

## THE BOOK – AT HOME AND ABROAD

*As a backpacker seeking work in Dublin in the height of the Global Financial Crisis, visiting Trinity College Library to view the Book of Kells was one of the few tourist attractions Michelle Collins was prepared to spend money on. She wasn't disappointed.*

I'm fascinated not only by the history of the *Book of Kells*, its beauty or its theological content, but also by the fact that thousands of people journey to Trinity College, pay their €9 and queue, to stare at its pages. The fact that the fruit of the daily labour of some celibate Celtic monks over a thousand years ago can still be physically present to viewers today strikes me as something of a miracle.

I went around the cabinet three times just to get my money's worth. I read the explanatory labels and stared at the enlarged prints illuminated on the walls

(mind the pun – they literally have a light behind them... they are illuminated 'illuminated manuscripts'). Once I'd seen the detail in the enlarged prints I could further appreciate the delicacy of the design.

Having admired the *Book of Kells*, it was time to soak up the ambience of the library. The Trinity College Library is the first library I ever fell in love with. It's gorgeous. The bookshelves, ladders, staircases and desks are all beautifully crafted in well-polished timber that has been there for years and years. Row upon row of deliciously old books line the shelves and the fact that you're not allowed to touch them somehow makes them all the more alluring. I could imagine generations of students and academics escaping the grey Dublin damp, searching among the shelves, flipping through the books seeking answers, inspiration and entertainment. For me, the warm brown hues of the Long Room, the promise of the abundance of knowledge held within the rows of bookcases and the ordered beauty of the room bordered on magical.

As I left the library and ventured into the bright lights of the gift shop I couldn't find a single souvenir that could capture the beauty of experience. I was smitten.

Now, as a library student working with and learning about digital books and e-resources, historical libraries take on an even greater significance. Ancient treasures,

such as the *Book of Kells*, will become even more precious as the production of the physical paper-based book subsides. I guess the role of the librarian will remain 'keeper of treasures' as well as 'information manager' as the definition of the 'book' grows and evolves.

Closer to home, I popped over to Clunes, in regional Victoria, for '*Clunes Booktown 2011*' this May. Once again I was struck by how many people continue to appreciate physical, paper books, especially antiques and secondhand volumes.

There were writer's talks and workshops, oodles of opportunities to buy new and secondhand books, to chat to publishers, booksellers and authors and enjoy the friendly Clunes hospitality. I enjoyed the chance to indulge in my love of book shopping in such a gorgeous environment.

The public library in Clunes may be a far cry from Trinity in Dublin, but it's cosy, neat and welcoming. There was a stunning display of local artwork in the library's front windows and a fun secondhand book sale within.

One of the most impressive things about the weekend in Clunes was the resilience of the locals; within the last 12 months they'd suffered not one but two devastating floods. Many businesses and homes were badly affected. Even so, a dedicated team in Clunes managed to organise and host a phenomenally popular and successful book event. Around 14 000 people wandered through the book stalls over the course of the weekend, listened to bands, tried the local fare at little market stalls, avoided the cold in cosy cafés, and relished being surrounded by all things book-ish!

Whilst the Clunes Booktown event may only happen once a year, I can always visit Clunes when I'm travelling through regional Victoria and savour the permanent bookstores and food outlets without all the crowds. So, I'll keep studying and dreaming of working in a library as gorgeous as those I visited in Dublin. At the very least I can look forward to visiting them next time I'm in Ireland, and in the meantime, I'll enjoy Clunes.

**Michelle Collins**  
shellie\_collins@hotmail.com

***"The Trinity College Library is the first library I ever fell in love with."***

*Ireland? No, Clunes, Victoria, another destination for all things book.*