

# **THE BOOK OF ARMAGH**

BY

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AND  
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The eighth and ninth centuries A.D. were an unsettled period in Irish history, the situation being exacerbated by the arrival of the Vikings<sup>1</sup> on these shores in 795, only to return again in increasing numbers to plunder and wreak havoc upon many of the church settlements, carrying off and destroying their treasured possessions. Prior to these incursions the country had been subject to a long series of disputes and battles, involving local kings and chieftains, as a result of which they were weakened and unable to present a united front against the foreigners.

According to *The Annals of the Four Masters*<sup>2</sup>, under the year 800 we find, “Ard-Macha was plundered thrice in one month by the foreigners, and it had never been plundered by strangers before.” Further raids took place on at least seven occasions, and in 941 they record, “Ard-Macha was plundered by the same foreigners ...” It is, therefore, rather surprising that in spite of so much disruption in various parts of the country, there remained for many people a degree of normality and resilience in daily life, which enabled

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<sup>1</sup> The Vikings, also referred to as Norsemen or Danes, were Scandinavian seafarers who travelled overseas in their distinctive longships, earning for themselves the reputation of being fierce warriors. In Ireland their main targets were the rich monasteries, to which they returned and plundered again and again, carrying off church treasures and other items of value. Their raids, first in coastal areas, then further inland by river, caused disruption to religious and commercial life. Some of the Vikings subsequently settled in coastal areas where they established trading towns such as Dublin, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford: they gradually intermarried with the Irish nobility, and participated in the power struggles between Irish rulers.

<sup>2</sup> *The Annals of the Four Masters* were drawn up (1632 - 1636) from a collection of annual records, made in Irish monasteries from the middle of the sixth century until the sixteenth century, when the monasteries were dissolved. Subsequently many of them were conveyed to Donegal, where, under the leadership of Michael O'Clery, assisted by three other scribes, they were collated to form a detailed record. This valuable work was edited by John O'Donovan, LL.D., M.R.I.A., Barrister at Law, and entitled, “Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616, with translation and copious notes”, and published in Dublin, (in seven volumes), 1851.

developments to proceed in scholarship and Christian art, and some of that legacy, thankfully, has been preserved or re-discovered in more recent times, bearing witness to the skills and commitment of people who lived on this island more than one thousand years ago. Such artistic work includes artifacts that have been uncovered in various parts of the country, chief amongst which must be the Ardagh Chalice, an ornamental eighth century communion cup of beaten silver, found near Ardagh, County Limerick, in 1868; also the famous Tara Brooch, made of cast-silver gilt, discovered at Bettystown, County Meath, in 1850; and the Derrynaflan Hoard of finely wrought communion plate, thought to have been hidden from the Vikings about the ninth century, and found on the ancient monastic site of Derrynaflan, near the royal seat of Cashel, County Tipperary, in 1980. All of these precious items, and many more besides, are in the keeping of the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.

Another valuable part of the Christian legacy, from the same period, is to be found in the superb manuscripts made by skilled monks, of which *The Book of Kells* is an outstanding example, being an illuminated manuscript of the Gospels, written in Latin, dating from around 800 A.D., and of which it has been said: “no words can convey an adequate idea of the beauty of this Manuscript ... in the lavish variety of artistic ornament applied to the letters of the text, which justifies Professor Westwood in calling it ‘the most beautiful book in the world’ “.<sup>3</sup>

Pertaining to the same period is the renowned *Book of Armagh* (circa 807 A.D.), a small volume measuring  $7\frac{1}{3}$  inches in height, by  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches in breadth and  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches thick, consisting originally of

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<sup>3</sup> “The Book of Trinity College, Dublin 1591-1891”, Marcus Ward & Co. Belfast, 1892, p.160.

222 leaves of vellum, the writing being arranged mostly in double columns. It is written almost entirely in Latin. and contains: (i) A life of St Patrick written by Muirchu; (ii) A Memoir of St Patrick's Mission by Tirechan; (iii) Liber Angeli (The Book of the Angel) concerning the rights and usages of the Church of Armagh; (iv) The Confession<sup>4</sup> of St Patrick; (v) The complete New Testament; (vi) A life of St Martin of Tours (there being an old tradition that St Patrick visited him and received from him the tonsure).<sup>5</sup> The penmanship of *The Book of Armagh* is "of extreme elegance and admirable throughout for its distinctness and uniformity."<sup>6</sup> The principal scribe was Ferdomnach, who prepared the book at the request of Torbach, Abbot of Armagh.

At the time of the making of *The Book of Armagh* the place was renowned for its monastic school, whose reputation was such that students flocked here from England and the Continent of Europe, Ireland being widely known as "Insula Sanctorum et Doctorum" (The Island of Saints and Scholars). In the monastic schools the Latin language was the medium for study, serving as a common denominator for the cosmopolitan gathering of students, with the number at Armagh at one time exceeding seven thousand. Attached to each monastery was a scriptorium or writing room, where skilled scribes copied the scriptures and other manuscripts, as the art of printing by the use of movable type had not yet been invented - the first printed Bible, *The Gutenberg Bible*, being made in Germany in 1455. The scribe's task, therefore, was a slow process demanding

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<sup>4</sup> The "Confession" is St Patrick's defence of his labours in Ireland, and even in this abridged form is "a precious memorial of the man, his work and his times". *The Book of Armagh*, edited by Dr. John Gwynn, M.R.I.A. Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. 1913, p.lxxx

<sup>5</sup> The Celtic tonsure involved shaving from ear to ear across the front of the head.

<sup>6</sup> *The Book of Armagh*, edited by Dr. John Gwynn, p.xiii

great care, accuracy and patience; but a skilful scribe would have taken pride and satisfaction in his handy work. There is a record of an Irish scribe, happily engaged in his task, while accompanied by his white cat, which also had its own objective to accomplish. The cat was named Pangur Ban (both words meaning "white").

The scribe's poem is rendered thus by Robin Flower:

I and Pangur Ban, my cat.  
‘Tis a like task we are at;  
Hunting mice is his delight.  
Hunting words I sit all night.

Better far than praise of men  
‘Tis to sit with book and pen;  
Pangur bears me no ill will.  
He too plies his simple skill.

‘Tis a merry tiring to see  
At our work how glad are we,  
When at home we sit and find  
Entertainment to our mind.

Oftentimes a mouse will stray  
In the hero Pangur's way;  
Oftentimes my keen thought set  
Takes a meaning in its net.

‘Gainst the wall he sets his eye  
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;

‘Gainst the wall of knowledge I  
All my little wisdom try.

When a mouse darts from its den,  
O how glad is Pangur then!  
O what gladness do I prove  
When I solve the doubts I love!

So in peace our tasks we ply,  
Pangur Ban, my cat, and I:  
In our arts we find our bliss,  
I have mine and he has his.

Practice every day has made  
Pangur perfect in his trade;  
I get wisdom day and night  
Turning darkness into light.

In the early monasteries it was customary to keep the books in satchels to which straps were attached, and they hung from pegs in the walls of the libraries; the satchels also enabled them to be carried easily to a safer place in times of emergency. An important book, such as *The Book of Armagh* would first have been placed in a box-like case, probably made from silver and adorned with gems. Under the year 937, the Four Masters record: "Canoin-Phadraig was covered by Donnchadh, son of Flann, King of Ireland." *The Book of Armagh* would have been placed in this case and then placed in the satchel, which is preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, and is finely embossed with figures of animals and interlaced work, being made from a single piece of leather, although it is unlikely that this is the original one.<sup>7</sup>

It is generally accepted that *The Book of Armagh* was written there, most likely in the ancient Abbey of St Peter and St Paul, which stood near the top of Abbey Street, and across the road from the Armagh Public Library, founded by Archbishop Robinson in 1771. In spite of the numerous plunderings and burnings suffered from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, the work and witness of the Christian Church continued unabated. Under the year 1020, the *Annals of the Four Masters* records: "Ard-Macha was burned with all the fort, without saving any house within it, except the library only<sup>8</sup> and many houses were burned in the Trians."<sup>9</sup>

With the passage of time *The Book of Armagh* came to be revered as the writing of St Patrick himself, and was called Canoin-Phadraig

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<sup>7</sup> *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland ...*, by George Petrie, R.H.A. Dublin 1845, p.335.

<sup>8</sup> Literally, "save only the house of the manuscripts."

<sup>9</sup> The Trians were the liberties or streets outside the enclosed rath of Armagh.

(the Canon of Patrick). This assumption was given credence by the fact that at the end of St Patrick's Confession, the scribe copied in the colophon<sup>10</sup> (folio 24 verso), "Huiusque volumen quod Patricius manu conscripsit sua. Septima decima Martii die translatus est Patricius ad caelos." ("Here ends the volume of Patrick, written by his own hand. On the seventeenth day of March he was translated into heaven.")

Brian Boru was acknowledged as King of Ireland in 1002. Shortly afterwards he carried out a tour of his kingdom, arriving in Armagh in 1005. Here he placed a ring containing twenty ounces of gold on the church altar, and also, significantly, had his position as king confirmed in an entry made in *The Book of Armagh* by his scribe Mael Suthain (folio 16 verso). At the same time this act would have been seen as the King's imprimatur for Armagh's claim to the primacy of all Ireland.

The Battle of Clontarf, on Good Friday, April 23, 1014, in which Brian Boru was killed, proved to be a severe setback to the power of the Danes, as it removed the threat of Scandinavian rule in Ireland, but did not achieve lasting peace on the island. Brian was succeeded by Mael Sechnaill II, and when he died in 1022, the high kingship fell into abeyance, with ongoing power struggles. As late as 1080 The Four Masters record: "The battle of Ath-Erghail, by the site of Clochar (Clogher, Co. Tyrone) was gained over Feira-Manach, by Domhnall Ua Lochlainn (king of Fermanagh), and men of Magh-Ithe (a plain in the Barony of Raphoe, Co. Donegal, along the River Finn), where fell the plunderers of Ard-Macha ..." In spite of the continuing unsettled state of the country, scholarly pursuits

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<sup>10</sup> A colophon is a statement at the end of a work giving information about its authorship. This should have applied only to the original from which the scribe of *The Book of Armagh* had copied.

continued, particularly in Armagh, which in the twelfth century was still being regarded as the most important centre of Christian teaching in Ireland. This was evidenced at the Synod of Clane (Co. Kildare) in 1162, when the Primacy of Armagh was reaffirmed, and it was directed that no person should be allowed to teach theology in Ireland, unless he had been a student at Armagh.<sup>11</sup>

The Book of Armagh and the famous Crozier, known as the Bachall Iosa<sup>12</sup> (The Staff of Jesus), were in the twelfth century considered to be the treasured relics of the church at Armagh, bearing witness to its claim to the Primacy of All Ireland. Furthermore, the Book was used in the administration of oaths, the person taking the oath laying his hand upon it. The Four Masters under the year 1179 record: "O'Regan, Lord of Iveagh, died of three nights' sickness, shortly after he had been expelled for violating the Canoin-Phatruig," The implication being that he suffered this divine retribution because he had perjured himself.

It would appear that about the thirteenth century the famous school of Armagh began to go into decline, and in this connection Dr. John Gwynn states:

"Ireland was in early times famous for the ample provision of copies of the Latin Scriptures which it possessed, and was much resorted to as a safe, peaceable, and well furnished abode for religious study. But one after another the books of sacred learning

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<sup>11</sup> *A New History of Ireland*. Oxford. Vol.1, 2005. p.lxxvii.

<sup>12</sup> Tradition says that Jesus had borne this staff in his hands, and that St Patrick held it when laying the foundations of his church in Armagh. In 1180, it was stolen from Armagh Cathedral and taken to Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, to support Dublin's claim to the Primacy of All Ireland. The staff was publicly burnt in Dublin, as a superstitious relic, at the time of the Reformation (1538). Vide: *A Memoir of the Primacy of Armagh*, by Robert King. A.B. Armagh. 1854, p33.

perished; what the Danes spared, fire consumed, and what was fortified against fire, was soon decayed by damp. And thus, of all the Latin Bible manuscripts which existed in Ireland, not one copy of the New Testament has been preserved or any part thereof, except a mutilated copy of the Psalms; and the survival of this we owe to the veneration in which it was held, being supposed to be in St Columba's handwriting, and encased in a costly shrine of silver ... The Book of Armagh stands forth, to the student of Biblical literature, without a rival in the whole range of Irish antiquity, as the only entire New Testament as read in the early Irish Church, and copied by the Irish scribes, that is now extant,”<sup>13</sup>

In the fourteenth century *The Book of Armagh* was in the custody of a family who held certain lands in south County Armagh at a modest rent as a quid pro quo for caring for it, and becoming its hereditary keepers. In 1375, when Archbishop O'Scanlan had an inventory made of the Armagh See lands, it contained the entry, “from the lands of the Porter of the Canon, 5 shillings.” He was designated “the Porter”, because he probably carried the Book, in its case, in ecclesiastical processions; his office in Irish being “Maor”, meaning Warden or Steward. Dr. Reeves pointed out that as early as 1367 this family had the name MacMoyer, although it was not their original name, but taken from the position they held as the keepers of the Book. Their title is perpetuated in the name of the parish of Ballymoyer, indicating the town of the Keeper, and in the past, occasionally as “Stewardstown”.

By the early seventeenth century *The Book of Armagh* had become the private property of its keepers, who allowed James Ussher, the renowned scholar and divine, Archbishop of Armagh 1625-56,

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<sup>13</sup> *The Book of Armagh*, edited by Dr. John Gwynn, p.xv.

access to study it in detail. In his work on the Religion of the Ancient Irish, Ussher refers to the Book as, “Vet. Codex Ecclesiae Armaghanae” (The Ancient Manuscript or Book of the Church of Armagh)<sup>14</sup>; and he also in his work, “De Vita Patricii” (Concerning the Life of Patrick), quotes from Tirechan's account, which is to be found only in *The Book of Armagh*. It is probable that Ussher, who was reputed to have been a generous person, remunerated the MacMoyers, who lived in humble circumstances, for the privilege of borrowing it to study; it would also appear that at that time the first folio or page was already missing.

Sir James Ware (1594-1666), the celebrated antiquary and historian, in 1656 published his book, “S. Patrico Adscripta Opuscula” (Lesser Writings Attributed to St Patrick), in which he places the Confession first in order, quoting from the book which he styled “Codex Ecclesiae Ardmachanae” (“The Manuscript or Book of the Church of Armagh”), at which date it was still in the possession of the MacMoyer family, and which he also had evidently borrowed in the course of his studies.

The latter part of the seventeenth century witnessed a most unhappy episode in the story of *The Book of Armagh*, involving the last of its hereditary keepers, Florence MacMoyer. In 1679, a kinsman of Florence, John MacMoyer, was induced by the agent of the Earl of Shaftesbury to swear an oath to the effect that Oliver Plunkett, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, had committed an act of high treason in colluding with the King of France (Louis XIV), to raise an insurrection against King Charles II. John MacMoyer was a Franciscan Friar, and at that time the

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<sup>14</sup> It would appear that Archbishop Ussher was the first person to style it *The Book of Armagh*, as previously it had been called “The Canon of Patrick”.

Franciscans were strongly resisting efforts by the Archbishop, to impose upon them a much more strict form of discipline. Feelings were running so high that Friar John “often avowed his determination to bring him (the Archbishop) to the scaffold.”<sup>15</sup>

An abortive trial of the Archbishop took place in Dundalk, where the Grand Jury refused to give credence to Friar John's testimony, and the case was moved for trial in London, where it commenced in June 1681. The witnesses accusing the Archbishop comprised two Franciscan Friars, the aforementioned John MacMoyer and a man named Duffy; also two suspended secular priests<sup>16</sup> and several laymen, one of whom was Florence MacMoyer, a schoolmaster.

Florence MacMoyer, in order to finance his journey to London to give evidence at the trial, pawned *The Book of Armagh* for the sum of five pounds sterling. At the trial he swore that in his presence the Archbishop had discussed the details of the plot, and that the Archbishop had raised large sums of money from his clergy to this intent; and the other witnesses corroborated his evidence. All of these charges the Archbishop solemnly denied, but was pronounced guilty by the court, and ordered to be hanged, drawn and quartered. The Archbishop responded:

“God Almighty bless your lordship ... I die most willingly. And with God's grace I shall give others the good example not to fear death. I do forgive all who had a hand directly or indirectly in my death and in my innocent blood. As for my religion, 'tis glorious for all my friends that I should die for it.”

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<sup>15</sup> *Memoirs of Oliver Plunkett*, by the Rev. Patrick Francis Moran, D.D., p.282.

<sup>16</sup> One of them. Father Edward Murphy, was suspended by the Archbishop for constant drunkenness and disorderly conduct.

The verdict was unjustified, as the evidence against the Archbishop was weak. On July 11, 1681, Archbishop Oliver Plunkett was taken to Tyburn where he was publicly hanged.<sup>17</sup>

Florence MacMoyer was the current head of the family which for generations had enjoyed the hereditary right and privilege of keeping *The Book of Armagh* in return for which they held eight townlands in the barony of Upper Fews, in south County Armagh; but “providence so arranged, that in punishment for his guilt, he should lose his long-treasured inheritance, and be compelled through poverty to part with, for a mere trifle, that precious relic of the early Irish Church.”<sup>18</sup>

*The Book of Armagh* was not redeemed by the MacMoyer family, and by the year 1707 it had passed into the possession of Arthur Brownlow of Lurgan, M.P. for County Armagh, who had an interest in Irish antiquities. In that year Edward Lhwyd, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, published a catalogue of Irish manuscripts containing the entry, “Arthur Brownlow, of Lurgan, has the manuscripts following .... Books mentioned in a letter lately received from Ireland as manuscripts now extant there ...”. The first book listed was “Leabhar Arda Macha” (*The Book of Armagh*). Arthur Brownlow rearranged the loose leaves and had the book rebound, and it remained in the Brownlow family for six generations (about 150 years).

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<sup>17</sup> *A History of Ireland in 250 Episodes*, by Jonathan Bardon. Gill & Macmillan, 2008, p.215.

<sup>18</sup> *The Book of Armagh*, edited by John Gwynn, D.D., p.cx.

In 1815 *The Book of Armagh* was inherited by the Rev. Francis Brownlow, Rector of Leckpatrick Parish, Co. Tyrone, who brought it to the attention of Dr. William Magee, Archbishop of Dublin (1822-31), who in turn acquainted Sir William Betham, Ulster King-of-Arms and Deputy Keeper of the Records, Dublin Castle. He studied the manuscript, and gave a memoir of it in *Irish Antiquarian Researches* (1827); it was subsequently studied by other scholars, including Dr. George Petrie, the antiquary, and John O'Donovan, LL.D, M.R.I.A., whose magnum opus was the translation and editing of *The Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters* (1848-57).

In 1846 the Rev. Francis Brownlow deposited the manuscript in the custody of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, and when he later authorised the bookseller, Richard Tims, of 85 Grafton Street, Dublin, to offer it for sale for £50, but when a purchaser agreed to pay this sum of money "with too much apparent readiness", the price was increased to £75, and subsequently to £500; it was then withdrawn from sale. It next came into the hands of a literary person, and was sold at Maguire's sale of books in Dublin, the purchaser placing it on view at the Irish Industrial Exhibition, which was held on Leinster Lawn, in May 1853, with a note attached reading "To be sold".<sup>19</sup>

When Dr. William Reeves became aware that it was for sale, he wrote to Archbishop Lord John George Beresford, on August 13, 1853, informing him that *The Book of Armagh* was for sale for £500. Two days later the Archbishop replied saying: "There are just at present so many and such heavy demands on me, that I do not feel disposed to give £500 for that manuscript. It is one which is suited

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<sup>19</sup> Lecture on *The Book of Armagh*, by the Rev. Dr. William Reeves, delivered to the Armagh Natural History Society, in the Tontine rooms, Armagh, on Monday, January 22, 1855; reported in *The Armagh Guardian*, Friday, 26 January.

rather to the library of Trinity College, Dublin, than for the library of Armagh, which is so much out of the way.”<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Reeves, however, was not prepared to let the opportunity slip, and succeeded in purchasing *The Book of Armagh* for £300 of his own money; and in the following year, on further reflection and the advice of Dr. Todd<sup>21</sup> the Archbishop placed in his hands “for the purchase of *The Book of Armagh*, on the understanding that the book is to remain in the hands of the Rev. William Reeves, D.D., until he has prepared his copy of it for publication and that afterwards it shall be deposited in the Library of Trinity College, the sum of £300”.<sup>22</sup>

On Monday evening, January 22, 1855, under the auspices of the Armagh Natural History Society, the Rev. Dr. Reeves, then in charge of Ballymena parish, Co. Antrim, delivered a lecture on *The Book of Armagh*, in the Tontine,<sup>23</sup> English Street, Armagh; the room was filled to capacity, and the fascinating lecture lasted almost three hours.<sup>24</sup> As a result, some correspondence appeared in the local

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<sup>20</sup> *Life of the Right Rev. William Reeves, D.D.*, by Lady Ferguson. Dublin, 1893, p.32. In the same letter the Archbishop asks him to undertake the transcription of the medieval Armagh Registers.

<sup>21</sup> The Rev. James Henthorn Todd. D.D., Senior Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, in 1843 founded the Irish Archaeological Society and became Librarian of T.C.D. in 1853.

<sup>22</sup> *The Book of Armagh*, edited by John Gwynn, D.D., p.cxv.

<sup>23</sup> The Tontine Rooms were erected by a syndicate of local businessmen, with ground-floor rooms and a spacious ballroom upstairs. In 1908, the premises, in Lower English Street, were acquired by the Armagh Urban District Council, and enlarged to form the City Hall. The building was destroyed during the “troubles”, and the site is now occupied by the premises of the North-South Council Joint Secretariat. A tontine is an annuity shared by subscribers to a common fund, the shares increasing as subscribers die, until the last survivor enjoys the whole income.

<sup>24</sup> *The Newry Telegraph*, Thursday, January 25, 1855.

press, expressing gratitude to Dr. Reeves, and the hope that Archbishop Beresford would change his mind, and place the book in Armagh Public Library, so as to be “a proud appendage to the Primatial See of Ireland”, as there was considerable local feeling to that effect. Had this taken place, *The Book of Armagh* would have come back to within a few yards of its most likely birth-place, now more than 1200 years ago.

The permanent securing of *The Book of Armagh*, after the vicissitudes of many centuries, was due to the intervention of Dr. William Reeves, churchman, scholar and antiquarian. He was the eldest son of Bowles (Attorney-at-Law) and his wife Mary, nee Roberts, and was born at Charleville, Co. Cork, on March 16, 1815. At Trinity College, Dublin, he had a distinguished career, and was ordained deacon for Lisburn parish in 1838; Perpetual Curate of Kilconriola (Ballymena), 1841-57; Prebend of Armagh Cathedral and rector of Tynan, Co. Armagh, 1865-72; Precentor and retaining Tynan parish, 1872-75; Dean and Keeper of Armagh Public Library, 1875-86; Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, 1886-92. During his working life, in addition to his manifold duties as a priest and then as a bishop, William Reeves prepared and published more than eighty authoritative historical works, and was an active member of the Royal Irish Academy, continuing at every opportunity to study and make editorial notes on *The Book of Armagh*.

Writing on August 14, 1891, to his cousin, Miss Charlotte Townley (whom he married on Dec. 26 of that year),<sup>25</sup> Bishop Reeves informed her:

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Reeves had, in 1838, married Emma, daughter of Thomas Reeves, of Carlisle. She died at Ballymena, on October 12, 1855, leaving issue six sons and three daughters (dying a fortnight after the birth of Francis). Her funeral was the first held in the newly consecrated Ballymena Parish Church. In the burial register he wrote: “Uxor charissima et delectissima - valde semperque deflenda! Tecum meos primos

“... I turned to do some literary work, and I spent some hours over the grand old Manuscript, which I have here in my charge: the Book of Armagh, which was written in the year of our Lord 806. The writer died at Armagh in 845. It was mine once, and I gave £300 for it. As my family increased, and I had but little to live on, I sold it to the then Primate, Lord John G. Beresford. for what I gave, and he presented it to Trinity College, Dublin, with the condition that I might keep it until it was published by me; and one fine morning he handed me a cheque for £500 besides, towards the cost of printing. I am now engaged preparing it for the Press, and I transferred lately my £540 to the Royal Irish Academy, of which I have the honour to be President; and the Council have undertaken the publication, which will cost some thousand pounds more. So my heart is in the task.”<sup>26</sup>

On August 17, he wrote again:

“Up to-day at 6.30. I have now breakfasted, and, thankful for the restoration of light and life, I sit down pen in hand. This day is wild, wet, windy, and whistling here. It is a stay-at-home with me which I much enjoy, let the weather be ever so unsettled. 11 p.m.: I have spent the evening over my venerable old Manuscript. I have a fine iron safe in which I keep my precious book.”<sup>27</sup>

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amores abstulisti. In silenti sepulchre custodiantur et serventur. Gullielmus Reeves.” (Dearest and best-loved wife - deeply and ever to be mourned. With thyself thou hast taken away my first loves. May they be guarded and preserved in the silent grave. William Reeves).

<sup>26</sup> The Life of the Right Reverend William Reeves, D.D., by Lady Ferguson, p.174.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Bishop Reeves had many happy memories of his research work in the Armagh Public Library while he was Keeper; and these came flooding back to him when he visited the Library in September 1891. He wrote:

“Here I am in my old quarters, 7 a.m., surrounded by my darling old books, which nearly jumped down from the shelves to welcome their dear old keeper.”

On January 5, 1892, the Bishop and his (new) wife arrived in Dublin, where the weather was intensely cold and there was an influenza epidemic in the city. He collected his letters at the University Club, and, on returning to his hotel, felt unwell. Medical aid was procured, but his condition became progressively worse, and he died of pneumonia at 6.15 a.m., on Tuesday, January 12, 1892. His remains were conveyed to Armagh where he was buried in the Cathedral churchyard.

At the subsequent meeting of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, the Archbishop of Dublin (Lord Plunket) paid this tribute to Bishop Reeves:

“In him we have lost a ripe scholar, who, by his special knowledge of antiquarian lore, and more particularly in its bearing on the history of our Church, had won for himself a name throughout the length and breadth of the literary world; a genial companion, who, by the charm of his conversation, flowing forth from a well stored mind, and by his self-forgetful courtesy, was a welcome friend and guest in any social circle. Above all, we have lost one who, by his loyal and affectionate friendship, has left a blank of imperishable memory in many a mourner's heart.”

Shortly after the Bishop's death, his son, Major John Reeves, made over the manuscript and a vast amount of material his father had accumulated in preparation for the publication of the book, to be placed at the service of Dr. John Gwynn<sup>28</sup>, Professor of Divinity, Trinity College, Dublin, to finalise the work for publication, under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy. This was a mammoth task, to which Dr. Gwynn devoted over twenty years, the book being published, with a detailed introduction and appendices, running in total to 793 pages, and the edition was limited to 400 copies. It is now a century since it was published (1913), and this affords an opportunity to reflect with gratitude on the valuable research carried out by Dr. Reeves, one of the outstanding figures of the Irish Church in the nineteenth century, and completed by the learned Dr. John Gwynn, in *Liber Ardmachanus The Book Of Armagh*.



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<sup>28</sup> The Very Rev. John Gwynn was the eldest son of the Rev. Stephen Gwynn, M.A., Perpetual Curate of Lame, Co. Antrim. 1823-36; Treasurer of Connor, 1836-75, by his first wife, Mary Stevens, of Belfast, who was drowned at Portstewart, October 1837.

He was born in 1827; educated at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen; and Trinity College, Dublin, D.D. 1880; member of the Royal Irish Academy. Ordained in 1853; Dean of Raphoe, 1874-82; Dean of Derry, 1882-83; joined the teaching staff of T.C.D .. 1883; Regius Professor of Divinity, 1888-1917. He was a man of great learning, courteous and kind. In 1862 he married Lucy Josephine, elder daughter of William Smith O'Brien, and had issue. He died, at Clontarf, on April 2, 1917, in his 90th year.