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# *The GPA - Bolton Library, Cashel: A Summary of the Nature of the Collection*

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by David Woodworth

Apart from being the private collection of two archbishops, the GPA - Bolton Library, Cashel includes portions of the collections of Marcissus Marsh, of bishops Jephson and Foley, and of the Abbe Bignon. There are library stamps or ownership marks indicating provenance connected with Catherine of Aragon, Francis Bacon, Bishop Julius of Wurtemberg (1570), and Abraham Ortelius, cartographer to Philip II of Spain. These are some of the more prominent samples of previous ownership.

About two-thirds of the books were printed in Britain or Ireland; approximately 900 of these are Irish imprints. The dominant language, therefore, is English, and all but ten per cent of the remainder of the books are in Latin.

French comes next but, while there are at least a dozen more languages in the Library, their volume is very small. Continental printing is well represented, with a quarter of the books coming from presses in the Low Countries, Germany and France. Switzerland and Italy also have a significant representation.

The manuscript collection is small. The oldest is a small twelfth century volume, in a thirteenth-century binding of deerskin over oak boards. Its contents include *Imago Mundi*, music, mathematics, calendrical tables, and Romulus's version of Aesop's Fables. There are two other volumes of manuscripts from the era before the advent of the printing press.

Of Irish manuscripts there are three, the finest being one from the hand of Dermot O Conor of Limerick. It is a folio volume and includes Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Eirin*, done in about 1716. Its contents also include what is believed to be the only attempt to translate the antique French of heraldry into the Irish language.

More dull to the eye, but of great importance, is the collection of bound pamphlets. This runs to over 200 volumes, and includes politics, controversy, broadsides, a little music, and some nonsense that would do justice to Edward Lear. Since some titles in this area were missed in the 1973 catalogue, there is new material to be discovered. A significant number of the smaller publications are very rare, some being unique. These include seventeenth-century printing from Dublin, Cork, Kilkenny and Waterford.

There are some twenty titles prior to 1500. These include the spectacular Nuremberg Chronicle (1493), and our oldest printed volume, the *Speculum Historiale*, by Vincent of Beauvais. This was printed in 1473 at Strasbourg by Adolf Rusch, known as the R-printer because of his distinctive treatment of that letter. Like several of our other works of that period, the capitals are entered by hand, and richly coloured. There is a certain amount of illumination; apart from some mould discolouration, the book is in good condition.

The houses of the great printer-publishers are well represented. Estienne of Paris and Geneva, Koberger of Nuremberg, Froben of Basle, Caxton and Pynson of London, Aldus Manutius of Venice, Elzivir of Amsterdam, Plahtin of Antwerp, Froschover of Zurich, Josse Bade and Jean Petit of Paris — these and many others may be found in Cashel Library. Fine bindings abound;



we believe we may have a portion of a Caxton binding, enough of it to warrant restoration and to enable reconstruction. This has yet to be verified.

There is a wealth of liturgical printing, ranging from pre-Reformation Missals to continental Protestant Liturgies. The most spectacular early missal is a Rouen printing of 1515, from the house of Martin Morin. It is of the Sarum Use, and is an as yet unrecorded edition.

The oddest continental item is a copy of the Heidelberg catechism, printed at the royal press in Weissenberg for the Prince of Transylvania. Bound in light brown morocco decorated with panels of gilt and blind, and including a double-headed eagle, it appears to be a presentation copy made especially for the confirmation of the two sons of Prince George Rakoci on 15 August 1637.

Stranger still is a Hebrew manuscript translation of the Irish Book of Common Prayer. This was made in Dublin in 1717 by Abraham bar-Jacob Halevi, a rabbi who converted to Christianity. Four copies of this work were still extant in 1973 — in T.C.D., Marsh's, and St Fin Barre's Cathedral Library, Cork.

Eighteenth-century gentlemen were nothing if not catholic in the material they collected for their libraries. Cashel is fortunate in having the custody of such a treasure. It is, surely, a good thing that the great commercial houses of the late twentieth century are prepared to help to preserve such an incomparable collection. When a firm of the international stature of GPA comes to the rescue, and does so with such outstanding generosity, it is only right that its name should be remembered with that of the founder, the gentleman and Archbishop of Cashel, Theophilus Bolton.

The GPA - Bolton Library is open to the public Monday to Saturday, 9.30 - 5.30, and Sunday, 2.30 - 5.30. (Tel. 062-61944). The writer is Custodian.

