

MUIRIS Ó GORMÁIN’S BOOK-LISTS AND T. F. O’RAHILLY

ON 11 May 1954 the National Library of Ireland bought a number of Irish manuscripts from the estate of the late Professor T. F. O’Rahilly (1882–1953). They were assigned the accession number 1490 and then were bound for the library and catalogued under the numbers G 653 to G 670 and G 691 to G 700.<sup>1</sup> Almost all of the twenty-eight items were written in the nineteenth century. O’Rahilly appears not to have been in the habit of entering in his manuscripts any note of the circumstances in which he acquired them. In only three cases is the means of acquisition reported, G 658 (bought in 1916 from Risteard Ó Foghludha, 1871–1957), G 659 (bought at the Irish book shop in Dawson Street), G 660 (sent to O’Rahilly in 1913 by its author, Fr Peadar Ó Laoghaire, 1839–1920, with a view to publication in *Gadelica* 1 (1912–13), 209–219, a short-lived journal, which O’Rahilly edited). The oldest item in the collection is ms G 664, which principally contains book-lists dated 3 October 1772 and 17 May 1776. Articles in *Gadelica* show the extent to which O’Rahilly was interested in eighteenth-century scribes. Indeed in his late twenties and early thirties he was immersed in Irish manuscripts. It was O’Rahilly who in 1912 urged the need for a published catalogue of the important collection in the Royal Irish Academy.<sup>2</sup> He certainly recognized the hand of the well-known scribe, Muiris Ó Gormáin, who drew up these lists of his own books. The two lists in G 664 illustrate the changing shape of Ó Gormáin’s collection, or perhaps rather, stock of books after his first known list dated 22 December 1761, which has only recently been published from RIA ms 23 H 23 (cat. no. 631), part 1.<sup>3</sup>

What has not hitherto been recognized is that NLI ms G 664 was in the library of the Royal Irish Academy from 1883 until at least 1907, where it formed part of RIA ms Stowe I v 1 (cat. no. 745).<sup>4</sup> The published catalogue description of this manuscript, drawn up by Gerard Murphy (1901–1959), no

<sup>1</sup> Nessa Ní Shéaghda and Pádraig Ó Macháin, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland*, in fascicules (Dublin, 1961–) [in progress], fasc. 12, p. 44 (G 653); fasc. 13, p. 1 (G 700).

<sup>2</sup> T. F. O’Rahilly, ‘Irish MSS in RIA’, *Irish Book Lover* 4 (1912–13), 174–5, his first contribution to that journal. In a speech delivered in 1938 Séamus Ó Casaide recalled O’Rahilly’s decision to found the journal *Gadelica*, saying that ‘he invited me to contribute something from the manuscripts among which we spent many hours together both in the Academy and in Maynooth College’ (‘Mé féin agus an Cinnlae’ [in honour of Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin], *Irish Book Lover* 26 (1938–9), 32–6, at p. 32).

<sup>3</sup> Lesa Ní Mhunghaile, ‘An eighteenth-century Gaelic scribe’s private library: Muiris Ó Gormáin’s books’, *PRIA* 110 C (2010), 239–76. That booklet had passed through the hands of Peadar Ó Conaill (1755–1826), of Carne, Co. Clare, and it reached the Academy by purchase in 1843, bound with other items as Hodges & Smith 138. The two later lists have come down to us by a different route, but all must have come from Muiris Ó Gormáin himself.

<sup>4</sup> T. F. O’Rahilly and others, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, 27 fascicules (Dublin, 1926–43); Indexes, 2 vols (1948–58); Fascicule 28 (1970), fasc. 18, p. 2276.

later than 1935, treats it as ten distinct items bound together, but the binding was at that time recent. The items were still unbound when an earlier description was drafted, apparently towards the end of 1907. Murphy has used this, citing the earlier cataloguer’s draft in notebooks numbered 173 and 186.<sup>5</sup> The date 1907 is inferred from the cataloguer’s references by month alone to issues of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* from that year.<sup>6</sup> At that time the present section H, comprising a booklet of 66 pages on Kerry history, formed no part of the book.<sup>7</sup> There was, however, ‘before’ (*recte* after) section F another booklet of only eighteen leaves, now missing, which Murphy described as ‘a library catalogue not included in the bound volume’. Murphy was apparently unaware of what had become of it. On the basis of the detail provided in notebook 173, it is clear that this is now NLI ms G 664, a perfect match in contents and number of leaves. It must have been separated from the cluster of booklets from Stowe after 1907 and before they were bound. The date of binding is not recorded, but it was obviously earlier than Murphy’s work on the catalogue, which must be dated to some time between his return to Ireland in 1930 and the publication of fascicule 18 in 1935. Was the booklet comprising Ó Gormáin’s book-lists already in O’Rahilly’s possession?

T. F. O’Rahilly was instrumental in the initiation of the published catalogue in 1918, and he drew up the first fascicule; his involvement appears to have ended with its publication in 1926.<sup>8</sup> In this fascicule I find three instances of his deploying information from the 1772 list as evidence that a book was at that date in Muiris Ó Gormáin’s keeping. (The General Index does not reference them under his name.)

(1) For whatever reason, O’Rahilly fixed on RIA ms 23 D 14 (cat. no. 1) to open his new catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Academy. It is a collection of verse from the seventeenth century. He recognized that it had

<sup>5</sup> These cataloguers’ notebooks, numbered 1–186, are now bound in series, RIA MSS 67 M 1–17, 67 N 1–14 (cat. nos. 1329–59). The descriptions are attributed in the catalogue to Walter J. Purton (1863–1943), J. H. Lloyd (1865–1939), J. J. MacSweeney (ret’d 1908), the Revd P. S. Dinneen (1860–1934), and E. J. Gwynn (1868–1941), but there are no signatures or dates on individual descriptions. Purton was assigned to the work in 1907, and the draft may be his. (J. J. MacSweeney, sub-librarian at the Academy from 1869 to 1908, was married to Maria, daughter of Joseph O’Longan (1817–1880), a link with the scribal era.)

<sup>6</sup> The poems of Seán Ó Gadhra were published in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* without editor’s name in twenty instalments between January 1905 and March 1908. The editor has been identified as Tadhg Ó Donnchadha. Some of the poems were drawn from ms Stowe I v 1, section C, written by Ruaidhrí Ruadh Mac Diarmada, 1758, cited in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 17 (no. 199, April 1907). The cataloguer in the notebook refers to the printing of individual poems, such as the Latin poems for Ruaidhrí Ó Flaithbheartaigh in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 17 (no. 204, September 1907), 393–6, (no. 205, October 1907), 408–9.

<sup>7</sup> Printed from another copy, RIA ms 24 K 43 (old number 20/4; not in the Irish catalogue) in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 2nd ser. 4–6 (1898–1900).

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth FitzPatrick, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy. A Brief Introduction* (Dublin, 1988) 6, says that the first income from the Smythe Bequest was applied to the catalogue in 1918; ‘Rules for cataloguing were drafted and £60 allocated for the work, which was to be done under the general editorship of Dr E. J. Gwynn’. O’Rahilly’s name is on the first fascicule and the rules bear his stamp. From 1919 to 1929 he was Professor of Irish at Trinity College and therefore a colleague of Edward Gwynn, who between 1915 and 1921 was engaged in completing T. K. Abbott’s catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the college library.

belonged to Edward O’Reilly (1768–1830), in whose personal catalogue it was No. 142.<sup>9</sup> He mentions also, ‘In 1772 it was in the possession of Maurice Gorman, of Dublin, having been borrowed by him from one Dick Plunkett (I. v. 1)’. Neither Muiris Ó Gormáin nor Dick Plunkett feature in Murphy’s description of RIA ms Stowe I v 1, but we have now established that NLI ms G 664 was once part of that manuscript. And here in the 1772 list of Ó Gormáin’s books, item 27 is described thus, ‘A 4<sup>to</sup> bound in vellum which I borrowed of Dick Plunkett misc verse’. This was a bold identification, since Ó Gormáin’s description contains nothing that is securely matched with ms 23 D 14 – by O’Rahilly’s time there was not even a vellum cover – but it proves that O’Rahilly had identified the handwriting of the book-lists. And he cited the book-list by its shelf-mark in the Academy, though he already omits the Stowe name.<sup>10</sup>

(2) It was presumably around the same date that he prepared his description of ms 23 I 40 (cat. no. 6), which had come to the Academy as part of the Hodges & Smith purchase in 1843. He dated this collection of verse ‘ca. 1700 (?)’, going on to say, ‘In 1761 and 1772 it was in the possession of Maurice Gorman, of Dublin, who got it from Andrew Carrol (23 H 23; I v 1)’. He obviously had in mind the one entry that names Andrew Carrol, ‘[p. 16] Tadhg mac daire, [p. 77] part of Dr Keating, [p. 173] Mealtar inde an taos dana, got from Andrew Corral deced’, which is item 48 in the 1772 list. He has equated this entry with item 71 in the 1761 list, ‘An old book in 4<sup>to</sup> with an old parchment cover stitched to it [p. 16] Tadhg Mac Daire. Déanaidh go súgach a shiol Adaimh. [p. 19] Eisdi re subhailcibh Aodh shiol Róigh a ghasraidh neambaoth. [p. 21] Truagh liom a chompain do chor, but imperfect. [p. 31] A Thsionaind Bhriain Bhoroimhe. [p. 34] Tiomna Thomáis Deis .i. Roinneas mo thiomna, a Sheamuis. [p. 58] A cholann, chugad an báis. [p. 59] Tadhg Dall. Maighean dioghla Druim Lighean. [p. 67] Naomhtha an obuir iomradh Dé. Craobhsgaoil(eadh) clanna Míl(eadh). [p. 150] Mairg mheallas muirn an tsaoghail. [p. 158] Dies irae, dies illa, in verse. [p. 161] The seven penitential psalms in metre or verse. [p. 184] Mor ata ar theagasg flatha. [p. 196] Bean ar natheirgh Éire being the last. I left out some I did not put down here’.<sup>11</sup> The itemization, though selective, is fuller than usual in these lists, and I have interpolated the page numbers of the manuscript

<sup>9</sup> O’Rahilly mentions the entry cut from a copy of the sale catalogue and pasted at the front, but he does not provide any precise reference, either to O’Reilly’s own catalogue, RIA ms 23 H 1 (cat. no. 1287), or to the printed sale catalogue of 30 November 1830. He did not know that it was sold to Myles John O’Reilly and returned to the sale room as lot 940 when his books were auctioned on 30 December 1837. It was Myles John O’Reilly who engaged John O’Donovan to draw up the table of contents added at the front of the book. I have in hand an investigation of O’Reilly’s manuscripts.

<sup>10</sup> E. J. Gwynn, who had drafted descriptions for the Academy, and who from 1918 had oversight of O’Rahilly’s work on the catalogue, retained the Stowe name in such shelfmarks in his edition, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* (Dublin, 1903–35), published by the Academy in the series of Todd Lectures. Was it therefore O’Rahilly’s own decision to omit the Stowe name that so often provides an obvious link to Charles O’Conor of Belanagare?

<sup>11</sup> RIA ms 23 H 23, p. 22. Ní Mhungaile, 273, abridges the entry and does not record O’Rahilly’s identification.

where each article is found. Such matches, based on comparison of quite different descriptions of the contents, are hard won. This is a fully persuasive identification, arrived at through a close study of the book-lists, presumably at the same time as he was working on the descriptive catalogue.

(3) The third instance represents a complex of deductions. In describing ms 23 M 12 (cat. no. 10), he observed that this and two other volumes by the same scribe were copied in sequence by Aodh Ó Dálaigh in 1742 in TCD ms 1284 (H 1 10); the first and second articles there were copied from RIA ms 23 M 10 (cat. no. 335), the third and fourth articles from RIA ms 23 M 3 (cat. no. 331), and the remainder from ms 23 M 12. In this third part the scribe is not named, but O’Rahilly was good at identifying scribes and made this inspired connexion with the two volumes in which the scribe is named as Fr Maghnus Ó Domhnaill with the date 1706. ‘In 1772’, O’Rahilly writes, ‘the three now separate volumes still constituted a single ms., which was in the possession of Maurice Gorman, of Dublin (I v 1)’. The entry he had in mind is item 18, ‘Eachtra Chonuill Gulbann scríobhaí Maghnus O Domhnuill’, which equates to the first of the three perceived components, ms 23 M 10. The name of the scribe was obviously crucial to this match. There was no pagination to justify the further inference that the parts were all bound together, for which he relied on the transcript made by Ó Dálaigh. Their subsequent history, however, tends to support his conjecture. Two of the three volumes came to the Academy among the large collection bought from Sir William Betham in 1851. Betham’s ms XXXVII is now ms 23 M 3, described by the committee appointed by the Academy to value the collection in these words: ‘Small 4<sup>to</sup> not paged. The enchanted palace. Tale translated probably from the Spanish’. Next to it on the shelf was ms XXXVI, now 23 M 12: ‘Palais Doldasam. Small 4<sup>to</sup> — pages. [p. 1] Collections of Annals of the O’Donnells of Tyr Connel. [p. 11] Calendar of Saints Irish. [p. 74] Historical & prophetic Poems attributed to Columbkil. *Oiris oirderca Tíre Conaill*’.<sup>12</sup> What is now ms 23 M 10, however, was already in the Academy before 1844, since it has the First Series number 32/4.<sup>13</sup> None the less, at p. 1 is the signature ‘W. Betham’. This volume was bought from Betham in 1831 as part of a batch of manuscripts once owned by the Chevalier Thomas O’Gorman (1732–1809).<sup>14</sup> If all three parts were together in 1742 and still in 1772, we may actually conjecture that they were divided in William

<sup>12</sup> RIA ms 23 H 38 (‘Report of a committee appointed to inspect Sir William Betham’s Irish manuscripts’, not in the Irish catalogue), under the running numbers 88, 89. The committee had only two active members, Charles Graves and John O’Donovan, who, with Eugene O’Curry in attendance, met several times in March 1847 to carry out the listing and valuation.

<sup>13</sup> This old number represents Shelf 4, No. 32; described by O’Curry in his catalogue by First Series numbers, mss 67 E 9–11 (cat. nos. 1301–3), vol. i, pp. 81–3. The manuscripts case in 1844 had six shelves, of which the first three were occupied by books from the Hodges & Smith purchase and the remainder by the manuscripts already in the Academy collection.

<sup>14</sup> These were listed in the Council Minutes, 7 March 1831 (pp. 290–93). The report ends, ‘Your committee report that all the above MSS are now deposited in the Academy with the exception of the Life of Conal Golban’ [23 M 10], ‘which Sir William Betham still holds, but will forward to the Academy if the whole MSS shall be purchased by them, which this committee earnestly recommends’. The binding and lettering are characteristic of those done soon after this accession. Why Betham retained the other parts is unexplained.

Betham’s hands. This would not have been the only manuscript he broke up. Given O’Rahilly’s policy of arranging the catalogue as he saw fit rather than working along the shelf by number, one wonders why he did not describe the three parts together. When the other two parts were described, before 1932, by Lilian Duncan (1891–1984), she was quite unaware of the deductions he had made and under nos. 331 and 335 she gives no reference to no. 10.

Despite the fact that he catalogued only fifty-four manuscripts, it is obvious that O’Rahilly’s knowledge extended through much of the collection. It is also clear that the connexions he made with the 1772 Ó Gormáin list drew on a careful study of its contents in ms Stowe I v 1, to which he refers — study presumably carried out while drafting his descriptions of mss 23 D 14 (cat. no. 1), 23 I 40 (cat. no. 6), and 23 M 12 (cat. no. 10) between 1918 and 1926. If his papers were to have preserved a record of other identifications made by O’Rahilly, that would be well worth finding.<sup>15</sup> It seems likely that O’Rahilly’s interest lay in Ó Gormáin’s books, since in other respects his approach to the catalogue went against retaining a sense of the history of the collection. The original booklet containing the 1772 and 1776 lists had left the Academy before the binding that defined the contents of Stowe I v 1 at the time when Murphy catalogued it.

We can now see, therefore, that these two lists had come to the Academy as part of the Stowe collection in 1883. Only one other item from Case I made it into the catalogue of Irish manuscripts, I i 1 (cat. no. 1268), and neither of them was described by the Revd Dr Charles O’Conor (1764–1828) in his *Bibliotheca Stowensis* (1818). ms I iii 1, however, was described there, Class I, no. XXVIII, while much of cases G, H, and I was taken up with some sixteen volumes of a set of the Books of Survey and Distribution, which appear in O’Conor’s work as Class I, nos. LXXI to LXXXVI. This set was made around 1674 by Thomas Taylor for Arthur Capel, 1st earl of Essex, who was lord lieutenant from 1672 to 1677.<sup>16</sup> Absence from that catalogue suggests that our manuscript had not reached Stowe in 1799 as part of the library of Charles O’Conor (1710–1791), of Belanagare, but arrived only after 1818. How and when it got there are interesting questions. The answers, if one had the means to find them, might reveal whether this booklet came through the hands of Peadar Ó Conaill or passed through other hands after the death of Muiris Ó Gormáin, which happened around 1788. The dispersal of his books was a complicated business.

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<sup>15</sup> There is nothing of the kind among the O’Rahilly material in Queen’s University Belfast.

<sup>16</sup> They had remained with the Capel family until acquired by the Marquess of Buckingham for the library at Stowe in 1808. An overview of the various sets is provided by G. Tallon, ‘Books of Survey and Distribution, Co. Westmeath: a comparative survey’, *Analecta Hibernica* 28 (1978), 103–128).