The Library’s collections contain many records of travels to, from and within Ireland. These personal journeys and quests for discovery, documented in word and image, provide us with insights into cultural and social history, architecture, art, landscape and natural history. It is therefore particularly appropriate that travel should be the chosen theme for the current season of ‘Library Late’ public interviews featuring writers Peter Somerville-Large and Dervla Murphy, while the National Photographic Archive’s (NPA) latest exhibition *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* focuses on transport and how people travelled around and to Ireland in the twentieth century.

The NPA exhibition features images drawn from various Library collections including the Lawrence Collection, the Morgan Collection, the Independent Newspapers (Ireland) Collection, the Poole Collection, the O’Dea Collection and the recently acquired Justin Nelson Collection. Among the arresting images included in the ‘planes’ section of the exhibition is an historic photograph of Amelia Earhart, the first woman aviator to fly solo across the Atlantic from west to east. The photograph, which was taken in Derry in May 1932, shows her standing beside her plane just after she arrived from Newfoundland. Also featuring in this section of the exhibition is a photograph of the first flight taking off from Baldonnell Airport in September 1927; the arrival of the Naomh Padraig, Aer Lingus’ first aircraft, at Dublin Airport in 1958; a photograph of the first plane landing at Cork Airport in 1961, and images of seaplanes lined up at the Foynes seaplane terminal County Limerick in 1938.

The ‘trains’ section of the exhibition features images of early steam trains including a Lawrence Collection photograph taken on Ballydehob Viaduct around 1890. Also featured is a photograph of a crash at Harcourt Street Station in Dublin in February 1900 showing the steam train engine embedded in the station wall; the last train leaving Harcourt Street Station in 1958; the launch of the DART in 1984 by the then Taoiseach Dr Garret FitzGerald, and various photographs of trains and drivers on long-since closed sections of railway lines in County Meath, Louth, Dublin and Kildare.

The exhibition, which opens at the National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar Dublin on 26 June, continues until 6 October 2008. Admission is free.
National Library Events

Library Late

The featured writer for the March ‘Library Late’ public interview was Åsne Seierstad. She is photographed here being interviewed by RTÉ presenter Myles Dungan.

‘Foreign correspondents – an endangered species?’ was the title of the April ‘Library Late’ public interview. The panel who took part in the discussion included from left Lara Marlowe, Paris-based correspondent of The Irish Times; Rosie Whitehouse, author of Are we there yet? Travels with my frontline family; Richard Downes, RTÉ reporter; Myles Dungan, RTÉ presenter who chaired the discussion, and Marion McKeone, US correspondent for Today FM’s The Last Word programme and former US editor of the Sunday Tribune.

The Extraordinary Adventures of Foundling Mick

The Extraordinary Adventures of Foundling Mick by Jules Verne, a heart-warming story about a young orphan’s trials and tribulations in the late-nineteenth century, has recently been published by the Royal Irish Academy in association with the Library. The original story was published in French in 1895; this latest version marks the first time it has been published in full in English.

It was launched in the Library on 17 April by Isabelle Etienne, Cultural Attaché, French Embassy, who is pictured here (third from left) with Dr Howard Clarke, Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Royal Irish Academy; Professor Jane Conroy, Royal Irish Academy; Aongus Ó hAonghusa, Director, National Library of Ireland, and Christophe Lerouge, French Embassy.

Roddy Doyle archive presentation

On 29 April, the distinguished writer and winner of the 1993 Man Booker Prize, Roddy Doyle presented his literary papers to the Library. He is photographed here with Aongus Ó hAonghusa, Director, National Library of Ireland, and Gerry Lyne, Keeper of Manuscripts.

Visit to the Library by President of Estonia

On 15 April, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia, and his wife, Evelin Ilves, who were on a state visit to Ireland, visited the Library where they were given a guided tour of the exhibition Yeats: the life and works of William Butler Yeats. They are photographed here with the Library’s Keeper of Outreach and Preservation, Catherine Fahy.

The Friends of the National Collections of Ireland

On 7 April, the Library hosted a reception for the Friends of the National Collections of Ireland to mark the donation of various items to the Library by the Friends.

Photograph shows from left Aongus Ó hAonghusa, Director, National Library of Ireland; Aidan O’Flanagan, Hon Archivist of the Friends of the National Collections, and Professor John Turpin, President of the Friends of the National Collections. Professor Turpin is photographed here holding a proclamation on martial law regulations in Dublin which was issued on the Wednesday of Easter Week 1916. Other items donated by the Friends at the reception included a rare handbill from the same period entitled ‘Prevention of Epidemic’ which requests members of the public to inform the authorities if they discover dead bodies. Also included was an original 1913 cartoon of John Redmond by Thomas Reginald Cleaver entitled ‘The Ulster Crisis’.
Keiko Furumoto joined the Library as a paper conservation intern working under the supervision of conservator Matthew Cains. Her internship is being funded by the Heritage Council and the Library, and is part of a scheme which is being run in association with the Council for National Cultural Institutions. The scheme was established to support young conservators and recent graduates in their professional development.

Keiko holds a BA in Art Object Preservation from Tohoku University of Art and Design in Japan where she majored in the conservation of oil paintings. After she graduated, her first job was with a private conservation studio in Chiba, Japan where she was involved in the conservation of works of art on paper. The experience she gained there fostered her interest in treatment processes which focus on the cumulative effect of subtle changes which can significantly improve the overall appearance of an object.

As her interest in this area grew, she decided to do an MA in the Conservation of Fine Art at Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Her aim was to enhance her knowledge of specific treatments and also to work with experts who are using the most advanced technological innovations in the field of fine art conservation. While completing her masters, she worked as an intern at both the British Library in London and the LuEsther T Mertz Library in New York. She also spent a year at the Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property at Tohoku University of Art and Design where she carried out research on the composition of coating materials and the effects of damage to modern, commercially coated paper, in addition to working on the conservation of Japanese historical printed books.

Since joining the Library, Keiko has been involved in a number of important conservation and preservation projects. Due to her cross-disciplinary knowledge and experience, she has been able to carry out remedial treatments on various artefacts including a large pastel portrait of General Sir Arthur Vickers and a four-sheet map entitled – A Survey of the City Harbour Bay and Environs of Dublin by John Rocque (1757).

The latter project is still ongoing, as the map is extremely discoloured and brittle. Its poor condition is possibly due to the original map creator’s use of copper-sourced pigments and a layer of varnish; the latter may have been applied some time after 1757 in order to keep the brittle paper sections all in one piece.

Keiko’s conservation treatment is designed to address the issue of the map’s long-term stability by reducing the main causes of its deterioration. The treatment is also aimed at considerably improving the aesthetic appearance of the map – a complex process involving the removal of the varnish, adding a temporary facing and removing the old linings; this will be followed by washing to raise the pH of the map, and finally adding a support Japanese lining to the paper. Currently, the map’s sections are being treated in cycles of de-ionised water. Keiko noted that significant discolouration had been removed from the paper helping to reveal the original paper tone. As the aqueous treatment helps to reduce harmful substances in the paper, the washing process will be repeated until such time as no soluble discolouration is observed.

Following the discovery of ‘vinegar syndrome’ (so called as the odour of vinegar is apparent once the film begins to degrade) in a recently acquired photographic film collection, Keiko has carried out research aimed at understanding this phenomenon and she is currently conducting a survey to identify possible affected material in the archives. The results of this survey will dictate the necessary response to minimize the risk of contamination and allow continued access to the collection. After completion of the survey of the problematic collection, it is planned to extend the survey for other photographic collections.

Keiko’s experience in other areas of conservation – particularly in the area of working with Japanese papers and the traditional technique of using toning paper in the treatment of paper objects – has proved to be an invaluable asset to the Conservation Department.

We have very much enjoyed working with her throughout the year and we would like to wish her the very best in her future career.
The Library’s recently published strategic plan sets out a vision for the organisation up to the year 2020; it also charts the organisation’s strategic development for the years 2008-2010.

This three-year strategy will be the first in a series of strategies which will ultimately transform the Library into a world-class institution providing access to knowledge and information, regardless of format. In addition, the implementation of the strategy will enable the Library to operate at the forefront of the library and information world, offering leadership and collaboration as necessary.

The Library is the repository of a wide range of unique and world-class collections of material from and about Ireland. It is equally fortunate to have in place committed and expert staff who pride themselves on delivering an excellent service to Library users. These two features provide a solid base from which the organisation will be able to develop its collections, service delivery and staff in the years to come.

The Library has the potential to contribute enormously to Ireland’s cultural life through the provision of access to knowledge and information, and also through the provision of support for various research activities.

Increasingly, libraries are collecting and providing access to electronic material and are digitising large elements of their collections, thus facilitating the preservation of original material and speedy access to the digitised material. The implementation of the strategic plan marks the first step in the process of expanding the Library’s activities in this area.

One of the Library’s greatest assets is its Dublin city centre site. The availability of space on that site ensures that all of the organisation’s activities, including the storage of collections and the provision of a range of public services, can be delivered from a single location. While improvements have taken place in the Library’s physical infrastructure in recent years, some important elements of the agreed Building Development Programme remain to be completed. In that context, an opportunity now exists to address the remaining deficits in the Library’s infrastructure, particularly in relation to storage. Planning permission has been obtained for a dedicated storage building on the Kildare Street site and it is hoped that work on this building can begin in the near future, thus enabling the Library to fulfil its statutory remit in relation to caring for its collections and developing its services. Failure to address the storage situation would have major consequences for the Library, including severely inhibiting the future development of its services.

The Library’s core roles are to ensure that its collections reflect national cultural and intellectual output and that its collections and services are accessible to the widest possible audience. These roles will continue to be supported and enhanced over the course of the Strategic Plan implementation period.

The Strategic Plan has identified a total of six aims and twenty five objectives - all designed to enable the Library’s aims to be achieved. The plan was drawn up following an extensive consultation process both internally and externally; during that process the views of a wide range of stakeholders were sought and obtained, and have played an important role in helping to shape the plan.

The implementation of the Strategic Plan will be by way of a three-year operational plan, which in turn will be supported by internal business plans for each Library department.

Implementation will be monitored and evaluated on an annual basis and, by end 2010, the Library will be well advanced in the process of transforming itself into a world-class institution. In addition, it will have developed as an organisation; it will have improved its services to the public, and it will have equipped itself with the resources necessary in order to meet the challenges posed by the digital era.

Subsequent strategic plans will continue to build on those successes, thereby leading to the attainment of the Library’s long-term vision.
Plean Stráiteiseach 2008-2010

Leagann an plean stráiteiseach a d’fhoilsigh an Leabharlann le deireanas fis amach don eagraíocht go dtí an bhliain 2020; leagann sé amach forbairt stráiteiseach na heagraíochta do na blianta ó 2008–2010 freisin.

Beidh an stráitis trí bliana seo ar an chéad stráitis i sráith stráiteisí a atrothadh an Leabharlann ar deireadh go hínstitiúid den chéad scoth a chuirfidh ar chumas na Leabharlainne feidhmí ar thús cadhnaiochta i ndomhan na leabharlainne agus na faisnéise, ag cur ceannasaíochta agus coimhthirite ar fáil de réir mar is gá.

Stórálann an Leabharlann raon leathan bailiúchán uathúil den chéad scoth d’aithníonn d’éireann agus ag tarraingt chomh maith leis sin. Chomh maith leis sin, cuirfeadh na stráiteise ar chumas na Leabharlainne feidhmí ar thús cadhnaiochta in ndomhan na leabharlainne agus na faisnéise, ag cur ceannasaíochta agus coimhthirite ar fáil de réir mar is gá.

Tá d’acmhainn ag an Leabharlann cur go mór le saol cultúrtha na hÉireann trí rochtain ar eolas agus trí thacaíocht a chur ar fáil do ghníomhaíochtaí taighde éagsúil.

Cuirfear an Plean Stráiteiseach i bhfeidhm trí phlean oibríochtaí trí bliana, a bheidh tábhachtach a dhéanamh gur féidir linn do ghníomhaíochtaí a leathnú sa réimse seo.

D’aithín an Plean Stráiteiseach sé aidhm agus cuig chuspóirí is fiche – gach ceann acu deartha chun cur ar ár gcumas aidhmanna na Leabharlaine a bhaint amach. Dréachtaiodh an plean in ndiaidh próiseas comhairlúchtaí leabharlann inmheánach agus seachtrach; le linn an phróisis sin, lorgaíodh agus fuarthas dearcaí ó lucht leasmarh leathan agus bhi feidhm thabhairtach ag na dtacaí leis an plean seo a chumadh.
The Library has recently purchased an important collection of letters between the executed 1916 leader Thomas MacDonagh and his wife Muriel (nee Gifford), as well as letters from other members of the MacDonagh and Gifford families.

The most important letters in the collection are those between Thomas MacDonagh and his wife. Thomas and Muriel MacDonagh came from different religious traditions, and although this was a cause of concern to their families, the couple themselves did not regard it as a problem. Indeed, as Thomas MacDonagh wrote in a letter to his brother: ‘Muriel and I are of the same religion, which is neither Catholic nor Protestant, nor any other form of dogmatic creed.’

Although the MacDonaghs welcomed Muriel into their family, her marriage created a strain in her relationship with her own parents – damage which was never fully repaired. While the letters touch on these concerns, they mainly deal with the couple’s love for each other. For example, on the eve of their wedding, Thomas MacDonagh wrote:

‘Tomorrow begins life for us. My Darling, you do not know what you have brought to me and what you make me look forward to. I have lost years and years. Now we’ll make up for that… I’ll kiss you good night in future, always, always.’

At another point in their five years together, he wrote:

‘I have changed the poem for publication – I love to be working on something that has to do with you. I could not, and would not, try to write poems that did not come naturally. This poem did. Others could define only something of my love but would fail to express it. Indeed the best of my love is not expressed in poems or letters or words at all – You know that.’

The birth of their children Donagh and Barbara created closer family ties. When Thomas was away, he sent stories and letters to his children. Muriel also wrote to him about them: ‘The moment we came in Donagh pestered the life out of me to let him write a letter to Dadden … the little darling adores Dadden, and I know someone else who does the same.’

In the last letter from Thomas to his wife, written the night before his execution, he states:

‘I am to die at dawn … I am ready to die and I thank God that I die in so holy a cause. The one bitterness that death has for me is the separation it brings from my beloved wife Muriel, and my beloved children Donagh and Barbara. My country will take them as wards I hope … it breaks my heart to think that I shall never see my children again, but I have not wept or mourned … kiss my darlings for me, I send you the few things I have saved out of this war. Good bye my love, till we meet again in heaven, I have a sure faith of our union there … But for your suffering, this would be all joy and glory. Good bye.’

The execution of Thomas left Muriel devastated and in financial difficulties, while her subsequent conversion to Catholicism further strained relations with her mother. The MacDonaghs supported Muriel; Mary MacDonagh in particular remained a close confidante.

Mary MacDonagh’s later letters show her deeply-felt distress at the tragic death of Muriel just over a year after Thomas’ death. They also record her fears for the couple’s two orphaned children; these fears were well founded, as the custody of Donagh and Barbara MacDonagh was a source of controversy between the MacDonagh and Gifford families for many years afterwards.

This collection of letters not only provides a fascinating insight into the private life of this well-known couple, it highlights the love that Thomas had for his wife and children, and it also clearly demonstrates the extent of the personal sacrifice that he made in order to honour his patriotic beliefs.
Testament of Intentions, sent by Thomas MacDonagh to his fiancée Muriel Gifford, 20 November 1911, with first page of accompanying letter.

Poem by Thomas MacDonagh to his wife Muriel sent to her 4 November 1914. This poem was later published as 'To My Lady'.

Letter from Thomas MacDonagh to his son Donagh on the day of his birth, 22 November 1912.

Photograph of Muriel MacDonagh during her widowhood, 1916.
Letter from Muriel Gifford to her fiancé Thomas MacDonagh, 3 November, 1911.

My dearest, my darling,

I don't know if you'll be able to write me tonight — but if you can write it by the light of the moon — the moon has been turned out by her shrewd darling, don't talk to me about it, if it doesn't look enough from me — you know that.

I love you more, love, and with you than many the wealthiest men;

you do know that — my love is all that I have to give you on change of all — will heart if I can ever to be with to keep it for yours to happen. I can never love anyone —

my love, is all that is mine.

Tell your darling that Mrs. Stephen's is giving an odd slippy look at you to look like she'd not turned — I'm sorry. P. E. M.
Until recently, the experience of mass emigration exercised, for weal and for woe, a formative influence on the Irish national consciousness. The hemorrhaging of human capital happened at huge economic, social and cultural cost. Although this exodus brought benefits to other countries, its scale and pervasiveness fed complex attitudes at home.

On one level, there was real frustration with the state’s apparent incapacity to provide domestic opportunities. On another level, a disempowering fatalism seemed to sap personal initiative and justify resignation. It has only been with the decline of emigration and the recent phenomenon of mass immigration, that the national consciousness has had the opportunity to revisit its own emigrant experience, explore the complex set of emotions it generated and look again at its significance to the challenge of being Irish in a globalised, multi-cultural context.

Historians of Irish emigration have usually focused on the large-scale movements from Ireland to the United States, Australia and Great Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, through its exhibition, Strangers to Citizens: the Irish in Europe 1600–1800, which opened in December 2007, the Library offers visitors access to the pivotally important but frequently overlooked European dimension of early modern Irish migration. From 1600 to 1800 continental Europe was the main destination for tens of thousands of Irish migrants.

The vast transfer of people, resources and skills, involving individuals of all backgrounds, enriched Europe at a pivotal moment in its long process of political and economic modernisation. It also exposed Irish migrants to new ideas and opportunities, and on their visits back to Ireland these migrants carried home valuable cultural and intellectual baggage. This toing and froing helped to ensure that, during the period between the religious wars of the sixteenth century and the Napoleonic Wars of the early-nineteenth century, direct European influences were particularly strong in Ireland. Not surprisingly, this was also the period in which European attitudes towards the Irish achieved forms that remained largely unaltered until our own time.

To enhance the visitor experience to the Strangers to Citizens: the Irish in Europe 1600–1800 exhibition, the Library has now produced a book of the same name. It features five short essays which provide an accessible overview of the current state of historical research on Irish military, commercial, ecclesiastical and professional migration to Europe.

These essays are embellished with lavish corroborative illustrations that constitute, in their own right, a striking visual record of the variety and force of the Irish presence in early modern Europe. Here, in vivid pictorial form, a retinue of ancestors, some distinguished, others somewhat less so, come to life and invite the reader to relive a formative migrant experience.

Not every migrant was a success: many exchanged hardship at home for oblivion abroad but their memory was not entirely extinguished. Here, in word and image, they still speak to us and offer to the time-starved contemporary the opportunity to renew a temporarily forgotten but deeply cherished acquaintance.

Strangers to Citizens: the Irish in Europe 1600–1800 by Mary Ann Lyons & Thomas O’Connor is available at €19 paperback and €35 hardback.
National Library of Ireland Society

The National Library of Ireland Society is a voluntary support group which aims “to assist and support the National Library in the maintenance and expansion of its services and the improvement and protection of its status as the National Library of Ireland.” It arranges an annual programme of lectures on topics of Irish interest in a variety of subject areas including history, literature and current affairs; it organises an annual outing to historic houses and other venues, and it provides an opportunity for interested persons to support the Library at a crucial phase in its development.

Details of Society events can be found on the Library website www.nli.ie.

Lectures and other events begin at 7pm and take place in the Library’s Seminar Room.

Membership Rates

- OAP Membership: €15 p.a.
- Student Membership: €10 p.a.
- Corporate Membership: €1,000 p.a.

(by invitation only)

Members of the Society are entitled to a 10% discount in the Joly Café and in the Library shop.

Letters from John Count McCormack presented to the National Library of Ireland

Mr Eamonn Hennessy, President, Catholic Young Men’s Society of Ireland (left) is photographed here presenting a collection of letters from John Count McCormack to Gerard Lyne, Keeper of Manuscripts, National Library of Ireland. The letters written by Count McCormack date from the period 1929 to 1930 and, among other things, deal with McCormack’s donation of a gold medal for other things, deal with McCormack’s donation of a gold medal for an annual essay competition. (It would appear that the donation was offered to the Monasterevin, Co Kildare branch of the CYMS.)

In one of the letters, McCormack suggests an essay entitled ‘The fallacy of Communism’, and adds: ‘I would like to see some real propaganda work done to offset the growth of the Russian horrible (sic) doctrine in Ireland, where I fear it finds ready ground.’ In signing off, he notes that he hopes to get the medal blessed by the Pope the next time he is in Rome.

‘Library Late’ summer series

The ‘Library Late’ summer programme got off to a successful start on Thursday 28 May with a panel discussion chaired by RTÉ presenter Myles Dungan. The discussion focused on the origins of travel writing, the leading contemporary writers of this genre, and how one becomes a good travel writer. The panellists were Paul Clements, former BBC journalist, travel writer, tutor and author of The Height of Nonsense; Dr J oachim Fischer, University of Limerick, whose research interests include travel literature; Manchán Magan, writer and travel documentary maker, whose work includes The Big Adventure on RTE Radio One and the travel books Angels & Rabies and Manchán’s Travels: a journey through India.

Calendar of events

Bloomsday

The Library will mark Bloomsday with screenings in the Seminar Room of a number of short films about J ames Joyce and Ulysses: Ulysses in the public eye; J oyce’s contemporary legacy and An enduring relationship; J ames Joyce and the National Library of Ireland.

J ames Joyce’s Ulysses, a small exhibition including ‘turning the page’ digital installations of J oyce’s Ulysses will be on display in the main Library building from 9 to 27 June.

Summer’s Wreath 08

Following on the success of the Summer’s Wreath programme last year, the Library is again hosting a programme of lunchtime and evening events to mark the J une birthday of William Butler Yeats. Over the course of two weeks (beginning on Tuesday 17 J une and ending on Friday 27 J une), a cast of international and Irish actors, poets and other distinguished names will participate in a programme of readings, personal reflections, discussions and more. Summer’s Wreath 08 will be run in conjunction with the Library’s exhibition Yeats: the life and works of William Butler Yeats.

Library Late

The featured guest for the Wednesday 25 J une ‘Library Late’ public interview will be the author and writer Peter Somerville-Large. He will be interviewed by RTÉ producer and presenter Kay Sheehy. The featured guest on Thursday 24 J uly will be Dervla Murphy, the award-winning travel writer who, since 1965, has been publishing accounts of her journeys by bicycle and on foot in some remote areas of the world.

Scottish Irish Exchange with Kate Thompson and Keith Gray

On Monday, 30 J une the Library, in conjunction with Children’s Books Ireland, will present a literary event featuring the teen fiction authors Kate Thompson and Keith Gray.

Keith Gray is the virtual writer in residence at Scottish Book Trust; his latest novel is the recently published Ostrich Boys. Kate Thompson is the award-winning author of several teen books including The New Policeman. Her new novel is Creature of the Night. They will participate in a lively discussion covering two topics – writing for a teenage audience and living in Ireland and Scotland.

The event, which will take place at 7pm in the Library’s Seminar Room, will be chaired by Robert Dunbar, Irish Times critic, writer and broadcaster. Admission is free. To reserve a place, telephone 01-872 7475. Website: www.nli.ie or www.childrensbooks.ie

Strangers to Citizens

Guided tours of the Library’s new exhibition Strangers to Citizens: the Irish in Europe 1600 -1800 take place every Monday at 2.30pm. For information and tour bookings, telephone 01-603 0277 or email stc@nli.ie.

Comments and suggestions on NLI News should be addressed to Brid O’Sullivan. Email: bosullivan@nli.ie