

The Book of Kells

‘Turning Darkness into Light’



Exhibition and Library Shop
open seven days a week

Admission Times

Monday-Saturday 09.30 – 17.00

Sunday (October to May) 12.00 – 16.30

Sunday (June to September) 09.30 – 16.30

Trinity College Library Dublin

‘Turning Darkness into Light’

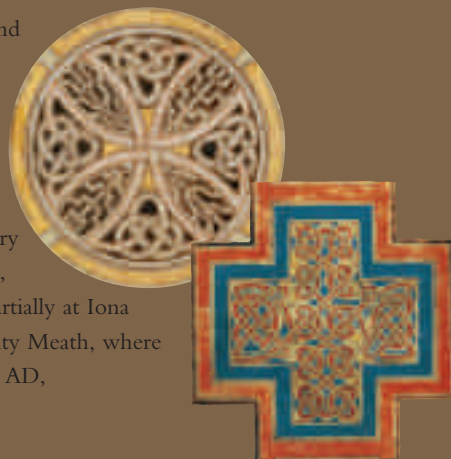
An exhibition introducing the Book of Kells and other manuscripts.

Over 1000 years ago, when the Book of Kells was written, Ireland had a population of less than a half a million people living in fortified homesteads along its coasts and inland waterways.



The Irish church was largely monastic in organisation. Monks lived in communities devoted to the study of God’s word, fasts and manual work. The message of the life of Christ was spread primarily through gospel books, and the scribes and artists who produced them held an honoured place in Irish society.

The Book of Kells contains lavishly decorated copy, in Latin, of the four gospels. It has long been associated with St Colum Cille (c 521–597 AD) who founded his principal monastery on the island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland, in about 561. The Book of Kells was probably produced early in the 9th century by the monks of Iona, working wholly or partially at Iona itself or at Kells, county Meath, where they moved after 806 AD,



when Iona was attacked by Vikings in a raid which left sixty-eight monks dead. The Book of Kells was sent to Dublin around 1653 for reasons of security during the Cromwellian period. It came to Trinity College through the agency of Henry Jones, after he became bishop of Meath in 1661.



Pangur Bán

I and Pangur Bán my cat

‘Tis a like task we are at:

Hunting mice is his delight,

Hunting words I sit all night.

Better far than praise of men

‘Tis to sit with book and pen;

Pangur bears me no ill will

He too plies his simple skill

Ofentimes a mouse will stray

In the hero Pangur’s way;

Ofentimes my keen thought set

Takes a meaning in its net.

‘Gainst the wall he sets his eye

Full and fierce and sharp and sly;

‘Gainst the wall of knowledge I

All my little wisdom try.

Practice every day has made

Pangur perfect in his trade;

I get wisdom day and night

Turning darkness into light

(Written by a ninth-century Irish monk in St Gallen, Switzerland)



Guide for Visitors



Trinity College Library Dublin

Trinity College Library Dublin

Trinity College Library Dublin is one of the world’s great research libraries, holding the largest collection of manuscripts and printed books in Ireland. Since 1801 it has had the right to claim a free copy of all British and Irish publications under the relevant copyright acts and has a stock of nearly three million volumes housed in a total of eight buildings. There has been a library since Trinity College was founded by charter of Queen Elizabeth in 1592. The earliest surviving building, the Old Library, was built between 1712 and 1732 to the design of Thomas Burgh.

Three areas of the Old Library are open to visitors: the ground floor was originally an open colonnade divided longitudinally by a central wall, with the sunny south side reserved for Fellows of the College. In 1892, the arcades were filled in to form bookstacks. One hundred years later, in 1992, the area was reconstructed internally to form an expanded Library Shop and a new exhibition area.

At the same time, a Treasury for the display of Irish medieval gospel manuscripts, principally the Book of Kells, the Book of Armagh and the Book of Durrow, was constructed in the East Pavilion. This area had originally housed the Philosophy School.

The Long Room

The main chamber of the Old Library, the Long Room, is nearly 65 metres in length, and houses around 200,000 of the Library’s oldest books. When built, it had a flat plaster ceiling, with shelves for books on the lower level only, and an open gallery. By the 1850’s these shelves had become completely full. In 1860 the roof was raised according to plans by the architects Deane and Woodward, to allow the construction of the present barrel-vaulted ceiling and gallery bookcases.

Marble busts are placed down either side of the room, a collection begun in 1743, when 14 busts were commissioned from the sculptor Peter Scheemakers. Other sculptors

represented are Simon Vierpyl, Patrick Cunningham, John van Nost and Louis Francois Roubiliac, whose bust of the writer Jonathan Swift is one the finest in the collection.

The harp is the oldest to survive from Ireland, and probably dates from the fifteenth century. It is constructed from oak and willow with brass strings. As an emblem of early, bardic society, this is the harp which appears on Irish coins. The attribution to Brian Boru, high king of Ireland (died 1014), is legendary.

One of the dozen or so remaining copies of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic is on display. This signalled the start of the Easter Rising when it was read aloud by Patrick Pearse outside the General Post Office on 24 April 1916.

The band of gold letters below the gallery commemorates benefactors of the 17th and 18th centuries: James Ussher, archbishop of Armagh; King Charles II; William Palliser, archbishop of Cashel; Claudius Gilbert, and Theophilus Butler.

Changing exhibitions of printed books and manuscripts from the Library’s collections are mounted in the Long Room.

Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Library support the work of Trinity College Library. As well as publicising the activities of the Library, the Friends contribute funds towards purchases over and above those which can be made from the resources of the College.

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- The minimum membership fee is €30 per annum. For this members receive:
- the journal *Long Room*, which contains articles about the Library’s collections and other items of bibliographical interest
 - a newsletter, which appears three times a year
 - free admission to the Old Library
 - invitations to the openings of exhibitions
 - a programme of lectures and visits
 - special reductions on some publications of the Friends

To join:

You can join immediately (enquire in the Library Shop), or write to the Treasurer, Friends of the Library, Trinity College, Dublin 2, from whom further information is available.

The Library Shop

The Library Shop is an integral part of the Library, the proceeds supporting the purchase of books and other services. The Shop specialises in merchandise relating to the Book of Kells, Celtic art, Irish history, Trinity College and Dublin city. Books, cards, CDs and cassettes, jewellery, posters, T-shirts and crafts are on sale.

The Library Shop is a member of the Museum Store Association.

A mail order service is available. Please ask for further details. Tel: (+353 1) 896 1171 Fax: (+353 1) 896 1016

Visitors are kindly asked to refrain for taking photographs while visiting the Exhibition and The Old Library.

