of a political decision made for other reasons, and the College remained indifferent at first to what was the most important gift in the Library's history.

There are, of course, exceptions to this passive approach, and the impact – for good or ill – of those Librarians who held office for more than a handful of years is one of the principal features of this story. In the late eighteenth century, Thomas Leland's involvement with Irish studies, his encouragement of scholars and his ability to persuade the College to part with its money for the purchase of manuscripts created a suitable environment for the gift of the Sebright collection, which placed the Library in the first rank among holdings of Irish manuscripts. In the nineteenth century, Jacky Barrett and James Henthorn Todd capitalised on the College's periods of relative affluence to develop the collection by extensive purchasing and by employing sufficient staff to process not just what was being bought but also the growing flood of materials arriving under the terms of the Copyright Acts. The Library's copyright or legal-deposit status has had an overwhelming influence, not only on the collection itself, but on all aspects of the way the institution has been run and used since the early nineteenth century. The need to find space to house the ever-growing collection has been a perennial problem for successive Librarians.

Until the mid nineteenth century, use of the Library was restricted to graduates, which meant that the number of readers using its books and manuscripts was relatively low. Changes to the curriculum and the admission of undergraduates led to a growth in use, particularly after the First World War. Unfortunately, this coincided with an unprecedented increase in the amount of material being received by legal deposit, a growing impoverishment of the College following Irish independence, and the incumbency of a Librarian, Josiah Gilbert Smyly, whose involvement with the running of the Library was minimal. As a result, resources became very thinly spread and the Library suffered a period of serious decline. It was not until the 1950s that efforts to restore the standing of both the College and its Library began to bear fruit. Despite the relative poverty of the Irish universities in comparison to those in other parts of the developed world, Trinity College is now a major player on the world scene and its Library not only plays a fundamental role in the support of teaching and research in the College but is an internationally important resource for scholarship, heavily used by students and scholars from all over the world.

The highlights in the story of the Library were retold in various publications during the nineteenth century, but relatively little primary research has been undertaken until recently on its history, its collections, its users

and its staff. The collections themselves have now been covered extensively in two books: *Treasures of the Library* and *The Old Library*.³ The publication of a book of *Essays* in 2000, and more recent research, have unlocked a considerable amount of new information, but the editors of the *Essays* noted that there was at that time an insufficient critical mass of research to provide the background for a full academic history.⁴ The College muniments (archives) document the organisation, buildings and acquisitions reasonably well – at least from the eighteenth century onwards – but there are still gaps in our knowledge of the Library’s history. In particular, its impact on teaching and research in the College and on the wider world of scholarship, and its use by individual readers are both areas which deserve further study.

The purpose of the present book is not to duplicate the work on the collections that have already been published, but to provide a chronological narrative showing how the Library has developed, the context into which its collections fit, the buildings in which they were housed and used, something of its organisation and, as far as current research permits, a glimpse at the use that has been made of it by readers. No library operates in isolation and, although this is not intended as a comparative history, the fortunes of other libraries have been included where they are relevant to the story of Trinity College Library. As an institution which had an English queen as its foundress and Cambridge men as its first five Provosts, Trinity College has traditionally related more closely to the ancient English universities than to the Scottish ones – and of course it was the only university in Ireland until the middle of the nineteenth century. This relationship applies equally to the Library, particularly after its inclusion among the British legal-deposit libraries in 1801, a status lost by the Scottish universities in 1836. Most of the comparative statistics that have been included, therefore, are for the other two university legal-deposit libraries, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and Cambridge University Library, as comparison between Trinity and other Irish or British university libraries is less straightforward, none being comparable in size to those three and all having to acquire most of their books and journals by purchase.

A note on terminology

The terms Trinity College Dublin and the University of Dublin are a frequent source of confusion. The Elizabethan College charter contained the curious

³ *Treasures, Old Library.* ⁴ *Essays.*

phrase ‘*mater universitatis*’. Quite what was meant by the designation of Trinity College as the ‘mother of a university’ is unclear, and the phrase has been interpreted in a number of ways. Was the University of Dublin founded on the model of Oxford and Cambridge, with Trinity as its first college and the assumption that others would follow, as nearly happened in the 1650s? Or was it a precursor of colonial foundations such as Harvard and the College of William and Mary, with a single authority acting as both college and university? ‘To say that Trinity was founded as a college and became a university is a convenient way of explaining to the bewildered the oddity of an institution which manages to be both simultaneously.’⁵ The distinction between the University of Dublin and Trinity College has changed over the years, but in essence it is the College which provides the teaching and research facilities, including the Library, and the University which confers degrees, though for most day-to-day purposes the two institutions are synonymous.

The University has a Chancellor and several Pro-Chancellors (the office of Vice-Chancellor was abolished in 1964), but all of those roles are primarily of a formal or ceremonial nature. The head of the College is the Provost, a post equivalent to Vice-Chancellor or President elsewhere, and the College is run by the Board, which until 1911 consisted of the Provost and the seven Senior Fellows. After that date its membership was gradually extended to include representatives of the Junior Fellows, professors and, later, students and other members of staff. Until the nineteenth century, most of the ‘annual officers’ were elected from among the Senior Fellows on 20 November each year. The principal officers included the Vice-Provost, Bursar (responsible for the financial management of the College), Registrar (who maintained the records of both the College and the University) and Senior Lecturer (responsible for undergraduate studies). Although these offices still exist, much of their work has now been taken over by professional administrators, but for most of the period covered by this book the officers were academics who worked with little or no administrative support. The Librarian was also one of these officers, but his election on an annual basis ceased in the eighteenth century. It took until 1965 for Trinity to appoint its first full-time Librarian, long after other comparable institutions, but this was in the context of a university which, even in 1939, had only five full-time administrative staff and the same number of secretaries.⁶

⁵ Aidan Clarke, ‘Responsibility: the administrative framework’, in Holland, pp. 89–105 (p. 89). See also McDowell and Webb, pp. 1–5.

⁶ McDowell and Webb, p. 443.

Copyright and legal deposit

Throughout the book I have used the term ‘legal deposit’ rather than ‘copyright’ to refer to the process by which publishers are obliged to deposit copies of their books with specified libraries. Until 1842, publishers wishing to protect the copyright in their books were required to register them at Stationers’ Hall in London, which then rendered them eligible for deposit in the libraries. The 1842 Copyright Act removed the link between copyright protection and deposit, but legal-deposit legislation continued to be included in successive Copyright Acts until 1911 and the term ‘copyright library’ persisted until the late twentieth century.

Conventions

In quoting from manuscript material I have not changed spellings, but abbreviations and ampersands have usually been filled out, and archaisms such as *y^e* and *y^t*, punctuation and capitalisation have been modernised. Throughout this book references to MUN and MS numbers without any further indication of location are invariably to documents in Trinity College Library. In all other cases the holding library or archive is indicated.

In September 1752, Britain and Ireland adopted the Gregorian calendar, which prescribed that the year should start on 1 January, rather than 25 March. I have followed that convention for all dates (i.e. the day following 31 December 1603 is rendered here as 1 January 1604, not 1 January 1603, as would appear in the sources) and the day and month are given as they appear in the original documents.

Currency amounts quoted are those recorded in the documents themselves, and, unless specified, they refer to Irish pounds at times when those were different from sterling. Throughout the eighteenth century thirteen Irish pounds equalled twelve pounds sterling, and in 1826 the Irish currency was assimilated to the British. This arrangement lasted until 1979, when Ireland joined the European Monetary System, breaking its link with sterling, and in 2002 the Irish pound was replaced by the euro.

1 | Early days: 1592–1640

At various times during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries attempts had been made to found a university in Dublin, but as Ireland entered the 1590s it was still without such an institution. By that time, England's two universities were already around 400 years old and Scotland had three that had been founded before 1500. With the relative peace following the religious upheavals of the earlier part of the sixteenth century, there was a flowering of new universities and colleges across Europe: Jesus College, Oxford was established in 1571, Leiden in 1575, Edinburgh in 1582, Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1584 and Graz in 1585.

In Ireland, it was recognised from the 1560s that, if the Reformation was to become embedded, its inhabitants needed to be educated and its clergy to be trained in the Protestant faith. After a number of proposed schemes had come to naught, the mayor and corporation of Dublin were persuaded in 1590 to set aside the land and the largely ruined buildings on the site of the former Augustinian priory of All Hallows, about a kilometre to the east of the city wall. Application was made to the Queen, Elizabeth I, and on 3 March 1592 the College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity near Dublin was granted a charter.

Unlike several of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, Trinity's foundation was not accompanied by a handsome endowment. The Queen, notorious for her frugality, encouraged the establishment of the new university but failed to provide any financial support. The initial funding to set up the College had to be collected by means of a public appeal, addressed to gentlemen in every county of Ireland. The appeal raised over £2,000, but throughout the first decade of its existence the College was beset by financial difficulties. It was granted estates in the 1590s, but the uprising of the Earl of Tyrone meant that the rent from those estates could not be collected until after Mountjoy's victory at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601.¹

Some building did take place in the early years. By the end of the Elizabethan era, the College consisted of a quadrangle of three-storey buildings,

¹ Mahaffy, *Epoch*, pp. 60–111; Colm Lennon, “‘The bowels of the city's bounty’: the municipality of Dublin and the foundation of Trinity College”, *Long Room*, 37 (1992), 10–16.

with Chapel, Hall and Kitchen on the north side, incorporating part of the former monastery, the Library on the south side, and students' chambers forming most of the remainder. A later drawing shows this layout. (See Figure 3.) When the first students arrived in 1594, only the west and north sides had been completed, but work was proceeding on the remaining buildings, including the Library, for which Roger Parker, described as the 'steward', was paying bills for woodwork, hinges, nails and glass in 1595 and 1596.²

Challoner and Ussher

During the first few years of the College's existence, its Library collection consisted of a mere handful of books. The Particular Book, the earliest extant record of College affairs, contains a list of '*libri in publica Collegii Bibliotheca*', dated 24 February 1601.³ (See Figure 1.) It records around forty printed works, including editions of classical writers such as Aristotle, Plato and Cicero, atlases by Mercator and Ptolemy, and a number of theological titles. Seven of the books were a gift from Richard Latewar, a former Fellow of St John's College, Oxford, who was killed in County Tyrone in 1601 whilst serving with Mountjoy's forces and who left books and manuscripts to his Oxford college, as well as to Trinity.⁴ Most of the printed books, and probably at least one of the manuscripts listed as being in the Library in 1601, are still present, but the majority of the entries for manuscripts have been crossed through, probably indicating that they were subsequently found to be missing. Three were gifts from Christopher Ussher, Ulster King of Arms.

The early members of the College had access to many more books than those represented in this small collection. Luke Challoner, one of the three founding Fellows, had amassed a substantial library of over eight hundred books by the 1590s, including works on philosophy, theology, history, astronomy, mathematics and geography, with maps by some of the important sixteenth-century cartographers. It is clear that Challoner was collecting not just for his own use, but also for that of students and other Fellows, to

² MS 2640 (transcription, MS 2641).

³ The Particular Book is now MUN/V/1/1. See also: TCD, *The Particular Book of Trinity College, Dublin: a facsimile from the original*, with an Introduction and appendices by J. P. Mahaffy (London: Unwin, 1904). References to the Library were collected by J. G. Smyly in 'The Old Library: extracts from the Particular Book', *Hermathena*, 49 (1935), 166–83, and for convenience these, rather than references to the original manuscript, are cited below (as Smyly).

⁴ Mahaffy, *Epoch*, pp. 141–2; K. J. Hölzgen, 'Richard Latewar, Elizabethan poet and divine', *Anglia*, 89 (1971), 417–38.

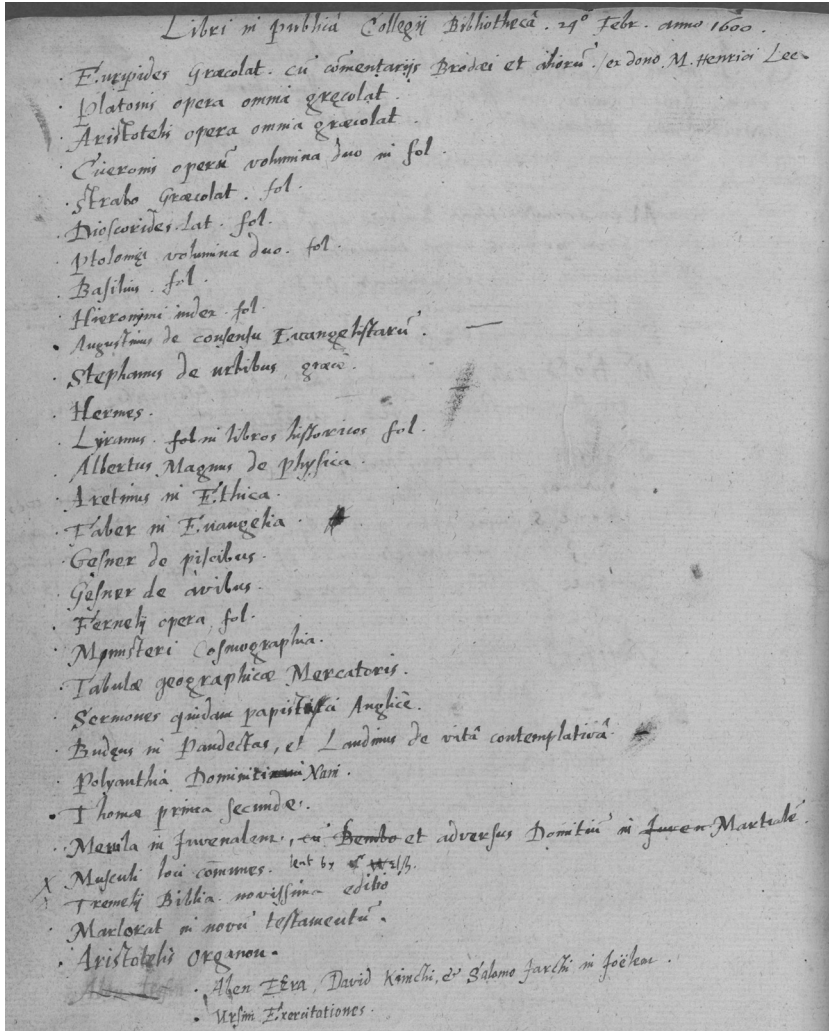


Figure 1 The first list of books in the Library, 24 February 1600/01 (MUN/V/1/1, fol. 216v.)

whom he lent books from his collection.⁵ One of his notebooks contains three catalogues of his library, dated 1595, 1596 and 1608, and lists of books lent, dated 1601 and 1610, with the names of the borrowers, including several of the Fellows, with the titles crossed out to indicate their return.⁶

⁵ Elizabethanne Boran, 'Luke Challoner's library, 1595–1608', *Long Room*, 37 (1992), 17–26; Boran, 'Libraries', p. 5.

⁶ MS 357, fols. 1–15.

The year 1601 marks the beginning of the College Library proper. As well as being the date of the first list of books, it was also the year when a Library Keeper was appointed and when the first recorded purchases took place. Between then and 1613, several members of the College undertook book-buying visits to England. Funding for the books bought on those expeditions came from a donation that had been promised to the College in 1593 but which was not received until 1601. A legend prevailed for over 200 years that a sum of £1,800 for the purchase of books had been donated by the officers of the army after Mountjoy's victory at Kinsale. That legend, almost certainly started in 1656 by Nicholas Bernard, the keeper of Archbishop Ussher's library and his first biographer, was conclusively disproved by J. P. Mahaffy in 1903.⁷ The amount donated was smaller than Bernard claimed and, though its source was indeed a gift from officers of the army, it dated from 1593, not 1601, and it was made to assist with the founding of the new College and not specifically for the Library. Bernard manipulated the story for political purposes, as will be seen in the next chapter. It appears that the soldiers were owed payment for their service in Ireland and that they decided to donate this money to the College.

The process of extracting the money from the Queen and Lord Burghley, however, turned out to be far from simple. In February 1593 the Lord Deputy, Sir William Fitzwilliam, sent to Burghley and the Privy Council a number of bills 'given by certain captains towards the building of the college', asking for reimbursement.⁸ The following month Challoner and others also wrote to ask for the money, amounting to £623 0s. 8d., owed to the 'captains serving in Ireland', requesting that it be transferred to the College as the soldiers had requested.⁹ A further letter from the Lord Deputy followed a year later, repeating the request, but it took until 1601 for the first payment to be released.¹⁰ Even then, the money seems to have arrived in small sums over a period of years, mostly through the hands of Sir James Carroll, an official of the government in Ireland, who was closely involved with the College finances.

The first of the book-buying expeditions was undertaken by Challoner in June 1601. He bought around 350 items from a number of London book-sellers, including Gregory Seton of Aldersgate, from whom he purchased

⁷ Nicholas Bernard, *The life and death of the most reverend and learned father of our church, Dr James Ussher* (London: Tyler, 1656), p. 42; J. P. Mahaffy, 'The Library of Trinity College, Dublin: the growth of a legend', *Hermathena*, 12 (1903), 68–78.

⁸ H. C. Hamilton, ed., *Calendar of state papers Ireland, Elizabeth, 1592–1596* (London: HMSO, 1890), pp. 77–8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

145 titles at a total cost of £58.¹¹ On his second visit to England, in 1603, Challoner was accompanied by the 22-year-old James Ussher, who had taken his MA at Trinity 2 years earlier and was later to become his son-in-law. (See Figure 2.) Ussher knew Challoner's library and used books from it, but this journey was his first introduction to the wider world of serious book-collecting and scholarship, when he began to assemble the nucleus of what was to become one of the most renowned private libraries of the age. On this visit, Challoner again bought extensively for the College. The Chester port-book for 1603 records the shipment by him of two barrels and one dryfat [chest] containing books valued at £100. In one year, possibly 1603, the College spent £568 9s. 0d. on the purchase of books and a further £20 on library desks.¹²

Ussher's journey to England was the first of what was to become a series of visits every 3 years until 1612, during each of which he spent about 3 months, not only buying books for the College and for his own growing library, but also undertaking research in Oxford and Cambridge. On those trips he met other scholars and collectors such as William Camden, Sir Thomas Bodley and Sir Robert Cotton, and after the visit of 1606 Camden asked Ussher to provide a description of Dublin for the next edition of his *Britannia*. Ussher did so, saying little about the College other than that it had been 'furnished of late with a notable library', a phrase added verbatim by Camden to the 1607 edition of his book.¹³

Challoner made one more visit, accompanying Ussher in 1609 and buying not just books but also globes and other items, to the value of £107 6s. 0d.¹⁴ The two men were mainly responsible for building up the Library, but they were not the only people entrusted to spend the College's money on books. In 1608, the Provost, Henry Alvey, travelled with a similar purpose, and in 1611 Anthony Martin, a Fellow, received payment for books that he had bought in England. Alvey's visit, and that of Challoner in 1609, are both well documented, and the booksellers from whom they made purchases are recorded: Adrian Marius, John Norton and John Bill in London, John Legate in Cambridge and Joseph Barnes in Oxford, several of whom were also

¹¹ Seton's bill, MS 2160a/10, is transcribed in William O'Sullivan, 'The Library before Kinsale', *Annual Bulletin*, (1952), 10–14. MS 2160a/1–17 consists of book lists from 1601–10, some in the hands of Ussher and Challoner and usually including the prices paid.

¹² D. M. Woodward, *The trade of Elizabethan Chester* (Hull: University, 1970), p. 21; MUN/LIB/10/4a.

¹³ C. R. Elrington, ed., *The whole works of the most rev. James Ussher*, 17 vols. (Dublin: Hodges & Smith, 1847–64), vol. XV, p. 11; William Camden, *Britannia* (London: George Bishop, 1607), p. 751.

¹⁴ MUN/LIB/10/4.