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Report to the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism on the Work of the Commission  
1997-2003

Source: *Analecta Hibernica*, No. 38 (2004), pp. v-viii

Published by: The Irish Manuscripts Commission Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20519902>

Accessed: 30-11-2018 15:21 UTC

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REPORT TO THE MINISTER FOR ARTS, SPORT AND TOURISM  
ON THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION 1997-2003

Is mór an gradam linn-ne, Cathaoirleach agus baoill Choimisiúin Láimhscríbhinní na hÉireann, ár dtuarascáil, do réir alt 1 de théarmaí tagartha an Choimisiúin, a chur féd' bhráid.

We, the Chairman and Members of the Irish Manuscripts Commission, have the honour to present our report as required by section 1 of the terms of reference of the Commission.

James McGuire (Chairman)  
Francis J. Byrne  
Nicholas Canny  
Patrick J. Corish  
David Craig  
Maura Cronin  
Louis M. Cullen  
Mary E. Daly  
Geoffrey J. Hand  
David Harkness  
James Kelly  
Declan Kiberd  
James F. Lydon  
Máire Mac Conghail  
Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha  
Máirtín Ó Briain  
Mary O'Dowd  
Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh  
Anngret Simms  
Brian Trainor

73 Merrion Square,  
Dublin 2

November 2003

Six meetings of the Commission were held on average in each of the years under review. There were too the usual meetings of the Editorial Board of the new series of Calendars of Papal Registers.

The membership of the Commission has undergone significant change during this period. It is with great regret that we record the deaths of Professor F. X. Martin and Professor Brian O Cuív, both long serving members of the Commission. An appreciation of their life and work is offered below. We note with regret the passing of Fr Leonard Boyle, who made a major contribution to the success of the Calendar of Papal Registers. In June 2000, six new members were appointed to the Commission: Dr Maura Cronin, Dr James Kelly, Mr James McGuire, Professor Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Dr Máirtín Ó Briain and Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh. In September 2003 Mr Brendan O Donoghue, Director of the National Library and an *ex officio* member of the Commission, ceased to be a member on retiring from his position in the National Library.

The Commission has traditionally been dependent on its parent Government Department for the provision of necessary staffing services. Following the departure in spring 2002 of the clerical officer who had been assigned to work part-time for the Commission, the offices were left without clerical assistance. The Commission wishes to emphasise the serious implications this situation has had for its work. In the context of a review of its role and functions, the Commission concluded that in future its needs would best be served by an administrator, appointed on a half-time basis, who would have charge of administration and day to day management of all aspects of the Commission's work. As an emergency measure the Commission put in place in 2003 contract for service arrangements to cover book enquiries and sales, as well as research and administrative assistance.

Having served as chairman of the Commission for five years, Professor Geoffrey Hand's term came to a close in May 2003. Professor Hand battled with indifferent health during his chairmanship to guide the Commission during a difficult time in its history. In June 2003 the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism appointed James McGuire as Chairman to 31 December 2003.

The Commission has continued actively with its publication programme. During the years covered by this report it has overseen the publication of a number of important guides, editions

and reprints. *British sources for Irish history 1485-1641: a guide to manuscripts in local, regional and specialised repositories in England, Scotland and Wales*, edited by Brian C. Donovan and David Edwards (1998), provides an invaluable inventory of manuscript material of Irish interest in British regional archives. Among the commission's reprint publications are a *Guide to the Genealogical Office, Dublin* containing papers by J. Grenham, J. Barry and P. B. Eustace (1998) and the *Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen* edited by R. B. McDowell, originally published in *Analecta Hibernica* and reprinted as a separate volume to coincide with the bi-centenary of the 1798 rebellion. Major publications relating to medieval and early modern Ireland include *The register of Octavianus de Palatio, archbishop of Armagh 1478-1513*, edited by Mario Alberto Sughì (2 vols, 2000); *The Irish sections of Fynes Moryson's unpublished itinerary of 1626* edited by Graham Kew (1998); and *Irish exchequer payments 1270-1446* (2 vols, 1998), edited by Philomena Connolly, whose death in 2002 we very much regret to report. More recently, the Commission published *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: the 1911 documents*, edited by Angus Mitchell (2003). This work was launched on 1 May by Senator Martin Mansergh, while the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue, T.D., launched in October 2003 *A 'Census' of Ireland (c.1659)*, edited by Séamus Pender with a new introduction by William J. Smyth. *Analecta Hibernica* no. 37 was published in 1998, as were two volumes in the series of *Calendars of papal letters relating to Great Britain and Ireland*: vol. 17, pt 2 (ed. by Anne P. Fuller) for 1492-1503, and vol. 19, pt 2 (ed. by Michael Haren) for 1503-13.

At the request of the Commission Dr James Kelly agreed in 2002 to become editor of *Analecta Hibernica*. Monsignor Charles Burns OBE has succeeded the late Leonard Boyle as general editor of the Calendar of Papal Letters and Professor Eamon Duffy of Magdalene College, Cambridge, has succeeded Professor Jane Sayers as chairman of the Editorial Board of the Calendar of Papal Letters project.

During the period under review, the Commission acted as the publisher for the Women's History Project, which was located at the Commission's offices in 73 Merrion Square. Its publications embraced *The Drennan-McTier letters*, edited by Jean Agnew in three volumes (1998-9); *The minutes of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council and executive committee, 1911-40*, edited by Diane Urquhart

(2001) and the *Directory of Sources for Women's history in Ireland*. This last work was published in CD ROM format in 1999. The Commission's collaborative relationship with the Public Record Office, London (renamed the National Archives in 2003) has resulted in the publication of the first volume (edited by Mary O'Dowd) of a completely new edition of the *Calendar of the State Papers, Ireland*. Further volumes in this series are progressing well.

The Commission meanwhile continues to advance an ambitious programme of publication that will include the appearance in 2004-5 of the *Armagh register of Archbishop Fleming, The Elphin religious census of 1749, The letters of John Fitzgibbon, earl of Clare, 1772-1802, The 1622 commission, and A list of the claims as they are entered with the trustees at Chichester House on College Green, Dublin, on or before the tenth of August 1700*.

The Minister notified the Chairman in November 2002 that it was his intention to arrange for an independent and impartial assessment of the Commission's role and functions, which would be carried out in the light of developments since the Commission's establishment. To that end, it was proposed to appoint a consultant to assess the role of the Commission and to report on any changes that might be desirable to increase the effectiveness of the Commission. The Commission welcomed the Minister's initiative and assured him of full co-operation in the process.

The Commission took the opportunity provided by the Minister's announcement to engage in a wide-ranging internal review of its terms of reference, its membership, its organisation and, most importantly, its role as publisher with reference to both printed and electronic publications, including the development of the Commission's website. In light of this review, the Commission will be seeking to have its terms of reference revised and updated to allow it to respond to the changing and expanding needs of scholarship and the State. It looks forward also to the full operation of those provisions of the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 under which it would have important advisory functions in relation to the export of cultural materials.