

**DENIS O'DONOVAN - 1836-1911**

**An Overview of his Life and an Assessment of his Role  
as Queensland Parliamentary Librarian (1874-1902)**

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In a discussion with the Parliamentary Librarian, Mr Nick Bannenberg, my attention was drawn to the contrast between Denis O'Donovan's early life in Europe and his role as librarian of a colonial legislature - in what then could be described as a 'backwater of the mighty British Empire'. O'Donovan had been the recipient of a classical education in the best of European traditions. He had been showered with honours, and had received high recognition for his scholarly writings. He had held a professorial post at a leading French institution and finally, and most importantly, in an era in which patronage held the key to a successful career, he was the friend and confidant of many influential persons in the noble, clerical and political fields.

This is not to imply that O'Donovan's endeavours in the colonies were wasted or passed unnoticed. As will be seen, he applied his intellect and classical knowledge to the twin tasks that brought him further fame, i.e. the creation of a catalogue which won him the praises of the library world, and the assemblage of a library collection which reflected the best in cultural and literary works. His catalogue focussed overseas attention on the infant colony of Queensland. His efforts

gain further enhancement when one recognises the virginal field into which he was thrust: a relatively small institution with a narrow perspective of library requirements; and a discipline which lacked today's professional arrangements. O'Donovan's choice of career, however, is still an enigma. Why would a person considerably recognised in the European literary world choose to spend a major portion of his life in the Australian colonies? Did he prefer the higher status more easily accorded within a small, colonial community? Was the climate more agreeable, as he once mentioned, to his personal health problems? Were there skeletons in the family closet back home? This paper cannot answer those questions. It can, however, sketch the professional career of an erudite Irishman, whose energetic and intelligent travail enhanced the quality of Queensland cultural life during the nineteenth century.

### **Early Life: 1836-1874**

Denis O'Donovan was born on 23 August 1836, at Kinsale in County Cork, son of William O'Donovan and his wife, Anne (*nee* Crowley).<sup>1</sup> His family claimed descent from one of the noblest Munster Houses, and the later lineage was published in Burke's *Colonial Gentry*, for which the latter relied heavily upon a family manuscript for its source.<sup>2</sup> This particular information certainly impressed the biographers of O'Donovan in the late 1800s, especially the family's claimed connection with the Royal Plantagenets of England. Glowing accounts of the more famous of O'Donovan's ancestors presented them as distinguished personalities, eminently capable in either the bearing of arms or of scholarly attainment:

Of the two fields of glory in which so many members of his family won renown, the subject of this sketch selected the one in which literary laurels are to be reaped - though if rumour speaks correctly, he once handled the sword with considerable skill.<sup>3</sup>

Private tutors attended to O'Donovan's childhood education in Ireland. During this period his literary talents emerged and he is credited with the authorship of a published volume of poems (one being in Latin), and some prose papers, which attracted the attention of Cardinal Wiseman.<sup>4</sup> He then journeyed to France to complete his studies, and subsequently attended lectures at two Parisian institutions - the Sorbonne and the Ecole de Medicine. O'Donovan graduated as a noted linguist and Hellenist, having devoted a considerable amount of his education to studying Greek culture. On the completion of his studies, O'Donovan undertook the customary 'Grand Tour' of Europe: visiting Italy, Germany and Spain. He spent considerable time in Italy and concentrated his attention upon the art and antiquities of that country. His period of residence resulted in the publication of *Memories of Rome*, a book which won the highest praises: 'from the leading journals and most distinguished personages of Europe'. He was also awarded two gold medals for his efforts - one from Pope Pius IX and the other from his fellow countrymen.<sup>5</sup>

After the publication of *Memories of Rome*, O'Donovan accepted a post at the College des Hautes Etudes in Paris as a Professor of Modern Languages and Literature. He also conducted lectures at one of the colleges of the University of Paris. It was during this period of his life that O'Donovan

gained recognition ‘as a powerful master of French prose’ via his literary contributions to the daily paper, *Ami de la Religion*. His position and writings brought him in contact with French notables of the period - Thiers, Guizot, Rouher, Cremieux, Montalembert, Dupanloup, the Bishop of Orleans, Cardinal Morlot, Prince Galitzin and even the French Emperor Napoleon III. It was after a discussion with the emperor that O’Donovan gained the aid of the French state in having a Greek manuscript, *Philosphumena*, published. This particular work had been translated by a friend of O’Donovan’s, the Abbe Cruice (with the assistance of O’Donovan), and refuted anti-papal attacks by other prominent theologians. Towards the end of his stay in France, O’Donovan wrote a short memoir of the celebrated Bishop of Orleans, Dupanloup (correspondence with the latter emerges at a later date when O’Donovan is residing in Victoria, Australia). The distress of the Irish was the subject of another pamphlet, which helped stimulate aid from France and other European countries for the Irish people. In 1864, O’Donovan left France and for the next two years resided in London. He then sailed from England in 1866, arriving in the Australian colonies in the same year.

According to Leavitt, O’Donovan had no intention of making the colonies his permanent home. However ‘he was... pleased with the climate, and attracted by some peculiar features in the field of labour’<sup>6</sup> and he remained there until his retirement in 1902. On 1 May 1868,<sup>7</sup> O’Donovan married at Emerald Hill, Victoria, Aimee Besson, a widowed French woman.<sup>8</sup> She was the daughter of Etienne Leroux, the Grand Maison of the Castle of Beausejour, France.<sup>9</sup> O’Donovan immediately immersed himself into the

intellectual life of Melbourne, and expressed his opinions on a variety of topics, both via the press and the platform. He delivered lectures at the Melbourne Public Library and appeared to be an active champion for what would today be considered Adult Education - especially for the artisans of Melbourne.<sup>10</sup> Two of his discourses were published as part of a volume of lectures delivered at the Melbourne Industrial and Technological Museum in the years 1871 and 1872. O'Donovan's contributions were titled *The Uses of Art and Design in Manufacture* and *Art and Building*.

Study of these lectures reveals an erudite person possessing a detailed subject knowledge gained from his European education, travels and experiences. The text displays both eloquence and scholarly expression. However, O'Donovan does not try to impress his audience by speaking down to them, in fact, he advocates art-education for working men: 'for whatever gives real refinement to the worker will be found to give beauty to his work'.<sup>11</sup> Many aspects of art and design are covered. Buildings, wall-coverings, mosaics, carpets, curtains, table linen, furniture and precious stones, provide a vehicle whereby his knowledge and observance of the classical and opulent examples in Europe illustrate the practical needs for balance and simplicity in modern construction and manufacture. O'Donovan also demonstrates a keen observance of how the colonies' slavish emulation of English architecture was resulting in discomfort for the inhabitants:

The consideration of climate is to some extent included in that of comfort. Shady balconies and deep verandahs, courtyards cooled with fountain freshness, and open turret and terraced roof from which to enjoy the evening breeze - all these things are conditions in our Victorian clime. And yet these are things... which have not hitherto received the attention they deserve, our homes being more adapted to the gloom and chill of an English winter than to the perennial summer of this bright Australian land.<sup>12</sup>

The lectures also reveal O'Donovan's continued contact with European personages. His 1871 lecture refers to the Paris Commune of that year and the preservation of France's art galleries 'from the Vandal fury of the Communists' which 'was a source of rejoicing over the whole civilised world'.<sup>13</sup> This concern with the revolutionary activities flowering in Europe is expressed later in a letter by O'Donovan to the Catholic newspaper the *Advocate* on 27 January 1872. O'Donovan claims that the recently formed Democratic Association of Victoria (an Australian link with the First International), was founded by foreign agitators and subversives, since it was:

mentioned [in] a recent letter he had received from Monsignor Dupanloup in Paris. This confirmed his view that the Commune was due to secret societies, 'cosmopolitan brigands and misguided Parisians'. The International 'now openly boasts of its crime...and I learn that persons have arrived in the colony within the last few months whose mission is to establish a branch of the International under that or some other name'.<sup>14</sup>

O'Donovan can be seen, then, as person interested in international and local affairs, while enjoying the advantages of being on intimate terms with many of the influential and famous of Europe. These connections were to be of assistance in his later position as Parliamentary Librarian. Between 1871 and 1874, O'Donovan was in charge of a school at Emerald Hill in Victoria.<sup>15</sup> After eight years in that colony, he applied for and gained the post of Parliamentary Librarian for the Queensland Parliament.

### **The Queensland Parliamentary Library**

After its inaugural meeting, the Queensland Parliament established a Joint Library Committee of both Houses on 30 May 1860. Two of the library committee's resolutions concerned:

1. the expenditure by Parliament of 1000 pounds for the foundation of the library; and
2. the annual appropriation of 300 pounds towards the maintenance of the library.<sup>16</sup>

Initially, the position of Librarian was not considered an important post since the first two incumbents also held the office of Usher of the Black Rod for the Upper House.<sup>17</sup> However, in 1861, the Committee appointed the Reverend J.R. Moffatt M.A. solely as Librarian. His academic qualifications seem to have corresponded with the Parliament's decision to engender a more professional approach towards the Library's administration. Under Moffatt's stewardship the Library's collection expanded.

However, after thirteen years in the position, the strain of office apparently took its toll upon the Reverend Moffatt's health. On 21 May 1874, he tendered his resignation, since according to his physician, he was 'suffering from nervous disability and prostration, with loss of flesh' and 'needed a permanent change, because if he came back...the association would bring it back again'.<sup>18</sup> On receipt of Reverend Moffatt's resignation, the committee ordered:

That notice be given of the vacancy of the Office of Parliamentary Librarian and that application in writing be invited to be sent to the Acting-Librarian before the 9th June.<sup>19</sup>

Applications for the position were reduced to a final six, and from this group, Denis O'Donovan was selected.<sup>20</sup> His appointment was controversial. A journalist and former member of the Legislative Assembly, T.P. Pugh, had been one of the final candidates. Previously, in 1861, Pugh had attacked the authority of the Legislative Council in the colony's newspaper, the *Brisbane Courier*. In the libel action that followed, Pugh was acquitted. The *Courier* questioned the methods of O'Donovan's selection. However, the President of the Legislative Council, when announcing O'Donovan's appointment in that chamber on 1 July 1874, stated that his decision had been influenced by a letter from sixteen Council members urging him not to recommend the appointment of T.P. Pugh. Although the President favoured Pugh's application, in deference to his fellow colleagues, and in conjunction with the Speaker of the Assembly, he recommended the appointment of Mr O'Donovan.<sup>21</sup>



The *Brisbane Courier* of 3 July 1874 saw the appointment as a usurpation by the Speaker over the various committees.<sup>22</sup> On the previous day, the President of the Council stated that because of the Library Committee's lack of agreement, the appointment was left to the combined wisdom of the Speaker and himself.<sup>23</sup> This fact was confirmed by the Assembly's Mr Samuel Griffith (later Sir Samuel, a future Premier and probably Queensland's greatest legal personality), who assured the House that the Committee had not appointed Mr O'Donovan.<sup>24</sup> It was then left to the Colonial Secretary, Mr A. Macalister, to inform the House that, because the Parliament had not been sitting, the Government had no hesitation in ratifying the recommendation of the President and the Speaker.<sup>25</sup>

Despite criticisms that a number of local applicants were better suited for the position, including an M.A. from Oxford<sup>26</sup> it would appear that O'Donovan's residency in Melbourne, which separated him from the Queensland social and political scene, was a major contribution towards his selection. However, the issue did highlight an element of rivalry between the two Houses.

The President of the Council would not oppose a substantial number of Upper House members because of their opposition to the applicant Pugh. Although the Assembly championed Pugh's case, since he was a former M.L.A., the Assembly's Library Committee members appear to have washed their hands of the whole affair, preferring to leave the decision to the Houses' leaders. Obviously, in order to prevent further exacerbation of the controversy, the leaders opted for a neutral candidate from outside the colony. In doing so, they

risked an escalation of the dispute if a substantial number of members had decided to support a local candidate, or if they felt that the wishes of the Joint Committee had been treated arbitrarily. The deciding factor lay with the Colonial Secretary's, and hence the government's approval and ultimate confirmation of the selection.

No doubt aware of the sensitive issues surrounding his appointment, O'Donovan applied himself assiduously to gaining a thorough knowledge of the present state of the Library. One month after taking up his position on 27 July 1874, he presented to the Library Committee a concise report of his activities, as well as suggestions for ways to improve the Library's services and organisation. These included plans for: (1) improvement of the Catalogue; (2) a financial statement outlining the operating balance; (3) library security; (4) the procurement of other Catalogues from Melbourne booksellers; and (5) the paying of accounts by cheque.<sup>27</sup>

A more comprehensive report was presented to the Committee the following year on 2 June. So impressed was the Committee with its content and detail, that it was ordered to be printed as a Parliamentary Paper and circulated amongst the members.<sup>28</sup> This was the first time a Parliamentary Librarian's report had been tabled and printed. Normally, the Annual Report tabled in Parliament was presented by the Library Committee, and usually it only contained a brief resume of the Committee's functions and deliberations for the past year.

Thus, the treatment of O'Donovan's report as a separate paper accorded him high recognition at an early stage in his career as Parliamentary Librarian. The report laid the foundation for O'Donovan's future administration of the Library by impressing the Committee to act upon his proposals.

His influence over the next twenty-eight years was dramatic, and as a later observer recalled:

The Parliamentary Library in Brisbane is one of the best of its size that I have ever seen, with a catalogue which is the model catalogue of all catalogues.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, under O'Donovan's administration the book collection which had remained at a static level for a number of years increased from approximately 8,000 volumes in 1875 to nearly 32,000 by 1901.<sup>30</sup> Comparing this to his predecessor's contribution, the increase represented over 100 percent each year. The collection contained a wide range of the best authors and varied subjects, as well as local and overseas periodicals and newspapers, and involved reciprocal arrangements for the exchange of parliamentary material from the United Kingdom, and the Australian and overseas colonies.<sup>31</sup> The book vote appropriation of 400 pounds was increased to 1,000 pounds per annum. This amount was maintained until the early 1890s, when the onslaught of the depression saw it reduced to 700 pounds p.a. - and finally pegged at 500 p.a.<sup>32</sup> Part of the expenditure was devoted to the binding of loose periodicals and newspapers as well as extensive re-shelving and re-arrangement of both the upper and lower Library rooms.

Over the years, the Queensland Parliament's high regard for O'Donovan's services was expressed via the increase in his remuneration: from 100 pounds (the original 1860 salary) to 400 after presentation of his 1875 report; to 500 in 1883, after the publication of his first catalogue.<sup>33</sup> The latter amount was only 100 pounds less than the Clerk of the Parliament's salary, which indicated a substantial affirmation of O'Donovan's importance in relation to his actual position in the parliamentary hierarchy. In addition, O'Donovan received three separate grants amounting to a total of 1,500 pounds (a large sum of money for the period), in acknowledgement for the lengthy and numerous hours expended upon the production of his famous *Catalogue's* two editions.<sup>34</sup> It would appear that the Queensland parliamentarians' generosity was stimulated by the international attention and recognition of O'Donovan's endeavours.

## The Catalogue

*An Irish god of language, weaving words to spin  
Across the centuries a web-like catalogue,  
To win swift access to the thread that winds  
Beyond the labyrinth, entwined within a classic key  
That sets each timeless world of printed content free.*<sup>35</sup>

Denis O'Donovan bequeathed two great legacies from his period as Parliamentary Librarian: *The Analytical and Classified Catalogue of the Library of the Parliament of Queensland* and the collection which bears his name. Both examples illustrate O'Donovan's scholarly proficiency.

Immediately after presenting his second report, O'Donovan began the compilation of his *Catalogue*. In the preface to the first edition, O'Donovan mentions his investigation of the two major classification systems available at the time, i.e. the logical and the alphabetical. O'Donovan chose the latter, and recognising its limitations, introduced his own alphabetical dictionary-type system incorporating a 'catalogue of authors, an index of titles, an index of subjects and a partial index of forms.'<sup>36</sup> In this manner, O'Donovan's catalogue arrangement anticipated the card-catalogue format principally used by libraries throughout the twentieth century. The first edition, comprising one volume, was published in 1883. A second, and more comprehensive, edition was produced in 1899, comprising three volumes and providing a clearer presentation for the entries.

In his preface to the second edition, O'Donovan refers to 'the flattering reception which the catalogue of 1883 received from [the] Parliament, from experts and from the Press'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the second edition contains two pages of 'Opinions on the Work'. These extracts of praises emanate from the greats of the library world. Commentators include E.A. Bond, principal librarian of the British Museum; Monsieur F. Denis, Principal Librarian of the Bibliotheque State, Paris; George Howard, Librarian of the House of Commons; and E.W.B. Nicholson, Bodleian Librarian, Oxford University. Accolades were received also from other prominent world library personnel, from leading European and Empire journals, and from eminent Australian politicians and newspapers. All are unstinting in their praise of the work.

O'Donovan was the recipient of many honours. From the French government he received 'la Croix du chevalier de la legion d'honneur', and in 1894, he was created a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (C.M.G.). He was elected also as a Fellow to many learned societies, including the following English societies: the Royal Society of Literature; the Royal Geographical Society; the Society of Literature, Science and Art; the Society of Arts and the Library Association of the United Kingdom; also the French Societies: de Geographie Commercial de Paris a Havre; d'Anthropologie; and Musks Social, Paris.<sup>38</sup>

The *Catalogue* is a remarkable publication, not only for its modern layout, but also because of the additional amount of information included by O'Donovan. Some of its major features are worth noting. For the purposes of the present study the focus will be on entries relating to Ireland, Irish subjects and forms. O'Donovan's major focus was concentrated within the author entry.

Thus for works by the Irish author and poet Thomas Moore the entry includes encyclopaedic information, a list of Moore's major works (even detailing the contents of individual volumes) and analytics from books and journal articles containing information relating to Moore. O'Donovan's inclusion of articles from the Library's large collection of periodicals was in recognition:

that an article will often be read when a volume would not be touched...It is well known that in the leading magazines of the day the deepest thinkers and ablest specialists frequently seek a medium of communication with the public. It is there especially that the first statement of scientific discovery is generally to be met with, and the freshest turn of thought, and the most reliable history of opinions to be found.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly he was aware of the parliamentarians' needs for succinct information in order to meet immediate deadlines. Thus the inclusion of analytics involved O'Donovan in the laborious task of scanning each journal received by the library for the selection of appropriate articles. The subject index covers a wide and varied range of entries, and in the larger subjects, he further divides the entries into related sub-divisions. For example, the subject entry for Ireland contains fifty-four subdivisions, such as:

IRELAND:

The Classification is as follows:

Absenteeism	Mines
Agriculture	Names of Places
Art	Parliament
Biography	Peasantry
Catholic	Peerage
Census	Police
Coercion	Politics
Convent Life	Population
Crime	Potato Blight
Descriptions	Priesthood
Disestablishment	Prisons, Criminal Statistics &c Protestantism
Education	Public Works
Established Church	Rebels, Spies, &c.
Exhibitions	Reformation, Church of England, &c.
Faction-Fighting	Roman Relations
Famine	Round Towers
Federal Movement	Schools
Finances	Social Condition
Geology	Taxation
Government by England	Titles Peculiar to Ireland
Heraldry	Trades, Resources, Manufacturers &c.
History	Travels, Descriptions & Political Conditions
Home Rule	Union
Land Question	Universities
Language	Viceroyalty
Law	
Literature	
Local Government	

Another excellent classification division comprised the Form Index. O'Donovan assembled all related titles under specific classes of literature, i.e. Poetry, Fiction, Drama, as well as types of publication, e.g. Almanacs, Essays, Handbooks, Letters, Maps, Pamphlets, Parliamentary



Papers, Periodicals and Newspapers, Speeches, Statutes, etc. Thus, under the entry 'Parliamentary Papers (England)' any official parliamentary paper, from 1836 to 1898, relating to Ireland would be listed. For the period 1878-98, O'Donovan detailed the individual titles for all parliamentary papers within each numbered volume.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, under the entry 'Periodicals and Newspapers (British)' one can find the Library's collection of Irish journals. These included the *Dublin Review*, the *Dublin University Magazine* and the *Freeman Weekly*.<sup>41</sup>

O'Donovan's *Catalogue*, then, is a worthy example of diligence, dedication, intellectual knowledge and practical utility within the library sphere. Use of the *Catalogue* not only guaranteed searchers access to particular titles on the shelves, but also provided them with extra material in the form of analytics indexed from the Library's sizeable periodical collection. As an additional bonus, O'Donovan included an informative array of encyclopaedic information regarding personages, countries and events, which illustrated the depth of his scholarly and classical knowledge, and his continued pursuit of knowledge throughout his entire life. The library world accorded due recognition to the ease of usage of O'Donovan's dictionary style of arrangement.

### **The Collection**

As previously mentioned, under O'Donovan's stewardship the book collection was increased fourfold. His ability to impress upon the Library Committee the need for additional funds ensured the purchase of a wide subject range. Many titles were donated from local and overseas sources.<sup>42</sup> The latter due to O'Donovan's continued contact with friends in

the literary world. All of the books, as well as the periodical annuals, were bound in Morocco leather with author and titles stamped in gold lettering.<sup>43</sup> The majority of the collection is housed in the old upper library of the original Parliament House, and is now called the O'Donovan Room. Even the advance of years and a number of relocations, have not dimmed the collection's aesthetic appeal.

Parliamentary publications, i.e. Papers, Debates, Journals and Statutes, dominate the collection's holdings. As well, nearly 1,000 volumes are devoted to parliamentary matters.<sup>44</sup> O'Donovan also collected the British Record Publications (including the Rolls Series), comprising the Chronicles dating from the Anglo-Saxon period (many in their original languages, such as: Gaelic, Old Icelandic, Norman French and Latin); the Calendars of State Papers; and the official documents and correspondence of the English monarchical governments from Edward I to George III. A number of Irish publications, comprising Gaelic text and translation, are evident. These include *Annala Rioghaeta Eirann* (Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland); and *The War of the Gaedhill with the Gad: the Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and other Norsemen*, edited by John O'Donovan (possibly a relative).<sup>45</sup>

The majority of the book collection was centred upon six major subjects: History; Biography; Travels; Literature; Sciences and Australiana. Other smaller categories include: Economics and Commerce; Law and Jurisprudence; Philosophy; Journalism; Speeches; Theatre and Art; Colonial Studies; Education and Sport.<sup>46</sup> The content of the collection is impressive. For example, the Literature category

reflects the Committee's decision, due to O'Donovan's recommendation, that 'old and valuable books' be purchased, including the complete works of Voltaire, Boccaccio's *Decameron* and John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*.<sup>47</sup> As well, there is a large range of popular 19th century authors, both English and European, covering the categories of Fiction, Drama and Poetry.

Within the Australian group, the library gained a group of rare 18th century publications of narratives of the early discoverers' voyages. These include James Cook's three voyages to the Pacific Ocean and Southern Seas; Captain Arthur Philip's establishment of the colony of Sydney; a 1729 edition of Dampier's exploration of the Australian west coast; as well as the voyages of Bligh, Flinders, Bougainville and La Perouse.<sup>48</sup>

O'Donovan's academic background is evident in the Philosophy section. Although relatively small in relation to other categories, it is most impressive for the depth and diversity of its contents. As with the Literature section, O'Donovan has assembled beautifully bound works which record and trace philosophic thought from the Greek and Roman periods through the ages to the leading philosophers of his own century.<sup>49</sup> This selection, I feel, signifies O'Donovan's attempts towards a better appreciation of deeper intellectual thought, which, in his own case, had been cultivated within a European university environment. Whether he succeeded in his purpose cannot be ascertained. His endeavours, however, have willed a magnificent collection, which stands as a memorial to his intelligence and cultural vision

## Conclusion

On a personal basis, O'Donovan still managed to find the time to participate in public life. He was a prolific letter correspondent to the colony's newspapers, and under the pseudonym 'Umbra' ('Shadow'), as well as his own name, carried on a critical campaign against the perceived abuses of Bishop Quinn. Quinn retaliated by refusing O'Donovan the sacraments, who in turn took great delight in challenging the bishop's authority by joining the queues for Communion or the Confessional at the Cathedral. The matter was finally settled in Rome, but not before a deluge of letters from O'Donovan to Archbishop Vaughan, in Sydney, and to the Vatican.<sup>50</sup>

O'Donovan was highly respected amongst the European members of the Brisbane community and assisted them through representations on their behalf, as well as with their language difficulties.<sup>51</sup> Later in his life, he bought an estate at Ormiston, which he called *Como* after his favourite lake in Italy.<sup>52</sup> Despite the availability of a train service to the area by the 1880s, when the Parliament was in session, O'Donovan would have resided at home only on weekends.

On 28 May 1902, O'Donovan notified the Committee of his intention to retire and this act became official the next month.<sup>53</sup> O'Donovan was now sixty-five and the strain of office had begun to take its toll. In the previous year he had been granted leave of absence because of ill-health.<sup>54</sup> His wife, Aimee, had died in 1892. After his retirement, O'Donovan left Brisbane to return to live in his beloved France. On a return journey to Australia in 1911,<sup>55</sup> he disembarked in Perth to visit one of his sons, and died there on 30 April, 1911 and was buried in the Fremantle Cemetery. The *Brisbane Courier*, five days later, expressed a fitting epitaph:

Noble of birth, the deceased was noble by nature; learned far beyond the average, he was a man whose usefulness had been restricted to no narrow confines; and great achievements, his name will long be remembered as one of the most distinguished personalities in the early days of Queensland colonisation<sup>56</sup>.

Today's Parliamentary Library is still very proud of Denis O'Donovan and his major contribution towards its evolution. Because the Library is fully computerised, the periodical analytics were reintroduced due to easier methods of processing. As well, the subject field, an important search tool in O'Donovan's catalogue, has been expanded by incorporating a multitude of subject tracings. The Library still collects all the provincial newspapers as well as a number from other Australian states and overseas. Now, however, computerisation allows a selective newspaper clippings service.

The major change compared with O'Donovan's period has been the creation of the Library's research section. O'Donovan assembled a large and varied collection for the members' own research and recreation. From this relatively passive situation, the Library actively uses subject experts to research the modern collection for the individual member's or the parliamentary needs. O'Donovan's own collection is also considered as part of the working Library, and on occasions, material for research has been gleaned from its volumes. Denis O'Donovan, I feel, would be proud of today's Library' operations which have been built upon the traditions bequeathed by an intelligent and cultured Irishman.

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*His talk on Denis O'Donovan is based on his  
Dissertation for his Graduate Diploma of Library  
Science post-graduate degree.*

## ENDNOTES:

*This study is based upon a postgraduate thesis for the Diploma of Library Science at the Queensland Institute of Technology in 1980.*

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