

The Bolton Library, Cashel, Ireland: Aspects of its treasures, history and the effort from 1994 to conserve the collections and retain them in Cashel.

By George Cunningham

Introduction

This article describes some of the holdings and collections of this relatively well-known – at least to bibliophiles and librarians – but little-used scholar's library of the eighteenth-century. For example, it houses significant manuscripts, seventeenth-century Irish pamphlets, bindings of note and rare volumes covering all the natural sciences. The story of its early history is briefly chronicled and, following Dean Woodward's early and sudden death in 1994, of how a dedicated small group of people endeavoured to give the library a meaningful future. Part One records these efforts up to 2013 when a decision had to be taken to transfer the collections to the University of Limerick (UL). These are first-hand accounts as recorded by the writer. Part Two is a synopsis of what followed, the latter years of which did not involve this writer.



GPA Bolton Library, Cashel, Co. Tipperary

Cashel

The Rock of Cashel dominates the Tipperary landscape just as it has done for many centuries. As its medieval buildings indicate, it was an important political and ecclesiastical site long before the successors of Archbishop Bolton abandoned the cathedral on the rock and moved downtown. Bolton was an improving archbishop and initiated many public works, but it is from his love of books that his name remains in the public eye. To the plan of Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, he built his Episcopal palace and housed his books in an annex. On Archbishop King's death, Bolton acquired a large portion of the 6,000 volumes that King had collected. Bolton died in 1744 and in his will he left instructions for the future of his library, at the time a collection of around 12,000 volumes:

First I the said Theophilus Bolton, Archbishop of Cashel do hereby leave all my books in my library and dwelling house in Cashel for the use of the Archbishop of Cashel for the time being and the clergy of the diocese my will and meaning being that the said books shall remain and continue in the said library forever for the use of my successors in the said see and the clergy of the said diocese for the time being and that none of the said books be removed from thence.

While his wishes have ruled the governance of the library since, he left no endowment, no provision for housing and maintenance, and so the library has remained in a perilous state for most of the ensuing years in spite of valiant efforts by successive deans and bishops. A catalogue of the collection was made by Cooper of Killenure Castle later in the century, but the quartering of militia troops in the Palace in 1798 saw some of the books used as fuel.

Following the suppression of the Archbishopric of Cashel in the early 1830s, a chapter house, with a primary library use on the second floor, was built in the grounds of the cathedral. Chiefly responsible for this initiative in 1836 was the Rev Henry Cotton who had been a sub-librarian at the Bodleian in Oxford. The books were moved into the upstairs gallery where most of them have been housed ever since.

The Library and its Contents

The history of the Bolton Library links it with the cathedral on the Rock, the present cathedral and the Archbishop's palace (now the Cashel Palace Hotel) which Bolton built. The two-storey building, designed by Clonmel-born William Tinsley, while modest in its construction, is pleasing to the eye and has good craftsmanship in its detail. It sits

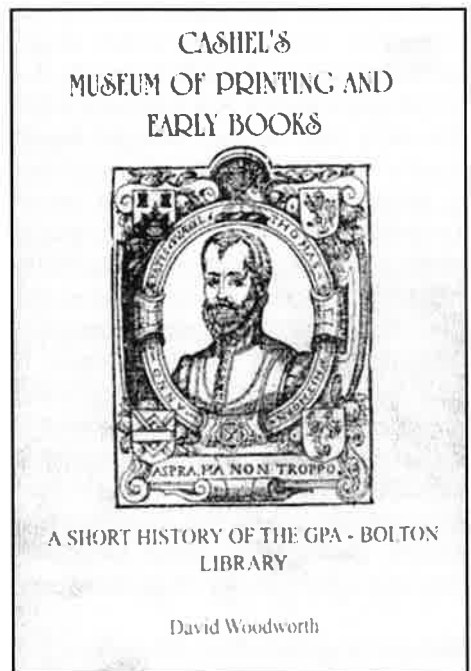


beside its more imposing neighbour, the Georgian cathedral, dating from 1783, within the ecclesiastical precincts, partly bounded by the medieval town walls with 13th century stone effigies.

Much has been made recently of the extraordinary Bolton assessment in Bloomfield and Pott's *Directory of rare books and special collections* (London, 1997) which stated that the library holds, 'many items of great rarity, at least 50 not recorded elsewhere in the world, and some 800 not recorded elsewhere in the world.' Would that it had! The reality is much more mundane: three important early manuscripts, some twenty imprints before 1500 and a further thirty up to 1520. It does have some later unique items but further research is needed before definite conclusions as to their rarity may be reached. The Caxton fragments, two leaves of the 1486 edition of Chaucer's *House of Fame*, are arguably among the most significant pieces of printing in Ireland.

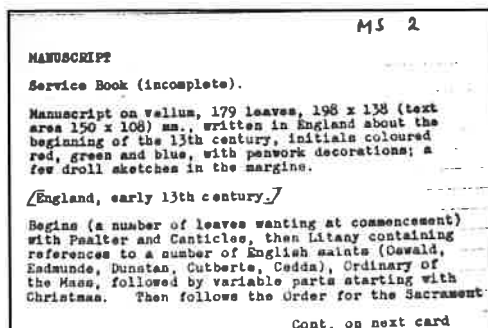
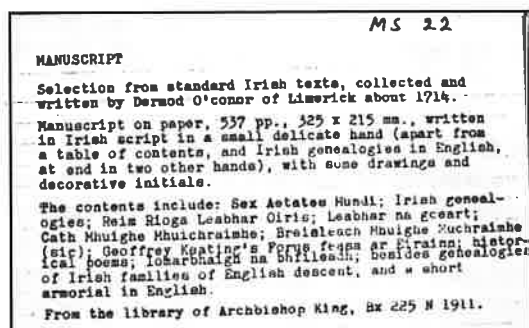
Dean David Woodworth describes the early manuscripts:

The oldest books in the Library are three manuscripts codices, each of them hand-written in England. The first of these, possibly begun about 1168, was finished around 1220 (except for some later additions), and is in its original binding of the early 13th century. Its subject-matter is vast, for it is a medieval encyclopaedia, covering such topics as numbers, language, music, and a charm for safe childbirth, as well as *Imago Mundi* and Aesop's Fables. The second which is much the same age, is a liturgical work comprising a Psalterium, Missale, Breviarum and some extracts from a Manuale. It is one of only three examples of a hand-written missal in Ireland, prior to 1500. The third, written about 1430, is a copy of Peter of Herenthal's commentary on the Psalms and has particularly elegant pictorial capitals embellished with gold.¹



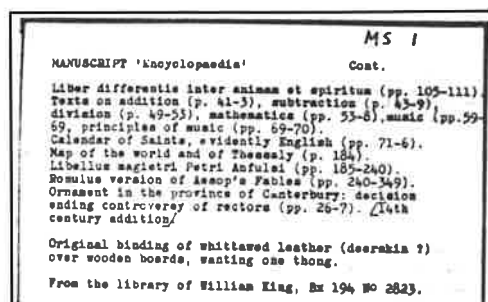
There are just three Irish manuscripts, the finest written by Dermot O'Connor of Limerick, c. 1716. Among the contents of this folio volume are Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Eirin* and what may be the only attempt to translate the antique French of heraldry into the Irish language.

In addition to Bolton's books, the Library also houses diocesan silver, and the parochial registers and other records relating to the Diocese of Cashel. Up to recently it housed the O'Looney Collection with its unique large-scale manuscript map of Tipperary, c. 1803,



estate records and manuscripts mainly relating to South Tipperary.

The 12,000 volumes constitute the finest collection of antiquarian books in the Republic of Ireland, outside of the Dublin area. Often erroneously described as a church, diocesan or cathedral library, it is a scholar's library of the early 18th century brought together by erudite men, bibliophiles who just happened to be churchmen. Of course it does contain many works on church history, religious controversy, theology, sermons and biblical publications. Among the wealth of liturgical printing, ranging from pre-Reformation missals to continental Protestant liturgies, the most spectacular is Morin's *Sarum Missal*, Rouen 1515. But it also is strong in the history of science and the natural sciences, medicine, political/military matters, law, European intellectual history, literature, travel, heraldry. The earliest printed volume is Vincent of Beauvais's, *Speculum Historical* (1473), printed at Strasburg by Adolf Rusch; the capitals are entered by hand and beautifully coloured. Houses of the great printer-publishers are all represented. Library stamps of precious owners indicate provenance connected with Catherine of Aragon, Francis Bacon and the cartographer, Ortelius. Fine bindings of great beauty include the *Reponse*, Geneva, 1662 with its exquisite contemporary French covers, and a 1588 Greek bible with contemporary Italian gold-tooled binding of red morocco with a design of arabesques.



Irish printings from the 17th century include examples from Dublin, Cork, Belfast, Kilkenny and Waterford. Of special note are the 200 bound volumes of 17th century pamphlets, mainly 1640-1660. Being ephemeral in nature, some are of the utmost rarity: politics, controversy, broadsides, a little nonsense. The run of the Perfect *Diurnall* gives a week by week account of the English Civil War. Items, like 'The Kilkenny Confederate Declaration of 1648' and Ulick De Burgh's manuscript account of the Irish revolt in the 1640s are significant Irish survivals. Some twenty-four works by Robert Boyle represent most of his writings between 1664 and 1693. Among the more unusual volumes is the Dublin (1717) Hebrew manuscript translation of the Irish Book of Common Prayer, made by Abraham bar-Jacob Halevi, a rabbi who converted to Christianity. With 900 Irish imprints, two-thirds of the collection was printed in these islands. And, so, as expected, English is the

dominant language followed by around a third in Latin, just over 6% in French, and other works in Greek, Hebrew, Italian and Arabic.

Its Recent History

Without any endowment or full time librarian, the Bolton always struggled, and its collections were always at risk. Well-meaning deans, saddled with the task of curating a library for which they had no training, often relied on parishioners who had some book expertise. Of note during the 1850s and 1860s was John Davis White, Cashel solicitor, historian and writer who acted as librarian, leading to the first printed catalogue in 1873. In 1909/1910 some 600 volumes were sent to Marsh's Library in Dublin for safe keeping. In 1935 these were transferred to the care of the Representative Church Body (RCB) when more books and manuscripts were dispatched. In all some 800 volumes were now in Dublin. In the early decades of the twentieth century little attention was paid to the collections which hastened further deterioration, both in the building and the holdings. When he arrived in Cashel in 1946, Dean Wyse Jackson attempted to put the library on a scholarly footing, drawing attention to its importance in an article in the *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, but it evoked no meaningful response.

Following Dean Wolfe's appointment as Dean in 1961, the first serious modern attempt to secure the library's future was made. However, an assessment by a leading London book dealer erroneously described the Bolton as an ecclesiastic library, thus facilitating the sale of many of its secular titles – principally to the Folger and Huntington libraries in



GPA Bolton Library, Cashel, Co. Tipperary

the USA – to pay off the debt. With these funds he established a small endowment that yielded £200 per annum, and had many volumes repaired or re-bound. And during his stewardship the books in Dublin were returned to Cashel.

Dean Wolfe's lasting achievement was the large catalogue published by G. K Hall of Boston in 1973 after four years of work by Ms J. McK. Millar. He also arranged to have the library opened on a daily basis, installing a half-crown entry slot in the door. After his death, despite the efforts of the succeeding Deans, decline set in once again: books were stolen or 'borrowed', and the building deteriorated to a dangerous condition.

This was the sad state when Dean David Woodworth arrived in 1984 and for the following ten years he devoted much of his life to rescuing and securing the library, as he thought, forever. Three sources provided funding, with Tony Ryan's GPA donating the major financial aid to secure the building (The name GPA Bolton Library is set in stone over the door). In tandem with the physical work, Dean Woodworth set about a major book conservation programme and commenced a new catalogue of the collections. He researched all aspects of the Library and provided leaflets and other ephemera for the public. His booklet *Cashel's Museum of printing and early books* (1994) remains the only substantial work on the history and holdings of the library.

The Bolton re-opened in 1986 to high expectations: the exhibition was first-class and the internal work completed on the building was of note. However, throughout the late eighties and early nineties visitor numbers remained pitifully low, never reaching anywhere near the expected figure. And with no revenue accruing from any source and no money for upkeep or essential maintenance, all at a time of high inflation, the debt grew alarmingly. Almost in despair Dean Woodworth was forced to sell two significant works which he hoped would draw attention to the library's continuing perilous state. Unfortunately, it did not.

An approach in 1994 from the author of this article as to possible help from the University of Limerick (UL) was enthusiastically received by the Dean. As I was then chairman of the Governing Authority Library Development Committee of UL, I made the approach with the full backing of the Librarian and the President of UL. After subsequent discussions with relevant university management, I returned to Cashel on a Friday evening in June and made tentative plans with the Dean as to how UL could help. His relief was palpable. Later I learned that he had carried the burden of the mounting debt with no help in sight on his own shoulders throughout those difficult years. Tragically and untimely, he died the following morning, having told no one, except a brief optimistic word to his wife, Mary, of the offer of help from UL. So, with the Dean's sudden death, this initiative was temporarily suspended. Much more serious was the fact that the recent work by him and his FÁS workers on a new catalogue was also lost, and no print out could be located.

Some months later, on hearing of my brief discussions with Dean Woodworth, Bishop Willoughby approached UL and helped rekindle a desired arrangement. On his appointment as Dean of Cashel in 1995, the Very Rev Dr Philip Knowles embraced the fledgling partnership offered by the university. An ad hoc committee of representatives of the diocese and UL worked to reduce the debt and to put management structures in

place. Continuous fundraising by Dean Knowles and a small band of volunteers enabled the library to continue operating as a visitor centre. Indeed, right up to the present time, Dean Knowles has done heroic work as curator in not only keeping the collections intact but working tirelessly to raise funds and create awareness of the library's plight.

During 1996 the large debt on the library was wiped out by a UL benefactor. Professional assessments of basic library requirements showed that a new catalogue was essential; security needed to be upgraded; environmental controls improved and the collections conserved. Sadly, the required funding for these never materialised. Essential staffing continued under a FÁS community scheme, operating under the aegis of Cashel Heritage. Such arrangements and the willingness of unselfish workers like Ms Pamela Ching allowed the library to remain open to visitors. However, the lack of an up-to-date catalogue meant that facilities for researchers were heavily curtailed.

In 1998, the Bishop of Cashel and the Dean and Chapter of the Diocese formally handed over the management of the library to a Board of Management representative of the Diocese, Cashel Heritage and Development Trust, and the University of Limerick. The University of Limerick agreed to provide technological, cataloguing and academic support for the collections. At its first meeting, George Cunningham was elected chairman, a position he retained until 2008/9 when Bishop Michael Burrows took over the chair. But the new Board had no success in solving the library's chronic problems. Much of its energies and that of the Dean went into maintaining the status quo and ensuring that nothing further was lost.

With the help of John Lancaster, the new Director of Library and Information Services at UL, an action plan was put in place in 2000/2001 with emphasis on the research potential and its unique position as a Museum of the Book. But as no official or private funding was secured, little progress was made. Millennium book-related activities connected with the library and the cathedral, while raising badly-needed funding, also highlighted locally the continuing difficulties.

Aided by a grant from the Heritage Council, the large scale illustrated manuscript map of Co Tipperary (early 1800s) from the O'Looney Collection in the library was conserved in 2001. The Munster Ecclesiastical and Monastic Libraries, the *MemoLib* project was centred on the Bolton. The project proposed to draw together for research purposes the catalogues of the library holdings of the Munster religious communities in partnership with UCC, UL, MIC, WIT and other third level institutions. However, despite a formal launch at the Roscrea Spring conference in 2003 and enthusiastic support from many quarters, the project never reached its significant potential and awaits a champion.

At this time a small grant from the Ireland Funds Chairman's Discretionary Fund enabled some marketing of the library to take place, but a direct appeal for financial aid to government failed: the Bolton was not part of the national cultural institutions. Following some thirty years of research, much of it at Cashel in the Bolton Library, *A Large Private Park*, the Collection of Archbishop William King, was published in two volumes by Professor Robert Matteson.² As most of King's books are or were in the

Bolton, the publication and allied research revealed just how many books had been lost. As chairman I organised a major literary fund-raiser; writer and publishers of Ireland were asked to donate some personalised work for auction or sale. This was moderately successful and the material donated sold enabled the library to continue its day-to-day operations.

In 2003, a new Board of Management was set up³ and as a practical expression of the partnership between the Bolton and the University of Limerick, the University's Special Collection Librarian, Ken Bergin, was allocated some time each week to carry out an assessment of the Bolton Collection. With the help of FÁS employees and a volunteer, the plan was that books affected by damp and mould would be moved, dried, cleaned, and put in order. By 2004, it was hoped that a computerization of the catalogue could begin using the UL Library system TALIS, thus permitting online access. In fact, the poor environmental conditions with the high levels of relative humidity meant that most of Ken Bergin's time at the Bolton was spent inspecting and carrying out basic cleaning on the hundreds of volumes at high risk. Given the time constraints, his was an impossible task. What was needed was a thorough expert review of the physical conditions and as outlined by Gonnait O'Riordan, Director LISD, UL what was also essential, 'an assessment of the restoration and treatment required to preserve the collection.' Based on the budget costs of cataloguing the Cathedral Library at St Finbarr's in Cork, she estimated that such work would take two assistant librarians three years at a cost in the region of €200,000. No such money was available. But by 2004, discussions had commenced with the Heritage Council as to how formal assistance for the library could be made available. Soon afterwards the Bolton board, finding itself without sufficient authority and resources to conserve, protect, and promote what they believed to be internationally significant collections, formally requested the Heritage Council to sponsor a Conservation Plan for 'the place known as the GPA-Bolton Library, Cashel, County Tipperary.'

The Heritage Council agreed to fund such a Conservation Plan, 'to assist in understanding the significance of the Library and inform policies and priorities for its future care and conservation.' Members of a steering group established to formulate such a plan were Ms Mary Hanna (2004/05), Dr Hugh Maguire (2005/06), Mr Colm Murray (2005/06) representing the Heritage Council; Dean Knowles, curator Bolton Library; Ms Gonnait O'Riordan, Ken Bergin and George Cunningham, UL; Dermot Burke and Martin Luby, Office of Public Works. Both Cashel Town Council and South Tipperary County Council declined to take part. The Steering Group appointed Architects Alasdair Coey to prepare the report. The plan was completed by early 2006 but was not published in printed form until December 2007 when it was formally launched in Cashel Cathedral. Speakers at the launch were the Bishop of Cashel and Ossory, Dr Michael Burrows, Professor Don Barry, President of UL, Mr Michael Starrett, Chief Executive of the Heritage Council, Dean Knowles and George Cunningham. All drew attention to the need for such a report and hoped that it would become the 'calling card' to obtain the necessary help 'towards the goal of conserving a national treasure for the benefit of future generations of researchers and scholars.'

The well-presented report with photographs by Eoin Stephenson outlined the relevant history and contents of the Library, threats to its significance, and policies and vision for the future. Despite the wide circulation of the document to agencies that could provide the necessary help, nothing much happened, and the Library continued to struggle. In an effort to halt the downward slide, in 2008 the Heritage Council did agree to fund vital structural repairs on the building.

Worried by the evident further deterioration of the collection, UL commissioned a report on the preservation needs of the collection from the National Preservation Office (NPO). Although the Board knew of the poor condition of the collection and the environmental deficiencies of the building, Ms Alison Walker's report of February 2008, revealed the most disquieting news that, 'the condition of the collection is characterised by high humidity, evidenced by swelling, cockling of paper, fragility of vellum bindings and distortion of structures.' Among the long term actions for the preservation of the collection the report recommended that the Board, 'fully assess alternative storage options.'

Clearly something had to be done. Despite Bolton's wishes in his famous will, if the Library was to survive, drastic and reluctant decisions had to be taken. With no other alternatives available, the Board explored the possibility of asking UL to take custody of the collection in Limerick, and to request the OPW to take over the Library building as part of their visitor services, creating in it a Museum of the Book with treasures from the Bolton exhibited therein. Seeking to take some pressure off the visitor numbers at the Rock of Cashel (in 2006 the Rock had more than a quarter of a million visitors, while just 532 were recorded at the Bolton), and 'come down town' to reinstate the Bolton link and the Rock's more modern history, the OPW were warm to the idea. Talks on such a project were initiated with George Cunningham as the facilitator.



2007-12-7 Cashel launch

Reluctantly UL agreed to the proposed transfer and in April 2008 a memorandum of understanding between the Glucksman Library on behalf of UL and the Bishop of Cashel and Ossory was drawn up:

The purpose of the understanding is to ensure the safety, security and conservation of the collection and to enhance scholarly access to it....all reasonable preservation/conservation of material deposited will be undertaken at the earliest opportunity but will be dependent on funding. The Bolton library will be kept together as a single entity and not dispersed. The University will work with other partners to share responsibility for the provision of a permanent but changing exhibition at Cashel.....

A committee representative of the Church of Ireland, UL and the Cashel community will be established to monitor the agreement. A timescale was drawn up to allow for the dehumidification of the books to take place before any transfer could occur. It was envisaged that this could happen by 2011 when the exhibition facility would be in place in Cashel.

The OPW were very positive about the development of this visitor centre in the library building. But almost immediately a radical proposal from them was put forward. In the early summer of 2008, as the continuing facilitator between the Bolton Board and the OPW, I was asked to attend another meeting in OPW headquarters in Dublin with Commissioner David Byers and Heritage Director, Dermot Burke. The thrust of that meeting is outlined in a subsequent letter to Bishop Burrows, June 2008, as below. It is worth quoting in full as it succinctly sums up the problems and proposes a most desirable solution:

Dear Bishop,

I refer to the Bolton Library and the various initiatives and proposals for the long-term care and management of the Library. The Heritage Conservation Plan in particular highlights the herculean efforts made over the years to preserve, protect, maintain and present the Library as an integral part of the town of Cashel and in its wider national and international context.

This Office has always been mindful of the historical relationship and empirical links between the Library and the Rock of Cashel, where the collection was first assembled. We would also have an intrinsic empathy as custodians of the built heritage in state care with ongoing efforts to conserve the Library and were represented on the steering group for the preparation of the Heritage Conservation Report launched in December 2007. The Heritage Conservation Report highlighted the fragility of the overall position. This Office has also duly noted the report on the preservation needs of the Bolton Library by the National Preservation Office of February 2008.

We consider that the ultimate solution for the retention of the Bolton Library in Cashel and for the long term care, conservation and management of the Library, its collections and its building and its presentation in a local, national and international context as a visitor resource and research facility would be on the basis of a

specific administrative agreement between the Church of Ireland and the State while continuing the interest of the University of Limerick.

The Rock of Cashel has been experiencing a progressive increase in the number of visitors each year. This increase poses a significant threat to the National Monument in the future. Numbers now exceed 250,000 visitors each year and are putting a severe strain on existing visitor facilities and on the Monument, particularly the Vicars' Choral. A strategy has to be devised to relieve the pressure and one of the suggested proposals is to spread the visitor load. This could be partly achieved by the opening of a complementary visitor facility at the Bolton Library. It would form part of the Rock of Cashel complex and would be promoted and managed in association with the Rock of Cashel and visitor traffic could be directed or rerouted to it. This could add significantly to the town's capacity to absorb increased numbers of visitors, contribute to the attractiveness of Cashel as a totality and act as a "signpost" to other attractions within the town of Cashel.

The Office of Public Works would therefore propose the following:

- (a) The Bolton Library building to be given on a long term lease to the Office of Public Works, who would be responsible for maintaining it.
- (b) The Collections to remain in the Bolton Library building in Cashel
- (c) The Collections be transferred to the ownership of a suitable State institution
- (d) The Office of Public Works to draw down funds for the cataloguing, conservation and preservation of the collections and to undertake the necessary environmental improvements
- (e) The Office of Public Works to manage the collection in association with the University of Limerick who would be consulted and advise on cataloguing, conservation plans and environmental controls
- (f) The Bolton Library would form part of the Rock of Cashel visitor facilities and would be administered and serviced by the Rock of Cashel Visitor Services staff
- (g) A Board of Visitors / Advisory Board for the Bolton Library would be established with representatives from the Office of Public Works, Church of Ireland, University of Limerick and any relevant Government Department with a direct interest in the Library to oversee its administration. The Board would meet on a regular basis and be concerned with the condition of the building and the collections, the management, use, requirements and scholarly future of the Bolton Library, and report to the Minister of State with Responsibility for the Office of Public Works on a regular basis.

I believe that these proposals would secure the future of the Bolton Library, ensure that it remains in Cashel while being recognised as a national asset, give it an exciting future of public and scholarly appreciation and maintain the involvement and participation of the Church of Ireland in its governance and future direction. I would be grateful if these proposals are given your consideration. These proposals would, of course be subject to the approval of the Department of Finance and any relevant Government Department. Any outcome would be dependant on such approval. If however the proposals are acceptable and agreed in principle we could seek such approval.

Yours sincerely,
Dermot Burke (Director, Heritage Service)

The Bolton Board heartily endorsed and unanimously approved the proposals contained in the OPW letter. Later that summer, the Board met with Dr Martin Mansergh, Minister of State at the Department of Finance with special responsibility for the OPW and the Arts, and his officials in Dublin for the formal approval of the proposals.

In expressing satisfaction with the outcome, a statement from UL went on to say:

The Special Collections Librarian, University of Limerick, has met with the OPW Librarian and her staff at the Bolton Library and shared his knowledge of the collection and the facility with them. We also provided print and electronic copies of the NPO report on the preservation needs of the Bolton Library, commissioned by the University Library, to the OPW. Following this the OPW Librarian met with the Director, Library and Information Services, University of Limerick to discuss the collection. The University Library will provide any further advice on the care of the Bolton Library that may be required.

..... *The University Library could enhance scholarly access to the collection and make the material available to the wider community and endeavour to encourage research and interest in the collection...and we are happy to work in a cooperative way with the OPW to provide this scholarly access. Arrangements could be put in place to enable researchers to consult items from the collection in the Special Collections Reading Room at the University Library. Other academic and library initiatives such as the preparation and hosting of exhibitions, digitising of items from the collection and making them available worldwide in electronic format, lectures, conferences and studentships could be developed jointly by the OPW and the University.*

Needless to say euphoria reigned at the Bolton Board – the Library had a secure future at last. A dream had, indeed, become a reality. Bishop Burrows and Dr Raymond Refausse, Church of Ireland archivist and librarian and a member of the Bolton Board since 2004, conducted the necessary arrangements to obtain approval for the leases and legal framework to be drawn up between the Representative Church Body (RCB) and the Chief Solicitor's Office (CSO). By June 2009, nothing had happened and when Bishop Burrows contacted Minister Mansergh, he received a reply stating that:

the essence of the proposals are still valid, but giving expression to them has proved to be more protracted and cumbersome than we had originally envisaged.....my main concern is to achieve the goal which seems to be in sight.

My officials have been in consultation with the Chief's State Solicitor's Office with a view to establishing the legal framework under which the proposals we outlined can be put into effect. The good news is I am in a position to write to the Minister for Finance shortly. ...once this approval has been given, lawyers will draft the formal agreements for the approval of the different parties...

However, a backlog of work at the CSO, and some misunderstanding about the length of the lease, meant that nothing much was achieved into 2010. Not good news for the collections as the environmental problems continued unabated, even worsened.

Following a meeting of the Board in April 2010, at which a concerned , almost distraught Dean Knowles drew attention to the present critical situation, the Bishop wrote to Minister Mansergh, again expressing very serious disquiet. In that letter of May 1st, Bishop Burrows rehearsed the OPW proposals to take over the Library

essentially from an initiative of your own, and we were given a clear impression that progressing the matter was regarded as a matter of real urgency.....The Board now finds itself, nearly two years on, in an impossible situation. We have almost no resources or income, and the condition of the building is visibly deteriorating. We shelved alternative plans to safeguard the future of the Library by the possible relocation of many of its contents for conservation and access in the University of Limerick because of (it appeared) your more satisfactory proposal; now the financial pressures on the University make them much less likely to offer to partner us again in this enterprise.

The Bishop went on to request another formal meeting with the Minister before the end of the month, saying that in the meantime the

fate of the Library will be raised publicly at this week's General Synod....we shall have to tell the Synod that there is no good news to report.....I have to say that I found the recent meeting of the Bolton Board one of the most gloomy meetings that I have ever attended anywhere. ..People felt despondent and frankly let down.... they were not sure where to turn next.

The Minister replied almost immediately saying that the proposals are practically finalized and that he was 'pretty confident of a satisfactory conclusion in the near future.'

The long-awaited press release finally came on the 25th May 2010, with the heading announcing,

'The Office of Public Works to Take in Charge the Cashel Bolton Library.'

The Minister of State at the Dept of Finance with Special Responsibility for the Office of Public Works and the Arts, Dr Martin Mansergh, TD, wishes to announce that the Office of Public Works will be taking in charge the Bolton Library, Cashel. The Office of Public Works will present the Library as part of the Rock of Cashel complex, mindful of the historic relationship between the Bolton Library and the Rock of Cashel, i.e. it was originally the Library of the Cathedral on the Rock. The Minister of State, Dr Mansergh, is delighted at the positive outcome to long drawn out efforts to secure the future of the Bolton Library at Cashel. The Library contains a unique collection of antiquarian books and pamphlets from all over Europe, including early material of Irish interest, and covering subjects from theology to history, including 17th century political pamphlets, to mathematics. ... The book collection will remain in the Bolton Library, and, as with the library recently acquired in Farnleigh, the ownership will in due course be lodged with Marsh's Library, while the building will be on long-term lease from the Church Representative Body of the Church of Ireland to the Office of Public Works. The books and other documents, while remaining in situ, will be managed in association between the University of Limerick and its Library and the Office of Public Works. A Board of Visitors/Advisory Body will be established with representatives from the OPW, the Church of Ireland, the University of Limerick and other interested bodies to draw on their expertise in the management of the library.

The Minister went on to acknowledge the care and custodianship of successive deans and bishops, volunteers, the recent help from the Heritage Council and Tony Ryan of GPA. He stated that the OPW would be carrying out further architectural works over the coming years. The Press Release ended with

The Rock of Cashel, Ireland's medieval acropolis, has been experiencing up to a quarter of a million visitors each year, which is putting a strain on existing visitor facilities and on the National Monument, particularly the Vicars' Choral. The opening of a complementary visitor facility at the Bolton Library will assist in the spreading of the visitor load. It will form part of the Rock of Cashel complex, and will be promoted and managed in association with the Rock of Cashel, and visitor traffic can be directed to it. This could add significantly to the capacity of Cashel to absorb increased numbers of visitors, and to act as a signpost to the other attractions within the town.

I continued to liaise with Dermot Burke who felt confident that physical work would commence during the latter end of 2010. Unfortunately, many critical factors now began to influence the OPW proposals. The recession meant that the Department of Finance stalled on the agreement; key personnel changes within the OPW heralded a shifting of priorities. The untimely and sudden death of Commissioner Byers followed by the early retirement of Dermot Burke meant, at its best, a lack of continuity about projects in the pipeline but needing major policy decisions. But probably the greatest mitigating factor was the General Election of February 2011 which saw Dr Mansergh lose his seat, and as a consequence his Ministry.

At the end of March 2011, Bishop Burrows wrote to the new Minister, Brian Hayes, TD, again outlining what had been agreed and saying that the RCB had approved the proposals in June of last year and that a 'draft lease was issued to the Chief State Solicitor Office during July. However, our solicitors are awaiting return of that draft lease from CSO in order to progress the matter'.

The Bishop concluded with the hope that the agreement to lease could be finalized in the near future, 'given the length of time that had already elapsed and the parlous state of the Library.' During 2011, the newly-appointed Director of Heritage Services, Dr Les Lennox, contacted Dean Knowles with fresh proposals that dealt only with structural improvements on the library building, that the OPW did not see itself as taking over or being responsible for the cataloguing or conservation of the collections.

Changes of personnel at the OPW during 2012, and the continuing budgetary restrictions they faced, meant that no progress was made. Newly-appointed Heritage Director, Mr Frank Shalvey and OPW Commissioner, John McMahon, visited Dean Knowles and the Library before Christmas to hear and see for themselves the problems confronting the Library. Responding to my request for a comment on OPW's present position with the proposals put forward during Dr Mansergh's time in office, Mr Frank Shalvey said that he was very much aware of them, that the visit to Cashel by both the Commissioner and himself was to hold full and frank discussions with Dean Knowles on how matters now stood, and to get a clearer picture of all aspects of the present situation. Mr Shalvey went on to state...

I am not saying that the OPW has explicitly taken a decision setting aside the previous undertaking that was given in 2010, but I certainly think that, at the very least, it is clear that the financial environment in particular that would be needed to underpin all these developments is much challenged at this stage and that, as a result, the desired end cannot be made materialize simply by our 'fiat'. Dermot Burke's letter in fact acknowledges this when he noted that the proposed arrangements would be 'subject to the approval of the Department of Finance and any relevant Government Department' and that 'any outcome would be dependent on such approval.' I would be emphatic therefore in saying that OPW will not be the final authority in relation to this and I would not like the impression that we are to get abroad. We will certainly, however, be hoping to help to put all of these measures in place and putting our voice and support into any solution along these lines and we will work toward that end.

When John McMahon and I met the Dean before Christmas, we were visiting because we were aware of the straits that the Library is in, because we had heard of the OPW's previous involvement and were anxious to assist. I thought that we were as clear as we could be speaking to him that there were limits to what we could propose, given both our remit in OPW National Monuments and the funds available to us. However, we remain committed to help and, as I suggested to you, we will engage fully with appropriate stakeholders to advance the cause of the Library. I think it should be recognized though that simply saying it and then doing it are two

different things and it will take considerable effort to achieve what the Library needs in what is a horrendously difficult climate for expensive projects like this.

The Director of the University of Limerick Glucksman Library, Gobnait O'Riordan, in a statement, also dated March 2013, outlined UL's position at that time:

The Bolton Library is a noteworthy scholar's library of rare and beautiful books from two Irish archbishops, William King and Theophilus Bolton. It is a national treasure and a unique research resource of interest to book lovers and scholars worldwide. The Glucksman Library, University of Limerick has worked with the Bishop of Cashel and Ossory, the Dean of Cashel and the Bolton Board since 1994 to try resolve some the most urgent concerns about the library and to ensure that the library would have a secure future.

Following the NPO Conservation Report, sponsored by the Glucksman Library and the Heritage Council's Heritage Conservation Plan, we welcomed the decision in 2008 for the OPW to take responsibility for the Bolton Library. The Glucksman Library agreed to work in a cooperative way with them to provide scholarly access to the collection, make the material available to the wider community and endeavour to encourage research and interest in the collection. There appears to have been little progress in securing the Bolton Library since then, The Glucksman Library remains committed to supporting it in any way possible.

Discussions between the Bolton Board and the OPW have recommenced to find ways to conserve, preserve and safeguard this national treasure. At the moment Dean Knowles's impending retirement in September adds urgency to the resolution of a situation which was already in need of urgent solution. That there is goodwill all round is evident, and an acknowledgement of the importance of the collections remains undisputed, but in the present economic climate its secure future remains far from certain.

Part 2

Synopsis of events as known to George Cunningham, April 2013 to Summer 2014.

May 2013: Meeting between OPW (Commissioner John McMahon and Frank Shalvey) and some members of the Bolton Board (Bishop Michael Burrows, Dean Knowles and George Cunningham) at the Bishop's residence in Kilkenny. OPW informed the meeting, while continuing to be sympathetic to the cause of the library, that there was no way could the OPW carry out what was envisaged and agreed by Minister Mansergh and the OPW in 2008. Those present acknowledged and accepted that this proposal was subject to the approval of the Minister of Finance, and in the light of the recession was just not feasible.

June 2013: The Bishop called a meeting of the Bolton Board for June 2014 at the Deanery Cashel. Present at a preliminary meeting were reps from Marsh's Library and Cashel Heritage together with UL reps and COI reps. At the Board meeting, following alarming reports on the acceleration of the deterioration of the collection, the Board had no option but to act immediately to safeguard it and attempt to ensure its safe future. It

was regretted that some five years were lost awaiting clarification of the OPW proposals which, notwithstanding Heritage Council conservation work on the building, saw the environmental conditions worsen.

The Board had no other choice but to take the only option that promised a future for the collection: that it had to be removed as soon as possible from the unsuitable environment of the Bolton building, and that the necessary conservation works on the volumes had to commence, again as soon as possible. One of the most poignant terse comments made at the pre-meeting was a plea from heart of the Cashel Heritage FÁS worker at the Library who spoke from the heart of the weekly deterioration of the most treasures volumes, even those on display. 'Something has to be done, now.'

(Preliminary estimates for the conservation of the collection run into millions of euros, not to speak of the proper conditions for housing and curating the collections). Marsh's Library was represented at the pre-meeting by its Curator and assistant. A proposal was made by them to house the collection in Dublin. However, the unanimous decision of the Board was that, if UL agreed, the collection would be moved to the University as soon as possible following the completion of legalities, and that conservation work would commence on the collections as funds allowed.

Following Gobnait O'Riordan's (LISD Director at UL) consultation with President Don Barry, UL agreed to take the Bolton collection into their charge. It had spent twenty years supporting all the efforts to maintain the collections in Cashel with financial, technical and professional library assistance. UL very much regretted that the desired outcome that the collections could remain in Cashel and be properly cared for, was just not possible.

A full agreement on the proposed arrangements was to be drawn up with UL on various reporting, management and policy matters regarding the collection.

All present at the June meeting were fully aware that the move would be a very traumatic one for Cashel. To create something unique in the Bolton Building in the historic Cathedral Close, the Bishop, through the RCB, initiated discussions to enquire if the OPW would take a long-term lease of the building to provide a Visitor Centre displaying treasures from the Library and other relevant material. These exhibits would be facilitated by UL who would act as an academic arm to whatever proposals came to fruition. The idea of having an OPW presence in Cashel town down from the Rock is one that would be warmly welcomed and one that was agreed before Dr Mansergh's proposals were made.

July 2014

Statement from the Bishop of Cashel and Ossory which elicited little comment nationally, regionally and locally. Most people recognized the dilemma and acknowledged what had been done.

In the seven years since I became bishop the Board of the Bolton Library in Cashel and I have been much concerned about the future. The Board consists of a number of local representatives including the dean of Cashel, along with expert advisers from the University of Limerick and the Representative Church Body Library in

Dublin. The great hope had been that the OPW would assist us in finding a way to conserve the collection on location in Cashel and to make it more accessible to scholars and visitors, but it has now become clear that this is not going to happen and the condition of the priceless collection of books is deteriorating rapidly. Following a recent Board meeting, it was decided after careful discussion to seek a different way forward in partnership with UL library, and I wish to acknowledge the support and patience of the representatives of that Body. I have asked UL to summarise the present situation from their perspective and the following outline has my full endorsement

The University of Limerick has been working with the custodians of the Bolton Library since 1994 when a taskforce was established to examine ways in which UL could assist in preserving the library and in making it available to research postgraduate students and to the public by way of exhibition. This was formalised as the Board of the Bolton Library in 2004. For the past 19 years the Bishop of Cashel and Ossory, the Dean of Cashel and members of the Bolton Board have strived to secure a solution to maintain the Bolton Library in Cashel and allow for the preservation and exhibition of the collection. This has involved working with community representatives, philanthropic organisations, the Heritage Council and latterly the Office of Public works. The board has overseen the development of a conservation plan and a report on the preservation needs of the collection. It was agreed with the OPW that they would take responsibility for the library in Cashel but due to the adverse economic climate the OPW informed the Bishop early in 2013 that this was no longer possible. It is deeply regrettable that it has not been possible to secure a solution that keeps all of the collection in Cashel.

The environment in the Library building in Cashel is cold and damp and the collection is vulnerable in such inadequate conditions. Despite the best efforts of all involved it has not been possible to put in place the appropriate environmental controls, monitoring and security required for the collection. The condition of the books continues to deteriorate in their current environment and the correction of this situation has been the focus of the Bolton Board in the past few months.

The Bishop of Cashel and Ossory has discussed with the University of Limerick the option of providing a new home for the Bolton Library, to house it the environmentally controlled Special Collections Unit and to make every effort with the OPW and others to establish a permanent Bolton Library exhibition in Cashel.

Moving in this direction has been a difficult decision, but it is undoubtedly right and responsible if this important collection is to be safeguarded for the future. Continued inaction is simply not an option; we must be more courageous in our decisions even if there is inevitable criticism from those who have affection for the status quo. We assure our critics that the Board of the library has spent years of painful frustration trying to discharge our duty in virtually impossible circumstances before reaching a decision. As has been indicated our hope is that the library Building itself will continue to be an architectural focus in the precincts of Cashel Cathedral so

that among its future uses may be the establishment there of 'a permanent Bolton Library exhibition in Cashel'.

I would like to end by paying the warmest possible tribute to Dean Philip Knowles who has at considerable personal cost, and with care and diligence, done all that any dean could have done to care for the Library for eighteen years in most difficult circumstances

Michael Cashel and Ossory
(added note: Dean Knowles died in 2018).

At the request of Cashel Town Council the Bishop, Dean and other representatives of the Board met at a later stage to discuss the proposed arrangements. Following full and frank discussions the Town Council was unable to offer any alternative solution. The legalities regarding the transfer of the collections to UL were placed in the hands of reps of the COI and UL. By 2017 these had been completed and the mammoth task of transferring the collections to UL began

The transfer alone of the collections from Cashel to UL proved very costly not to speak of the conservation work which is ongoing in UL. For almost twenty years everything possible had been tried by the Board of Management of the Bolton Library to retain the Bolton collections in Cashel. Unfortunately, little or no help of any substance was ever forthcoming from the relevant statutory bodies in Tipperary.

From time to time the issue of the future of the Library was raised at election time but nothing was ever followed through. Senator/Deputy/Minister Mansergh unfortunately lost his seat at a crucial time when it seemed that a successful outcome for Cashel was in sight.

References

- 1 Woodworth, David. *The GPA-Bolton Library, A short history*. (Irish Heritage Association , Belfast 1991). P9. Many of the statistics concerning the Bolton collections in this paper are based on his research which is acknowledged with gratitude. Those wishing for more detail on the library contents or history to 1990 should consult his work.
- 2 *Libri Pertines No 7. LP Publications. Cambridge, 2003*
- 3 Members of the Board were the Bishop of Cashel and Ossory, The Dean of Cashel, Ms Marian Thompson, Cashel; Ms Gobnait O'Riordan, Ken Bergin and George Cunningham, UL. Dr Refausse later joined the Board.