

# THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND LIBRARY

by Catriona Cannon

The National Gallery of Ireland Library has recently re-opened to internal and external readers after a number of years. The concentration so far has been on reader services, while a major revision of the cataloguing and classification procedures is being undertaken. New projects to organise the Gallery's Archives and make them more accessible for research, and to open a sponsored Centre for the Study of Irish Art in 2002-3, show the Library's revived interest in reaching its potential users.

## The National Gallery of Ireland

The National Gallery of Ireland was founded in 1854 under the National Gallery of Ireland Act 'to provide for the Establishment of a National Gallery of Paintings, Sculpture, and the Fine Arts . . . in Dublin'. Its art collections include oil paintings, drawings, watercolours and miniatures, prints, sculpture, and collections of silver, furniture and glass. The collections provide a representative sample of western art from the late medieval period to the 1950s, including Irish art from the Renaissance to the present day.

The Gallery is located in Merrion Square, one of Dublin's Georgian squares south of the river Liffey. The original building has been expanded with extensions over the years and a new wing, the Millennium Wing, is currently under construction.

## The Library – background

The Library was founded in 1968, under the directorship of James White, to serve the Gallery staff and the Irish art community. During the 1970s, when the Gallery was better funded than ever before, it flourished, providing a much-valued service to art professionals and scholars. However for a number of reasons it was, for a large portion of the 1980s and 1990s, closed to internal and external readers, and all aspects of the Library administration suffered. In August 1999 it re-opened to Gallery staff, and to outside readers in November of that year.

The Library forms a separate department within the Gallery, comprising three areas of operation: the Library proper, the Gallery Archives, and the Centre for the Study of Irish Art, a documentation and research centre which will be located in the Millennium Wing.

The Library is located in two rooms in the

Gallery's basement. The reading room houses the reference collection, Irish and British art, and current journals. Art from other European countries, back issues of journals, sales catalogues and oversize publications are kept in the stacks. The Gallery Archives are kept in a safe located in the Library.

## Collections

The Library's collections are rich and varied, and have benefited both from the expertise of past librarians and other Gallery staff, and from the Library's position within the Gallery, which means many key publications are acquired free. The collections cover monographs, journals, sales catalogues, exhibition catalogues, holdings catalogues, pamphlets, archival documents and CD-ROMs. The principal areas of subject coverage are Irish and European art, chiefly from the late middle ages to the middle of the 20th century. There is a particular emphasis on painting, mirroring the Gallery's collection.

The book collection numbers about 30,000 volumes, most of which date from the 20th century, and includes the Gallery's own publications. The Library currently receives over 100 academic and professional journals. Both the book and journal collections include many foreign language publications. The Gallery Archives, housed within the Library, consist of the minute-books of the Board of Governors and Guardians and documents relating to the history and foundation of the Gallery, as well as the papers of various individuals and organisations connected with it.

## Staff

The Library currently has a Librarian, three library assistants, two of whom are on eighteen-month contract and were hired specifically to help with re-

opening the Library, one clerical assistant and one archivist, who is on a two-year, part time contract. Volunteers are used for shelving and labelling.

#### *User groups*

As the Library has only been re-opened since August 1999, the patterns of use have not yet clearly emerged. However, so far the Library's user groups look like being: Gallery staff and volunteers, particularly from the Curatorial and Education Departments; academics from Ireland and abroad; art critics and independent scholars carrying out private research; research students; Friends of the National Gallery of Ireland; interested members of the public; and commercial users, particularly from auction houses and publishers.

#### **Progress to date**

When I was appointed Librarian in March 1999, I wrote a strategic plan for the Library, which has since been integrated into the Gallery's own strategic plan. This set out all the projects we wanted to achieve in the Library over the next three years to bring it into line with current best practice, with approximate timings. Our main achievements so far have been in the areas of reader services, cataloguing and classification and archives.

#### *Reader services*

Such a key resource for the study of art history as the National Gallery of Ireland Library had been greatly missed both by Gallery staff and readers from outside the Gallery and so access was a matter of concern to the Gallery executive and Board. This was, therefore, the first area we addressed and we decided to do it in two phases, opening first to Gallery staff on 3 August, and then to outside readers on 3 November.

Since the Library had last been open, its physical layout had changed as a result of Gallery building projects. Instead of being located in one area, accessible from public Gallery space, as previously, the Library is now located in two rooms, both in staff-only parts of the Gallery, with the book stacks in one and the reading room in another. The reading room had not yet been furnished, so shelving and other furniture had to be ordered and installed. We decided to put the reference collection, current journals, National Gallery of Ireland publications, plus all material on Irish and British art, in the reading room, and the rest of the stock in the book stacks. The reference collection and some more popular material were being stored in the Gallery Print Room, so they had to be moved back into the Library.

We also had to formulate policy and regulations for admitting and dealing with readers. Security was a major concern as there is no automated security

system in the Library, so we decided that there would be no unsupervised access. Once the Library gets an automated security system, however – and this is one of the projects we have planned – we will reconsider this for Gallery staff. The Library's opening hours are 10 to 5 Monday to Friday, for all readers, both internal and external.

Other security concerns were how to get external readers from the Gallery reception, which is a public area, to the Library, which is staff-only. It became clear that readers would have to make appointments, so that we knew when to expect them and could accompany them down to the Library. This is one of the major differences from the way the Library operated in the old days and it is proving quite difficult to re-educate our users.

Gallery policy on the admission of external readers to the Library was ambiguous, partly because there was disagreement about whether the Library should chiefly serve the internal community, with external readers admitted occasionally, or whether it should give equal priority to both internal and external communities. In the end we decided on the policy that the Library is open to anyone with a research need which cannot be satisfied in their public or university library. Space, staff and resources are limited, so only ten readers can be accommodated at once. We ask readers to provide identification and students also have to have a letter from their university. Commercial users are charged at a rate of £100 per year or £10 per week or portion of a week.

We opened the Library to Gallery staff quietly, and this served as a trial run for the second phase. Once that had gone successfully we started to plan for the opening to the outside world, which was marked by a reception in the Library itself. We also produced a leaflet giving information on the Library's collections and admissions procedures.

At the time of writing, we have been open for about two months to external readers, and I would say that everything has gone well, though of course some of our procedures have had to be adjusted in the light of experience. Numbers are small but increasing overall. Most of our readers have a professional interest in art, and could be easily categorised as university lecturer, art critic, and so on. However, we also get a lot of queries and some visits from members of the public: people who have retired or have increased leisure time, who have done evening courses, diplomas or degrees for their own interest, and for whom art is a serious hobby. Many of the Friends of the National Gallery of Ireland would come into this category.

#### *Cataloguing and classification*

Cataloguing in the Gallery Library has been automated since 1994, when the automated library

management system TechLib was bought. Before that, cataloguing was onto cards, and about 75% of these have been entered onto the computer catalogue. Cataloguing roughly follows AACR2 and though the Library does not use MARC, data input follows fields very similar to those in UKMARC. The classification used is a modified form of Dewey. There is no authority file and no subject headings in the records. The Library has a cataloguing backlog of approximately 3,000 books.

When the Library first introduced its computer catalogue and it became apparent that the book stacks would be in a different room to the reading area, the Librarian of the time decided to try a system of running numbers instead of classification. The readers would choose the books from the computer catalogue in the reading room and the staff would fetch them from the stacks. The running numbers assigned began with a 'B' and were known as the B numbers, and altogether about 9,000 books had been changed from a Dewey number to a B number. The Dewey numbers were still written on the books and the computer record had both Dewey number and B number in the classmark field.

I decided to re-integrate the B numbers into the classified sequence, as I had decided to allow reader access to the stacks and felt it would be easier for both readers and Library staff to have one sequence, arranged by subject, rather than several. Also, in a research library, readers still prefer to browse the books themselves, and many big university libraries are opening their bookstacks to their readers in recognition of this. So far about 5,000 books have been changed.

I have also begun to introduce cataloguing procedures which will bring our cataloguing more into line with AACR2 and make our transition to MARC easier. I plan to convert to MARC when we acquire a new automated library management system, though I have not yet decided whether it will be the UK or the US version. The chief area where change was necessary to conform to AACR2 was in exhibition catalogues, where the information about the exhibition was put in the title field in square brackets, even when this did not come from the chief source of information. This information now goes in a note. My membership of the ARLIS/UK & Ireland Cataloguing and Classification Committee helped here, as a sub-committee is currently working on guidelines for cataloguing exhibition catalogues.

Finally, I have put the classification schedules into a computerised format: up to now we have been working from a typed list. There was some overlap between official Dewey and our modified form, so I have decided only to use our version for the 700s – the art section – and official Dewey for books on all other topics. This will eventually involve some reclassification but for now I am concentrating on getting

consistency of current and future classification.

### *Archives*

Under the Gallery's Research Fellowship scheme, an archivist has been employed to survey the Gallery's Archives, which are housed in the Library, and to initiate procedures for creating a descriptive list and for the correct storage of the files. This project was eligible for the Fellowship scheme because the Gallery hopes to write its history, and this could not be undertaken until the Archives were in order. The only histories of the Gallery at present are Homan Potterton's introduction to the Gallery's *Illustrated summary catalogue of paintings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981) and Catherine de Courcy's *The foundation of the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: NGI, 1985), which deals mainly with the history of the buildings of the Gallery.

### **Future plans**

#### *Collection management*

There is at present no collection development policy for the Gallery Library, and writing one will be a major project for 2000. Once the policy is in place the procedures can be brought up to date: in acquisitions, for example, we would like to start ordering through the Internet, which we do not currently do, and we will also be re-establishing the Library's exchange programme.

#### *Information technology*

This is one of the areas in which most work still needs to be done. The Library relies to a large extent on the Gallery's information technology infrastructure. The automated library management system works on a network which was installed in 1994. In 1999 a general internal Gallery network was installed, but this only covers limited areas in the Gallery, and does not include the Library reading room or stacks. This means that the old Library network will need to be re-cabled and linked to the Gallery network. Further, there is no direct access to external email or the World Wide Web from the Library, though plans are now in place to deal with this.

In the past the Library was closely involved with the registering and monitoring of works of art acquired by the Gallery, and the Library held the files recording information on each work of art. The Library's automated management system was chosen with this in mind: the system, TechLib, was chosen in part because it was suitable for non-print works and artefacts as well as standard library materials.

The version of TechLib in the Library dates from 1994 and upgrades were not installed, so the Library now needs to choose a new system. This will not

need to accommodate works of art as this is now done separately by the Registration Department. Once the system has been installed, acquisitions and serials will be automated.

#### *Centre for the Study of Irish Art*

Another branch of the Library's operations, the Centre for the Study of Irish Art, is being planned for the Gallery's new Millennium Wing. This will be a documentation centre specialising in non-print materials and acting as a clearing-house for the study of Irish art. The Centre has corporate sponsorship, and this includes a salary for an administrator for ten years. It will open in 2002-3.

#### **Conclusion**

As can be seen from our plans, much work still remains to be done. However, once we have carried out all our planned projects, we hope that the Library will once more take its place as a key resource for the study of art history in Ireland.

Catriona Cannon  
Librarian  
National Gallery of Ireland  
Merrion Square  
Dublin 2  
Ireland

*Since this article was written Catriona Cannon has moved to another library post in Dublin.*

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edited by Jill Jimenez

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