

# MARSH'S LIBRARY

## STRATEGY STATEMENT 2023 - 2026

### *PART 1 - MISSION, VISION & VALUES*

#### ***Background***

In 1710, three years after Marsh's Library first opened its doors to the public, a now-obscure writer named Ninian Wallis praised it as "this golden fleece" of learning. Over the intervening three centuries very little has changed internally at Marsh's Library, and it stands today as a rare survival from a world long past.

Marsh's Library is both a museum of what a library looked like in the early-eighteenth century *and* a dynamic and welcoming space for tourist visitors, students, and scholars. We aim to preserve our historic buildings and collections and make the library relevant to new and diverse audiences in the twenty-first century.

This document reflects our core values, our ambitions for the library as a site of intellectual and cultural significance, as well as our determination to protect for future generations the buildings, books and artefacts under our care.

#### ***Vision***

To secure the place of Marsh's Library among the great small libraries of the world.

#### ***Mission***

To preserve and maintain our rare books and manuscripts, to acquire similar by donation, to cherish our distinctive building heritage, and establish Marsh's as a cultural and intellectual hub for visitors, students and scholars.

#### ***Values***

We strive to be:

- Welcoming to a variety of users, including local communities, tourists, students, and other interests
- Dedicated to a belief in the cultural and societal value of learning and knowledge and providing a secure and stimulating environment for study and research
- Dynamic in using new and emerging technologies to shed light on the treasures of the library
- Ambitious in terms of making Marsh's Library a learning studio for the most influential scholars and the best students of the early-modern period from around the world
- Collaborative in working with other libraries, cultural and tourism institutions, and academic partners nationally and internationally on a variety of research projects, events and initiatives.

## ***PART 2 – STRATEGIC PILLARS***

Our priorities are built about four critical areas – our strategic pillars.

The following identifies priorities to be addressed in each of these areas over the period of this plan

### ***Pillar 1. Collections***

- 1A. To protect and conserve our significant collections of rare books and manuscripts
- 1B. To acquire similar collections by donation
- 1C. To Improve digital security

### ***Pillar 2. Engagement***

- 2A. To sustain and improve tourist visitors' experience
- 2B. To develop the library as a “learning lab” for national and international students and researchers
- 2C. To increase the national and international profile of Marsh's Library for visitors
- 2D. To deepen feedback from visitors, students and scholars about their experiences in the library

### ***Pillar 3. Discovery***

- 3A. To encourage exploration of the collections through offering annual Visiting Research Fellowships to national and international scholars
- 3B. To develop expertise in the French and European context of our collections, with a particular emphasis on our Huguenot holdings
- 3C. To improve the interpretative tools for our major exhibitions, both physically and online
- 3D. To use digitisation to deepen opportunities for discovery across key areas of our collections

### ***Pillar 4. Built Heritage***

- 4A. To preserve the original eighteenth-century building and its furnishings
- 4B. To protect the collections with modern security infrastructure which is sensitive to the architecture of the building
- 4C. To refurbish key areas within the library and its precinct in order to enhance its eighteenth-century character and improve our ‘tourist offer’.

4D. To provide appropriate office space for staff, and quality teaching and reading facilities for scholars and students.

## ***PART 3- OUR STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES***

### **1. Strengths**

- Unique and significant books and manuscripts
- The oldest public library in Ireland and one of the oldest in Europe
- Magnificent 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings which house the Library
- Strong recognition internationally and across public and academic interests
- Accessible city-centre location next to St Patrick's Cathedral.
- Highly motivated and experienced staff and volunteers
- Board established by statute comprising key figures from across public and ecclesiastical life.

### **2. Challenges**

- High maintenance costs for the building, alongside fixed staff costs.
- Reliance on the state for core funding while remaining essentially a private charity.
- Threat of fire and water damage to historic collections and buildings.
- Danger of theft from collections.
- Major international shocks adversely affecting income from tourism and accessibility/ hosting of Exhibitions

Building on our strengths, the following sets out the actions proposed in relation to each strategy to address challenges arising, while continuing to build our collections, maintain our buildings and enhance our accessibility.

## **PART 4 - ACTIONS TO ADVANCE OUR STRATEGY**

The following will be reflected in our business plans over the period 2023 - 2026:-

### ***Pillar 1. Collections***

1A. To protect and conserve our significant collections of rare books and manuscripts

- Tracking and recording the movement of books and manuscripts from shelves to strengthen security and control of these precious assets
- Setting new priorities to be addressed by our conservation bindery in critical areas such as incunables (books published before 1501), single-sheet broadsides and proclamations, and the books within the Bouhéreau collection
- Availing of photo technology to speed up annual stock checks for the entire historic collection in St Patrick's Close.

#### 1B. To acquire similar collections by donation

- The library will seek to acquire 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century collections of manuscripts and books appropriate to our collections
- We will also seek to acquire important individual items from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century from private donors
- The acquisition, where possible, of titles that were removed illicitly from the library during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### 1C. Digital Security

- Our online catalogue will provide improved records regarding the provenance and marginalia for our historic books and manuscripts in St Patrick's Close.
- Improved records from our Benjamin Iveagh Library at Farmleigh House will be integrated into our main catalogue. In addition, the records of the Benjamin Iveagh Library will be made available for the first time on the standard database used by scholars: ESTC.
- Records for our entire historic collection (St Patrick's Close & Farmleigh House) will be made available on WorldCat.

#### 1D. For security purposes, to digitise all unique printed items and manuscripts in the collections

- Digital copies of our manuscripts and unique printed items will be created and stored externally by Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI), in addition to being available via our online catalogue
- The appointment of a Digital Librarian/Archivist to oversee the creation of meta-data for digital images and necessary improvements to the subject headings in the catalogue

### ***Pillar 2. Engagement***

#### 2A. To sustain and improve tourist visitors' experience

- Training and development of staff and volunteers to offer the best possible experience for visitors.
- Engaging and informative exhibitions in the library which highlight the breadth and depth of the collections.
- Provision of improved succinct accessible information on materials held by the Library

#### 2B. To develop the library as a "learning lab" for national and international students and researchers

- we will renew our contacts with lecturers to encourage visits by classes and seminars working on topics related to our historic collections.

#### 2C. To increase the national and international profile of Marsh's Library for visitors

- We will develop our links with RTE.ie to ensure that there are regular features about the library on the site's culture and history platforms
- We will work with Fáilte Ireland and Discover Ireland to highlight the library to tourist visitors and citizens nationally and internationally.
- We will facilitate, wherever possible, visits by national and international media to the library.

2D. To deepen feedback from visitors, students and scholars about their experiences in the library

- We will continue to encourage tourist visitors to review us on on-line sites such as GoogleReviews andTripAdvisor and will respond to all reviews with 7 days.
- We will ask all academic and scholarly users to rate their experience in the library via an online link
- We will build a network of contacts from those who visit the library or use our academic services and wish to be added to a mailing list which will keep them informed of news and events in the library.

### ***Pillar 3. Discovery***

3A. To encourage exploration of the collections through offering annual Visiting Research Fellowships to national and international scholars

- We aim to offer up to 10 Visiting Research Fellowships per year to encourage specialist exploration of our holdings
- Each recipient of a fellowship will write a short blog post about their research in the library
- Each recipient of a fellowship will be required to acknowledge their award in all publications arising from the fellowship and these will be collated on a regular basis to provide an indication of the impact of the Visiting Research Fellowship scheme.

3B. To develop expertise in the French and European context of our collections, with a particular emphasis on our Huguenot holdings

- Relevant library staff will be encouraged to develop their language skills to deal with the wide scope of the collections
- We will further develop the research link built between Marsh's Library, UCD, and University of La Rochelle and the historic collections in the Bibliothèque Michel Crépeau in La Rochelle
- We will develop research links with other institutions holding significant Huguenot collections in France and across Europe, with a view to constructing a bid for research funding at the EU level

3C. To improve the interpretative tools for our major exhibitions, both physically and online

- We will deliver a new website for the library in early 2023
- We will provide online versions of our physical exhibitions and provide a better orientation on our website as to the nature and scope of each of our existing and future online exhibitions
- Where practicable we will provide interpretative text for physical or online versions of our exhibitions in English and another language or languages.

3D. To use digitisation to deepen opportunities for discovery across key areas of our collections

- Digital images of our key holdings will be available via the Digital Repository of Ireland
- Digital images of our key holdings will be available on our online catalogue, with clear links to other similar or analogous materials in our collection
- We will make increasing use of film and video to highlight items within our collections

#### ***Pillar 4. Built Heritage***

4A. To preserve the original eighteenth-century building and its furnishings

- We will commission a Conservation Management Plan for the building for 2023-28.
- We will continue with a programme of repairs and restoration within the building informed by this conservation management plan.
- We will actively monitor the building and collections for possible signs of the adverse impacts of climate change, such as the growth of mould or the presence of insects and beetles

4B. To protect the collections with modern security infrastructure which is sensitive to the architecture of the building

- We aim to commission and install modern, secure exhibition cases in the galleries
- We will explore ways to maintain the security of the books on the shelves while removing the visually intrusive iron bars installed during the 1990s.
- We will specifically target ways to protect the books in the Bouhéreau collection, which are very close to visitors as they walk through the public galleries

4C. To refurbish key areas within the library and its precinct, so as to enhance its eighteenth-century character and improve our 'tourist offer'.

- We will improve the visual amenity of the Old Reading Room and develop a non-intrusive activity that will enable visitors to engage with the history of this space.
- We will develop the range of merchandise available in the shop and the improve the shop furniture
- We will develop the garden as a place in which visitors can, weather permitting, sit and enjoy the space in peace.

4D. To provide appropriate office space for staff, and quality teaching and reading facilities for scholars and students.

- We will install a proper staff bathroom on the ground floor with a shower facility for members of staff who cycle to work.
- We will develop an office with book storage facilities for the librarian adjacent to the New Reading Room.
- We will replace the old IT system installed in the Seminar Room in 2006 with a modern video conferencing system and large screen to enable academic presentations and conferences.