

Bibles from around the world

The Hibernian Bible Society collection at Maynooth University Library



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Introduction

One of the largest research collections at Maynooth University Library (<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library>) is the Hibernian Bible Society (HBS) collection, which contains over 2,000 bibles in more than 600 languages. In 1986 the HBS bible collection was permanently deposited in the Russell Library (<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library/collections/russell-library>) at Maynooth University (<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/>) and St Patrick's College, Maynooth (<http://maynoothcollege.ie/>). A series of sheaf catalogues accompanied the collection, providing important details relating to provenance and imprints. Items in the collection have retained their original shelf-marks and are identifiable by the prefix 'HBS'. Highlights of the collection include copies of the first published edition of the Greek New Testament, the King James Bible and the earliest edition of the Old Testament in Irish.¹ A decision was made in late 2016 to catalogue material in the HBS collection retrospectively, as part of the Russell Library Cataloguing Project.

Russell Library

The Russell Library houses the historical collections of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, which was founded in 1795 as the National Catholic Seminary for the education of Irish priests. The library was designed by renowned British architect and designer Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52) and completed in the year 1861 by Irish architect J. J. McCarthy. The collection includes approximately 34,000 printed titles from 1470 to the mid-19th century across subjects such as theology, language and literature, history, geography and mathematics. It also includes over fifty cuneiform tablets from Ancient Mesopotamia and a collection of medieval manuscripts dating from the 11th century onwards. The library is named after a past president of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Dr Charles William Russell (1857–80).

Hibernian Bible Society

The HBS (now the National Bible Society of Ireland (<https://www.nationalbiblesocietyofireland.ie/>)) was established by Rev. B. W. Matthias in 1806 and was originally known as the Dublin Bible Society. In 1808 the Society officially changed its name to the Hibernian Bible Society in order to reflect its work throughout Ireland. It shared the aims of its parent body, the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), which was founded in 1804 to increase the number of bibles in circulation. Originally based in Upper Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street), the HBS moved to Dawson Street following the destruction of the original building during the Irish Civil War. Much of the original library was also destroyed at this time, and the HBS relied on donations to replenish its books over the coming years, many of which came from the BFBS. The following items are some highlights from the HBS collection.

Greek New Testament (1516)²

The first published edition of the Greek New Testament was compiled by Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1536) and produced by Basel printer Johann Froben in February 1516. The earliest printed Greek New Testament was included in the Complutensian Polyglot produced in Alcalá de Henares, Spain between 1514 and 1517. However, Erasmus managed to secure publishing rights for four years from Pope Leo X to produce the Greek New Testament in 1516, effectively delaying the publication of the Polyglot until 1520. The manuscripts used for Erasmus's translation of the New Testament were 'neither ancient nor particularly valuable'.³ The text included several typographical errors.⁴ An attempt to address these errors was made in the second edition, published in 1519. The copy in the HBS collection (HBS 547) features a printed dedication to Pope Leo X beginning with a woodcut letter 'I' and surrounded by a woodcut border. The panel at the end of the border (which is held by two cherubs) contains handwritten text. Our copy features the bookplate of Samuel Alfred Steinthal, most likely the same Samuel Alfred Steinthal who was Minister

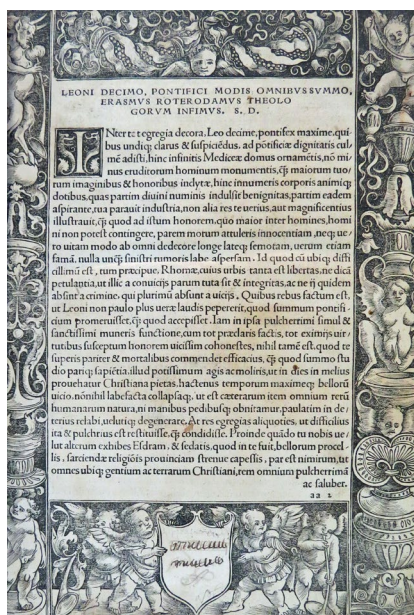
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of Cross Street Chapel in Manchester from 1870 until 1893.⁵ A note on the flyleaf of this work reads: '400 years to Day since this was published. 25 Feby 1916'. Handwritten notes referring to the history of this edition are also found in this copy.



Bookplate of Samuel Alfred Steintal in the Greek New Testament (1516)



Greek New Testament (1516) Dedication

Latin New Testament (1546)⁶

The Estienne printing dynasty was established by Henri Estienne in Paris in the early 16th century. This is a Latin New Testament, which was printed by Henri's son Robert in 1546, just four years before the latter emigrated to Geneva. It

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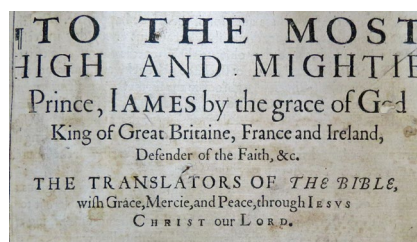
features two printers' devices associated with Robert Estienne – the first depicts a serpent winding around a branch and the second depicts a man under an olive tree. The HBS copy bears the bookplate of Syston Park in Lincolnshire, where a library was developed by Sir John Hayford Thorold, 10th baronet.⁷ A bookplate of Bible scholar Christian David Ginsburg (1831–1914) also appears in this copy.



Bookplate in the Latin New Testament (1546)

King James Bible (1611)⁸

The King James Bible (also known as the Authorised Version) was printed by the King's Printer, Richard Barker in 1611. Shortly after King James I ascended the throne of England in 1603 he convened a conference at Hampton Court with leading representatives of the Church of England. It was at this conference that the idea of a new English translation of the Holy Bible was first introduced. Although printed editions of the bible in English had existed since Tyndale's Bible in 1525, this new translation was an attempt by King James to assert his authority and to ease growing religious tensions. It was printed using a Gothic typeface without printed annotations. Unfortunately, numerous typographical errors appeared in the first edition, perhaps most notably in Matthew 25:36 when the word 'Judas' appears instead of 'Jesus'.



Dedication on King James Bible (1611)

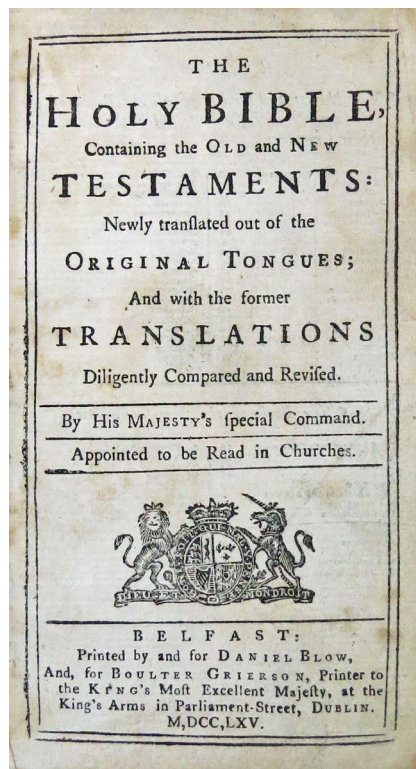
English Holy Bible (King James Bible) (1765)⁹

Printed by Daniel Blow in 1765, this is thought to be the first edition of the King James Bible printed in Belfast. The imprint states that it was 'printed by and for Daniel Blow, and, for Boulter Grierson, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, at the King's Arms in Parliament-Street, Dublin'. A note on the marbled pastedown indicates that it was presented to the library of the Hibernian Bible Society in 1942 by D. B. Bradshaw, Morehampton Road, Dublin. A handwritten note on the flyleaf reads: 'Sam Belsham. Sept. 10 1768'.

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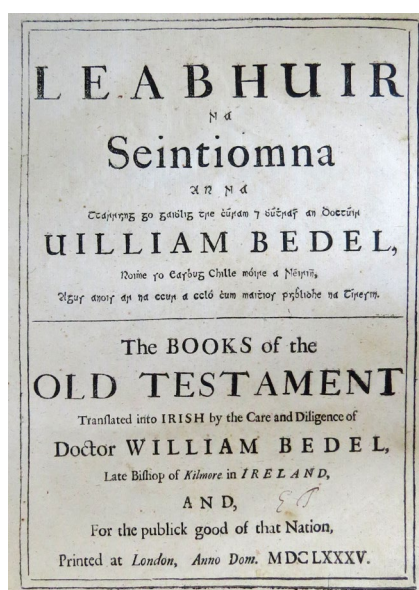
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King James Bible printed in Belfast (1765)

Irish Old Testament (1685)¹⁰

The first edition of the Old Testament in Irish, commonly known as Bedell's Bible, was prepared by William Bedell (1571–1642), and printed in 1685. Approximately 500 copies of this Old Testament were printed using a typeface designed by Joseph Moxon at the expense of Robert Boyle. A label pasted to the inside cover of this work indicates that it was purchased by the HBS in July 1934 for the sum of £6.10.0. The work contains an armorial bookplate designed by E. Lyons with the motto 'Virtus in Arduis' ('Strength in Difficult Times').



Title page of Irish Old Testament (1685)



Bookplate on Irish Old Testament (1685)

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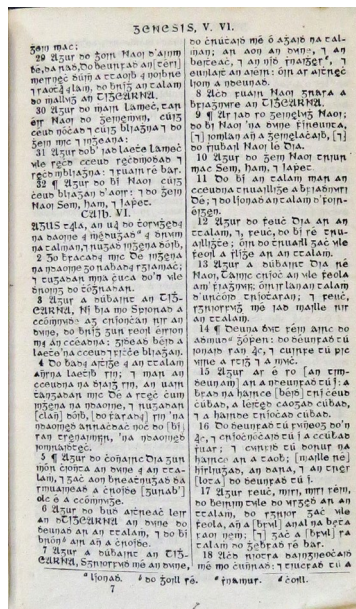


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Irish Holy Bible (1830)¹¹

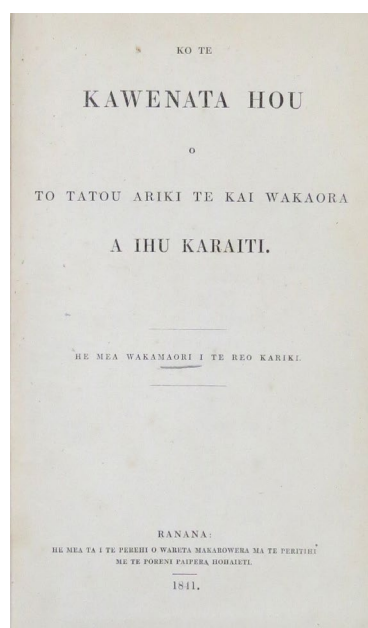
The Irish Holy Bible was printed by Goodwin, Son and Nethercott for the HBS in 1830. It was prepared by Edward O'Reilly (c. 1770–1829), Irish lexicographer and scholar, and was printed using Irish characters. A catalogue entry for this bible states: 'The plates and stock of sheets of this edition were destroyed in the burning of the H.B.S. Bible House, 10 Upper Sackville Street in 1922'.¹² Our copy (HBS 418) was presented by the BFBS in 1927.¹³



Irish Holy Bible (1830)

Maori New Testament (1841)¹⁴

This second edition of the Maori New Testament was printed in 'Ranana' [London] by the BFBS in 1841. It was translated by William Williams, J. Shepherd and W. G. Puckey of the Church Missionary Society under the supervision of Edward Norris of the Royal Asiatic Society.¹⁵ The first edition was published in 1837.



Maori New Testament (1841)

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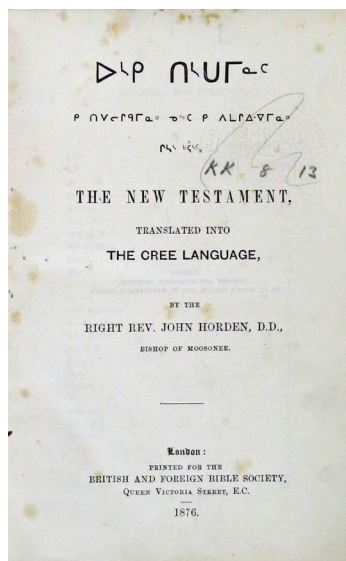


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New Testament in Moose Cree (1876)¹⁶

The New Testament in Moose Cree was published in London by the BFBS in 1876. Moose Cree is a dialect of the Cree language and is spoken in parts of Ontario, Canada. The New Testament was translated by the Right Rev. John Horden, Bishop of Moosonee.¹⁷



New Testament in the Cree Language (1876)

Conclusion

The HBS collection constitutes an important research resource at Maynooth University Library. It contains a wealth of material across several centuries in a multitude of languages. The collection has featured in a number of exhibitions since it was deposited in 1986, the most recent being an exhibition for members of the National Bible Society of Ireland on 16 June 2016. The retrospective cataloguing of this collection will make it fully searchable online for the first time. Maynooth University Library staff involved in cataloguing the HBS collection include: Yvette Campbell, Regina Whelan Richardson, Carole Connolly, and Olive Morrin. The Russell Library Cataloguing Project is managed by Barbara McCormack.

References

- 1 Many of the titles listed in this article were first exhibited in May 1986 and feature in *The archive collection of the Hibernian Bible Society: catalogue of an exhibition held in the Library, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, 7 May 1986*.
- 2 [Bible. N.T. Greek. 1516] *Nouum Instrumentu omne...* Basileae: in aedibus Ioannis Froben, 1516. HBS 547
- 3 Adye, W. L. (1865). *The history of the printed Greek text of the New Testament*. London: Rivingtons, p. 5
- 4 Seymour, V. (1995). 'The Bible in Maynooth', in A. Neligan, ed., *Maynooth Library treasures: from the collections of Saint Patrick's College*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, p. 66
- 5 Cross Street Chapel. *A brief history of Cross Street Chapel*. [online] Available at: <http://cross-street-chapel.org.uk/2013/07/a-brief-history-of-cross-street-chapel/> [accessed 30 April 2017]
- 6 [Bible. N.T. Latin. 1546] *Nouum Testamentum...* Lutetiae: ex officina Roberti Stephani, 1546. HBS 521
- 7 Leeds University Library (2017). *Sir John Hayford Thorold (1773–1831)*. [online] Available at: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/1587> [accessed 30 April 2017]

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- 8 [Bible. English. 1611] *Holy Bible* (London, 1611). HBS 335
- 9 [Bible. English. 1765] *Holy Bible* (Belfast, 1765). HBS 1206
- 10 [Bible. O.T. Irish. Bedell. 1685] *Leabhair na Seintiomna ar na ttarruing go Gaidhlig* (London, 1685). HBS 879
- 11 [Bible. Irish] *An Bíobla Naomhtha: air na tharruing ó na teangthaibh bunadhúsacha go Gaoighilig* (Dublin, 1830). HBS 418
- 12 According to the catalogue entry for HBS 418 (HC 5559) which accompanied the collection when it was deposited in 1986.
- 13 For more on this topic, see McCormack, B. (2017), 'Using the Irish language to further the aims of bible societies: An analysis of Irish bibles in the Russell Library, Maynooth', in J. Hill and M. Lyons, *Representing Irish religious histories: Historiography, ideology and practice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 165–79
- 14 [Bible. N.T. Maori. 1841] *Ko te Kawenata Hou...* (Ranana [London], 1841). HBS 251
- 15 Hathi Trust Digital Library. *Catalogue record: Ko te Kawenata...* [online] Available at: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008675179> [accessed 30 April 2017]
- 16 [Bible. N.T. Cree. 1876] *The New Testament, translated into the Cree language* (London, 1876). HBS 250
- 17 Seymour, 'The Bible in Maynooth' (1995), p. 74

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