

OPENING STATEMENT
BY JOHN McCAFFERTY
TO
THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON ARTS, HERITAGE,
REGIONAL, RURAL AND GAELTACHT AFFAIRS

20 SEPTEMBER 2017

IRISH MANUSCRIPTS COMMISSION



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1. The Irish Manuscripts Commission – A brief description.

ABOUT THE IRISH MANUSCRIPTS COMMISSION

Since 1928, when the Commission was established by the Irish Government, scholarship and learning have expanded beyond anything that could have been conceived at the time. The Commission has played a significant role in this process by publishing to the highest scholarly standard editions, calendars and lists of primary materials. The Irish Manuscripts Commission is committed to promoting public awareness of primary source materials and their importance for the history, heritage and culture of Ireland. The experience gained by the Commission over the years makes it especially suited to advise on policy towards preserving and making accessible sources of our past. Through its publication programme, the Commission can bring these sources to the widest possible readership within Ireland and worldwide.

Ó 1928, nuair a bhunaigh Rialtas na hÉireann an Coimisiún, tá borradh thar cuimse tagtha ar léann is foghlaim na tíre. Bhí páirt nach beag ag an gCoimisiún sa phróiseas seo ag foilsiú, den chaighdeán is aoirde, eagráin, cailenadair agus liostaí de bhunabhair. Tá cúram ar an gCoimisiún eolas poiblí a chur chun cinn faoi fhoinsí bhunabhair agus a dtabhacht i leith stair, oidhreacht and cultúr na hÉireann. Leis an cleachtadh atá faighte ag an gCoimisiún le blianta anuas tá ar a chumas comhairle a thabhairt ar pholasaí faoi chaomhnú agus inrochtaineacht fhoinsí stairiúla. Tríd a chlár foilseacháin tá ar chumas an Choimisiúin na foinsí seo a chur ós chomhar an phobail is fairsinge in Éirinn agus ar fud an domhain.

ORIGINS AND THE WORK OF THE IRISH MANUSCRIPTS COMMISSION

President of the Executive Council William T. Cosgrave announced the establishment of the Irish Manuscripts Commission in the Dáil on 17 October 1928. Its brief was to report on the nature, extent and importance of manuscripts of historical interest relating to Ireland, to undertake their publication as necessary and advise on their protection and preservation. The Commission held its first meeting at 5 Ely Place, Dublin on 15 January 1929.

Bringing together scholars from across Ireland, the Commission has always been a representative independent voice in the cultural heritage sector and its cross-border

membership has given it an important North-South dimension. The IMC is a board of experts whose task it is to ensure the survival and availability in print and online of vital parts of the collective written memory of the inhabitants of the island of Ireland.

IMC is at the cutting edge of historical scholarship and, on occasion, of technological innovation. In the 1930s the Commission introduced new photographic and printing techniques, including microfilming, to Ireland. In recent years IMC has been involved in developing policy on best practice in digitisation.

Led by Chairman Eoin MacNeill, the members of IMC — Ireland's leading historians, librarians and archivists — began work in 1929 with an ambitious attempt to gather the most important of the remaining source materials for Ireland's histories. They sought copies of what had been lost in 1922 in the Four Courts fire in the great archives of Britain and Europe and, often through specially appointed inspectors, searched for new and undiscovered materials while demonstrating at local and national level the importance of preserving historical records.

During the paper shortages of the Emergency (1939–1945) the members of the Commission alerted the Irish public to the need to safeguard valuable records, which could be destroyed by accident. They also urged Government departments to ensure the security of historic records from possible wartime damage, particularly destruction from air attack.

Since the 1950s, under successive chairpersons — R. I. Best, Edward MacLysaght, Rev. Patrick Corish, Rev. Donal Cregan, Brian Trainor, Geoffrey Hand, James McGuire— IMC has advocated the need to develop viable national structures for the preservation of historical sources. From the 1960s IMC pioneered the preservation of records in private hands, most importantly, business records.

Through its publications IMC has for more than eighty years made the fundamentals of Irish history accessible to the widest audience. In its early years the Commission published the great codices of early, medieval and early modern Irish history. Since the 1990s the Commission has consciously broadened its remit to publish primary source material from all ages and centuries of Irish history.

To date IMC has published 211 volumes of primary source material for periods from the medieval to the twentieth century. Single volume and multi-volume, transcripts, facsimiles and calendars, these editions cover events of central importance to the history of the island of Ireland.

Several series are included in these publications, the most important of which are: *The Civil Survey, 1654–56* edited by R. C. Simington (10 vols, 1931–61); *Calendar of Ormond Deeds* edited by Edmund Curtis (6 vols, 1932–43); *Commentarius Rinuccinianus* edited by Fr Stanislaus Kavanagh (6 vols, 1932–49); *The Correspondence of Daniel O’Connell* edited by Maurice O’Connell (8 vols, 1973–7), *Registers of the Archbishops of Armagh* (various editors, 1996, 1999, 2003), *Calendars of State papers Ireland, Tudor period* (various editors, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2017), the *Correspondence of James Ussher* edited by Elizabethanne Boran (3 vols, 2015), *1641 Depositions* edited by Aidan Clarke (Armagh, Louth & Monaghan, 2014; Cavan & Fermanagh, 2014; Antrim, Derry, Donegal, Down & Tyrone, 2014; Dublin 2017) as well as special volumes to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the 1916 Rising — please see attached PDF of the IMC publications catalogue for details.

From 2012-2016, the IMC produced 29 volumes, digitized out-of-print material from the back catalogue, launched a searchable database of important economic data from the 19th to the 20th centuries and reprinted 9 volumes due to demand. To date — September — in 2017 the IMC has already reprinted Eoin MacNeill’s memoirs, the lost works of a female Ulster poet of the 18th century and will, by the end of the calendar year, produce unique material relating to Coleraine and Dublin as well as the latest *Analecta Hibernica*.

Forty-eight issues of IMC’s serial publication, *Analecta Hibernica*, have been published since the first volume in 1930 edited by James Hogan of University College Cork. Today *Analecta Hibernica* is edited by James Kelly of DCU, St Patrick’s Campus and it continues to publish important documents that are too short to form a stand-alone publication. In the early days it played an important role in the publication of reports by the Commission’s inspectors on collections of documents in public and private archives.

IMC looks forward to the future with renewed energy, fully committed to raising awareness of the scholarship contained in its publications and to making that knowledge available to the widest possible audiences via print and online editions.

2. Letter of J. McCafferty to the Public Appointments Service, 9 February 2017.



Fondúireacht Mhíchíl Uí
Chléirigh um Thaighde ar Stair
agus Sibhialtacht na nGael
UCD

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9 February 2017

Dear members of the Public Appointments Service,

I am pleased to make my application to serve as a Member of the Irish Manuscripts Commission.

Since I began work as a professional historian my life has been bound up with manuscripts – deciphering them, editing them, interpreting them, disseminating them in print and online. My involvement with the transfer of several large collections to UCD has been complemented by my service to the university in both human and financial management of units and projects. My archives advocacy both within and without the university has culminated in my current role as Curator of UCD's Heritage Collection. I have also been heavily involved in various initiatives aimed at safeguarding and managing some of Ireland's most important manuscript collections. Finally as a practising historian, research supervisor and editor of an academic journal and of many books and collections I have considerable experience of the changing landscapes of publishing and dissemination.

I have carried out senior administrative and research roles within the university handling budgets in the region of €2.5 – 3 million per annum and I have also been involved in various fund-raising initiatives with public and private entities on behalf of UCD.

My administrative, research, editorial and financial experiences render me, I believe, an efficient and energetic candidate for service to the citizens of Ireland as a member or Chair of the IMC. It would be an honour to be chosen.

Yours sincerely,

Professor John McCafferty , MA (*NUI*), PhD (*Cantab*)

3. Short vision statement by J. McCafferty to the Public Appointments Service,

9 February 2017.

Manuscripts are the inside story of history. Manuscripts are the intimate parts of our collective memory. Manuscripts are the first drafts of history. Communicating the work of the IMC is about revealing that what might be thought to be remote is actually close, intimate, relevant and compelling. It is about partnership with researchers, cultural institutions, archivists and genealogists but above all with every citizen and all those who identify with the Irish nation.

There are two ways to achieve this.

- Physical – through continuing publications (both specialist & more popular), systematic outreach by Chair & members, open days (such as Culture Night), lectures, launches - moving about the country in pursuit of these.
- Virtual – through continuing digitization, participation in Europeana.eu, IMC's social media and website – constantly maximizing access. Communication will be enhanced by leveraging existing links and synergies with Government Departments, NAI, NLI, PRONI, so that the public service is fully aware of what the IMC is offering the public.
- A new strategic plan for 2018-2023 will set out a more programmatic approach to publication of sources reflective of the IMC's roots in the 1920s and 1930s as well as maintaining the very healthy tradition of facilitating publication of material considered to be lost or previously unknown.

4. Curriculum Vitae summary with links to full academic CV and relevant professional and social media.

Curriculum Vitae: At-a-glance

Historian of Religion, of Ireland, 1400-1700

Qualifications: 1990: BA (UCD) 1991: MA (UCD) 1996: PhD (Cambridge)

Research Fellow, Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, Professor

In UCD: Academic Curator of Collections, Member Governing Authority, Vice-Principal, Head of School, Director of Archives, of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute

Research funding by donation/competition: €2,067,026 (as PI/solo)

Editor of Academic Journal

Manager of budgets up to €2.5 – 3 million *p.a.*

Teaching: At BA & MA level, groups of 10 to 400+

Externally: Advice and service to Government, Public Bodies, partnership with holders of vulnerable private archives, partnership with local communities, private consulting, fund-raising

Institutional CV: <http://www.ucd.ie/research/people/history/professorjohnmccafferty/>

<https://ucd.academia.edu/JohnMcCafferty>

Twitter account: @jdmccafferty