The Cathach
c. AD 560

The Cathach is the oldest extant Irish manuscript of the Psalter and the earliest example of Irish writing or callam. It contains a Vulgate version of Psalms 89:10 to 105:13 with an interpretative rubric or heading before each psalm. It is traditionally ascribed to St Columba as the manuscript of a Psalter lent to Columba by St Finnian. A dispute arose about the ownership of the copy and King Diarmait Mac Carthuille gave the judgment "To every one belongs his calf, therefore to every book belongs its copy". It is possible to date the manuscript to the late 6th or early 7th century from the script.

The script is early majuscule with ornamental capitols, some of which are in red and, like the red in the lettering for the rubrics, the colour has faded. The framework of the capitols is often outlined by a series of scintillae dots and the decoration is realised by specks and animal heads. In the 11th century a ceremonial or shrine was made for the manuscript. It was named 'Cathach' or 'Censer' from the practice of carrying it before the High Priest as a tithe.

The Psalter was owned by the O'Donnells but in the custody of the Mac Rbhaintriagh family at Mulroy Abbey in Co. Donegal. It was taken to France in 1691 and brought back to Sir Neil O'Donel, Neospire, Co. Mayo, in 1802. The manuscript was discovered in 1815 when the censer was opened by Sir William Balfour. It was deposited in the Academy by Sir Richard O'Donel in 1843. The shrine was subsequently transferred to the National Museum of Ireland, while the manuscript was retained in the Royal Irish Academy.

The Cathach was repaired and rebound in 1980-2 by Roger Dwell and Dorothy Cunliffe. The vellum leaves were attached to new vellum supports specially made to match the original leaves.

RES MS 17, R 113

Left: Part of the Cathach at the National Museum of Ireland
Right: Part of the Cathach at the Royal Irish Academy
The Cathach: Psalms of St Columba (c. 6th Century), Dublin, Ireland, 1980-2.

Treasures of the Royal Irish Academy
Library
Most of the Academy's vellum manuscripts have been conserved since the late 1960s. Vellum (leaf data) is durable but needs to be maintained in an environment with viable temperature and humidity levels.

Conservation begins with an assessment of a document to determine its condition and the extent of repairs required. The purpose of conservation is to ensure that the manuscript is given a renewed lease of life. To further preserve the document for the future, we normally digitize it after conservation and publish the digital images. This helps to increase access while reducing handling thus preventing further damage.

The Cathach (RIA MS 12 R 88), the Academy's oldest manuscript, was conserved at the British Museum in 1920-21. In that time, the 18 folios or leaves were individually mounted on paper and bound together. By the late 1960s, the paper supports were cocking and the manuscript could no longer be handled. The leaves were coming adrift from the binding.

Conservators allowed for missing lines of text before determining the final position of the leaf in the new mount. The manuscript was assembled into sections which were sewn and prepared for binding. Finally, the manuscript was bound into half-inch-thick quarter-cut English oak boards, covered along the spine with white alum tissue pig-skin.

The bound manuscript is housed; under slight pressure, in a specially made oak box produced by George Taylor at the workshop of Edward Bonsley in England.

In March 1998 the Cathach was taken to the workshop of Mr Roger Powell at Foxhill, Hampshire, for major conservation work. Roger Powell, a master conservator, and his assistant Miss Dorothy Carey disbound the manuscript, separated the leaves from their mounts and secured loose fragments at the edges. Each leaf was mounted on a frame of raw vellum, rescued from County Cork. Each piece of vellum was matched to each manuscript leaf for spine direction and for balance in weight. The manuscript was then bound in a workshop in London by Mr John J. Bok and Mr Christopher McSorley.

The Cathach is digitised with funding from Mrs Carrol Naughton, MRA, and published on CD-ROM in 2002. Readers may now consult the digital version of the manuscript, and the CD-ROM may also be purchased for home use.

Treasures of the Royal Irish Academy Library
The Stowe Missal
c. AD 800

The Stowe Missal is a manuscript of the early Irish Church, compiled by the end of the 8th century. Its inscription is the earliest in the monastery of St Brendan in Louth, Co. Tipperary, c. AD 800. The manuscript is a rich treasure of Irish Christian art and scriptural tradition. It contains the Ordinary and Canon of the Mass, the Order of Baptism, and the Order of Visitation of the Sick. Its initial letter is an ornate initial letter, the rest of the manuscript is not decorated. The original scribe was a monk named 'Mael Catheb Dara', who inscribed himself on the manuscript. The manuscript is bound in a border-coloured yellow and pink. It is bound in boards of oak covered with unlined vellum and bound in the same manner as the other manuscripts in the library of the Irish House, Buckinghamshire. In 1883 it was purchased by the British Government and deposited in the Royal Irish Academy. The manuscript contains the following texts:

- The Gospel of St John
- The Lectionary of St John
- The Breviary
- The Psalter

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The Book of Ballymote is one of the largest Irish manuscript compilations produced by the learned class in medieval Ireland. It is like a one-volume library, and contains genealogical, topographical, biblical and hagiographical material, including *Leabhar Gabháil* (Book of the Foundations), *Leabhar na gCeart* (Book of Rights), *Díonnochtaí* and a key to the Ogham alphabet. It also has versions from Latin of the Deorainn of Troy and the History of Philip and Alexander of Macedon.

The manuscript was written mostly in Irish, with some Latin, at Ballymote Castle, Co. Sligo, the former seat of the Mac Dermot of Conna. The principal scribes were Maghnus Ó Dubhghaillain, Seán Ó Doire and Róbarra Ó Sofhgha. The writing is in two columns. There are decorated capital letters and the colophons used in colouring the interlined designs on the captials are vermilion, crimson, red, black, green and blue. The Book of Ballymote is bound in leather with oak boards.

This was the first Irish manuscript to be acquired by the Royal Irish Academy, presented in the year of foundation, 1785, by the Chevalier O’Gearma, who purchased it from Tolla Ó Dhuibhne of Drumblade for £3. A facsimile edition was published in 1987. Digital images of the Book of Ballymote can be viewed on www.nima.ie.

K 85 125 MS; No. 550

**TREASURES of the ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY LIBRARY**
The Leabhar Breac was written in Irish by Monach Raibhthach Ó Cainnide, at Christ Island and Loughb (Lorlea) in Mucrige Tin, in north Co. Tipperary, in the years 1408–1411. It is the largest Irish vellum manuscript by one scribe. The writing is in double columns, the decoration of the capitals is simple and there are some fine illuminated letters of zoomorphic design, coloured in red, vermillion, yellow and blue.

The manuscript contains religious and biblical material derived from Latin sources, Irish literature and history, including Lives of St Patrick and St Brigid, the Litanies of Our Lady, Elfin Oengusu Síd Dí, Antaighe Mair Cogllum, a history of Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great.

In the 16th century this manuscript was held by the Mág Egan of Dunany and in the 17th century it was known as Leabhar Mór Dún Daingh, 'The great book of Dunany'. The Leabhar Breac was acquired by the Royal Irish Academy in 1790.

In 1973 Roger Powell replaced the 19th-century binding and repaired the manuscript. The cockled leaves of the manuscript were flattened and the fragile parts of the vellum with writing have been reinforced with cellulose-freeiazza skin stuck with parchment site. Other repairs were made with specially treated vellum. The leaves were re-sewn in one volume and bound between mahogany boards with an alabaster pigeon spine. Digital images of the Leabhar Breac can be viewed at www.ria.ie.

**Leabhar Breac**

**The Book of the MacEgans**

**Leabhar Mór Dún Dainghre**

AD 1408–1411
Books of Hours were devotional works designed to assist private prayer and meditation. Often lavishly illuminated, these illuminated manuscripts were very popular in the Middle Ages. Each manuscript was unique, being personalized for an individual patron. The Hoo Book of Hours is the Royal Irish Academy was written at Bicenn in France about 1444, and belonged to an Englishman, Thomas Lord Hoo, Chancellor of Normandy and France. It may have been a wedding present to his wife, Eleanor Wider, as a member of the prayer concern marriage.

The Hoo Book of Hours consists of 253 folios with 26 miniature illustrations in 15th-century French style. The Hoo Master was responsible for 27 of the 26 miniatures, with the Talbot Master contributing one. Lord Hoo knelt before the Trinity on f. 19r, his wife kneels before the Madonna on f. 106v, in an image that also contains heraldic symbols of the two families. The borders contain rich floral and gold leaf decoration. The vellum manuscript measures 29cm x 16cm. The binding in red morocco leather with gold-edged leaves dates from c.1693.

The hours are normally found in a Book of Hours, a liturgical calendar, psalms, readings from the Gospels, prayers, and the Hours of the Virgin. The "Hours" were prayers and readings arranged for the eight canonical hours of the day: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terra, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. The liturgical calendar follows the Sarum Use, common in Britain and Ireland before the Reformation.

The manuscripts belonged at one time to the Lindsays of the Lindsay family of Scotland. There is a note on an inserted flyleaf: "To the memory of the late, Lady Lindsay, sister to the late, Lady Lindsay, sister to the late, Sir James Lindsay of Grovemill, of Linlithgowshire, being the living sister, who left the Book to the Dean of Dunfermline in 1543."

The Hoo Book of Hours was purchased by the Royal Irish Academy in 1874, and is now held in the library of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.
The Annals are a chronicle of Irish history from the year of the world 2242 to AD 8166. They contain records under successive years of the deaths of kings and other prominent persons, both ecclesiastical and lay, along with accounts of battles and other exploits. They end with the death of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. In 1616, the annals were largely derived from older manuscripts, many of which have not survived.

The Annals of the Four Masters were compiled in the years 1632–36 in County Down by a Franciscan friar, Michael O'Crohoi, and those Lyman, Cú Choigiríche Ó Cléirigh, Burchard Ó Maolchomáin of Ca Reann, and Cú Choigiríche Ó Dubhghailleraí of Caileana, Ca Leitir. Two other scribes also assisted, Cúscán O'Crohoi (an older brother of Michael) and Maáin Ó Maolchomáin. The written hands are clear, legible and unusually smooth with a pointed quill.

In 1885, George Petrie arranged for the purchase by the Academy of an autograph copy of the post-1770 annals (23 P 6-7). These are believed to be part of a set formerly in St. Anthony's College, Louvain. The manuscripts were repaired, mounted on paper, and bound in leather in two volumes by George Mullin. Another autograph volume (Cii 3), containing annals up to the year 1171, and believed to have been preserved to the patron, Ferap O'Gara, was acquired by the Academy with the same manuscripts in 1885. The Annals were published in 1868–69 in a classic dual-language edition edited by John O'Donnovan. Digital images of the manuscripts of the Annals of the Four Masters are available at www.irish.dlin.ie.
The Ordnance Survey (OS) was established in 1824 to undertake a survey of Ireland and to map the entire country at a scale of 6 inches to one mile. The cartographic project was completed by 1842, and a full set of maps exists for each Irish county.

**LETTERS**

The Ordnance Survey Letters’ correspondence of John O’Domett (1805–1863) and other researchers employed on the survey. The original Letters are 29 Irish counties preserved in the Royal Irish Academy Library. The exceptions are Antrim, Cork and Tyrone, for which no OS letters exist. The letters contain a vast amount of antiquarian and topographical information, together with family histories, local lore and customs.

**MEMOIRS**

Surveyors also compiled manuscript memoirs, containing descriptions of topographical details and antiquities that could not easily be summarised in cartographic form on the maps. The OS Memoirs are arranged by county and parish and contain information on landscape, topography, population, economy and society, as well as recording features of antiquarian interest and a range of historical data.

**SKETCHES**

Drawings and sketches of buildings and other antiquities items were made by the OS researchers who were recording antiquities in the landscape. Among the artists employed by the survey were George Batty (1750–1866), George Vicor de Noyer (1813–1869), and William Frederick Witheren (1822–1900), all of whom were members of the Royal Irish Academy. There are over 1,000 OS Sketches in the Royal Irish Academy Collection.

**TREASURES of the ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY LIBRARY**
Edward Donovan's
Insects of China

A prolific writer and artist, Edward Donovan published illustrated books on various topics of natural history. His main interest was entomology. Donovan engraved and hand coloured his own plates for all his books, a meticulous and skilled process. When first published, his use of cutaway sections for metallic parts was often criticized and regarded as gaudy; later opinion proved more favourable.

This illustrated book from the Library of Cynthia Longfield, acquired by donation in 1797, is representative of the Royal Irish Academy's rich collection of scientific books of historic interest. Cynthia Longfield (1896-1991) became known as 'Madam Dragonfly' for her work in entomology, research that took her to many parts of the world.

Scientific subjects are well represented among the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century library holdings of the Royal Irish Academy. The varied subjects include: astronomy, chemistry, geology, mathematics, natural history (botany, mineralogy, zoology etc.) and natural philosophy (physics). Many of the books are illustrated. Apart from Cynthia Longfield, major donors to the natural history collection include Alexander Henry Haliday, MRIA (1807-76), Robert Lloyd Praeger, MRIA (1865–1953) and Richard J. Asher, MRIA (1841–1913).

RBA Longfield-Bobbin Collection

![Illustration from an album of the natural history of the insects of China, comprising figures and descriptions... by Edward Donovan (1778-1837). Natural history book by T. Bowles Jardine, 1796, part of the Longfield-Bobbin Collection.]

TREASURES of the ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY
LIBRARY
Senate Casket and Roll of Senators of the Irish Free State

1924

The entire Senate Casket was designed in 1924 by Miss Creanwell (1890–1972) to hold the membership roll of the first Senate of the Irish Free State. It was commissioned by Senator Aisce Somnard Green. The design was inspired by Galway O’Connor, Co. Kerry.

The casket is made of Norwegian copper overlaid with piccadilly and repoussé silver panels with top panels of Higgens silver and gold. It is ornamented with four large ones in bluish, vermillion and a deeper red claretone encrusted. The four of the divine were fashioned to allow the casket to be carried ceremonially on poles, in the manner of early shrines. The design at the front of the casket embodies heraldic devices relating to the donor and artist. To the left is a figure representing the recipient senators. Creanwell intended the scene depicted on the front to represent parochial introducing art to the people.

The senators who signed the membership roll were prominent public personalities in the early years of the Irish Free State. Senators were elected by members of the Dail and Seanad sitting together, and were selected from those whose services in public life or special attainments qualified them for membership. Some, for example W.B. Yeats, are now best remembered for their literary achievements rather than their political activities.

The casket and roll of signatures were presented to the Royal Irish Academy on the dissolution of the Senate in 1936, as a gift for preservation. The Friends of the National Collections of Ireland contributed towards some repairs to the casket soon after its reception into the Academy.

Considered a fine example of metalwork inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement, the casket has been displayed previously in exhibitions in Dublin, Edinburgh and Los Angeles.

TREASURES of the ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY

LIBRARY