



IRISH SCHOLARSHIP LANDMARK AT BOSTON COLLEGE

25th Anniversary Salute to the Burns Scholars

By Turlough McConnell

Since 1991, the Burns Visiting Scholar in Irish Studies program at Boston College has invited various academics and experts in Irish Studies to live on campus, where they teach, confer, and conduct research for their own projects. Every year, the Scholars credit the program as beneficial and crucial in the development of their work. As the program turns 25 this October, we asked a number of the Scholars to tell us what the experience meant to them.

Mary McAleese, Burns Scholar 2013, served as the eighth President of Ireland from 1997-2011. Photographed at the Library of Trinity College Dublin by Kim Haughton for the exhibition *Portrait of a Century*.

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Mick Moloney, Burns Scholar 2004-2005, is a musician and scholar of Irish traditional music.

Photographed at Hughes' Bar, Dublin.

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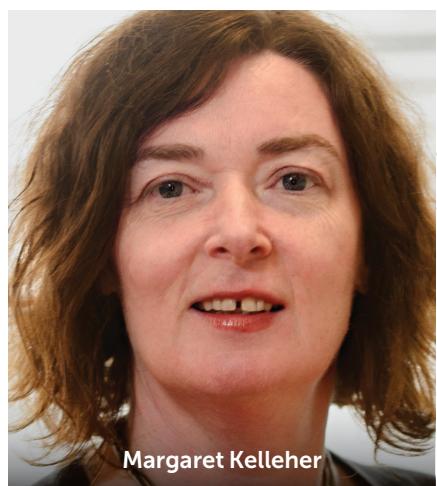
Christian Y. Dupont is Burns Librarian at the
John J. Burns Library of Boston College.

Since its founding in 1863, Boston College has maintained a commitment to service through knowledge. The knowledge base, says David Quigley, Provost and Dean of Faculties, “emerges in large measure from extended studies of our traditions and the great works of the past.” Those traditions derive from the College’s Irish roots. Those great works include texts found in the College’s library collections, which provide resources for research and scholarship. These two ideas – of interacting with the community and facilitating research – are evident in Boston College’s scholarly programs. In particular, the College’s department of Irish Studies fosters deep engagement with Irish culture and society.

Maureen Murphy, Hofstra University

city professor and past president of the American Conference for Irish Studies, stresses the relevance of Irish Studies: “Most institutions of Irish Studies start with the interest of an individual faculty member. As faculty retire or move on, the practical matter of the importance of institutionalizing Irish Studies is paramount. Some of the models of Irish Studies programs which have been institutionalized are those at Boston College, College of St. Thomas, Fordham University, the University of Notre Dame, New York University/ Glucksman Ireland House, and more recently, Quinnipiac University.”

Boston College’s Irish Studies department offers courses on Irish social, economic, political, and cultural history; on Irish literature, film, art, and music; and the Irish language. The program’s strength is its accessibility to students, the community, and the wider research world – connections forged through its partnership with the John J. Burns Library, the university’s repository of rare books, special collections, and archives. Called the “guardian of Irish culture” by *Irish America* magazine, Burns Library preserves the historical, literary, musical, and artistic heritage of Ireland, and provides access for research, teaching, and general appreciation through online resources and onsite exhibitions. Burns Library holds more than 50,000 volumes of Irish history, lit-



Photograph by Vincent Hoban, UCD Media Services



Colmán Ó Clabaigh, O.S.B., Burns Scholar, Spring 2016, has edited and authored several major studies of Irish monasticism. Photographed at the University of Leuven, Belgium, by Rob Stevens.

erature, and culture, and dozens of manuscript and archival collections; it is the largest and most comprehensive collection of Irish research materials outside Ireland.

Burns Library was created in 1986 with substantial support from the Burns Foundation. The Foundation subsequently endowed the Burns

Visiting Scholar in Irish Studies program. Thanks to the program, for every academic year or semester since 1991, Boston College has welcomed a scholar, writer, or artist who has made a significant contribution to Irish cultural and intellectual life. The Center for Irish Programs periodically publishes calls for nomi-

nations and applications for future Burns Visiting Scholars.

The roster of Burns Scholars include such luminaries as **Mary McAleese**, (Fall 2013), who served as the eighth President of Ireland from 1997-2011 and is a lifelong academic and barrister, McAleese is currently pursuing a doctorate in canon law at the Grego-

rian University of Rome; **Kevin Whelan**, (1995-96), author of sixteen books and over 100 articles on Ireland's history, geography, and culture; **Margaret MacCurtain O.P.**, (1992-93), historian and pioneer in the field of women's history in Ireland, and former prioress of Sion Hill Convent (Benedictine), Dublin; **Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill**, (1998-1999), regarded as the finest poet in Ireland writing in the Irish language, and whose papers are archived at Burns Library; **Paul A.E. Bew**, (1999-

Photograph by Paul Sherwood/The Gallery Press.



Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill

2000), now Lord Bew, is Professor of Politics, Queen's University, Belfast, and an authority on the politics and history of Northern Ireland; **Brendan Kennelly**, (Fall 2007), author of more than 30 books of poetry; **Peter Fallon**, (2012-13), poet and founder of The Gallery Press who says that "the Burns Visiting Scholar program... gives the scholar or the writer the gift of time. I was able to take a much-needed break from my work as a publisher to complete *Strong, My Love*, my first collection of poetry in seven years;" and **Mick Moloney**, (2004-05), who utilized Burns Library's Irish Collection to complete his book about the history of Irish traditional music in America.

Nicholas Allen, (2010-2011), says, "The Burns Scholar offers a unique opportunity for an academic based in Ireland to come to America to engage with wonderful faculty at one of the leading Irish studies programs in the world."

The Scholars attest not just to the



James H. Murphy, C.M., Burns Scholar 2015, has been appointed interim director of the Boston College Center for Irish Programs for 2016-17. Photographed at Boston College Ireland, Dublin.

support they received but also to their contributions to the College and the goal of advancing Irish-American cultural links. Many point to resources available at Boston College and Burns Library that enabled substantial progress and completion of major academic projects. **Alvin Jackson**, (1996-97), says that the Burns

program "was critical in the writing of my book *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace & Beyond*." Jackson, whose work concerns the politics and culture of the Home Rule era, says that he was able to explore "much wider intellectual territories. It is difficult for me to imagine how it might have been completed without the support



Nicholas Allen, Burns Scholar, Spring 2010,
photographed at Blackrock Castle on the
banks of the River Lee in County Cork.

of the Burns program.” Jackson credits the program with sparking lasting scholarly friendships that flourish in both countries.

Thomas Bartlett, (2009-10), cites “the Library setting, its holdings, and its staff” as critical to finishing his acclaimed *Ireland: A History*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2010.

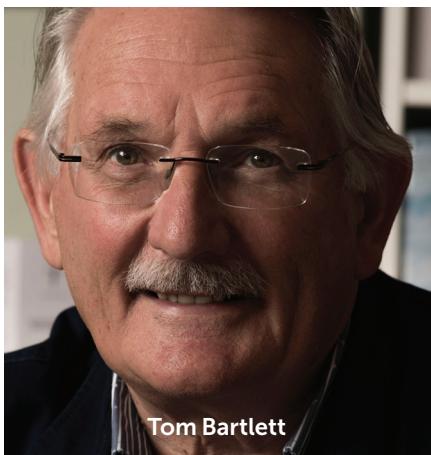
The Burns Scholars themselves are a resource for the Irish Studies department. Recently, **James H. Murphy, C.M.**, (Fall 2015), was named interim director of the Boston College Center for Irish Programs for the 2016-17 academic year. Murphy brings to Irish Studies his background as a scholar of Ireland’s “long century” – the years

1791-1922 – the time, says Murphy, when modern Ireland emerged, when the relationship between England and Ireland changed, as did “Ireland’s view of itself.”

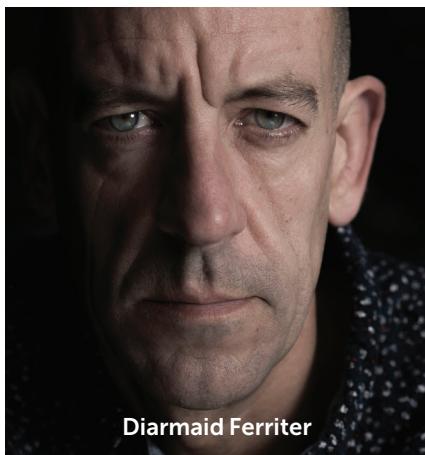
Margaret Kelleher, (2002-03), remains deeply connected with both the program and Boston College, where she earned her Ph.D. in English.



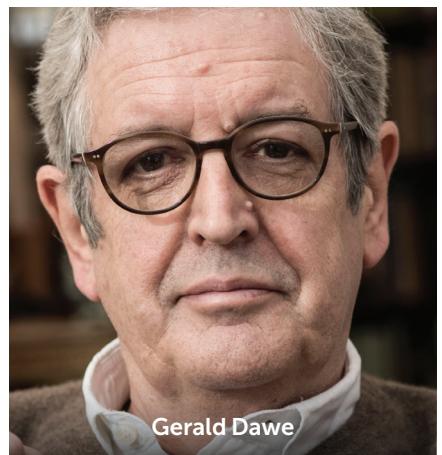
Photograph by Chris Bellew / Fennell Photography



Tom Bartlett



Diarmaid Ferriter



Gerald Dawe

Top: Alvin Jackson, Burns Scholar 1996-1997, Professor of History at the University of Edinburgh, with Ireland's President, Michael D. Higgins, and his wife, Sabina Coyne Higgins.

Kelleher and her work embody the core aspirations of the Burns Scholar. Kelleher describes her year as "truly a formative period"; like Jackson, she enjoyed "the resources and time to work with Professor Philip O'Leary on our project, the *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*." This collaborative work "comprises 1,400 pages and 28

contributors, and is the first comprehensive history of Irish literature written in both Irish and English. Spanning fifteen centuries of literary achievement, the two volumes range from the earliest medieval Latin texts to the late twentieth century." Today, Kelleher has expanded her outreach. In addition to serving as Chair of Irish Literature

and Drama at University College Dublin, she is Chair of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures, which has over 400 members in over 25 countries, including Japan, Brazil, and most recently China. Her most recent project is the *Digital Platform of Contemporary Irish Writing* (contemporaryirishwriting.ie), a resource



Peter Fallon, Burns Scholar 2012-2013, is a poet and publisher, and founder of The Gallery Press, which has been recognized as Ireland's pre-eminent literary publishing house. Photographed at home in County Meath.

designed to highlight Irish writing today and to bring these writers to the attention of wider global audiences.

The move beyond national boundaries into a future of global connection is a reality for Kelleher and other Burns Scholars. **Colmán Ó Clabaigh**, (Spring 2016), a Benedictine monk, uses medieval Ireland as the laboratory for his

inquiry into the impact of religion on all aspects of life among common people. By plumbing the depths of medieval Europe, Ó Clabaigh has – thanks to the support of the Burns program – begun to unravel universal archetypes and their role in secular life.

The Burns Visiting Scholars program has left its original orbit. Kelleher and

others have seized the opportunity to transcend nationalities and reach new audiences. Today's community is one without borders. As Colmán Ó Clabaigh states, the matter of "ethnic identity" is of great significance in the modern world, where people cross borders while searching for an authentic expression of self. In this way, Irish

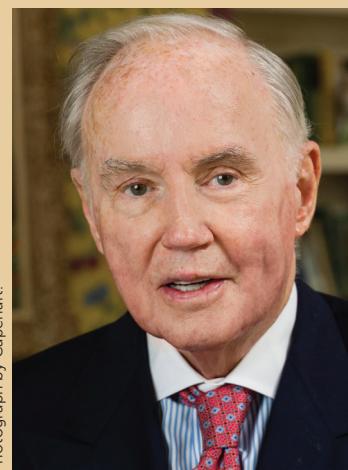
Studies can be a channel for that quest. As **Gerald Dawe**, (2004-05), puts it, "Irish Studies is a force field of cultural and literary knowledge. When it's taught with an open mind, it takes students into the wider world of history and otherness, of how a small island on the westerly flank of Europe survived economic and spiritual challenges of colonialism, conservatism, civil and political wars, and sectarian attrition such as the Troubles, and yet has managed to look at itself critically... Irish Studies only works in the context of other national or interna-



Kevin Whelan, Burns Scholar 1995-1996, is director of the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Photographed at O'Connell

House, Dublin, home of 18th-century Irish political leader Daniel O'Connell from 1809 until his death in 1847.

tional traditions; which it must be now more than ever as our world becomes increasingly globalized. You can't go back to some dewy-eyed version of our pasts, Irish or any other. We have to look forward. And I think Irish Studies can do precisely that; look forward by understanding the past. That's why it's critical for students on both sides of the Atlantic to be mobile. They need to re-imagine their cultural and political traditions in the light of where they are, wherever that might be." ■



Photograph by Capelhart.

Brian P. Burns

For decades, Brian P. Burns, grandson of an Irish immigrant, has been a tireless supporter of Irish-American culture. A prominent executive, attorney, and philanthropist, whose collection of 19th century Irish art is the finest in the U.S., Brian maintains a commitment to academic excellence and community service.

In 1963, Brian became director of the American Irish Foundation, established by President John F. Kennedy and Irish President Eamon de Valera. As director, he helped guide the merger of the American

Irish Foundation and the Ireland Fund.

The two organizations became The American Ireland Fund. To date, The American Ireland Fund has raised over \$430 million for projects promoting peace, culture, and charity throughout Ireland. Brian remains a lifetime trustee.

In 1986, Brian and the Burns family founded The Honorable John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections at Boston College. The library is named for his father, a first-generation Irish-American who became a judge and law professor. With Brian's support, former Burns Librarian Dr. Robert K. O'Neill, who retired after 26 years, acquired the most comprehensive collection of poet W.B. Yeats's manuscripts outside Ireland.

Since 1991, through Brian's endowments, the library hosts an annual visiting professorship that brings a figure of academic or cultural significance to campus to work with the Irish collection and teach students. The contributions of Burns Scholars do this grandson of an Irish immigrant proud.

This year Brian celebrates his 80th birthday and shows no sign of slowing down. He and his wife, Eileen, have eight children and 15 grandchildren.

25 Years Burns Library Visiting Irish Scholars

1991-92	Alf Mac Lochlainn	2006-07	Tom Garvin
1992-93	Margaret Mac Curtain, O.P.	2007, Fall	Brendan Kennelly
1993-94	Maurice Harmon	2008, Spring	John F. Deane
1994, Fall	Sean Ó Tuama	2008-09	Diarmaid Ferriter
1995, Spring	Timothy O'Neill	2009-10	Thomas Bartlett
1995-96	Kevin Whelan	2010, Fall	Francis Martin Carroll
1996-97	Alvin Jackson	2010, Spring	Nicholas Allen
1998, Spring	Bernard Meehan	2011-12	Dermot Keogh
1998-99	Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill	2012-13	Peter Fallon
1999-00	Paul A.E. Bew	2013, Fall	Mary McAleese
2000-01	Patricia Donlon	2014, Spring	Terence Brown
2001-02	Brendán Ó Buachalla	2014, Fall	John Horgan
2002-03	Margaret Kelleher	2015, Spring	Damian Bracken
2004, Spring	Peter Gray	2015, Fall	James H. Murphy, C.M.
2004, Fall	Mick Moloney	2016, Spring	Colmán Ó Clabaigh, O.S.B.
2005, Spring	Gerald Dawe	2016, Fall	Louis de Paor
2005-06	Maria Luddy	2017, Spring	Kevin Barry