



# Ireland

Anne Grady  
Department of Art, Sport and Tourism

Annette Kelly  
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna,  
The Library Council

## Digitisation policies and emerging initiatives

In March 2002, the Irish Government published *New Connections: a strategy to realise the potential of the Information Society*, a policy framework document which outlined Ireland's action plan for development as an Information Society going forward. *New Connections* identified the key infrastructures of eGovernment, Telecommunications and the Legal and Regulatory Environment and supporting frameworks of eBusiness, Research & Development, Lifelong Learning and eInclusion where the capacity to support and underpin Information Society development must be created. In 2004, the following initiatives have emerged in the development of the supporting framework:

### *Culturenet.ie*

The Euro Focus on The Cultural Heritage Committee, comprised of representatives of the key national cultural institutions of Ireland, has initiated the development of the Irish national cultural portal [www.culturenet.ie](http://www.culturenet.ie). Culturenet.ie will act as a gateway to Irish cultural resources online, primarily the websites and online databases of institutions from across the cultural spectrum (libraries, museums, archives, galleries, performance art, theatre, etc.). The portal will provide the end user (a tourist, a researcher, a member of the interested public) with a range of services, including:

- a profile of the online cultural resource and what can be found there
- a centralised search facility, allowing searching of all participating websites and databases (including, for example, library catalogues).
- a centralised events and 'what's-on' guide for the cultural sector.

Culturenet.ie will provide a valuable service to citizens, tourists, students, researchers and the interested public, in helping them to find cultural information about Ireland. A single point of access to cultural information, combined with searching capability across all websites, will also meet Information Society objectives by encouraging new users to the Internet to view cultural information.

### *National Digitisation Strategy*

The National Digitisation Strategy for public library authorities was implemented in 2004 with the following objectives:

- that a significant volume of online digitised local studies content should be created and made available in order to stimulate usage of the Internet by the general public. The local nature of the content was projected to appeal in particular to segments of the general public not currently online, such as members of the retired community and people <with home duties
- that the projects would maximise the strengths of the local studies' collections within public libraries, would focus on the community, on the creation of local content and on the needs of the end users
- the library authority staff skills and expertise, developed in the course of the Cultural Heritage Project, would be further enhanced and consolidated in the course of the National Digitisation Strategy programme
- that each participating authority would establish and equip a specific facility for digitisation in order to enable the ongoing digitisation of local studies material.

To date, the programme has achieved the creation of significant further online content which spotlights the strengths of the individual local studies' collections, is local in nature and will be of interest to the local community and to the general user.

Furthermore, digitisation expertise has been enlarged within the library authorities with the decision of many of the authorities to attempt new materials and new formats for digitisation. Digitisation expertise has equally been extended to additional members of staff within authorities and the funding has enabled the creation of digitisation units to ensure the ongoing nature of the process.

#### *Cultural Heritage Project*

The new version of the local studies portal website ([www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie)) was launched by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in December 2004, together with the report *Our cultural heritage: building the gateway*. [www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie) focuses on the digitisation and provision of new means of access to cultural heritage material in museums, libraries and archives and includes key national institutions such as the National Museum. It makes national treasures available online and makes local treasures available to those who would not otherwise have the time or opportunity to access them. These "treasures" include those elements of Irish history locked up in 19<sup>th</sup> century Poor Law Union records, or in the beautifully artistic posters which were the pop art of the 1920s and 30s in Ireland. Users can look at true-to-life three-dimensional images of artefacts from the National Museum of Ireland. They can browse through the flora and fauna of the sloblands of Wexford, the pages of the *Dublin Evening Telegraph* of 1904 or follow the spectacular walking route of the North Kerry

Way, all samples of the material from the local studies collections in public libraries.

In 2005, it is proposed to enlarge the portal with the addition of extra topics and a new phase of content creation involving public libraries, museums and archives and a potential cross-border collaboration with institutions from Northern Ireland.

#### **Other initiatives**

Details relating to the developments in digitisation in the National Cultural Institutions are outlined below.

#### *National Library of Ireland*

The National Library continued its programme to implement recommendations contained in a Digitisation Review carried out in July 2003. A major initiative undertaken was the project to digitise at high resolution some 40,000 historical photographs. The process of selecting a successful tenderer for this project was in progress in October 2004.

Some additional major Gaelic manuscripts were digitised in the Irish Script on Screen project ([www.isos.dios.ie](http://www.isos.dios.ie)), run by the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

The National Library is one of the suppliers of historical maps to the Ordnance Survey of Ireland for that organisation's project to digitise the 19<sup>th</sup> century first and second editions of its 6" series maps.

In June 2004 the National Library opened a major exhibition on the theme of James Joyce and *Ulysses* at the National Library of Ireland. This exhibition included six "Turning the Pages" installations, using British Library developed software. These allow the pages of various Joyce manuscripts and the first edition of *Ulysses* to be digitally turned.



Image of the prehistoric Keenoge Food Vessel, Keenoge Co. Meath, National Museum of Ireland - Archaeology & History  
© National Museum of Ireland

From *The Wild Harp*: a selection from Irish lyrical poetry,  
by Katherine Tynan, Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1913

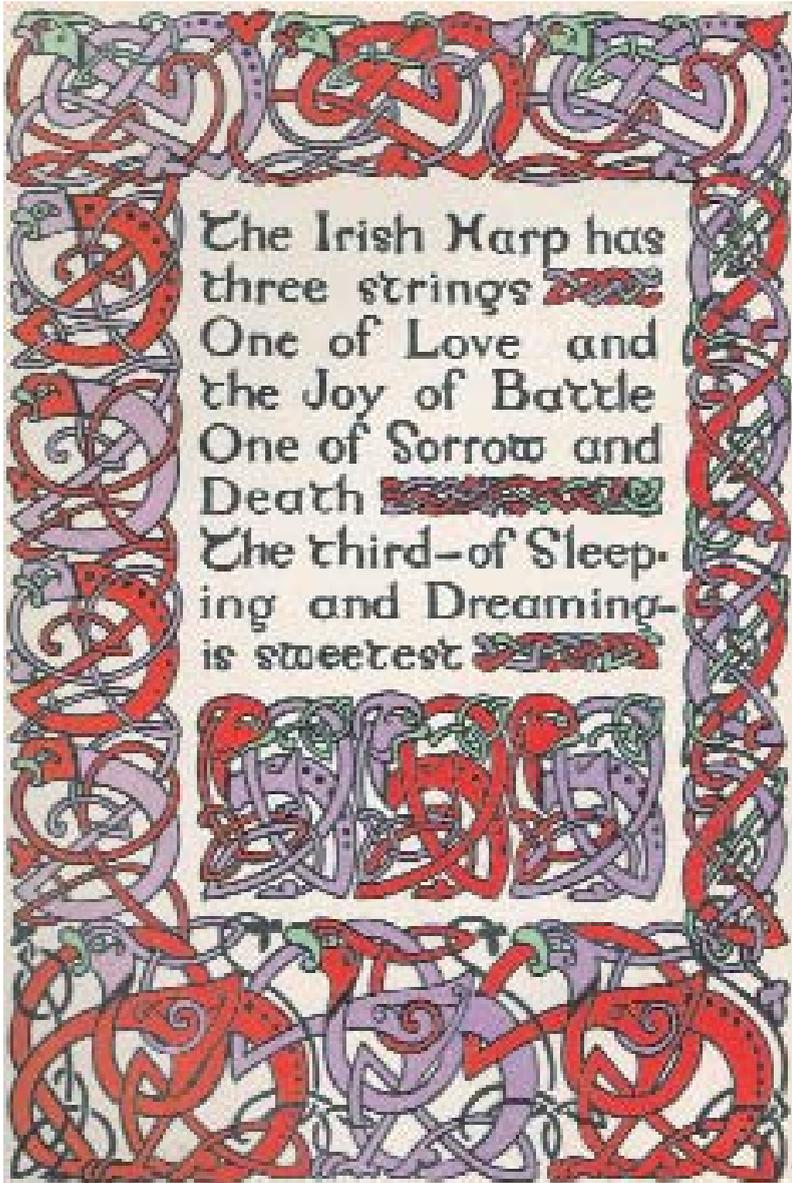


Image of St. Senan's Bell Shrine Scattery Island, Co.Clare  
National Museum of Ireland - Archaeology & History  
© National Museum of Ireland



### *The National Museum of Ireland*

Work continues on scanning images of artefacts to the National Museum's collections management system AdLib: there are now five thousand attached images. The Irish Folklife Division's microfilm records were scanned and are currently being loaded onto the Museum's system for easier curatorial access. The same division's collection of twelve thousand 35mm colour transparencies have also been scanned and are being loaded onto the Museum's server. In addition, plans are at an advanced stage to scan the Irish Antiquities Division's 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscript registers to allow easier access to this important source of archaeological/antiquarian information.

The National Museum of Ireland participated in The Library Council of Ireland's cultural heritage digitisation project commencing in late 2003 and continuing throughout 2004. This involved the laser scanning and 3D imaging of a selected group of objects from the National Museum's Irish Antiquities and Natural History collections. It afforded an opportunity to provide enhanced public access by means of the web allowing the viewer to examine the objects in detail and to manipulate and interpret them in a manner that can promote better understanding of the past. Furthermore, it was possible within the project to examine other uses of the resulting 3D data especially for collections management purposes in curatorial, conservation and documentation departments. In exploring these areas, the National Museum continued its previous research association with *el Grupo Tratamiento de Imágenes of Universidad Politécnica de Madrid* which provided technical advice on the scanning data and applications. The National Museum is now continuing to test the benefits of 3D using the raw data and scanning geometry from the 17 objects that were scanned as part

of the project. The scanning system used by The National Museum is based on non contact 3D laser scanning which allows the capture of geometric and colour data permitting surface characteristics of objects to be uniquely identified and quantified. The scanning equipment and technology was provided by Kestrel 3D Ltd. in their Belfast Scanning Centre at the Northern Ireland Technology Centre in Queen's University. The second level school curriculum was a factor in the choice of archaeological objects as was the intention to allow reuse of the images by designated county museums in several counties. Objects scanned and imaged included the Neolithic period Knowth macehead, a Bronze Age decorated funerary vessel from Co. Meath; decorated Viking Age lead weights from a Co. Westmeath lake dwelling or Crannóg site and a number of medieval period shrines such as St. Senan's bell shrine from Scattery Island, Co. Clare and portion of a crosier from the great medieval period ecclesiastical site of Durrow, Co. Offaly. The objects chosen from the Natural History collections were the massive Brasky meteorite that fell in Co. Limerick in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and a Dodo - one of a very small number of examples that survive in museum collections world wide - assembled from bones of the extinct bird excavated on the island of Mauritius.

More recently, in September 2004, the National Museum tested mobile 3D laser scanning equipment on a range of objects in conjunction with Kestrel 3D and Konica/Minolta. This included scanning and imaging of museum objects that are too fragile and environmentally sensitive to be transported to an off-site fixed scanner. This forms part of an ongoing project to study the potential usages of 3D technology across a wide range of museum activities.

### *National Archives of Ireland*

#### *Digitisation of 1901 and 1911 census household returns.*

The household returns and ancillary records for the censuses of Ireland of 1901 and 1911, which are in the custody of the National Archives of Ireland, represent an extremely valuable part of the Irish national heritage, and a resource for genealogists, local historians and other scholars, which has not as yet been developed to its fullest potential. The Irish diaspora is estimated to amount to 70 million people in all parts of the globe, and many of these have an interest in their family and local history. The digitisation of the equivalent records for England, Wales and Scotland has proved hugely popular with users, as has the digitisation of Canadian and United States census records. The National Archives of Ireland proposes to establish a research partnership with Library and Archives Canada to facilitate the digitisation and indexing of our 1901 and 1911 census records. Funding approval is awaited.

*Digitisation of the Bureau of Military History statements.* The Bureau of Military History was established in the late 1940s to collect reminiscences and documents from people active in the national revolutionary period from 1913 to 1921. It collected 1770 statements, some 6 pages long, some 200 pages, from people ranging from Ernest Blythe, Kathleen Lynn and Maude Gonne to ordinary men and women who were involved. The total page count of these records is 35,000. They were released last year, and have been constantly in demand by researchers. At present, the statements can only be accessed by the name of the person who made the statement. The index also

contains information about rank or office held, and location. However, there is no way to know, except by trawling through the lot, how many times, say, Collins or DeValera are mentioned, or where other people, subjects or places may appear. Scanning the statements and placing an optical character recognition index behind the scans would allow the statements to be searchable by word to 99% accuracy. The scans and index could be placed on a website or CD-Rom. This would be an immensely popular project, to scholars of the period all over the world, to local and family historians, and particularly to pupils and teachers currently implementing the new Leaving Certificate History syllabus, which places a strong emphasis on primary sources, and requires students to carry out a research study, which can be on a local issue or event. Hard-pressed teachers are very excited at the prospect of getting a resource, which would solve many of their problems. Funding approval is awaited.

*Counties in Time CD-Rom.* In December 2003, the National Archives launched *Counties in Time; Documents and Commentaries from the National Archives of Ireland*, a CD-Rom containing almost 1000 scanned and transcribed images of documents from the Archives, covering every county in Ireland from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The CD-Rom also contains illustrated county histories for every county in Ireland, a timeline, a glossary of terms, and a guide to using documents for historical research. In 2004, the CD-Rom met with an enthusiastic response from the public, and has been distributed free to every secondary school in the country, where it is proving very useful in implementing the new Leaving Certificate history syllabus.



### *National Gallery of Ireland*

The Library and Research Services Department launched a project to create a browser based image database which would allow for digital access to, and preservation of, the various archive collections held within the National Gallery including those of the Centre of the Study of Irish Art (CSIA), the Gallery collection of works on paper and the National Gallery Archive. It is envisaged that gallery staff and external researchers will primarily utilize the commissioned database in-house. However, the long-term aim of the project is to launch this resource on the World Wide Web. The pilot project centred on the digitisation of a unique collection, the Graves Collection of William Orpen Letters, which is made up of a total of 365 items.

The completion of this project will coincide with the William Orpen exhibition, which will open in the National Gallery of Ireland in May 2005. Once the individual items were scanned, the digital surrogates were catalogued according to international standards, namely Dublin Core and ISAD(G). The functionality of the relational database allows for the creation of relationships between different items in the archive hierarchy, as well as the creation of links to individual biographies of the various artists. The user will be able to browse the digital database by collection, artist, subject or A-Z index. A simple free-text search, as well as an advanced search facility, will also be operational. The system allows for the images to be viewed in up to four different levels of resolution and the user can focus on various areas of the digital image through the use of a 'tracker' tool. The next phase of the project will centre on the digitisation of the National Gallery Minute Books, a unique source of information on the Gallery's

long and eventful history. The subsequent phases of the project will include the digitisation of items in the Yeats Archive, the National Gallery Archive and the Library Special Collections. These digitisation projects will serve to increase access to, and ensure preservation of these valuable and unique collections.

### **Co-operation developments**

As part of MINERVA Plus Ireland is producing the *Report of the Progress Assessment of the Coordination of Digitisation in Europe*. The assessment exercise is an initiative of the Irish and Italian EU presidencies. Discussion between the responsible state agencies in Ireland and Italy, as well as the relevant EU services, highlighted the importance of planning and laying the foundations for future policy development in the digitisation of cultural heritage material. The existing objectives as laid out in the Lund Action Plan were seen to have evolved significantly, and a review and refocus was seen as an important and worthwhile exercise. Such an exercise could feed into post-Lund planning envisaged during the subsequent presidencies. Under the Irish Presidency, a steering group representing the European Commission, the Member State Presidencies, past, present and future and the new Member States was established to review and monitor the progress of the assessment and to ensure that it addressed the most important issues. The first draft of the report was presented to the 6<sup>th</sup> NRG meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2004 in Dublin. A further draft reviews progress under the Netherlands Presidency and has been circulated electronically





The Ask About Ireland website  
[www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie)

to the NRG in December 2004. The Library Council is continuing to monitor developments under the Luxembourg and UK Presidencies as part of this Progress Assessment under the MINERVA Plus Project. The most important outcomes will be the revised Lund Principles and a new Lund Action Plan to take the coordination initiative forward into the next five years. The results will be published by MINERVA Plus in December 2005 as the *Report of the Progress Assessment of the Coordination of Digitisation in Europe*.

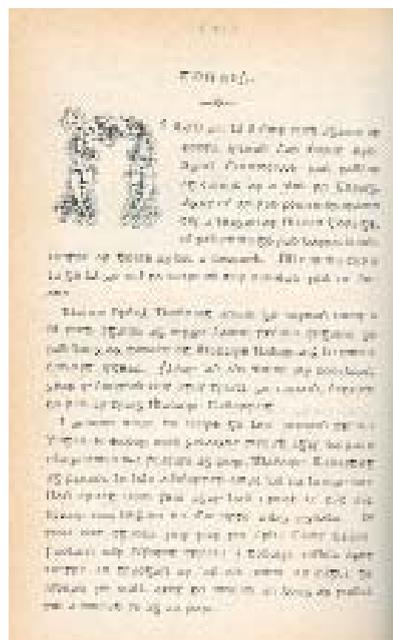
**Emerging issues**

New issues in relation to digitisation have emerged through the initiatives carried out by Irish libraries, museums and archives. The new phases of programmes such as the National Digitisation Strategy and the Cultural Heritage Project will attempt to address:

- the sustainability of digitisation programmes in institutions. The creation of digitisation environments and the expertise within institutions to manage these, which is a key objective of both programmes, will make strides towards alleviating the issues of sustainability. Additional impacting variables, including levels of staffing and funding remain problematic
- encouragement of take-up of cultural content by users. This will be investigated and addressed through strategic promotional events organised at local level involving public library staff with the general public in line with the requirements of the Information Society.

**Use of NRG/MINERVA results and impact**

Ireland continues to participate fully in the NRG and MINERVA Plus. Ongoing initiatives such as the Cultural Heritage Project, [www.culturenet.ie](http://www.culturenet.ie), [www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie) and the National Digitisation Project are implemented having regard to the NRG and MINERVA/MINERVA Plus guidelines.



Excerpt from *Bruidhean Chaorthainn*, by Domhnall Ó Baoghaill, Seaghan Mac A' Bháird and Fearghus Mac Róig, M.H. Gill & Son, 1911