
Creation of an online catalogue for a special collection: the experience at WIT Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) is one of the largest institutes of technology in Ireland and has 10 000 full-time and part-time students. The nature of the institution, from its origin in 1970, has meant that WIT's focus has largely been on the present and the future, rather than on the past. The Luke Wadding Library, WIT's main library, is a modern academic library that opened in 2000. The library's role and collections generally reflect the remit of its parent institute. In recent years, however, a number of collections have been donated to WIT and merit the designation 'special collections'. These collections are not related to any particular course, but rather enhance the library collections and the institute overall, in terms of their historical and local interest value. The Bonaparte-Wyse Collection is one example of this.

The collection was acquired at auction by Waterford Institute of Technology in 2006 and subsequently handed over to the library for cataloguing, display and conservation. It comprises a variety of material including papers, manuscripts and diaries, mainly personal documents, in the form of diaries and letters pertaining to several generations of the Wyse family.

WYSE FAMILY



The Wyse family was the only Catholic merchant family from the Middle Ages to retain their lands and their Catholicism, and to survive (at least from 1375) into the twenty-first century. Thomas Wyse (1791–1862) was educated at Stonyhurst College, England, and at Trinity College, Dublin, where he distinguished himself as a scholar. After 1815 he spent some years travelling, visiting Italy, Greece, Egypt and Palestine. In 1821 he married Letizia, daughter of Napoleon Bonaparte's brother, Lucien. After residing for a time at Viterbo, Italy, he returned to Ireland in 1825, having by this time inherited the family estates. Thomas and Letizia had two children, Napoleon Alfred and William Charles Bonaparte-Wyse. The couple separated in 1828. In her lifetime, Letizia had five children in total, but only the eldest two were acknowledged by Thomas Wyse as his own. Some of the correspondence reveals insight into the legal issues to stop Letizia scandalously calling her illegitimate children 'Bonaparte-Wyse'.

In his lifetime Thomas Wyse was a leading Irish educationalist and politician. He was a major figure in Catholic Emancipation and was an MP for Tipperary in 1830, and in 1835 for Waterford City. He was the second Irish Catholic MP ever elected, following Daniel O'Connell. As a member of the British Liberal government, Thomas Wyse put his energy into educational reform and was pivotal in the establishment of the national school system. He also chaired the secondary education committee, which proposed the setting up of inter-denominational state-financed secondary

schools. He sought the establishment of four provincial inter-denominational third level colleges, to offer a curriculum similar to that in the University of London.

Napoleon Alfred Bonaparte-Wyse (1822–1895), elder son of Thomas and Letizia, was variously referred to as Napoleon, Nappo, Alfred or 'The Gaffer'.

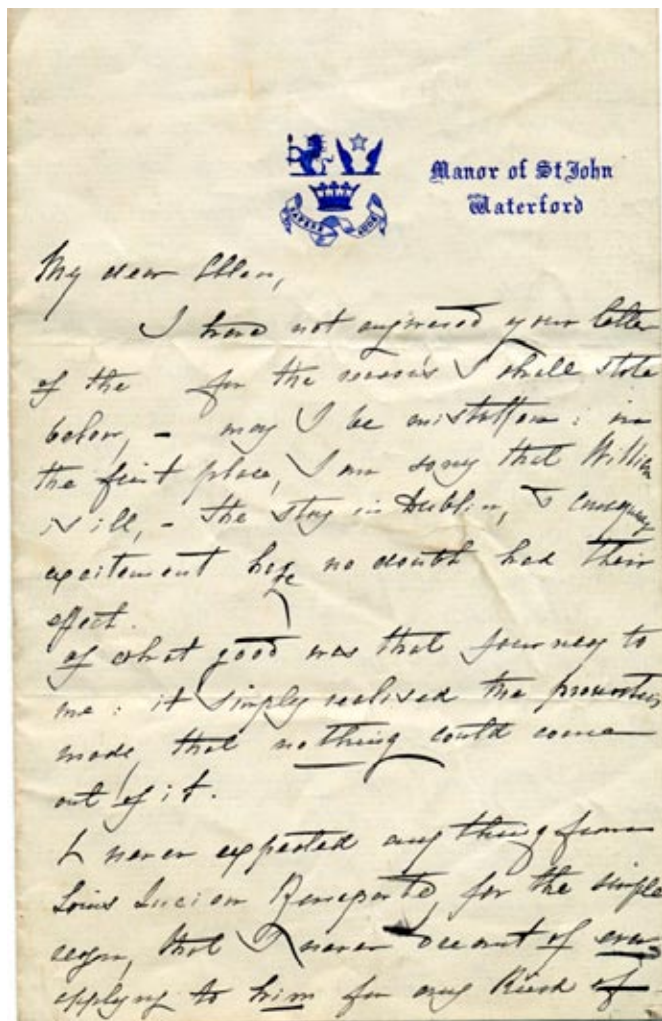
William Charles Bonaparte-Wyse (1826–1892) was a captain in the Waterford Artillery and spent much of his working life in the army. He became High Sheriff of Waterford in 1855. He wrote a series of lyrics and sonnets in French, English and Provençal and eventually became a celebrated poet in the Provençal language. In 1864 he married Ellen Linzee, daughter of W.G. Prout of St Mabyn, Cornwall. They had four sons.

Andrew Nicholas Bonaparte-Wyse (1870–1940), son of William Charles, was an educationalist like his paternal grandfather. He worked as Chief Inspector and then as Secretary to the Commissioner of National Education in Ireland. After the foundation of the Irish Free State, he worked for the Ministry of Education in Northern Ireland.

ORGANISING THE COLLECTION

The content varies widely and includes letters exchanged between a young Thomas Wyse to and from his parents and other family members, correspondence between Thomas Wyse and his parents prior to his marriage and subsequent exchanges following the very acrimonious breakdown of his marriage. Some of the content relates to the political situation of the times and includes correspondence between Thomas Wyse and Daniel O'Connell. The documents date from the early nineteenth up to the mid-twentieth centuries. Some letters and newspaper cuttings are also included. The material is mainly written in English, with a small number of items written in French. Some of the more unusual pieces include a poem printed on silk to commemorate the marriage of Thomas Wyse to Letizia Bonaparte.

The presentation of the papers to the library raised a number of issues to be resolved in relation to storage, display, cataloguing and access. The collection arrived in five cardboard boxes, randomly arranged and with little information as to the contents. A secure storage cabinet was made available in a staff area of the library and staff removed the papers from their boxes and placed them on the shelves in the cabinet. Although the library has a



special collections room that houses other special collections, most notably the Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, Collection, received by the library in 2006, the Wyse Collection was not immediately placed on public display. It was decided that when an inventory and online catalogue had been created, access could be granted to readers as and when required.

In order to facilitate the processing and storage of the collection, archival storage boxes, soft wrap lining and envelopes were purchased from an English company that specialises in special collections material. Thermometers, snake weights and book display pillows were also purchased.

CATALOGUING/CLASSIFICATION

It was decided to catalogue the collection in house by experienced library staff. In order to ensure consistency among the cataloguing librarians, a template was developed for the creation of catalogue records. This meant that a similar record was created for each item in the Bonaparte-Wyse Collection. Information held on each item can be sparse in special collections, and this presents a challenge when creating a catalogue record. Given

that a lot of the letters in the collection were handwritten, the details were sometimes difficult to decipher. Some, but by no means all, of the letters, were, however, accompanied by typed transcripts, which made their cataloguing much easier. Millennium is the library system used at WIT and the collection was catalogued using the cataloguing module of this system. MARC 21 records were created, using AACR2 rules.

A series heading of 'Bonaparte-Wyse Collection' was set up, so that the collection could be searchable by series. It has been possible to create at least a basic title and subject field for all items in the collection. Many of the items also have author, pagination and date information. Additional information has subsequently been added to notes and contents fields. This is an ongoing process, with information from the auction documents being added, for example, biographical details about the person who forms the subject matter of the catalogued item. In many cases, very substantial records are now available.

Rather than use the Dewey classification system, which is used for most of the library's collections, a classification system was devised in house, based on location of the items within the storage cabinet that was initially used to store the collection. This system consisted of the letters BW followed by numbers, where the first digit designated the section of the cabinet, the second the shelf number and the third the individual item. For example, BW.3.2.45 was in the third section of the cabinet, on the second shelf and was the forty-fifth item. In total, the collection comprises over 1800 individually catalogued items and this simple classification system enabled each item to be given a unique call number. As the material was randomly arranged, it was important in the first instance simply to get the items on to the system so that staff would have a better idea as to what the collection contained and would then be in a better position to organise it logically.

Once basic catalogue records had been created on Millennium for each item, the system's 'create lists' function, in conjunction with information from the auction lots, was used to create an order for the collection. The 'create lists' function allows for catalogued material to be linked by fields such as subject or date of publication. For example, letters from a particular historical period could be grouped together. Documents relating to Thomas Wyse's role in education could be kept together. This function was particularly useful for personal

letters and correspondence, which formed the largest lot, and is now arranged in date order.

When the collection was placed in what was judged to be the best possible order on the online catalogue, the items were physically placed in labelled display envelopes in the same sequence within the display cabinet. Finally, the original classification system was amended once all material was catalogued and each item now has a call number comprising Bonaparte-Wyse and a four digit number e.g. Bonaparte-Wyse 0030. The call numbers run sequentially from Bonaparte-Wyse 0001 to Bonaparte-Wyse 1862.

The online catalogue creation and subsequent placement of the items within marked envelopes means that the Bonaparte-Wyse Collection can now be searched and specific items located with relative ease. The accessibility and presentation of the collection today, compared to its initial state, represent major progress.

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE COLLECTION

Special collections can present both opportunities and problems for libraries. While they may contain a wealth of valuable information and will certainly hold an interest for subject specialists, they can be expensive and time-consuming to preserve, house and maintain. A balance needs to be found which ensures that the collection is looked after and used in the best way possible, while other library services continue.

The main plan for the collection going forward is to improve and enhance accessibility. Work has begun to digitise it, starting with the larger pieces. This will allow for the availability of enhanced records, whereby the image of the item can be linked to the record on the library's OPAC catalogue. This will allow interested parties to not only search the contents of the collection, but also view it online. Once complete, digitisation will allow the special collection to be accessible via the internet twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. This accessibility will allow interested researchers to make arrangements to come to the library in order to view selected pieces in person if required. The special collections section of the library website is currently being upgraded in order to reflect the importance of the Bonaparte-Wyse Collection. This will be a means of publicising the collection, which has to date mainly been of interest to people who already knew it was in the library.

It is also planned to place some pieces from the collection on display in cabinets within the library, and an appropriate logo to accompany the collection has been designed for use in print and electronically.

The collection is of major interest locally, due to the Waterford connection. It is also potentially of interest both nationally and internationally because of the contribution of Thomas Wyse to education in Ireland and his political links to the UK. The connection to the Bonaparte family gives an added dimension to the collection. All in all, the Bonaparte-Wyse Collection has proved a welcome addition to the resources of WIT Library and every effort will be made to ensure that its potential is maximised, both now and in the future.

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