

WOODS, Penelope: 'From the Russell Library...' in *Siolta* 2008/09 (Maynooth, 2009), pp. 28-9. *Siolta* is the student magazine of St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

From the Russell Library...

In 1808 the following story about a Maynooth student appeared in Watty Cox's *Irish Magazine and monthly asylum for neglected biography*:

A Hungarian, who translated some of Ovid's elegies into Greek verse, travelled through these countries in 1802. He had been in both the English universities, in Edinburgh, and at the College in Dublin [TCD]; at each of which places he conversed with the cleverest men in the Greek and Roman tongues. After spending some time in Dublin College, curiosity led him to Maynooth. It was during the summer recess, and most of the professors were from home. He met a lad about twenty years of age, with whom he entered into conversation. He asked several questions concerning the internal economy of the college; and, among the rest, if there was a professor of Greek on the establishment. The young lad, indignant at the affront offered his Alma Mater, spoke to him in that language with the greatest fluency. The Hungarian was struck with wonder, and afterwards declared that the best Greek scholar he had conversed with since he left his own country was a student at Maynooth College(1).

The student who thus brought glory to Maynooth was Patrick Conry of Ballyragget, Kilkenny, who at that stage had been three years at Maynooth. We are not told the name of the visitor, but it may well have been Antal Egyed, priest, classicist, poet, translator and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences who taught classics in Budapest, and is known to have travelled very widely(2).

The study of Latin and Greek at that time was under the care of the Professor of Belles Lettres, Mr James Bernard Clinch, who began teaching in Maynooth in 1795. He was described as being 'in the highest degree amiable', his vast information accompanied 'by the most unaffected and graceful modesty'(3). His father was a fine classical scholar and he himself had studied at the Irish College in Rome for five years from the age of sixteen. He wrote Greek, Latin, French and Italian with great elegance and ease, and was obviously a very good teacher.

When it opened, the College was no more than Stoyte House and could take only fifty students. In 1796 the wings flanking Stoyte were begun and a public ceremony was held on 20 April to mark the laying of the foundation stone. The Lord Lieutenant, Earl Camden, was present, together with a number of the College Trustees. Specially-composed odes were the order of the day. Mr Clinch composed one in Greek and one in Latin and these were printed on a single folded sheet, a copy of which survives in the Russell Library (4). No

translation was given for the Latin ode but it was obviously felt that the Greek might be troublesome for some of those present, and so an English version was provided. The odes were declaimed by two students: the Greek, by Patrick Colman of Dublin, and the Latin, by William Aherne of Cloyne. An engraved metal plate was fixed to the foundation stone, commemorating the occasion, but no-one quite knows now where it lies.

Questions and answers in interviews with Maynooth students in 1826, survive in a government inquiry into education(5). They all reeled off the Greek and Latin classics they had studied before coming to Maynooth. Revd Thomas Furlong, a Dunboyne student from Wexford, confirmed that all the teaching in Logic class was through Latin. So it was in most classes! The same Thomas Furlong later became a Maynooth professor and subsequently Bishop of Ferns. In 1871 he founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St John of God in Wexford, to nurse the afflicted. In 1895, a group of sisters went out to Australia in answer to a call from the Bishop of Perth. There they set up hospitals. For several years past, staff from the hospitals have come to Ireland led by Sr Mary Eugenia Brennan, to visit places associated with their foundation. The twice-yearly visits to Maynooth centre on the Russell Library where there is plenty of Furlongiana, including the library of the former House of Missions, set up by Bishop Furlong in Enniscorthy.

The most recent arrival in the Russell Library, printed in 1478, is one of the oldest books in our collection. A student text, it's a survey of the world by Greek author Dionysius 'Periegetes', and was originally written in verse for easy learning (1,187 lines!). In the 15th century it was translated into Latin prose by the Italian humanist, Antonio Beccaria(6). With the original text giving Ireland only half a line, Beccaria could not refrain from inserting extra lines of his own. He expounded on the great store of Irish horses, the mould mixed with sulphur found underground which burned like coal (turf) and a people stout, sturdy and fair who were, as a translator in 1572 expressed it, 'apt to warres' and 'no deale behind in witt, and promptness of tong'.

(1) Reprinted in the *Catholic Luminary and Ecclesiastical Repository*, no. 10 (24 Oct., 1840), p. 224

(2) I am indebted to Dr Thomas Kabdebo for this suggestion.

(3) Obituary of J.B. Clinch in the *Catholic Penny Magazine*, vol. ii, no. 86 (7 Mar.1835), pp. 115-20

(4) *The following odes were delivered before Earl Camden, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, on Wednesday the 20th of April, 1796* (Dublinii, 1796)

(5) *Eighth report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry* (London, 1827)

(6) Dionysius Periegetes, *De situ orbis*; tr. Antonio Beccaria (Venice, 1478); translated later into English by Thomas Twyne as *The surueye of the world* (London, 1572)

