

Gaelic in print

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Yesterday evening I went to a fascinating talk at NLS by **Mark Wringe** about Gaelic in print. Mark is a lecturer at **Sabhal Mor Ostaig**, sits on the Board of Directors of the **Gaelic Books Council** and is hugely interested in Gaelic printing. His talk was entitled '**Striking the pages**', a pun on the Gaelic word for printing, which is clo-bhualadh, literally 'striking the cloth' (from which paper was made).

In less than an hour, Mark managed to give a fascinating insight into five centuries of printing in Gaelic. The **first Gaelic book** was published in 1567: a translation of sorts of **Knox's Liturgy**. That much I was aware of - but I had no idea that it was the first book ever printed in Gaelic in any country (including Ireland). Also, it had not crossed my mind that it was translated into classical Gaelic, which was still understood by Scots and Irish Gaels, in order to serve the Protestant mission of both Scotland and Ireland!

Mark then moved on to the second Gaelic book (published 1631), of which we hold the only known copy, and which you can see in the religion case:



Mark had lots to say about **Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair**, or Alexander MacDonald, a schoolteacher and fierce Jacobite poet who published the first original and creative Gaelic book, *Ais-eiridh na sean chanoin Albannaich*, a collection of his own poems, in 1751. We have a copy of this book in the exhibition too! Ten years earlier, in 1741, MacMhaighstir Alasdair had compiled the first non-religious book published in Gaelic:



You can see a copy of this first Gaelic-English dictionary in the Education case.

When Mark got to the 19th century, the talk moved across the Atlantic to **Canada**, esp. to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, where Gaelic printing thrived enormously. He ended with one of the latest Gaelic novels, *Dacha mo ghaoil*, a story of breeding ostriches in Uist.

I was delighted that Mark took every opportunity to point out that books he was talking about are actually in the Imprentit exhibition, and that the Front of House staff kept the exhibition open after normal hours so that people could actually see some of the items Mark had mentioned.