

TRANSLATION, TRADITION, AND TRACING THE HISTORY OF AN IRISH MANUSCRIPT PRIMER

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IN 2011, QUEEN Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom visited the Republic of Ireland in what was widely hailed as an “historic” and culturally significant occasion. She was the first British monarch to visit the neighbouring country in over a century. As part of the state visit, the queen was presented with a facsimile of a sixteenth-century manuscript entitled *Treatise on the Irish Language and Alphabet*, more generally known as the Irish Language Primer. It was a gesture of particular symbolic resonance. Originally written for Queen Elizabeth I (nominally in order for her to interact with her Irish subjects), its historic parallels and royal provenance were considered fitting for the occasion. In its intended use as a language primer or grammar, it embodied notions of cultural meeting, interaction, and crossover that had been woven through Anglo-Irish relations since the era of the first Elizabeth. Indeed, central to coverage of the two-day event in 2011 were questions of language and culture, with the five words of Irish spoken by the British monarch at a state dinner highlighted by commentators as a meaningful acknowledgment of her recent gift.¹ The facsimile of the *Treatise*—itself a rare book, as only two official copies exist—now resides in the Royal Collection. The choice of this manuscript as the official state gift was therefore an illuminating gesture, foregrounding Ireland’s rich history of manuscript and print culture and underpinned with political symbolism.

As a document, the primer can help us to understand the value and visibility of the Irish language throughout its history. Tracing the movement of the manuscript across space and time—establishing its “antiquarian footprint,” in other words—is a valuable exercise in bringing to light not only the primer’s importance to early Irish language development on the page, but how it has been perceived and presented. Its material history can be mapped broadly onto the shifting value of Irish language history in a collector’s market, though, as always, care should be taken in conflating financial value with cultural or historical value. David Pearson has taken a broader view, identifying a “matrix of influences, including cultural and academic values, developments in histori-

¹ Michael Parsons, “President gave Queen ‘speake Iryshe’ book written for Elizabeth I,” *The Irish Times*, May 31, 2011, 12.

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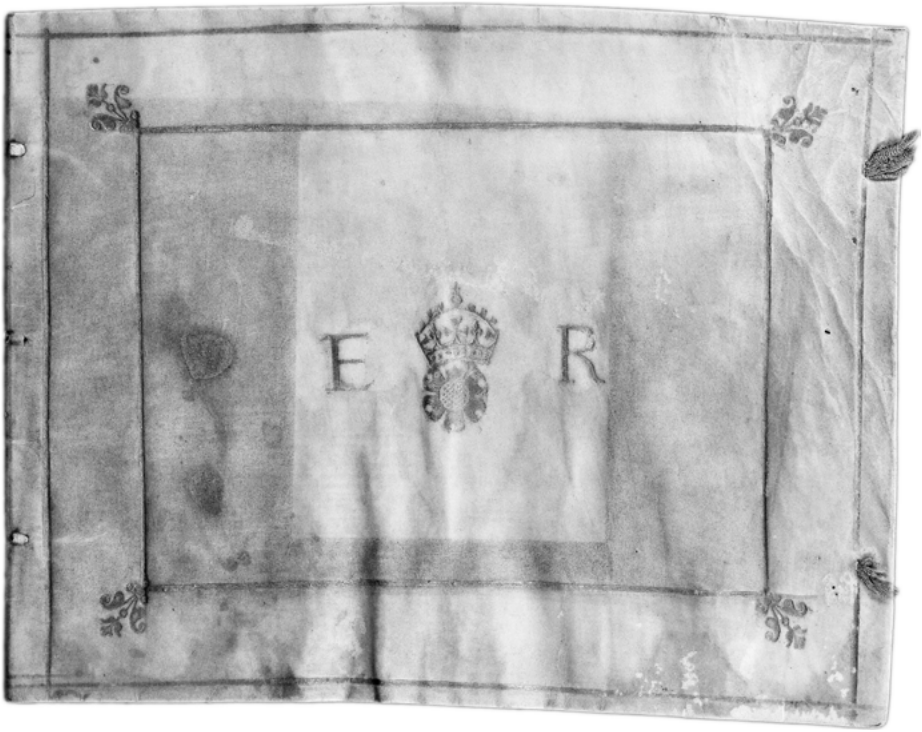


Figure 26.1. The Benjamin Iveagh Library, Irish Primer, outside front cover
 © The Benjamin Iveagh Library, by kind permission of the Governors and Guardians of Archbishop Marsh's Library.

cal bibliography and the availability of material” when assessing such questions.² This chapter considers the provenance and sale history of the Elizabethan primer, placing it in a context of late-nineteenth and twentieth-century book collecting across England, Ireland, and the US. Using the primer as a lens into the world of Irish language manuscript production, it widens the focus to explore issues of translation and the cultural interfaces that have characterized the history and journey of the primer to the present day.

The item in question is a relatively unassuming booklet, measuring 12.6 × 16.8 centimetres and containing twelve folios, amounting to eighteen pages of text (Figure 26.1). It is bound in a limp vellum cover of dark cream colour, with an armorial stamp and the letters “E R” embossed in gold on both the front and back. Around this is a simple fillet border with floral corner decorations. The armorial stamp consists of a crown over a rose and was a relatively common heraldic Tudor device. According to the catalogue of the British Armorial Database, similar designs appeared on various books throughout

² David Pearson, “Patterns of Collecting and Trading in Antiquarian Books,” in *Out of Print & Into Profit: A History of the Rare and Secondhand Book Trade in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Giles Mandelbrote (London: British Library, 2006), 201–14 at 202.

her reign, including a 1538 edition of *Il Petrarca con l'espositione* and a 1590 text of *The Faerie Queene* (both in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle).³ Other critics have noted the similarity in binding to the contemporary manuscript of “Verses presented to Queen Elizabeth” produced at Cambridge in the same year, perhaps suggesting the same binder at work.⁴ Notwithstanding these ambiguities, the intent of the binding and crest was clearly meant to curry favour with the monarch and ties the primer into a tradition of dedicatory volumes produced in this era.⁵

The treatise was composed by Christopher Nugent, an Anglo-Irish lord from county Westmeath, sometime around 1564. Denis Casey, in his comprehensive study of the primer and its various contexts, elaborated on Nugent’s background as one of the “old English” aristocracy in Ireland of the sixteenth century.⁶ As a future Baron Delvin, Nugent trod a careful line between pride in his English heritage and emotional affiliation with aspects of Gaelic culture through patronage of the arts, knowledge of Irish, and his Catholic religion. It is generally assumed that Nugent wrote the primer while at Cambridge University between 1563 and 1565, although the document itself is undated.⁷ Elements of the work correspond with developments in print, especially the decorative first letter of the introduction (an “A” surrounded by an elaborate illustration)—a device more commonly seen on, and presumably meant to mimic, contemporary woodcuts (Figure 26.2).⁸ Although a relatively short and unadorned manuscript, its design and care in composition were clearly meant to underscore Nugent’s awareness of the political importance attached to learning the language. In reality, however, the primer “reveals more about a not-untypical Anglo-Irish lord’s attitude to Irish than about its recipient’s.”⁹

The first two-thirds of the document consist of prefaces, in English and Latin, explaining the reason for the production of the grammar. Nugent addresses himself to

3 John Morris and Philip Oldfield, “British Armorial Bindings,” University of Toronto; see <https://armorial.library.utoronto.ca/content/il-petrarcha-con-l%E2%80%99espositione-d%E2%80%99alessandro-vellutello> and <https://armorial.library.utoronto.ca/content/faerie-queene-1>, accessed May 15, 2023.

4 Elizabeth Leedham-Green, *Verses Presented to Queen Elizabeth I by the University of Cambridge, August 1564: Cambridge University Library MS Add. 8915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 1993).

5 Such volumes were commissioned by both institutions and individuals with the aim of patronage and personal advantage, and had been in evidence for a number of decades by the time of Nugent’s work. See the online catalogue record of “Cambridge University: Verses presented to Queen Elizabeth” (Add. MS 8915) at <https://archivesearch.lib.cam.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/8121>, accessed May 15, 2023.

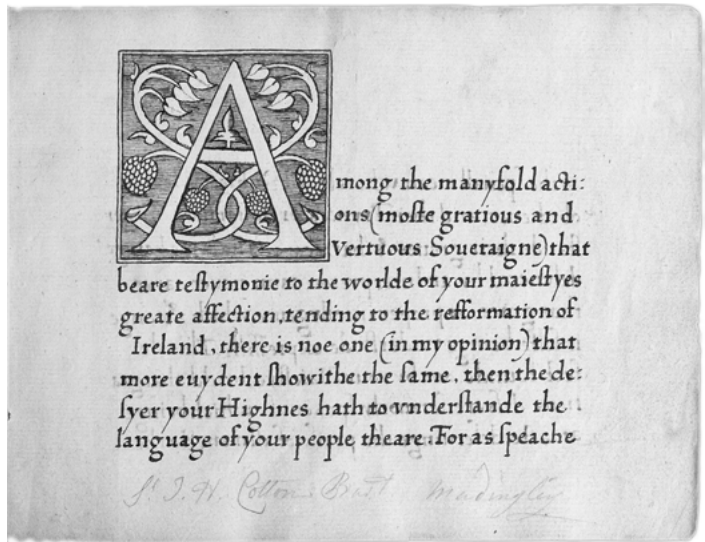
6 Denis Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath and Queen Elizabeth’s Irish Primer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016), 47.

7 Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath*.

8 Pádraig Ó Macháin, “Two Nugent manuscripts: the Nugent Duanaire and Queen Elizabeth’s Primer,” *Records of Meath Archaeological and Historical Society* 23 (2012): 121–42 at 135.

9 Patricia Palmer, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 80.

Figure 26.2. The Benjamin Iveagh Library, Irish Primer, fol. 2r © The Benjamin Iveagh Library, by kind permission of the Governors and Guardians of Archbishop Marsh's Library.



the queen, stating that he wrote it for her to assist “the desyer your Highnes hath to understand the language of your people theare.”¹⁰ Placing himself as the conduit for language acquisition—in essence bridging the divide between the English monarch and many of her Irish subjects—was a deliberate positioning by Nugent. As a member of one of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy’s more troublesome families, this primer made him appear “more than just a supporter of government policy; he was advertising himself as a man with the linguistic and cultural wherewithal to implement it.”¹¹ The preface also alludes to aspects of Irish history, declaring “I thought it not inconuenient to ioynе therto the originall of the nation also; to the ende your maiestye knowinge from whence they came, & theire tongue deryued, might the soner attaine to the perfection thereof.”¹² The tone is flattering and ingratiating, clearly meant as a gesture of loyalty and favour towards the queen. The Latin section elaborates on this history, referencing the antiquity of the Gaelic race and language. It has been read as an attempt to move Tudor imaginings of the Irish away from the barbarous and uncivilized ideas at play during this time, and towards a sense of the language as worthwhile and indeed politically useful.¹³

Both the English and Latin sections are written in a neat Roman script: presumably in Nugent’s hand, though this cannot be verified. The last section, “The Irish Alphabet,” is titled in a Gothic script and introduces the characters of the Irish script (Figure 26.3).

10 Christopher Nugent, *Treatise on the Irish Language and Alphabet* [1564?], Dublin, Farmleigh House, Benjamin Iveagh Library, fol. 2r.

11 Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath*, 28.

12 Nugent, *Treatise on the Irish Language*, fol. 3r.

13 Ó Macháin, “Two Nugent Manuscripts,” 138.

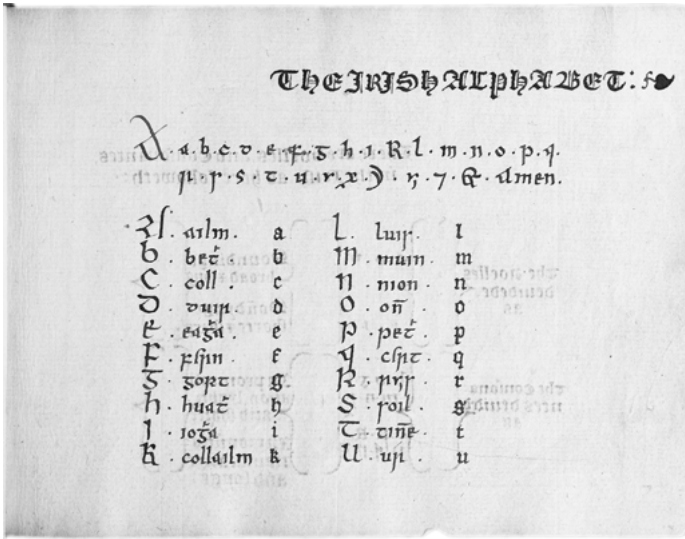


Figure 26.3. The Benjamin Iveagh Library, Irish Primer, fol. 8r © The Benjamin Iveagh Library, by kind permission of the Governors and Guardians of Archbishop Marsh's Library.

The primer then lays out the basic grammatical structure and pronunciation guide for the language. The final few pages provide translations of words and phrases from Irish into both Latin and English. Translation can be an act laden with political significance. In this case it is important to note that only six phrases were provided by Nugent as examples of translation: “How doe you;” “I am well;” “I thancke you;” “Cann you speake Iryshe;” “Speake Latten;” “God save the Queene off England.” Whether we can consider these politically pointed statements is a discussion for another time, but it is worth noting that the last phrase quietly omits the latter part of Elizabeth’s full title as Queen of England *and Ireland*. While these phrases certainly reveal a civility, they also insist on moving the conversation—quite literally—towards Latin as the *lingua franca* of the day.¹⁴

We should, of course, be careful of reading too much into fragments of text; largely because many of the details of this primer remain shrouded in doubt and questionable notions of “authorship.” Indeed such a definitive notion can obscure the range of figures and input behind early print and manuscript production. One of the more important individuals to consider in this case is Séan Ó Cearnaigh (John Kearney), Nugent’s direct contemporary at Cambridge and author of the first Irish book printed in Ireland, *Aibidil Gaoidheilge, & Caiticiosma* (1571). Like Nugent’s primer, this was also a grammatical and educational tract, containing depictions of the Irish alphabet and instructions for reading the language. The fact of Ó Cearnaigh’s proximity to Nugent at Cambridge—though there is little evidence that they ever interacted—has led some critics to question whether Ó Cearnaigh had a hand in composing the Queen Elizabeth primer. There are some close similarities between the depictions of the alphabet in both, as well as the inclusion of letters in the Roman alphabet not found in Gaelic. Notwithstanding, the

¹⁴ Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath*, 47.

later grammar can help contextualize the contemporary approaches towards language learning and its development in print in the late sixteenth century.

The question of a direct relation between the primer and Queen Elizabeth is, like many historical aspects of the book, a thorny one. Nugent states in his introduction that the queen had specifically requested the volume, and there is no reason to disbelieve this. But whether this request took the form of an official commission or a mere passing comment on her “desyer” to learn the language is a topic of debate. The queen’s visit to Cambridge University in 1564 provides a compelling historical moment on which to pin the composition of the primer, and indeed it seems likely that she would have interacted with her Irish subjects there. Whether the primer ever found its way to the queen is doubtful, however, considering that it seems to have spent most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at Cambridge (as discussed below). The primer’s link to its royal subject and dedicatee is therefore at most a tentative (and textual) one. Its stated intent does not imply readership, though this should not obscure the significance of the production of the primer. In claiming that the monarch should and perhaps did learn Gaelic, the primer embodies an association between Elizabeth and the Irish language that was to take political and cultural form throughout her reign. The much-vaunted meetings between queen and insubordinate Irish subjects Shane O’Neill and Gráinne Mhaol may or may not have included any Irish (an assumption which Hiram Morgan has termed “gesture politics”), but it was certainly the case that she heavily pushed for the creation and dissemination of religious works printed in a newly commissioned Irish type.¹⁵

The significance of this manuscript primer is therefore embedded in the cultural and political entanglements over the Irish language in sixteenth-century Ireland. The Elizabethan years heralded some of the most important developments in the representation of the language on the page, with the first translation of the Bible (both New and Old Testaments) begun at the behest of the queen. The late sixteenth century also saw an acceleration of the policy to convert large swathes of the Catholic population to Protestantism, though this policy through print was uneven and secondary to the more direct Tudor methods of controlling the Gaelic-speaking peoples.¹⁶ Much like the Elizabethan religious texts of the time, then, the primer serves both practical and ideological purposes. The queen’s sponsorship of Irish-language translation of the Bible some years after this primer reflected an interest in and promotion “not of the language per se, but of texts and practices in Irish which would enhance the Protestant Reformation.”¹⁷ Language learning and writing in this era was closely entwined with the cultural and religious diplomacy of Elizabeth’s reign, and a keystone in her efforts to portray her role as a promoter of humanist education and civility.¹⁸

15 Hiram Morgan, “‘Never Any Realm Worse Governed’: Queen Elizabeth and Ireland,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004): 295–308.

16 Morgan, “‘Never Any Realm Worse Governed.’”

17 Tony Crowley, *Wars of Words: The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1537–2004* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

18 Richard A. McCabe, “Ireland’s Eliza: Queen or *Cailleach*?” in *Elizabeth I and Ireland*, ed. Brendan

Sale History

The second half of this chapter will trace the journey of the primer through various collections and libraries in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It first emerges in this era at Madingley Hall, Cambridge, where it was reportedly discovered in a cupboard in the 1850s during renovations when the house was being prepared for Edward, Queen Victoria's son, to live in during his time at the University. This corroborates the evidence of the primer itself, which bears the signature of "Sr J. H. Cotton Bart Madingley"—referring to John Hynde Cotton (1686–1752), owner of Madingley during these years. After it was discovered, it turns up in the library of Lough Fea, in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan. This was the celebrated collection of Evelyn P. Shirley, whose two properties of Lough Fea and Ettington Hall, Warwickshire, had extensive holdings of Irish material in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We know the primer was here because Shirley (very usefully) published a catalogue of his library in 1872.¹⁹ Shirley was an astute collector and certainly aware of the value of this manuscript—he wrote to the scholar and collector John T. Gilbert in 1877, inviting him to come and see the primer at Lough Fea for himself:

I cannot find the little treatise of Lord Delvin made for Queen Elizabeth on the Irish language, because it is locked up at Lough Fea. I shall be going there in July or August, and if you could come and see me there, you can judge what should be said in your Report on Historical Manuscripts on the original.²⁰

Gilbert's work on the Historical Manuscripts Commission was not only an important watermark for the serious study of early manuscripts in Ireland, but helped bring the primer to a broader consciousness for the first time. He later published extracts from the primer in his 1882 book *Facsimiles of the National Manuscripts of Ireland*.

The primer was sold from Lough Fea in the 1920s. The Shirley estate, like those of many Irish and English landholders, was facing increasing financial pressures during the early decades of the century. Evelyn Shirley had died in 1882, and his library at Lough Fea was largely decimated by the infamous "book raids" on Ireland and England by A. S. W. Rosenbach in 1928.²¹ However the Elizabethan primer was part of an earlier sale, of June 1924. The Sotheby's catalogue lists the primer as part of over 70 lots from the "well-known Irish library at Lough Fea," describing it as a "manuscript of historic interest in fine preservation."²² Interestingly, it dates the primer to 1580, suggesting that

Kane and Valerie McGowan-Doyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15–39 at 24.

19 Evelyn Philip Shirley, *Catalogue of the Library at Lough Fea, in Illustration of the History and Antiquities of Ireland* (London: Chiswick Press, 1872).

20 As quoted in Rosa Mulholland Gilbert, *Life of Sir John T. Gilbert* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1905), 215.

21 See Leslie A. Morris, *Rosenbach Redux: Further Book Adventures in England and Ireland* (Philadelphia: Rosenbach Museum & Library, 1990).

22 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Autograph Letters, and Historical Documents, Comprising the Townshend Papers...Which will be Sold by Auction...14th of July, 1924* (London: Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 1924), lot 514, pp. 92–93.

it was composed while Nugent was locked up in the Tower of London. This has been contested by later scholarship; as detailed above, it is now thought more likely to be the product of Nugent's years at Cambridge. The primer was bought at this auction by Maggs for £48, and it promptly appeared in their catalogue of that year. The catalogue entry drew upon Gilbert's research, and referenced the potential original use of the manuscript: "such as her majesty might have used at her interviews with O'Neill and other Irish chieftains."²³ Most notably, however, the catalogue listed the manuscript as sold. While somewhat unusual, this practice of marking catalogue entries as sold was by no means unique, although in this case the primer was the only item in the catalogue marked as such. What is more intriguing is the reason it was listed in this way—why not exclude it from the catalogue altogether? Possible grounds for keeping it in include the timing of its sale (as the catalogue was going to press), and the undoubted publicity effect of advertising that a prestige item in Maggs's coffers had been bought quickly.

The Sotheby's sale of 1924 did garner some interest and commentary in the press. *The Times* reported that:

A large number of scarce books and pamphlets on Ireland and Irish subjects, being a selection from the library at Loughfea, Carrickmacross, and the property of Major Evelyn Shirley, formed an unusual feature in the book sales at Sotheby's yesterday, the 75 lots producing £1,074 2s. As one of the chief purchasers was the firm of Hodges, Figgis & Co., the Dublin booksellers, a considerable portion of the books will presumably find their way back to Ireland.²⁴

This theme of repatriation is one that underpins not only the Elizabethan primer throughout its later history, but commentary on the many Irish books and manuscripts that were bought and sold outside the country during the twentieth century.²⁵ 1924, for instance, was a year in which there was much movement of Irish material on the market. The ongoing dispersal of the Phillipps collection in this period included considerable collections of Irish manuscripts; ones that "touch Irish history at every point."²⁶ In New York, meanwhile, possibly the most important sale of an Irish private library happened in the Anderson sales room when the collection of John Quinn was auctioned between 1923 and 1924. This high-profile sale, with its detailed and lavishly produced catalogue, brought into focus the demand for Irish literature and history, and formed the cultural touchstone for a growing interest in Irish material which was filtering through in the London papers.²⁷

23 *Books, Manuscripts and Bindings, Remarkable for their Rarity, Beauty and Interest*, Catalogue no. 456 (London: Maggs Bros., 1924), no. 217, p. 163.

24 "The Sale Room," *The Times*, July 17, 1924, 15.

25 See, for example, the quarterly issues of the *Irish Book Lover* (1909–1957), which contained regular notices of sales and auctions of Irish material.

26 "Notes on Sales," *TLS*, October 16, 1924, 9.

27 *Complete Catalogue of the Library of John Quinn Sold by Auction in Five Parts*, 2 vols. (New York: Anderson, 1924).

After the Maggs sale, the picture becomes a little cloudy. It is not entirely clear where or to whom the primer was sold—though one can assume that the client was a regular or valued customer of Maggs, considering they bought it pre-catalogue publication. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the manuscript ended up in the US during the 1920s. In a letter of September 11, 1924, the Chicago bookseller Walter M. Hill wrote to an E. F. Carry to discuss the possible purchase of the manuscript. Hill declares the primer a “unique” object, having examined it in person, and arranges to have it sent to Carry to consider adding it “to your collection of Irish books and MSS.”²⁸ Edward F. Carry was a Chicago-based businessman who directed the Pullman railroad company for over a decade, and had Irish ancestry. As with other wealthy industrialists in early twentieth century America, his interest in book collecting was as much a statement of cultural and literary refinement as it was of economic capital. In Carry’s case, his considerable library of Irish material reflected a deeply-felt historical affiliation with his country of ancestry, alongside an interest in transportation and railway history.²⁹ Whether the sale to Carry went ahead cannot be confirmed, though it seems probable; both considering Carry’s Irish collection and because the letter was preserved alongside the primer in its current home.

The Carry library was dispersed after his death in 1930, with some parts being absorbed into the John Crerar collection at the University of Chicago Library in 1950. The trail for his Irish material, including the primer, unfortunately runs dry here. The next record is in the Christie’s sale catalogue of November 1980. According to an Irish newspaper report of that year it had apparently come from the sale of material from Chetham’s library in Manchester.³⁰ This, however, was a mistake, with the primer actually listed as the only lot under “The Property of a Gentleman” (lot 289). It was sold for £6,700 to Benjamin Guinness, via his London agent H. D. “Dick” Lyon. Listed at a reserve (or estimate) price of £4,000–£5,000, the actual price realized represents a significant demand for the primer, and a remarkable increase in valuation from its sale to Maggs earlier in the century. The catalogue entry represents a more sustained focus on the history and significance of the primer, with detailed descriptions of both the content and binding. The entry also considers the questions of provenance and dating in depth, remarking that

Delvin approvingly links Elizabeth’s interest in the Irish language with the possible ‘reformation of that Contrie’, and although it is undated, the manuscript possibly belongs to the years circa 1584–7, when he was in high favour with the Queen and compiled his ‘Articles for reformation of certain abuses in Ireland.’³¹

28 Letter from Walter M. Hill to E. F. Carry, September 11, 1924, Dublin, Farmleigh House, Benjamin Iveagh Library.

29 “Edward F. Carry, 1867–1930,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 23 (1930): 353–57.

30 *Evening Echo*, December 3, 1980, 11.

31 *Valuable English Literature, Early Printed Books and Manuscripts...19 November 1980* (London: Christie’s), lot 289, p. 81.

This is a departure from the Sotheby's estimation of 1580 as a date of composition, though without a named author or citations in the entries there is little way of knowing how either of the catalogue writers arrived at these conclusions.

The Benjamin Iveagh Library

Since its accession to the Guinness's collection in 1980, the Elizabethan primer has been regarded as an important document for a range of reasons, and it is generally classed as one of the highlights of this collection. The Benjamin Iveagh Library is the former book collection of Benjamin Guinness, third Earl of Iveagh and heir to the Guinness brewing fortune. Iveagh started collecting in 1967, soon after he moved to Farmleigh House in Dublin and took the reins of the family company. Farmleigh already had a modest gentleman's library when Benjamin moved in, largely concentrated on works on brewing and history from the nineteenth century built up by Benjamin's great-grandfather, Edward Cecil Guinness, first Earl of Iveagh. During his relatively short lifetime, Benjamin added to this a considerable collection of Irish books and manuscript material. These included eighteenth-century fine bindings, a range of early modern works, literary archives, and a large selection of rare first editions of Irish writers. The collection stands at over five thousand items, still housed in the double height oak-panelled room at Farmleigh House. Once the private library of an apparently very private man, the material today comprises some of the finest books in any of Ireland's national literary collections.

The library expanded rapidly from Benjamin's early forays into collecting in the 1960s, with material purchased from booksellers and auctions around Ireland and Britain. Indeed, the source of material was divided almost evenly between Irish and English sellers. The acquisition of the primer at the 1980 sale would have been a typical one for Iveagh, as much of the valuable Irish material appearing on the market in these years came through the large auction houses. Most notable here, however, was the role of Lyon. As a private bookseller and agent, Lyon was a lynchpin in the development of the library and Iveagh's most trusted advisor on the London market. He is a recurrent presence in the library acquisition records dating from 1971, buying frequently for Iveagh, and was reportedly given a *carte blanche* at auctions for high-profile items.³² Lyon's success in bidding on the primer is matched by other purchases: in the same year he secured for Iveagh the first edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* for £1,800, and in 1982 he brought in Sean O'Casey and Lady Gregory manuscripts, Maud Gonne and George Bernard Shaw letters, and the impressive collection of Lennox Robinson papers that remains one of the highlights of the library.

Iveagh was an astute and educated collector: he clearly researched each purchase carefully, assessing it within the context of both his library and the antiquarian market at the time. Almost every item in his collection is in superb condition, a sign of the resources that he was able to apply to his collecting. He was helped in this by his wife Miranda who acted as the first librarian in Farmleigh, taking detailed notes for the acces-

32 "H. D. Lyon Obituary," *The Times*, August 7, 2004, 14.

sions register and corresponding with booksellers and binders over the years. By the 1990s Iveagh had become one of the most respected and prolific collectors in Ireland. His collection offers an alternative story of Irish private libraries, which in the twentieth century is mainly one of dispersal, sale, and destruction. The Farmleigh library, by contrast, is a rare example of a complete collection preserved as it had been envisioned and built. When Iveagh died in 1992, Farmleigh was left empty with receding family involvement in the brewery in Dublin, and most residing in the UK. After the sale of the house to the Irish state in 1999, the books were kept in the house on loan from the Guinness family. There was a desire on both sides to see the library maintained as it had been for the life of its creator. In 2008 the library was formally gifted to Marsh's Library in Dublin, but with the books staying in Farmleigh and maintained by the Office of Public Works (OPW). It is now a fully catalogued collection open to researchers and readers through Marsh's Library.

Significance

The Elizabethan primer ended up in Benjamin Guinness's collection in Dublin through a relatively circuitous route over the previous hundred years. Why is this important? There are a number of elements to consider here. Firstly, the journey across the Irish sea—in both directions—was one that was relatively common for Irish manuscripts throughout their history. The National Library of Ireland and Trinity College acquired much important material (like the Ormonde state papers and the extensive collection of Sir William Betham manuscripts) through the Phillipps sales in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some of which had in turn come from Irish estates and country houses.³³ Thus this primer, while at first glance unusual in having been composed abroad, in fact reflects some of the key themes of early Irish print and manuscript circulation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Catholic centres of Louvain and Rome were the source of much Irish language printing in these years, producing influential grammatical texts such as Francis O'Molloy's *Grammatica Latino-Hibernica* (1677) and Aodh Buadh Mac Crúitín's *English-Irish Dictionary* (1732) which were filtered back to Ireland. These multiple channels of exchange and communication have always been a feature of embattled languages, and the books from this era illustrate what we might call an exiled sense of Irish cultural identification. There is therefore scope to see the primer within (or prefiguring) the lexicographical tradition in later Irish print culture. In the context of the Farmleigh collection, the primer is merely the pinnacle of a subset of grammars and dictionaries, even if its importance can only be stated as "somewhat vaguely reflect[ive of] the spirit of an age when second-language teaching was a matter of great intellectual importance."³⁴ Nevertheless, the cultural exchange that it embodies is one that is consistently echoed throughout the Irish language elements of the collection.

³³ See A. N. L. Munby, *The Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, Phillipps Studies 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 80–85.

³⁴ Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath*, 38.

Related to this, the primer's provenance history in many ways reflects its subject, that of the meeting of two languages and cultures, and the political, social, and linguistic questions embodied in this interface. There has been some critical attention devoted to the "interpersonal and intercultural drama underwriting the primer's genesis," and its peripatetic journey embodies various complex sets of identities at play within sixteenth-century Irish language learning, touching on elements of Irish, English, Latin, and Gaelic linguistic heritage.³⁵ It contains links to established centres and modes of learning (Cambridge and Latin, respectively), and brings them into dialogue with native Irish speakers. Form and content thus provide a useful, if not entirely consistent, parallel within which to frame the manuscript's cultural resonance. Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the primer moved between libraries in Cambridge, Ulster, the United States (probably), and Dublin. This is especially relevant for its most recent purchaser, Benjamin Iveagh, for whom the notion of an intellectually cosmopolitan Anglo-Irish identity—as reflected in a colourful provenance history—was central to his collecting. Like Nugent, Iveagh saw himself as both English and Irish, and his library highlights Irish contributions to literature, history, language, theology, and intellectual thought across seven centuries.

The presentation of a facsimile to Queen Elizabeth II in 2011 was therefore a gesture that would have appealed to Iveagh's emotional and intellectual identification with both the Irish language and an aristocratic heritage. Part of his motivation in collecting the primer (alongside some of the most important works in the Irish print and manuscript canon) was to provide a fitting home and context for it. Indeed, he was eager to promote the value of Irish material in Ireland, once writing to a friend how pleased he was that his Irish books "repose" in the Farmleigh library instead of being lost in an "obscure" archive abroad.³⁶ While it is important not to overstate the "repatriation" element to Iveagh's collecting impetus—there is little evidence that he saw his library as part of a national project—there is no doubt of his belief and pride in the richness of this uniquely Irish collection. There maintains a strong vision of national reimaginings and cultural reconciliations inherent in this collection, and ones which the Queen Elizabeth primer both symbolizes and reflects back from the sixteenth century.

35 Christopher Martin, "Denis Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath and Queen Elizabeth's Irish Primer*" (review), *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 49 (2018): 562.

36 Letter from Benjamin Iveagh to Mark Hely Hutchinson, October 1, 1982, Dublin, Farmleigh House, Benjamin Iveagh Library.