Cataloguing the St. Canice's Cathedral Library Collection at Maynooth University

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Abstract

This article outlines the processes involved in cataloguing the historic St. Canice's Cathedral Library collection of over 3000 rare books. Cataloguing began on the collection in June 2015 and subsequently ceased in March 2016 to facilitate the main objective of allowing access to this collection without delay. Collection processing was carried out on a phased basis: the first stage was to list the material in the collection and then each item was catalogued to a minimum level. Priority was given to 14 of the rarer books in the collection to comply with the DCRM(B) rare books cataloguing standard, including four items of incunabula (pre-1500 printing). Phase 2 of this retrospective cataloguing project will include full bibliographical descriptions for all materials, following prescribed rules set forth in DCRM(B).

The challenges of cataloguing a rare books collection using the St. Canice's Collection as an example are considered. Metadata issues experienced in displaying such collections on library management systems are also discussed.

Keywords: *Rare Books, Retrospective Cataloguing, Metadata*

Introduction

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1   Project Manager for the St. Canice's Cathedral Library Collection.

Uncanny circumstances

It is extremely curious to note that in 1332 the central Cathedral tower of St. Canice's collapsed in circumstances that were associated with the trial of Dame Alice Kyteler for witchcraft, the most notorious event of Kilkenny's medieval history. During the Kilkenny Witchcraft Trials, Kyteler was accused of practicing witchcraft and her servant, Petronilla, was charged with being one of her accomplices. Petronilla was tortured and forced to proclaim that she and Kyteler were guilty of witchcraft. Hers was the first known case in Ireland or Great Britain of death by fire for the crime of heresy.

It was certainly an unnerving surprise to discover that Petronilla was then flogged and eventually burnt at the stake on 3rd November 1324, in Kilkenny – the very day we presented on this unique collection at the prestigious 5th International Summit of the Book, an initiative of the Library of Congress which was held in Limerick on the 2nd and 3rd November 2016.

St. Canice's Cathedral Library

The Otway-Maurice Collection of St Canice's Cathedral Library, Kilkenny was recently acquired by Maynooth University Library on long-term loan from The Representative Body of the Church of Ireland for restoration and safe keeping. This is a unique collection of early printed books, mainly that of Bishop Edward Maurice, who was Bishop of Ossory in the mid-18th Century but also including works from one of his predecessors, Bishop Thomas Otway. It includes many fine examples of woodcut illustrations, historic bindings, and manuscript fragments. Particular highlights of the collection include: four items of incunabula (pre-1500 printing), a Shakespearean Fourth Folio (1685) and numerous titles on witchcraft, demonology and even cannibalism.

Collection Overview

The collection features over 3,000 titles printed before the year 1850. Many of the works are theological but works on history, the classics, law, literature, and science also feature. The earliest printed works date from 1483-1498 and there are also over 300 titles printed before the year 1600. The oldest known piece in the collection is a fifteenth century manuscript text which is a citation mandate from Thomas Bourchier, Papal Legate and Archbishop of Canterbury, to John Bar in the year 1468. Other important works include items by the Venetian printer Aldus, as well as several sixteenth century Parisian printings.
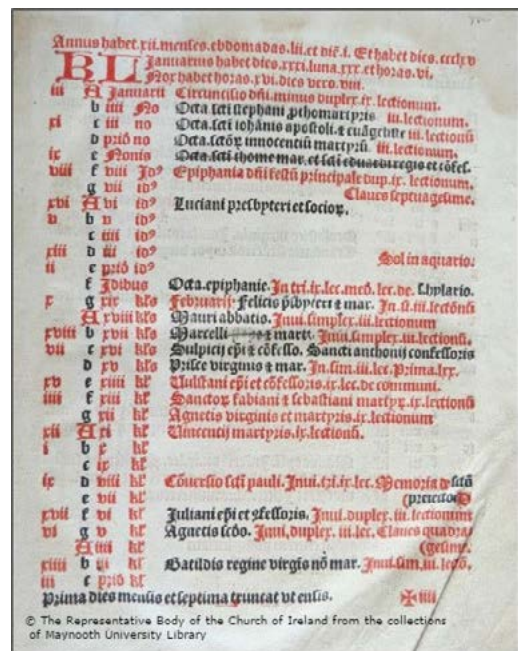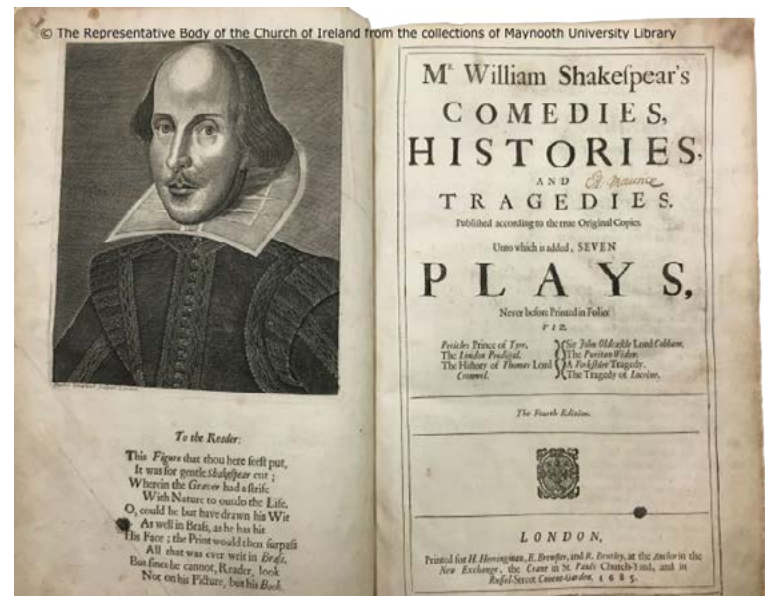
Early Cataloguing Efforts

A comprehensive catalogue of the Collection was completed by Hugh Campbell in 1997. This listing was invaluable in terms of processing the collection when it arrived at Maynooth University Library. A decision was made to retain the original shelf-marks and shelving sequence of the Collection when it was transferred to a state-of-the-art secure storage area in the John Paul II Library. 14 rare books were identified and were given priority when cataloguing phase 1 of the project began.

Subsequent to this, a pilot project was carried out to assess how many OCLC records could be downloaded in a given hour. This initially projected the

possibility of cataloguing 10-15 books per hour. This listing served as the guideline for cataloguers for the duration of the project, the aim being to reduce handling of older material. While this figure was deemed realistic for the comparatively 'light touch' cataloguing of phase 1, it was not proscriptive and indeed, such were the qualities and depth of the collection, that it was necessary to spend far longer on each item, even with minimal cataloguing standards being applied as noted below.

The Cataloguing Process

In evaluating the collection, and in order to allow immediate access to the material, it was decided that the collection's inherent structure would lend itself well to a hybrid approach. The library devised a two phase approach that provides an efficient and accurate way of dealing with immediate access to a rare book collection while adhering to descriptive standards for this category of collection. Phase 1 cataloguing aimed to provide bibliographically identifiable records of books while also being quick and efficient.

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This process has been boiled down to the simplest elements of rare books cataloguing, but should provide enough information for accurate research retrieval. While a 'book in hand' approach is considered the ideal when cataloguing a rare book collection, for this project, cataloguing was guided by Hugh Campbell's printed listing. Despite being a simplified process phase 1 operates to a defined standard and includes specific elements of quality control – such as:

- Full Transcription of the Imprint
- Author Entry
- Pagination Description
- Basic Subject Entries
- Provenance Note
- Location/Classmark

This approach to rare book cataloguing allowed for 3152 books for a significant and historical collection to be catalogued in a 10-month period. The 14 rare books that were identified as too bibliographically complex, too fragile and too important to be done at the Phase 1 level, were given

cataloguing priority and now have the final stage of full DCRM (B)[2] compliant records. These include four items of incunabula (pre-1500 printing), a Sarum Missal printed for Fleet Street printer Wynkyn de Worde and our magnificent copy of Shakespeare's Fourth Folio (1685).

Phase 2 cataloguing work will provide full descriptive records for each book – in hand – when conservation work has been completed on the more fragile items and also when time and resources allow. This will then follow the prescribed rules set forth in the DCRM(B) standard which is an internationally recognized standard for rare books cataloguing. These records will include full descriptions about the physical nature, publication history and unique characteristics of the book in-hand (binding, more details of provenance, missing pages, etc.

Challenges

There were two main challenges faced during the cataloguing phase of this project. The first was working from a title listing rather than taking a 'book in hand' approach. Realistically due to the complex nature of some of the titles and the difficulties of finding rare items, 3-5 records were downloaded per hour rather than the preliminary 10-15 records per hour. Cataloguing from a printed list was also a challenge as due to the nature of early printed books it was often necessary to consult the physical item to confirm bibliographic details.

It is also important to note that books from the pre-1850 period lack standardised spelling, something we take for granted today. For example, the word "murder" was sometimes spelt "murther", the word "public" was sometimes spelt as "publick". The number '40' or 'forty' in the title "40

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2   Descriptive Cataloguing of Rare Materials (Books)

Sermons" was actually spelt 'Fourty Sermons' on the title-page. These characteristics made it necessary to consult the physical item before searching OCLC.

The second major challenge was the limited option in our discovery tool required for the searching of a rare book collection. This is increasingly fundamental for all libraries with rare holdings as the current generation of discovery services does not necessarily provide adequate access into the specialized collections of the library, the archives of an institution (whether it be part of the library or a separate institution in the university), or in other departments that manage unique information resources. Therefore, using LibrarySearch – our discovery tool - will only display basic information regarding a *unique* item. Therefore, it is recommended at this time, to search the Maynooth classic catalogue in order to retrieve a full and descriptive record for this collection.

Discovery tools and the bibliography of rare books

A recent RLUK report emphasizes the need to understand our rare collections as broader than simply rare books or manuscripts. As such it adopts the term 'Unique and Distinctive Collections' (UDC) which it defines as 'a collection that, regardless of format or location within an institution, derives significance from its interest to research, teaching or society through its association with a person, place or topic, such as to distinguish the constituent items from similar items which may exist elsewhere'. UDCs encompass, but are broader than traditional special collections, potentially covering collections in all formats and at all locations.

However, evidence from this cataloguing project verifies that the various 5XX fields required for UDC's content is included in some discovery tool's index only, but not in displayed fields at the present time. The 5XX fields are

essential for UDCs as information that identifies exactly why they are unique is recorded such as binding and provenance information. Any extension of RDA for rare materials—such as the next version of DCRM will not be effective for libraries using these systems.

Special collections materials are unique to their institutions, rely on locally created metadata for access, and as such are at risk for being overlooked in a discovery environment if metadata quality standards fall short (Wood, 2011).

Any eventual transition to broad exposure of scholarly materials as linked data, including both proprietary and open access content would naturally have a major impact in how discovery services are populated (Breeding, 2015).

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