

Inside

Colmcille 1500: Celebrating the rich legacy of St. Columba at the Royal Irish Academy

The Ebooksos campaign in Ireland

The Maynooth University Library Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry
Competition: Engaging Community and Collections

Conference Report: Virtual Libraries and New beginnings

CONTENTS

Editorial 3

ARTICLES

The Ebooksos campaign in Ireland
Stuart Hamilton (LGMA), Marian Higgins (Past President, LAI and Kildare) and Cathal McCauley (President, LAI and University Librarian, Maynooth University) 04

Colmcille 1500: celebrating the rich legacy of St. Columba at the Royal Irish Academy
Barbara McCormack, RIA 08

The Maynooth University Library Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry Competition: Engaging Community and Collections
David Rinehart, Maynooth University 12

CONFERENCE REPORT

Virtual Libraries and New beginnings: 2021 CILIP Ireland/LAI Annual Joint Conference, 15-16 April, 2021
Catherine Ahearne, MU 17

OBITUARIES

Betty Searson
Mary Kelleher, former Librarian, RDS 19

Muriel McCarthy
Note: I have asked the Irish Times if we can reproduce 21

NEWS FROM THE STACKS 23

Library Association of Ireland,
Cumann Leabharlann na hÉireann,
c/o 138-144 Pearse Street, Dublin 2
www.libraryassociation.ie

An Leabharlann: The Irish Library is published
by The Library Association of Ireland and The
Chartered Institute of Library and Information
Professionals (Ireland).

ISSN: 2009-6062.

Editor: Marjory Sliney.

Editorial Board: Fintan Bracken (IT, Carlow),
Kate Kelly (Royal College of Surgeons in
Ireland), Claire Milliken (Northern Ireland
Assembly), Philip Russell (TU Dublin, Tallaght),
Brendan Teeling (Dublin City Public Libraries).

Production/Distribution

Distribution: Gillian Kerins

OA Manager: Vacant

Proofreading: Jenny Stokes

Design: Noel Smyth

Frequency

An Leabharlann: The Irish Library is published
twice a year in March and October.

Acknowledgements

Photos:

pp. 8,9, 10: RIA

pp. 13, 14: Maynooth University

p. 19: RDS Library

This journal is deposited with edepositireland.ie

Guidelines For Contributors

An Leabharlann: The Irish Library publishes articles on
libraries, librarianship and related topics of interest to
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- For additional information on style and referencing,
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Style Manual*. Oxford: OUP

Copy Deadlines

- 31 December 2021 for March 2022 issue
- 31 July 2022 for October 2022 issue

Editorial

Editorial, Vol 30 (2), October 2021

Apart from COVID-19, 2021 may well go down as the year of cyber-attacks, climate disasters and COP26. It is also the year in which there are global shortages of computer chips, shipping containers, HGV drivers and paper. Shortages mean there is inflation in higher container costs and higher shipping charges. Economic costs are not confined to the shortages above.

Library and information services currently operate against the backdrop of Brexit and Budget 2022, the National Development Plan and various other sector specific developments. As I write, Budget 2021 for the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, has been delivered. While much of the spend will go on public services, it seems that the majority will be spent on health services.

As restrictions lift, many users welcome the return of libraries. One good finding that emerged from library usage metrics is that reading is still popular. Our colleagues in the book trade saw the growth of independent booksellers. In an article in the *Guardian* (15.08.21), it notes that 60 opened in the UK and Ireland in the past 18 months. One in Ireland is Books at One, Letterfrack which was established with support from the One Foundation (run by philanthropist, Declan Ryan).

Unlike the last two issues, there are no COVID-19 related articles. Rather articles featured include Colmcille 1500, e-books in Ireland and a practical article on running a library-based poetry competition. Barbara McCormack's article on the Cathac notes the origin of copyright and intellectual rights.

Stewart Hamilton, Marian Higgins and Cathal McCauley consider the problems arising from exorbitant prices being charged for e-books. David Rinehart outlines running a poetry competition during a pandemic. Copyright is covered in the first two articles. Though the concept originated in the 6th century, today it is central in contract negotiations with publishers of digital material.

While COVID-19 may change from a pandemic to an epidemic, there are still challenges to be addressed. COVID protection measures are still required in all public buildings including libraries.

The lockdown provided many opportunities for creative changes in how libraries are organised. Opportunities for CPD were also provided and were delivered online or via Zoom. Essential skills were updated.

Library infrastructure across Ireland is changing. New public libraries are being built, others extended or refurbished. Expanded public library services will see more My Open Library sites developed around the country.

In 2018, legislation enabling the establishment of Technological Universities was enacted¹ (Technological University of Dublin (TUD) was established in 2019. This year, 2021, saw the establishment of Munster Technological University and the

Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands, Midwest. This change of status means that the universities will have greater access to research funding.

A new 10-year Adult Literacy for Life Strategy has been launched by Minister Simon Harris, TD.² This includes literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. A recent article by Fintan O' Toole highlights the importance of digital literacy. Budget 2022 (Education) has included once-off capital allocation of Euro 20m for the purchase of books and other library material. This is to be welcomed as it recognises the importance of access to good literature.

Apart from the problems this year, there was great co-operation within the scientific community. Vaccines were developed and results were disseminated rapidly. Hopefully we will soon see the vaccines widely available in poorer countries in the world.

Marjory Sliney, Editor, editor@libraryassociation.ie

¹ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/3/enacted/en/html>

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/655a4-adult-literacy-for-life-a-10-year-literacy-strategy/>





The #ebooksos campaign in Ireland

Stuart Hamilton, Marian Higgins and Cathal McCauley

Abstract

Against the backdrop of COVID-19, this article outlines the ebooksos campaign. The origin and rationale for the campaign is described. Development of the campaign and possible future developments are considered.

Keywords: #Ebooksos Campaign, Ireland



Background

Irish libraries, across all sectors, have responded superbly to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In the face of a constantly fluctuating public health context and associated restrictions, libraries innovated and adapted to continue to meet and exceed users' needs and expectations. In addition to increasing the scope and diversity of library activities due to the emergency, many library colleagues also found themselves facing new challenges in the shape of operating community help lines, contact tracing and repurposing 3D printers to produce personal protective equipment (PPE). During this time of extreme uncertainty, and difficulty, one of Irish libraries responses was to significantly increase spending on ebooks. On the 26th March 2020, just 13 days into what could now be called Lockdown 1, the Irish government announced an additional €200,000 investment in e-books for public libraries and they injected a similar amount again in June 2020. Academic libraries have also ramped up spending on ebooks and welcomed the decision by many publishers in 2020 to make a range of content temporarily available at no additional cost. Unsurprisingly, given the sudden increase in availability and the reduced access to physical stock, ebook usage soared by up to 300%. The increased content was broadly welcomed by students, faculty and members of the public. However, library leaders like the undersigned authors and

colleagues were worried about the sustainability of the approach and concerned about the fact that this increased dependence and spend on ebooks was highlighting the longstanding problems with the current models of ebook provision that predated COVID-19.

The #ebooksos Campaign

By the summer of 2020 the authors were discussing what we considered the perfect storm of financial pressures, a dysfunctional market and skyrocketing customer demand in relation to ebook provision. As we struggled with these issues the ebooksos campaign (<https://academicebookinvestigation.org/>) was gathering momentum in the UK and Research Libraries UK issued a content statement (<https://www.rluk.ac.uk/rluk-content-statement/>) in support of libraries. The ebooksos campaign started when subject librarian Johanna Anderson was unable to obtain ebooks to support a new flagship course at her institution. The few titles that were available as ebooks cost multiples of the print equivalent via third party platforms. To add insult to injury, the titles that were made available were sold directly to the school for an annual subscription – limiting access to a small group of students and removing the library from the relationship. Frustrated by this experience she started the ebooksos campaign with other colleagues including Caroline Ball and Rachel Bickley.

The UK ebooksos campaign's primary objective is to call for an investigation into the academic ebook market. By early July 2021 more than 4,400 people had signed the open letter (<https://academicebookinvestigation.org/>) including the Library Association of Ireland, CILIP, senior university staff, eminent academics, student unions and many librarians. In parallel to this the campaign crowd sourced data to highlight the issues of concern. This confirmed that many ebooks are many times more expensive than their print equivalents, many titles are unavailable as ebooks and vendors apply a raft of onerous terms and conditions to ebooks that are available.

The Campaign in Ireland

Building on the work of our UK colleagues the LAI drafted a call for action ([Irish librarians call for action on the electronic content crisis facing libraries and library users – Library Association of Ireland](#)) on what we called the electronic content crisis facing libraries and library users and, working together, the call was signed by four key representative groups: the Library of Association of Ireland who represent librarians and libraries in Ireland; the Irish Universities Association Librarian's Group; the Technological and Higher Education Association Librarians' Group; and the Consortium of National and University Libraries. This was an unprecedented cross-sectoral move which underlined the level of concern in libraries about these issues. This cross-sectoral dimension is an interesting difference from the UK campaign which started out with an exclusively academic library focus.

The key issues addressed in the call for action were the unsustainability of electronic content and ebook pricing and the objectionable terms and conditions under which they are made available. It is important to note that public libraries face even worse terms and conditions than academic libraries



do with concepts such as 'exploding licenses'. In addition to highlighting these problematic issues the call also suggested areas for action including more support for Open Educational Resources (OERs), copyright reform and - echoing the campaign in the UK – a call for these issues to be investigated by government and/or other relevant bodies.

We followed up the call, again following the [UK ebooksos example](#), by gathering examples of the kinds of issues we were concerned about and our data collection confirmed that some ebooks are 20 times more expensive than the print equivalent and many are 3 – 10 times more expensive. Interestingly, the data gathered suggested that the largest multipliers are applied by the large international publishers rather than the small local Irish publishers.

Gaining Momentum

The campaign attracted a great deal of attention from the outset. Webinars focusing on it have attracted over 500 delegates, librarians involved in the campaign have been asked to speak at many events, the BBC ([University staff urge probe into e-book pricing 'scandal' - BBC News](#)), The Guardian (['Price gouging from Covid': student ebooks costing up to 500% more than in print | Higher education | The Guardian](#)), and many more organisations have written about it. IFLA interviewed ([IFLA -- An Electronic Content Crisis: Interview with the Library Association of Ireland](#)) the authors about the campaign in Ireland. In the UK an increasing number of senior staff in relevant organisations and UK government departments are now interested in the campaign and the issues it is highlighting. During March and April 2021, ahead of planned meetings with Irish government officials, we engaged in a concerted social media campaign which was able to avail of the graphics prepared by our UK colleagues. In May 2021 a series of meetings were held with officials in key Irish government departments and agencies (including the Department of

Rural and Community Development and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission) about our concerns around ebooks and a similar process was underway in the UK. At the time of writing these processes were ongoing but at the very least have resulted in significantly increased levels of awareness of the challenges facing libraries and may result in national and/or European action to address them. In late May 2021 the UK campaign issued guidance for academics on negotiating contracts with publishers (<https://academicebookinvestigation.org/2021/05/20/can-my-students-read-my-books-guidance-for-academics-on-negotiating-contracts-with-publishers/>). This guide offered practical tips for academic authors to consider when entering into contracts with publishers and flagged up some of the common pitfalls that lead to many ebooks being difficult and/or expensive to access. In July 2021 the ebooksos campaign, including the Irish component, was one of the central elements of the launch of Knowledge Rights 21 (<https://www.knowledgerights21.org/>) a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) funded by Arcadia and advocating for a twenty first century copyright and open access environment across Europe in the area of education and research.

Most recently, in August 2021, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) gave its support to the campaign and the IFLA Secretary General committed to write to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in the UK urging that a market investigation into the issue is undertaken as a matter of urgency.

What can you do!

The Irish library community has rallied to the ebooksos campaign. The cross-sectoral support for it has been excellent. Individual librarians can help to sustain the campaign by signing the aforementioned letter at <https://academicebookinvestigation.org/> and seizing opportunities to highlight the problems associated with most publishers' current approach to ebooks. This could be in a meeting with academic colleagues to discuss publishing options, in a collection development planning session with library colleagues or when consulting with students and other library users. Colleagues who are active on social media should also consider highlighting the challenges

caused by current ebook pricing and associated issues using the #ebooksos hashtag. It is important that these issues are raised within libraries and beyond so that they remain in the spotlight that the campaign has successfully generated until acceptable solutions can be found.

Future Developments

For many of us who worked through the transition from print to electronic journals in the 1980s and 1990s and the recent move to more open access publishing, the current situation in relation to ebooks is familiar. Then, as now, publishers resisted change for many years but when it did come it came very quickly. It is likely that the same pattern will be repeated on this occasion. Through our involvement in the ebooksos campaign we aim to ensure that the changes that will come will lead to a tangible improvement for libraries in the key areas of terms and conditions, pricing and licensing. Importantly, libraries must also continue to foster alternatives routes for knowledge dissemination including the use of open access book publishing (via for example university presses), open educational resources (OERs), controlled digital lending and other approaches. The promotion of such routes will have the dual benefits of reducing our over dependence on the traditional ebook publication process which has proven so problematic, and encouraging routes that will increase knowledge accessibility. Ultimately, we want publishers to play their part in the ebook market but to do so on fair, reasonable and sustainable terms.

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Marian Higgins, BA, HDipLIS, Past President of the LAI and Kildare County Librarian
and Cathal McCauley, MLIS, CDipAF, ALAI, President of the LAI and University
Librarian at Maynooth University*



Colmcille 1500: Celebrating the rich legacy of St Columba at the Royal Irish Academy Library

Barbara McCormack

Abstract

This article focuses on activities at the Royal Irish Academy Library to commemorate the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St Columba (521-97) which included online exhibitions, a lunchtime lecture series, and other activities aimed at highlighting the rich heritage collections of the Academy, particularly the oldest extant Irish manuscript known as the Cathach or Psalter of St Columba.

Keywords: Exhibitions, Royal Irish Academy, Manuscripts, St Columba

Introduction

Most good scholars respect copyright and intellectual property rights associated with original works but sadly this was not always the case. Legend has it that the sixth century Irish saint Columba [Colum Cille] made an illegal copy of a book of psalms, an action which sparked a war and ultimately led to his banishment from Ireland. In the medieval period this illegal copy became known as the 'Cathach' or 'Battler' from the practice of using it as a talisman before battle, it later travelled to France and returned to Ireland where it was deposited in the Royal Irish Academy. Just fifty-eight of approximately 110 leaves of the manuscript have survived, the rubricated text preceding each psalm is largely faded, and the original binding has been lost. Yet the story of the *Cathach* remains a key part of the legacy and influence of Columba, which the Royal Irish Academy celebrated in 2020-1 to mark the 1500th birth of the saint.

The Library of the Royal Irish Academy is home to a number of important collections for the study of Irish history, language and archaeology with manuscript holdings including the deeds of the Guild of St Anne, the seventeenth-century Books of Survey and Distribution, and the Haliday manuscript collection. The largest collection of Irish language manuscripts in the world is held by the Academy and one of these, the Book of the Dun Cow (*Lebor na hUidre*), is the earliest surviving text written completely in Irish. Dating from c. AD 600 the *Cathach* is the oldest extant Irish manuscript of the Psalter and the earliest example of Irish writing.¹ A Latin manuscript decorated with rubric headings preceding each psalm, it is traditionally ascribed to St Columba who was born in Gartan, County Donegal in the sixth century and who later founded monasteries at Durrow and Kilmore in Ireland and Iona in Scotland. Legend has it that Columba

borrowed a psalter from St Finnian of Druim Fhinn and copied it without permission, leading to a dispute around ownership which ultimately resulted in Columba's banishment from Ireland. King Diarmait Mac Cerbhaill attempted to settle the dispute with his ruling: 'To every cow belongs her calf, therefore to every book belongs its copy'. The arbitration failed and the resulting battle of Cul Dremhne took place in A.D. 561, after which ownership of the Psalter of St Columba passed to the O'Donnell family. The manuscript remained with the O'Donnells and became known as the 'Cathach' or 'Battler'

from the practice of carrying it three times around the battlefield as a talisman. A special shrine or 'cumdach' was made for the manuscript in the 11th century and this is now housed in the National Museum of Ireland. The *Cathach* was later taken to France and returned to Ireland in 1802 by Sir Neal O'Donel, Newport, Co. Mayo, and forty years later it was deposited in the Academy by Sir Richard O'Donel. In 1920 the vellum leaves were separated and mounted in paper frames by conservators in the British Museum bindery. In the early 1980s further repair and rebinding work was undertaken and the paper mounting was replaced with new vellum mounts specially stained to match the colour of the original leaves. Although modern research casts doubt over Columba's authorship of the *Cathach* it is



¹ See *The Cathach of Colum Cille* by Michael Herity and Aidan Breen (Dublin, 2002).

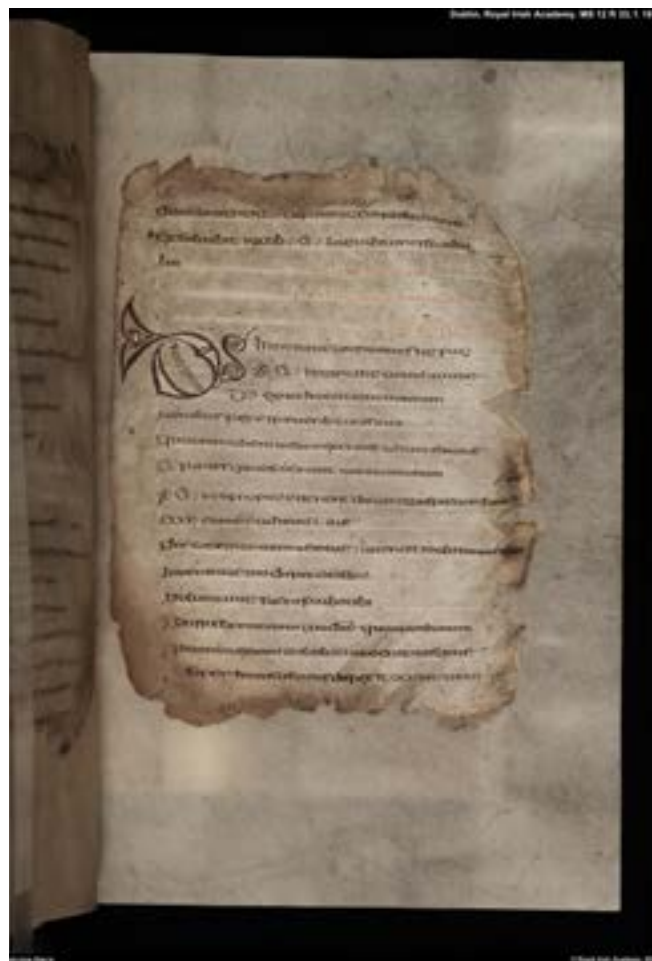
nevertheless possible to date the manuscript to the late 6th or early 7th century.

1500 Commemorations

In May 2020 the Library was approached by the RIA multidisciplinary committee, Coiste Léann na Gaeilge, Litríocht na Gaeilge agus na gCultúr Ceilteach, about the possibility of marking the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St Columba through a lecture series and accompanying exhibition to highlight the various important manuscripts held by the Library. Originally planned as an onsite lecture series in Academy House, accompanied by a display of relevant material in exhibition cases in the Reading Room and Meeting Room, this wasn't possible due to COVID-19 restrictions. It was therefore decided to commemorate the anniversary through a series of online events and activities.

'The Cathach of Colum Cille: The story of an ancient Irish manuscript' [online exhibition]

The first online exhibition on the theme of St Columba was launched in March 2021.² Curated using Microsoft Sway, the exhibition explored how the *Cathach* survived as a relic from early Christian Ireland into modern times and how through conservation and digitisation it is accessible to a modern audience more than 1400 years after its production. The exhibition focused on the materiality of the sixth-century manuscript, exploring the use of vellum as a writing surface and detailing the steps involved in preparing the animal membrane. It



explored the composition of the iron-gall ink used to produce the text and the addition of the decorated capital letters preceding the psalms. It provided an interesting overview of the manuscript's history before and after it reached the Academy and referenced other manuscripts such as the *Book of Fenagh*, the oldest text to link the *Cathach* with St Colum Cille, and *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*, which contains a story of the Battle of Cúil Dreimhne. The exhibition ended with the later history of the *Cathach* in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and its conservation at the British Museum Bindery and by Roger Powell and Dorothy Cumpstey in the early 1980s. Curated by Dr Bernadette Cunningham and Sophie Evans, the exhibition received over 4,000 views in the initial months after its launch.

American Conference for Irish Studies (ACIS)

In June 2021 the RIA Library contributed to a session on the *Cathach* at the American Conference for Irish Studies (ACIS) hosted by the University of Ulster. Prof Pádraig Ó Macháin (UCC)

delivered a keynote lecture on the manuscript and Ann Marie O'Brien (DIAS) spoke about the Irish Script on Screen project. 2021 marked nearly twenty years since the RIA Library began participating in ISOS, a collaboration which has culminated in the digitisation of nearly one hundred medieval and early modern manuscripts including flagship texts such as the *Stowe Missal*, *Lebor na hUidhre*, *Leabhar Breac*, and the *Annals of the Four Masters*, making these treasures freely available to an international audience and greatly contributing to the field of Irish studies. The session was introduced by Prof

² 'The Cathach of Colum Cille: The story of an ancient Irish manuscript', <https://sway.office.com/41nDx9ZQsN2VG8y9>.

Ruairí Ó hUiginn (DIAS) and the Academy Librarian, Barbara McCormack. A reproduction of the *Cathach* were first published in CD-ROM format by the Academy in 2002 with an accompanying booklet *The Cathach of Colum Cille: An Introduction* by Michael Herity and Aidan Breen. At the ACIS conference this eighty-four-page booklet was launched on open access, introducing readers to the provenance, decoration and content of the manuscript. The publication is now accessible via the Digital Repository of Ireland.³

‘Columban Texts and Traditions / Téacsanna agus Traidisiúin Cholm Cille’ [online exhibition]

The RIA Library carries a wealth of Columban manuscript material, spanning a period of over 1,000 years and including valuable recensions of the 9th-century poetic lament *Amrae Coluimb Chille*, the 16th-century biography *Beatha Cholaim Chille*, and early Irish poems ascribed to or associated with the saint. Curated by the Library, in collaboration with the Academy’s Foclóir Stairiúil na Gaeilge, an online exhibition was curated to highlight these rich treasures through a series of images and associated commentary.⁴ The exhibition covered the themes of ‘Amrae Coluimb Chille and its manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy’ by Dr Jacopo Bisagni, ‘Beatha Cholaim Chille: Borradh, Scaipeadh agus Síoraíocht’ by Dr Colm Ó Cuaig, and ‘Colum Cille and the Poetic Tradition’ by Dr Charles Dillon. Featuring content from *Lebor na hUidre*, *Leabhar Breac*, and *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*, as well as images from the Westropp collection and print holdings, the exhibition launched during National Heritage Week.

‘Colm Cille 1500: Téacsanna agus Traidisiúin / Columba 1500: Texts and Traditions’ [online lecture series]

From August to October the Library collaborated with the Coiste Léann na Gaeilge, Litríocht na Gaeilge agus na gCultúr Ceilteach on an online lunchtime lecture series with nine contributions in Irish and English on topics such as early Columban texts, poetry, and medieval liturgy. The series began with a talk by renowned Irish calligrapher Timothy O’Neill who spoke about the *Cathach* in terms of the manuscript tradition. The next lecture in the series featured Prof Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha and Dr Jacopo Bisagni who spoke on the theme of politics, piety and poetry in the context of early Columban texts and traditions. Prof Thomas Owen Clancy spoke on the theme of Colum Cille’s voice and the poetics of place, and Dr Charles Dillon and Dr Colm Ó Cuaig focused on the life of St Columba. The series also included lectures by Dr Brian Lacey and Dr Ailbhe Nic Giolla and ended with a discussion on medieval liturgy by Dr Ann Buckley.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions significantly impacted Academy plans to commemorate the 1500th anniversary of Columba’s birth. Yet a move to online activities such as exhibitions and lectures provided an opportunity to engage audiences in new ways and also resulted in a suite of educational resources on Columba and the legend of the *Cathach*.

Barbara McCormack, BA, ALAI, MLIS is Librarian of the Royal Irish Academy.

3 Michael Herity, & Aidan Breen. (2021) The Cathach of Colum Cille, Digital Repository of Ireland [Distributor], Royal Irish Academy [Depositing Institution], <https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.9c6899405>.

4 ‘Columban Texts and Traditions / Téacsanna agus Traidisiúin Cholm Cille’, <https://sway.office.com/h2gtQkAMJbYDQcHs>



The Maynooth University Library Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry Competition: Engaging Community and Collections

David Rinehart

Abstract

This article details the history and process of establishing the Ken Saro-Wiwa poetry competition and its success in engaging an international and diverse community. This competition is an important aspect of the collection itself as it has helped bring the contents of the collection into the community. The competition has also given people from diverse backgrounds – non-academic, academic, from different ethnicities, races, ages, and nationalities – the opportunity to engage and become part of the collection through poetry. This piece will describe the administration of the competition, the diverse cast of poets, the subsequent podcast featuring the poets from the school category, and, finally, the publication of *I am a Man of Peace: Writings Inspired by the Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Collection* in which over 40 poems from the competition dating back to 2018 were published.

Keywords: *Community Engagement, Poetry, Ken Saro-Wiwa*

Introduction

Ken Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian activist and writer who was executed along with eight fellow activists (The Ogoni 9) in 1995. The Ogoni 9 were executed for protesting about the activities of the international petrochemical corporation, Royal Dutch Shell, in Ogoni in the Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa's death row correspondence to Sister Majella McCarron (OLA) was donated to [Maynooth University Library](#) in 2011. The collection has been a catalyst for a number of initiatives.

This article details one such initiative - the Maynooth University Library Ken Saro-Wiwa poetry competition. The competition has helped bring an awareness of the collection to a wider audience and has given people of different ethnicities, races, ages, and nationalities the opportunity to engage with the collection through their poetry. This initiative has provided a forum for people to explore issues from environmental justice to immigration.

Administration

The administration of the competition included providing free poetry workshops, judging the competition, corresponding with the diverse cast of poets, hosting a Poetry Evening via Zoom, and the creation of the subsequent podcast featuring the poets from the school category. The poetry project culminated in the publication of [I am a Man of Peace: Writings Inspired by the Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Collection](#), which contains 21 essays and 42 poems. The book was published on the 10th of November 2020 by Daraja Press to mark the 25th anniversary of the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his eight colleagues (The Ogoni 9).

The book is in two sections. The first section is twenty essays by national and international contributors, including members of the Saro-Wiwa family. The

second section contains an introduction by the competition judge Jessica Traynor, the selected poems from the competition and a reflective essay I wrote for this section. My involvement as editorial assistant was primarily with the poetry section which is the focus of this article.



Image taken from the *Readings from the Maynooth University Library Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry Competition 2020* Zoom event



Image taken from the 2018 Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry Workshop

The Poetry Competition

Background

The Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry Competition has been offered to transition year students since 2018. In 2020, the competition was extended to include an adult category. Since its conception, poet and creative writing teacher Jessica Traynor has judged the competition.

The competition was advertised via social media and other networks in March 2020 with a given date of end of May. There was no fee and entrants could submit up to three poems which had not been previously published. This and other [competition rules](#) were available on the library website. The Library funded two poetry writing workshops facilitated by Jessica Traynor in order to promote interest and engagement with the competition. While it was planned

to have a face-to-face workshop in April 2020, due to COVID-19, it was held via Zoom. The level of interest was high and so a second workshop was offered in May 2020. The workshops were two hours in duration, each on a Saturday morning.

Administration

Sixty-six entries were received in the adult category and eight in the school category. I acknowledged receipt of all poems via e-mail. I then created two

documents, one for the school and another for the adult category, eliminating the identifying characteristics such as name, address, etc. These two documents were then sent to the judge, Jessica Traynor. She placed the selected poems into five categories: longlist, shortlist, notable mentions, second prize, and first prize. After Traynor made her selections, I then used my master sheet with the identifying information to identify the poets to contact and notify them of the results. The winning poets were given book tokens as prizes.

Once the successful poets had been notified, I then asked them all if they would agree to have their poem included in the book, [I am a Man of Peace: Writings Inspired by the Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Collection](#). Fortunately, all of the poets agreed to have their poems included.

Events

Since 2011, the Library has organized an annual Ken Saro-Wiwa seminar. This event marks the anniversary of the executions, November 10th, and is a forum for discussion on the topics relating to the issues for which Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni 9 died. It was, unfortunately, not possible to hold the seminar in 2020. As an alternative, the anniversary was marked with a virtual Poetry Evening via Zoom. The event was facilitated by Jessica Traynor and several of the poets read their poems to a virtual audience. Lively discussion followed. The [video](#) of the event can be viewed on the library YouTube channel.

While the open access version of the book was available in November, the printed version was launched on December 10th. An open access version of [the book](#) is available via the [Maynooth University institutional repository](#). All contributors were mailed a complimentary copy of the book. Copies are available to purchase at €10. All proceeds from the sale of the book go to the Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa bursary, which supports postgraduate study relating to the issues for which Ken Saro-Wiwa campaigned

Poetry Podcast

The decision was made to have the adult poets participate in the zoom poetry evening event while the school poets would participate in a specially produced Maynooth University Library podcast. In this podcast, the student



poets read their poems, were interviewed and shared their thoughts on Ken Saro-Wiwa, the competition, and what topics were most important for them and their work. Bairbre Flood, a media producer, who was one of the short-listed poets in the adult category, was commissioned to produce the podcast. Many of the students had similar themes running through their poems, such as an urgency for action with regards to the Climate Emergency. This theme was highly appropriate for the competition because Ken Saro-Wiwa was an environmental activist. The podcast is freely available via the Maynooth University Soundcloud account and available for free to the public via the [Maynooth University Library website](#).

Reflection

While all of the poems were awe inspiring and gave me great pause to consider the many global issues we face, there were two poems, one from the adult category and one from the school category, that spoke to me and moved me most.

Night Feedings By Eilish Fisher

For the children separated from their parents at the U.S. Mexican border, detained in custody and neglected, 2018-present.

**I hear you call into the night's fluorescence,
a cage unable to stifle the sound
that travels around the world to this bedside radio.**

**I move in maternal mindfulness towards a source-
my child's cries puffing like smoke through muted cot bars.
I lift him while your sobs cling and sway.**

**I stir like tendrils of seaweed in these waves, a pulling of you to me.
I would hold you all if I could-rock you into stony caverns
of peaceful sleep and quiet listenings.**

**You would hear the tick tock of the clock on the wall,
rustle of soft-pawed foxes in the woods, the purring
as night's dark harnesses the bee-balm moon.**

**These days the numbing salve is washed away
as we rock and cry and ache into the long night's waiting.**

Having spent two months working with Humanitarian Aid organisations along the U.S. – Mexico border in 2017, right after the new presidential regime at the time took office, I was particularly moved by this poem. The injustice and frustration many of us feel for migrants and the unjust immigration policies from country to country is often amplified ten-fold when it is migrant children who are being mistreated. Fisher says in her poem, 'I move in maternal mindfulness towards a source – my child's cries puffing like smoke through muted cot bars.' Our children, those of us lucky enough to have been born with the privilege of

keeping our children close to us and safe, are behind bars which protect them from falling, those of their cot, while the migrant children are pulled apart forcefully from their parents and put behind metal bars, as prisoners. As a parent and empathetic person, I feel her compassion emanating from this poem.

Bystander By Conor Walsh

**As he reached into his pocket,
He felt the cold metal key.
It sends a shiver up his spine,
But that will dissipate in an instant.**

**He turns around to take one last look at the site
Before it becomes a profit driven retail outlet.
He sees the family,
A father, mother and four children,
Attempting to hold back the emotions.**

**As they pack frantically
He ponders how they must feel,
The emotions that are consuming them.
They certainly won't simply, dissipate.
A tear comes to his eye.**

**But he reminds himself,
This is not his fault.
He is only doing his job,
He's an innocent bystander.**

What more could he have done?

This winning poem in the school category by Conor Walsh also addresses the injustice and inequality that permeates our societies. In this poem, we have the bystander who is seemingly evicting a family from their home. The why is not important, just that the family are shifting into a state of further destitution. The bystander fights back emotions and just does their job. This is an element of our social constructs that I have thought a lot about, the fact

that power structures are established in a way that those who are profiting and making the most money do not have to 'deal' with or interact with those who are hurt and oppressed. If the lowly worker, in this poem the bystander, leaves their job, another will fill their place. They know this, so they separate themselves from their emotions and get the job done because they too are likely in need of money and do not see many options for themselves. Thus, in the pyramid like structure of this capitalist model, the character of the bystander makes the least money but faces the harshest realities while the evicted family has no one to complain to but the disgruntled and jaded poorly paid workers who have no power.

Conclusion

The Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry Competition was an effective way to involve the community with the collection, and indeed to add to it with their own writing. It is an example of how a library collection can inform and stimulate discussion around issues of concern to us as global citizens.

David Rinehart, MA is Library Assistant, Maynooth University



An Leabharlann
30-2
October 2021

Virtual Libraries and New Beginnings

2021 CILIP Ireland/LAI annual joint conference. 15-16th April 2021.

Catherine Ahearne

The theme of the 2021 virtual conference was Virtual Libraries and New Beginnings. The conference highlighted how all sectors of the profession have not only risen to the challenge of COVID-19, but have also thrived.

Following a welcome from the CILIP Ireland chairperson Alex McIlroy, the first day's keynote speaker, Bobby Seagull (Public Libraries ambassador) discussed the impact of the library on the journey to lifelong learning. He noted that prior to the pandemic the library was seen primarily as a physical space for learning; with the move to the digital world the digital divide has been highlighted. He stressed the need to balance face to face and digital services when libraries fully reopen. There will be a need for digital options, and our public library spaces will continue to be essential to bridge the gaps in society. Following the keynote speaker, the Library Ireland Week Library Staff Champion Award 2021 was awarded to Maynooth University's Marie Cullen.

The **new voices** session covered a broad area. It was amazing to hear of the achievements during what had been a challenging year for many. Daniel McGrath from Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Library Service (DLR) discussed how the Covid-19 pandemic is accelerating digitising the public libraries. With the physical space closed to the public the need to enhance user's digital literacy became a priority, with the 'getting the most from your library card' initiative and podcast explaining how to utilise the library to its full potential. Emma Rothwell talked about moving to the library sector from the teaching profession with her studentship with the National Library of Ireland (NLI). Niamh O'Brien spoke of Plan S, part of the international drive for Open Access. We were then taken on a 360-degree tour of Munster Technological University (MTU) by Adrian Vaughan.

The afternoon discussions, led by Ricardo Castellinin da Silva (MediaAware) and Alan Carbery (UCC) covered media literacy and misinformation. They discussed the impact the internet has had on this and how it has come to be perceived as a digital/technical issue rather than an information literacy issue. Media literacy should be tackled with an integrated approach. Technical skills are important but a critical approach to media content is also needed. Information literacy is not just a checklist list for fake news - context matters as does taking a critical approach so we can confront our biases. Information literacy does not start and end at the library - we do not "own" it but we are ambassadors. Individual responsibility needs to come to the fore.

Day one closed with FactCheck Northern Ireland's Orna Young. This is a non-profit organisation run by researchers, who encourage people to question information. Orna made an interesting point about conspiracy theories being born from fear.

Marion Higgins, President of the LAI opened the second and final day. The keynote speaker was Stuart Hamilton, Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) with his talk titled "We've been there but do we want to go back again." Stewart noted that the growth of the public sector libraries has been unprecedented during Lockdown. He stressed the need to use the

learnings from the last 12 months, to inform our practice going forward. We need to keep and encourage new types of users, while retaining our existing users. Moving forward we need to demonstrate our space is safe and keep the new workflows that we have implemented that work best for our users.

The **response to Covid** session covered public, health and management of libraries. Sinead O'Higgins (Waterford County Council) and Trisha Ward (Libraries Northern Ireland) covered the managing of the public libraries across the island of Ireland. Moving outreach events online offers real opportunities for partners & audience to make connections but these are dependent on those who have access. Aoife Lawton of the HSE (Health Service Executive) spoke about supporting frontline staff during the pandemic. Siobhan Stevenson (University of Toronto) discussed library management during a global pandemic. A survey of public library staff discovered the mood of those working on the front line. Fear and/or anticipation anxiety conflicted with their desire to provide the best service to the user. Emma Horgan (UCC) and Marion Khorshidian (Ulster University) closed out the conference with a discussion on sustainable libraries.

Key points of the conference were that libraries are about people, our staff as well as our users. The pandemic has shown the adaptability, empathy, knowledge, and desire to help of library staff. Going forward, we need to consider how we provide and balance our services across the digital/physical space, and our responsibility in terms of tackling information literacy. Libraries should be places that unite people in curiosity and places to share knowledge.

Catherine Ahearne is Library Assistant, Maynooth University Library

Betty Searson, 1923- 2021



Betty Searson died on June 28th, following a short illness. It was less than a month before her 98th birthday. She had led such a vibrant and active life that few of her friends could credit her real age.

Betty lived all her life in Dublin. She was educated at Dominican College Eccles St. and pursued her third level education at UCD. She graduated from UCD with a BA degree in English and History, which she followed with a Diploma in Library Training.

In 1945 she joined the staff of the RDS Library, a library she was familiar with during her student days. The Librarian at the time was Desmond Clarke, who played an active part in all aspects of the Library Association of Ireland, and was for many years editor of *An Leabharlann*. Betty also joined the Association where she had a significant role in the establishment of the Special Libraries Section drawing together private, university, and special libraries in Ireland.

In 1957 Betty was granted six months leave of absence, during which time she worked in the Library of the University of Pennsylvania. This proved to

be a valuable experience and one she enjoyed. However, in spite of tempting enticements to remain, she returned to Dublin.

One of the high points of the following period was the planning and construction of the New RDS Library. Based on a Scandinavian design, it provided a complete contrast to the dark sombre Concert Hall where the Library had shared its function with other events. The transfer of several hundred thousand books to the new building was done manually by the library staff, and was a source of great excitement and camaraderie. On April 12th 1965 President Eamon de Valera officially opened the "New Library".

At around the same time Desmond Clarke assumed responsibility for the science and arts activities of the Society (in addition to his role as Librarian), and Betty became his deputy. These activities included the organisation of the weekly music recitals and lectures, while the scientific activities resulted in 3 major Scientific Exhibitions in 1963, 1966 and 1973.

When Desmond Clarke retired in 1973, three separate departments were created - Library, Arts, and Science. Betty was appointed Arts Administrator

in 1974. In addition to planning the cultural events, and administering the various trusts, such as the Taylor Art and Henry Higgins prizes, her brief also included fostering the revival of crafts in Ireland (being spear-headed by Muriel Gahan, who was later to become first lady Vice-President of the RDS). This element involved much travel throughout the country identifying all areas where traditional crafts were practised, and then encouraging the craft workers to enter their work in the RDS Crafts Competition. In due course, the Crafts Council of Ireland was established with its first home at the RDS, and Betty as its honorary secretary.

In both her public and private life Betty held high standards, and expected no less of others. She showed the same attention to staff as she did to the many visiting celebrities.

The calm rationality she brought to problems normally prevented any panic or escalation.

Before the opening of National Concert Hall, the RDS brought the Czech Philharmonic and London Symphony Orchestras to play in the Main Hall of the RDS - both operations needing considerable planning, and were not without moments of extreme anxiety. In 1981 the RDS celebrated 250 years, and many special events were planned to commemorate the occasion. These events represented all the areas in which the Society has contributed to life in Ireland over the centuries, but the most memorable from Betty's point of view were the talk given by social commentator Alistair Cook entitled "How to do America in 13 hours" and a hilarious performance by English entertainer, Joyce Grenfell.

When she retired in April 1987, the RDS awarded Betty Life Membership of the Society - an exceptional honour for a staff member.

In retirement her talents were directed towards the things she loved most - music, books and art. With the greater personal time afforded her, Betty joined the High Loft art group, and had time to take part in the art-related activities of the Friends of the National Gallery.

When the Dublin International Piano Competition was launched in 1988, Betty was one of the volunteers who offered her services. She attended many musical events both at home and abroad, notably the Wexford Opera Festival and the West Cork Chamber Music Festival,, as well as making frequent trips to the National Concert Hall. She was a long-time friend of the singers Bernadette Greevy and Veronica Dunne as well as of many musicians from around the world.

Betty's organisational skills were again used to good effect when she joined the team administering the Irish Times/Aer Lingus Literature Awards, between 1989 and 1992. She travelled to New York for the launch, and met many celebrities from the world of books and publishing - including Jackie Kennedy.

Betty was gregarious and hospitable, and loved social occasions. Her annual Christmas party - which only Covid-19 could stop - was something she looked forward to, as much as her guests did, but she would also often suggest "come for a chat and a bite in my kitchen". She will be greatly missed by her family and by her friends. May she rest in peace.

Mary Kelleher is former Librarian, Royal Dublin Society

Muriel McCarthy, 1931-2021



Keeper of Marsh's Library who became its most dedicated guardian
Muriel McCarthy was the library's first female and first Roman Catholic keeper

Muriel McCarthy, the first female and first Roman Catholic keeper of Marsh's Library, Ireland's oldest public library, has died following a long illness. For more than 40 years – 22 of which she was the keeper, McCarthy passionately promoted the library's historical collections of books, climbing up and down ladders to reach rare editions for international scholars, hosting exhibitions on everything from botany and astronomy to medicine and religion, and giving engaging tours of the 18th-century building on St Patrick's Close, Dublin.

For McCarthy, no task was ever too much trouble if it brought further acclaim to her beloved library. She wrote a book on the library's history, *Marsh's Library: All Graduates and Gentlemen* (1980 and 2003). She also co-edited (with deputy keeper Ann Simmons) two books of papers from international conferences in the library in 2001 and 2007: *The Making of Marsh's Library: learning, politics and religion in Ireland 1650-1750* and *Marsh's Library – A Mirror on the World: law, learning and libraries 1650-1750*. The latter conference commemorated the 1707 Act of Parliament which established Marsh's Library. A privately funded project of Archbishop Narcissus Marsh, the library was designed by William Robinson, surveyor general of Ireland, in 1701 and subsequently filled with 30,000 rare and early printed books on science, music, history, politics, religion, law, literature, medicine, witchcraft and travel.

McCarthy's strong attachment to Marsh's Library began in the late 1960s when she volunteered there a few days a week. Then, she worked for many years as an unpaid librarian before being given a small stipend. At that time, many of the books were in a poor state; the galleries and reading rooms were freezing cold and the toilet was in a shed in the yard. McCarthy spent many hours alone, wrapped in a winter coat, opening up the library for the occasional scholar or curious tourist or when the Church of Ireland clergyman Canon Cecil Bradley – then deputy keeper of the library – popped in for a chat.

Through her patient devotion to the library, she became a scholar herself. Over the years, she gave illustrated lectures on the library in Ireland and in the United States, raised money for building works to the library and to fund fellowships for international scholars. Renovation works – including the addition of a seminar room and indoor toilets – were completed with funds from the American Irish Foundation in the mid-1980s and a standalone conservation bindery funded by an American couple, the Delmases, was added in 1988. McCarthy was appointed keeper of Marsh's Library in 1989 and remained in that position until 2011.

Hands-on knowledge

In an interview with *The Irish Times* in 2009, McCarthy said she learned almost

everything about the job by doing it, supplementing her hands-on knowledge with classes in paper conservation and book bindery. "Working here opened so many opportunities to me and opened my mind to so many things... it has enriched my life more than I can say," she said.

Her hard work and enthusiasm were rewarded with an honorary doctorate from Maynooth University and an honorary masters from Trinity College Dublin. And although she was a committed Catholic and active member of the Carmelite Church in Whitefriar Street, Dublin, she was made an honorary lay canon of St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral in Armagh for her commitment to the library. She was also a recipient of the Dublin Lord Mayor's prize and a gold medallist at the Royal Dublin Society.

Muriel McCarthy and her twin sister, Mairead, were the middle children of four born to Liam and Christina Breslin. The family lived in Clontarf where Muriel and Mairead attended the Holy Faith School. However, the death of her father when she and her twin sister were eight and her brothers were 11 and three resulted in her mother getting work as a live-in housekeeper for St Joseph's Young Priests Society on Merrion Square. The family lived in a flat on the top floor of the building.

Like many of her generation, Muriel left school early and worked for a time in Pilkingtons antique shop on Kildare Street. She met her husband-to-be, Cork-born Charles McCarthy, when she was 17. The couple married two years later and their three children were born and reared in their home on the Howth Road in Raheny, Dublin. When their children moved away from home and Muriel was already ensconced in the work for Marsh's Library, the couple moved into a renovated apartment in the library. The death of Charles McCarthy, a well known trade unionist and academic, in 1986 left Muriel bereft but she soldiered on, dedicating more and more of her time to her work at the library.

Prof Ruth Whelan from Maynooth University said that Muriel became the doyenne of early printed librarians and libraries. "She acted as the unofficial guardian of the Edward Worth Library, Dublin, advised on the preservation of the Bolton Library, Cashel and was an inspiration to the next generation of librarians entrusted with keeping these early print treasures safe and making them known.

"Muriel often remarked that the foundation of the library by Archbishop Narcissus Marsh, at his own expense, was an 'act of incredible generosity'. We could say the same of Muriel's devotion to that library and of the many ways that she built it into an internationally known institution."

Fearless

Renowned for her fearlessness, her feistiness and her great sense of fun, McCarthy was also politically astute and negotiated State-funded salaried positions for staff at the library during her tenure. She was equally at ease speaking to the local ladies of the Liberties as she was showing the library to visiting professors, ecclesiastical scholars or American patrons. So popular was she in the locality that the bells of St Patrick's Cathedral were rung on her birthday.

Colleagues say that she had a great talent for bringing the glitterati of Dublin together for the summer exhibitions she held at Marsh's Library. Opened by high-profile individuals including the former president Mary Robinson, the poet Seamus Heaney and the novelist Edna O'Brien, they were stylish events with live performances by musicians and beautifully illustrated catalogues that fast became collectors' items.

McCarthy's fascination with books and cultural matters also brushed off on her adult children. Her older daughter, Paula, runs a fine art press and gallery at the University of Wisconsin in Madison; her son, Justin, is a musician and her younger daughter, Martina, is a librarian and teacher. McCarthy retired from her job as keeper at Marsh's Library when she was 80 and continued to live in the apartment there until ill health prompted a move to Newtownpark House nursing home where she died at the age of 90.

Muriel McCarthy (nee Breslin) is survived by her daughters, Paula (Panczenko) and Martina (Kealy), her son, Justin, her grandchildren, Caroline, Susan, Richard, Julianne, Charlie and Max and her best friend, Ann Simmons. She is predeceased by her husband, Charles, her twin sister, Mairead, and brothers, Sean and Liam.

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NEWS from the STACKS

People

Recent Appointments:

Congratulations to the following:

David O'Brien, Cork City

Trisha Ward, Libraries NI

Recent Retirements:

Bernie Fennell, Patricia Harkin, Eddie Keyes, Stewart McKee,

Helen Osborne, Val Payne, Frank Price and Carrie Stafford

We wish all a long and happy retirement.

LIS Association appointments

BIALL: Hon. Treasurer, Megan Guthrie, McCann Fitzgerald

Forthcoming Conferences

ALA: <https://2022.alaannual.org/>

IAML: <https://www.iaml.info/congresses/2022-prague>

IFLA:

Literary Awards:

International Booker Prize 2021: 3rd November

International Dublin Literary Award 2021: Lost Children Archive

Women's Prize for Fiction 2021: Piranesi (Susanna Clarke)

Virtual Mentoring Network

A new and exciting Virtual Mentoring Network will soon launch.

The initiative is a collaboration between CILIP Ireland and the Library Association of Ireland as an all-island network to enable library and information professionals share knowledge and support.

Announced back in April at the CILIP Ireland/LAI Joint Annual Conference we are in the process of finalising a pilot scheme which we hope will go live soon, initially for a six month period.

Awards

Library Champion of the Year 2020

Marie Cullen, MU

CONUL Library Assistant Award winners 2021:

1st Prize: Iain McCool, Queen's University Belfast

Joint 2nd Prize: Sinead Byrne, RCSI and David Rinehart, Maynooth University

3rd Prize: Gretchen Allen, Maynooth University

Highly Commended Entries:

Stewart Killeen, TUDublin, Fiona Tuohy, Maynooth University,

Sheree Yeates, Maynooth University

LAI News

<https://www.libraryassociation.ie/>

Library Developments

<https://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Services/Libraries/News/wicklow-towns-new-library-open>

TCD Old Library: https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/government-announces-e25-million-in-funding-for-trinity-colleges-old-library/

Glucksman Library UL: <https://www.rte.ie/news/regional/2021/0903/1244493-shannon-development-archive/>

Libraries Ireland: <https://www.librariesireland.ie/news/ireland-reads>

Librarians in the News

<https://www.echolive.ie/corklives/arid-40699229.html>

<https://www.businesspost.ie/commercial-reports/carlow-a-haven-for-creativity-6b08f836>

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/artsandculture/arid-40324310.html>