

Welcome

Track

1

Welcome to the Book of Kells Experience at Trinity College Dublin. The first stage of your journey will take you through the Old Library which first opened its doors in 1732 - the Old Library is home to the Book of Kells, Ireland's greatest cultural treasure and the Long Room which is considered to be one of the most beautiful libraries in the world.

Each part of this audio tour is numbered on your phone application with its corresponding number displayed clearly throughout the exhibition. Your route will take you through the Book of Kells Exhibition on the ground floor, to the treasury where the book itself is housed, afterwards you will explore the Long Room which is located upstairs on the first floor of the Old Library.

On finishing your tour of the Old Library, you will continue to the Red Pavilion building for chapter 2 of your visit. This building is located just a minute's walk away. Here you will embark on a digital journey through the Old Library's precious collections and voyage through the history of the Book of Kells. If you're ready - let's begin!

The Ogham Stones

Track

2

Ogham was an ancient alphabet used to record primitive Irish, probably dating to the 4th century and possibly even earlier. The surviving Ogham inscriptions are inscribed on standing stones, known as Ogham stones but they were probably more commonly carved on wood. The script is read vertically, with various combinations of horizontal lines and notches along an upright stem representing different letters and sounds. Ogham stones can be found in Ireland, predominantly in the south west, but examples can also be found in Wales, Scotland, England and the Isle of Man.

Although Ogham has traditionally been regarded as a pagan writing system, recent studies have dated the majority of the stones to the 5th and 6th centuries, well within the Christian era in Ireland. Ogham inscriptions record the names of individuals and their tribal links and it is thought that the 2 examples here may have been positioned to mark territorial boundaries. Of the 300 or so surviving ancient Ogham Stones in Ireland, over 80 originate from County Kerry alone. The larger stone is from a ringfort, a Bronze Age circular fortified settlement, in Fortwilliam, County Kerry - the words Anm, meaning "name", and Mac, meaning "son" - are carved into the stone. The smaller stone is from the island of Inish-Vickillane, one of the Blasket Islands off the coast of County Kerry. Here the words Anm meaning 'name' and Avi meaning grandson are visible. Crosses were carved into all four sides of the stone.

The use of Ogham as a script carved into stone declined from the seventh century but it did still survive as 'scholastic ogham' written in the margins of some ninth century Irish manuscripts.

The Symbols of the Four Evangelists

Track

3

The Book of Kells contains the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It was written around 800 A.D. - nearly 600 years before the invention of moveable printing characters in China and 400 hundred years after St Patrick arrived in Ireland. Two monasteries are important to the story of the book : the monastery of Iona, situated on an island near the west coast of Scotland, and the monastery of Kells in county Meath.

Saint Colum Cille (or Columba) was the founder of the monastery at Iona and we believe that the book might have been written to honour the anniversary of his death. The Book of Kells was moved presumably for its safety; the isolated island was attacked by Vikings in 795, in 802 and again in a devastating raid in 806 during which 68 monks were killed. Some of the surviving monks left Iona to set up another monastery at Kells, presumably bringing the great gospel book with them to this safer refuge.

To the right-hand side is an enlargement of the symbols of the Four Evangelists that feature in the book - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In Christian tradition these are the names of the authors of the four Gospels in the New Testament. The word Evangelist is translated from the Greek, meaning 'bringing good news'.

Clockwise, from top left St. Matthew is represented by the man, St. Mark by the lion, St. Luke by the calf and St. John by the eagle. In the fourth century, Pope Gregory identified the symbols as the four stages in the Life of Christ - born as a man, becoming a sacrificial calf in death, a lion in resurrection, and finally as an eagle ascending into Heaven.

Pigments

Track

4

The Book of Kells is renowned for the richness and beauty of its decoration and today some 1,200 yrs. After the manuscript was created its colours still shine brightly. It is so exquisitely painted that for centuries people have wondered about the source of its vibrant and varied colour palette.

Well, years of research into the book's pigments have revealed that its colours were largely created using locally sourced materials readily available in medieval Ireland and Scotland.

The main ink used for the script is iron gall ink, an ancient ink made from crushed oak apples, iron sulphate and gum, mixed with wine or vinegar, and iron sulphate. The blue is an indigo dye extracted from the woad plant which was widely grown in Ireland and Britain for dyeing clothing. Purple was created using lichen, a fungus/plant hybrid which grows on trees, soil and rocks throughout Ireland. The very rich yellow pigment in the manuscript was made from arsenic sulphide. This was known as Auripigmentum, or gold pigment in recognition of its lustrous golden quality. When you look at the Book of Kells you will notice how this golden colour shines out from the pages.

These shades have been applied with great creativity, as pure colour, in simple mixtures, and in layers. Areas of colour are often accentuated with red dots, which create a lively pattern on the cream coloured parchment. You will see some sample pigments and inks of the colours used in the Book of Kells in the case in front of you.

Calf Skin Vellum

Track

5

Like other manuscripts of the period, The Book of Kells was written on prepared calfskin, known as vellum, an example of which can be seen here. The skins of approximately 185 calves were used to make manuscript. To prepare vellum the skin was soaked in lime, then hair and other debris was scraped away using a knife. The prepared skin was stretched on a wooden frame for drying. Each skin has a hair side and a flesh side – in fact hair follicles can be seen on the pages of some medieval manuscripts. The scribes used the smooth flesh side of the vellum for their most elaborate decorated pages. In Medieval times, vellum was a valuable resource. As a result, scribes made use of available skins whether they were perfect or not, and some stitching is still visible showing where the book was repaired or patched.

Did you notice the repair stitching on the bottom right-hand corner of the Four Evangelists folio? Vellum was a very effective writing surface because if the scribes made any mistakes these could be easily removed by simply scraping the surface with a knife. Scribes used quill pens made from the flight feathers of swans or geese.

Make your way across to the other side of the Exhibition to enjoy the video on the work of the scribes called The Art of the Quill. If you are very quiet, you will even hear the scraping of the quill as the scribe writes on the vellum.

The Chi Rho Page

Track

6

You now find yourself standing in front of one of the most celebrated images of medieval art – the Chi Rho page of The Book of Kells. Chi Rho is the Greek abbreviation of the name of Christ. Can you see the letters X, P, and I in a stylised format?

The intricacy of the details is astounding even at this degree of magnification and one wonders at how the young monks created such minute details in the Book of Kells. It was incredibly skilled and disciplined work which placed tremendous demands on their eye sight and stamina. In fact, it was common for monks working on manuscripts to occasionally write notes to each other in the margins, saying things like "I'm tired of this!" "It's cold in here" or "I wish this was finished!" These monks were most likely young – around 18 or so, or possibly even younger - in fact in those days 18 was considered middle aged! They would have needed excellent eye-sight to work on the level of detail required in poor lighting conditions from dawn to dusk. You may wish to pause the tour now to take a closer look at this page in detail, with a little help from the explanatory panel to your right.

Another page from the book enlarged here opposite to the Chi Rho Page, is the Portrait of St John the Evangelist. St John is holding a Gospel book carrying the message of Christ. The lower part of the head, feet and hands of another figure can be glimpsed at the outer edges of the framed figure of John. Unfortunately, when the Book of Kells was rebound in 1826 the binder trimmed the outer edges of the folios resulting in the loss of some details of the decoration.

The Book of Kells

Track 7

Finally, this is your chance to put all the strands of history together and view the world's most famous medieval manuscript in the flesh. The Book of Kells is displayed in a carefully controlled environment, at a constant humidity level, and protected from damaging light levels.

The Book of Kells was not made for everyday use. It was in fact a ceremonial manuscript designed to sit on an altar. It would have been an awe-inspiring sight when it was created 1,200 years ago, since most people at that time had very little exposure to such artistic work. We don't know the identities of the individual scribes or artists but their personalities are revealed in the extraordinary variety of decorated letters and words on each page – they can be playful, geometric, fluid, intensely expressive but never repetitive. Even if you can read Latin, it still takes time for your eye to adjust to the beautiful but unfamiliar script where a letter can be formed by the contorted bodies of humans or animals.

The Book of Kells is truly one of the single greatest achievements of the early medieval monastic world – the originality of its design, the inventive use of colouring, and the intricate complexity of its imagery must surely place this great gospel book among the wonders of the world. It is a great privilege for Trinity College to have the responsibility of preserving it so that it continues to inspire future generations. Next, make your way upstairs to view the magnificent Long Room.

The Old Library Redevelopment Project

Track 8

Welcome to the Old Library's Long Room often referred as Ireland's Front Room and considered to be one of the most beautiful libraries of the world. The library chamber has been a working library since 1732 and is used by students and scholars still to this day.

A landmark restoration and conservation project is currently taking place in the Old Library called the Old Library Redevelopment Project. As part of this all the collections housed in the Old Library have been removed and transferred to special storage. Helen Shelton, Librarian & College Archivist, explains more...

"There are 3 main components to the current Old Library Redevelopment project, firstly the conservation of this 18th century building and protection of the vast library collections that span millennia. We must conserve for building its 4th century and must improve the environment and fire protection for the collections. Secondly for our visitors we are creating a new exhibition, an interpretation of the Book of Kells Library Treasures an enhanced museum experience and thirdly we are creating a new inspirational research collection study centre an international standard for students and researchers. In order to do this, we must move all the collections housed as part of a decant of 700,000 items – this will involve updating the records to make them electronic, cleaning the volumes and tagging them so that they can be tracked. We are also creating an alternative research collection study space so that all the books can be accessed by our readers throughout the closure period for the construction.

The Old Library is at the very heart of Trinity College Dublin, it is the soul of the university. The Library and its Collections are some of Ireland's greatest cultural heritage which we must conserve for generations to come"

The Decant

Track 9

By now you will have noticed there are very little books on the shelves as the conservation team have removed the majority of the books from the Old Library. The shelves and the Long Room Library chamber have not been empty for hundreds of years which means what you are witnessing is a once in a lifetime historic event.

The process of removing the books is called a decant and a decant of this scale is quite rare. Each book that has been removed from a shelf has been cleaned with a specialised vacuum, then measured, tagged and linked to an online catalogue record, before being safely relocated to a temporary climate controlled storage facility. The large screens hanging in the library showcase behind the scenes footage of the decant, take your time to see the level of detail and care that was taken at each stage of the process.

The Proclamation

Track 10

The first display case in the Long Room contains one of the few surviving copies of The Proclamation of the Irish Republic, which is probably the most iconic documents in Irish history. It was read aloud by Patrick Pearse outside Dublin's General Post Office (GPO) at the beginning of the 1916 Easter Rising. After declaring themselves the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic the signatories of this historical document were subsequently court-martialled and sentenced to death.

The 1916 Proclamation was published by the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers during the Easter Rising. It states that an independent Irish Republic had been declared and that an Independent Provisional Government had been appointed. The document was ahead of its time in many ways, calling for a republic when most of Europe was ruled by Emperors and Kings. A section of the document proclaims:

The Irish Republic is entitled to and hereby claims the allegiance of every Irish man and Irish woman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens and declares it resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts cherishing all the children of the nation equally..

Approximately 1000 copies were printed in Liberty Hall at the time and today there are only about 50 in existence. We believe the one you are looking at may have been taken from the walls of the rebels HQ on O'Connell St. Hence this document is extremely rare! Apparently, they ran out of some typeface before it was printed and had to raid another printer to complete the layout. This could explain why there is more than one font in use in this rare copy of the Proclamation of The Irish Republic.

Female Sculptures

Track

11

Since the 18th century, the Long Room library chamber has been lined with marble sculpture portraits, representing great thinkers, scholars and writers through the ages. Many of the sculptures represent figures connected Trinity College, both famous and not so famous.

On St Brigid's Day, the 1st of February 2023, sculptures of 4 women scholars have been added to the space for the first time. The women represented are the scientist Rosalind Franklin, the folklorist, dramatist and theatre-founder Augusta Gregory, the mathematician Ada Lovelace and the pioneering women's rights advocate Mary Wollstonecraft. Anne-Marie Diffley, our Visitor Services Ambassador, tells us more: Anne-Marie Diffley Visitor Services Ambassador explains the background:

We now have 4 new sculptures of women in the Long Room and this is quite a historic occasion because up to recently all the sculptures in the Long Room were of men because women didn't come to Trinity College until 1904 and the busts really date from the 18th and 19th centuries, so there were 4 introduced. They cover Drama, Scientific Discovery, Maths and Women's Rights. It was a competition run by a former Provost and these were the 4 that were picked out of 500. So, they are the first of many.

So, who are the 4 women and their achievements.....

Lady Augusta Gregory – representing drama - became one of the most significant intellectual and creative powerhouses of the Irish Literary Revival. Her work as a writer, dramatist, theatre-founder, champion of the Irish language, translator, folklorist and social commentator, helped define and give voice to the beliefs of cultural nationalism in the years leading up to, and after, the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921. George Bernard Shaw once described Lady Gregory as “the greatest living Irishwoman”,

In Science - Rosalind Franklin's scientific discoveries have benefited humanity in several ways despite a career cut short by untimely death at the age of 37 in 1958. Her work was key to one of the most transformative advances of the 20th century, uncovering the structure of DNA. Nobel prizes were awarded for work in these areas after her death, though not to her because they cannot be awarded posthumously. While her name is often connected with missing out on a Nobel prize, her legacy is of much greater significance.

The mathematician Ada Lovelace could be considered to be the first computer programmer. She was the author a paper in 1843 on Charles Babbage's design for the first analytical engine - in simple terms what we would call today a computer! Her famous notes therefore were a full century before Alan Turing, who worked at Bletchley Park during WW2 the code breaking centre and is widely considered to be the father of theoretical computer science and artificial intelligence.

Finally, the pioneering women's rights advocate Mary Wollstonecraft is the fourth person to be honoured - the author of A Vindication of the Rights of Women published in 1792, is considered a foundational text for women's rights movements. Radical for her time, she argued that all humans have the faculties of rational thought and reason. She also argued that women must be allowed to be educated and to contribute equally to society.

Ireland's Oldest Harp

Track 12

This display case contains the Brian Boru harp, which is Ireland's oldest surviving harp. Does it look familiar? It's image appears on all government stationery, Irish coins, flags, and passports today. You may also recognise it as the emblem of Guinness.

The Brian Boru harp is made of oak and willow and if you look closely, you will see ornate carvings and the markings where there once was semi-precious stones. It was donated to Trinity College Dublin in 1782 and it has been associated with the King of Ireland Brian Boru who lost his life at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. It was designed to be portable, in order to be brought around the castles of Ireland to entertain the kings of the day. The bards who played these instruments were the oral historians of the time, keeping alive the songs, the stories and the sagas of the era

This brings us to the end of your visit to the Old Library. However, it is not the end of the Book of Kells Experience.

If you've chosen the full Book of Kells Experience ticket, we now invite you to join us as we walk to the Red Pavilion, where chapter 2 of your journey begins. Prepare for an extraordinary, immersive exploration of the Book of Kells and the Old Library like never before.

As you exit the Old Library, play track 12 on your phone to discover more about Trinity's historic buildings during your short walk to the Red Pavilion.

Journey to the Red Pavilion

Track 13

On leaving the Old Library, you will take the pathway to the right to move to the Red Pavilion. You'll pass a red brick terraced building - this is known as the Rubrics. The Rubrics is the oldest surviving building in Trinity and it was built in the 1690s. Today it is used to accommodate students, university fellows and visitors to the campus.

The Rubrics is also the location of an infamous murder that occurred in 1734 when shots were fired between four students in Front Square and Edward Ford, a Junior Dean at his bedroom window. The Junior Dean was responsible for disciplinaries on campus and Edward Ford was not well liked amongst students at the time. Ford died from gunshot wounds and the four students were accused but acquitted due to conflicting evidence, though all were expelled from Trinity.

To get to the Red Pavilion, continue walking down the path into New Square, with the Rubrics on your left and the Old Library on your right. As soon as you step into New Square you will see the Red Pavilion Building.

To get to the front entrance, take your first left along the path and walk along the back of the Rubrics building.

The Red Pavilion is a self-guided experience that will take you through a series of immersive digital spaces showcasing the Old Library's precious collections and a 360 journey through the Book of Kells. Your experience ends in our gift shop which features exclusive Irish design collections, clothing and gifts inspired by Trinity.

We hope you enjoy the rest of your journey and would like to take this opportunity to thank you for visiting the Book of Kells Experience. Revenue from your visit is invested back into Trinity College Dublin to support teaching, conservation and research programs.