

“I Wish You to Send it to Zaehnsdorf in London for Binding”: Alexander Turnbull and his Bookbindings

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A glance along the shelves in the Special Printed Collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington reveals large numbers of volumes in top quality late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century London bindings mixed with historic bookbindings ranging from the simple to the most elaborate and dating from as early as the fifteenth century. Many of these volumes were part of the original collection of Alexander H. Turnbull (1868–1918), one of New Zealand’s foremost early collectors.¹

What was Turnbull’s interest in these often very beautiful representations of this ancient craft? How did he acquire them? Did he sometimes purchase solely for the binding, like the oft-quoted Samuel Pepys who wrote in his Diary of 1660: “After this to a booksellers and bought, for the love of the binding, three books ...”; or was there some other reason for his choice? Were some of these books bound especially for him and if so who were his major binders? Did he indicate any preferences as to how they should be bound and what factors influenced his choices? This article sets out to answer these questions through a survey of his extant correspondence both inward and outward, and by taking a closer look at some of the bindings on the shelves.

Historically the art of bookbinding has always catered for a range of client, from the bespoke binding at the top end of the market with its often elaborate and exquisite decoration, to the simple and cheap trade binding with little or no decoration. Whatever their level, in the past these bindings were all hand-crafted and were therefore unique. In the nineteenth century this changed. With the introduction of the machine age, most books were bound in factory-type binderies where they emerged in identical cloth covers and with identical decoration; the creative input reduced almost to nil.² These covers were intended to be permanent. Some firms, however, persevered against this tide and continued to offer a bespoke service and to produce hand-crafted bindings to a high standard. These were usually in the traditional leather covering, which, depending upon your pocket, would be gold-tooled in unique patterns from the simple to the elaborate. Clients were mainly from the wealthy classes; people for whom a library co-ordinated in design

¹ For more on the life of Alexander Turnbull, see E. H. McCormick, *Alexander Turnbull: His Life His Circle His Collections* (Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library, 1974).

² For a concise description of bookbinding activity in the period 1820–1918, see Bernard C. Middleton, *A History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique* (New York & London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1963), 293–5.

and colour and sparkling with gold leaf was an affordable indulgence. Alexander Turnbull was one of these clients.

Ordering books

Alexander Turnbull spent much of his family fortune on his book collecting obsession. He spread his net wide when purchasing books, from places as far afield as Great Britain, North America, Europe, and the Pacific. London was his main source, however, and in this city some of his dealers included Bernard Quaritch, Maggs Bros, Pickering & Chatto, Walter T. Spencer, Henry Sotheran & Co, Herbert E. Gorfin, J. & J. Leighton, Henry Stevens, James Tregaskis, Dulau & Co, and Francis Edwards. Dealers would send catalogues of books on offer or letters detailing specific items they thought would interest their customer. Descriptions of the binding and condition were always included, a standard practice for booksellers then as now.

Books were sent out by ship for inspection, usually in tin-lined cases, and could be returned if not wanted. This was a slow process taking around six weeks each way. The packing boxes were tailor-made for the task. One of Turnbull's book dealers wrote to Turnbull:

The two pieces have been packed in a box as desired. I am afraid my case-maker has somewhat exceeded his instructions in respect to the strength of the box, but he has erred on the right side, although it makes the parcel rather heavy.³

There were dangers with these long-distance transactions and the slow postal service. Items could get lost. Bernard Quaritch wrote in mid July 1912: "I shall be glad to know if by any chance you decided to keep this book as if not I presume it has gone astray in the post."⁴ Damage could also occur during transit. In early October 1892 Turnbull wrote to Jones & Evans, book dealers in Cheapside: "Be very careful in making up each parcel – put boards to protect the edges because I want to receive them here in good order so that I may bind them."⁵ And in a letter to Quaritch, Turnbull wrote:

³ Letter 24 October 1913 Gorfin to Turnbull, "Invoices, Receipts etc and Correspondence with Book Dealers," Alexander Turnbull Library [henceforth ATL] MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, V.

⁴ Letter 19 July 1912 Quaritch to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, II.

⁵ Letter 5 October 1892 Turnbull to Jones & Evans, Alexander Turnbull, "Letter Book Volume 1," ATL qMS-2053. The letterbooks qMS-2053-2056 are typescript copies made in the 1940s from the originals. The originals, owing to fragility, have only been consulted where there appears to be an error in transcription.

The “Kaikoura” arrived today & I have just unpacked Morris’s edition of the Golden Legend; ... On taking the volumes from the case I found that they were quite hot evidently due to fermentation of the damp leaves during the voyage....⁶

Waiting for books was par for the course at this time: waiting for items to come on the market, waiting for incomplete items to be made complete (a not uncommon practice), waiting for letters and sale catalogues to go back and forth, waiting for items to be posted out and then to be returned again if binding was required, and then waiting for items to be bound. It was an accepted fact that items sent out for inspection could be returned for binding. Quaritch wrote on 4 April 1912 regarding the second of two parcels of books:

I have not attempted to repair the bindings or bind up the unbound items but send them to you just as they were when I acquired them recently, all these books will clean up & make presentable volumes when bound & this I shall be pleased to undertake for you if you will return them with your instructions when returning any of this consignment you may not care to take.⁷

Further waiting if the binders were busy. On 8 January 1913 Pickering & Chatto wrote to Turnbull:

No. 7886, Urquhart Rabelais, 1753–93 [*sic*] 5 vols, is at the binders. It should have been returned before this, but we conclude the rush of business at Christmas time, has delayed it. We expect same in the course of a week or two at latest, when we will send same on to you immediately.⁸

In the above situation there was a subsequent hold up because when the volumes did come back from the binder, two pages in volume two had been damaged and knowing Turnbull’s desire for perfect books, the dealer elected to hold the damaged volume until a better copy came on the market.⁹ More than a Christmas delay, however, must have been the reason for the letter Turnbull wrote to the bookbinder, J. Zaehnsdorf, in February 1900 regarding books sent for binding 10 months earlier: “I should be glad to know when I may expect to receive the books sent to you in

⁶ Letter 29 November 1892 Turnbull to Quaritch, ATL qMS-2053. This 3-volume set, with no visible signs of any damage, is shelved at qRPr KELM JACO 1892.

⁷ Letter 4 April 1912 Quaritch to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, II.

⁸ Letter 8 January 1913 Pickering & Chatto to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1913, V. This five-volume set bound by Rivière & Son was published between 1653–93. Shelved at REng RABE First 1653.

⁹ Letter 12 June 1913 Pickering & Chatto to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1913, V.

April last for binding.”¹⁰ The delay may have been due to the type of binding as some top of the range bindings could take up to nine months to complete.¹¹

Once books had arrived in New Zealand there could be even further delays:

The case of books from you arrived today – that is the steamer conveying them has arrived – but it will probably be some days yet before I can get the case opened – Our Customs authorities always being fearful that there is something contraband concealed between the leaves[,] books being about the only thing on which there is not a high duty.¹²

The trail of correspondence between Turnbull and his Leipzig dealer, Karl W. Hiersemann, indicates that it could take the better part of a year from first deciding upon an item for acquisition to receiving the physical volume ready to go on his library shelves. The initial correspondence alerting Turnbull to a run of *Quinzaine Coloniale* is dated 13 November 1912. By 31 May 1913, following receipt of Turnbull’s acceptance and instructions for binding, the 12-volume set was at the binders, and by the 18 July 1913 it was ready to be posted to Wellington, thus probably arriving early September 1913—a wait of nine to ten months.¹³

Turnbull’s Binders

Although resident in Wellington for most of his adult life, Turnbull had most of his books bound in London, and by the best craftsmen. Bindings by Zaehnsdorf and Rivière & Son are particularly prominent in his collection.

Zaehnsdorf was without doubt the favoured binder. This firm was the only recipient of Turnbull’s extant letters written directly to a binder, and was also the firm that held Turnbull’s armorial dies and printing blocks. These dies and blocks in different sizes were used for stamping Turnbull’s arms onto book covers and were lent out to other binders when required:

If you succeed in obtaining the publications mentioned in my last letter will you kindly have my arms stamped upon the binding of each volume; Zaehnsdorf has a set

¹⁰ Letter 17 February 1900 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, Alexander Turnbull, “Letter Book Volume 4,” ATL qMS-2056.

¹¹ “Zaehnsdorf’s New Bindery,” *British Bookmaker* 4, no. 41 (November 1890): 12–16, esp. p. 13.

¹² Letter 25 November 1896 Turnbull to Frank George, Alexander Turnbull, “Letter Book Volume 3,” ATL, qMS-2055.

¹³ Telegram 13 November 1912 Karl W. Hiersemann to Turnbull, ATL MS-Copy-Micro-482, Reel 2, MS-Papers-0057-112 (1913-i); and letter 31 May 1913 and 18 July Karl W. Hiersemann to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1913, I. These volumes in half goatskin bindings with marbled boards are shelved at G Per QUI.

of dies that he uses for my books so if you apply to him he will do the work for you or lend one of my dies.¹⁴

The dies and blocks were returned to the Alexander Turnbull Library in 1934 and are now housed in the ATL Drawings, Paintings and Prints Collection.¹⁵ Zaehnsdorf was even trusted with designing the decorative additions to Turnbull's armorial when a new die was to be made. The resulting new die and monogram can be seen in Figure 1. Turnbull wrote in December 1896:

Will you also be good enough to have made for me a monogram of my initials A. H. T[.], for stamping on the binding of my books and another die of my arms the mantling and decoration of which I leave to your taste.

On the binding of the books I am sending you, you can stamp the monogram in the eight corners and the new arms in centre.¹⁶

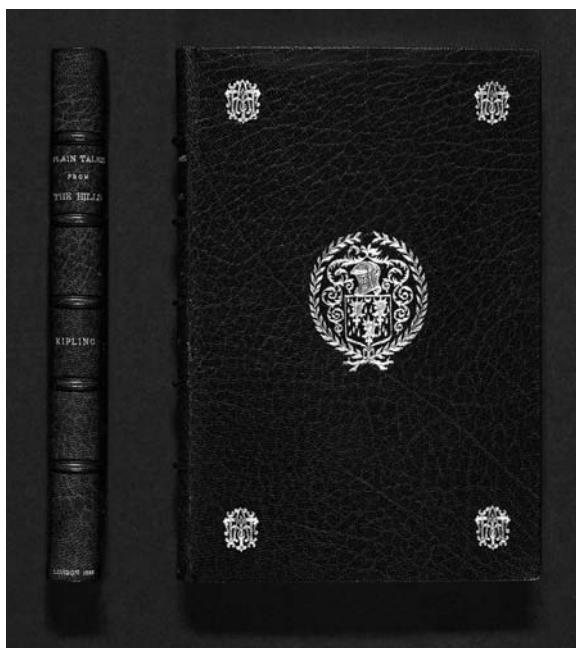


Figure 1: Turnbull's new die and monogram with mantling and decoration designed by Zaehnsdorf. *Kipling, Plain Tales from the Hills (1888), 19cm.*
ATL reference: REng KIPL Plain 1888. Photo courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

¹⁴ Letter 17 October 1892 Turnbull to Henry Sotheran & Co, ATL qMS-2053. A die is an intaglio-engraved stamp used for impressing a design.

¹⁵ See letter 17 May 1937 to T. L. Mills, ATL TL3/1. The dies and stamps are shelved at Curios-011. The nine armorial variants are reproduced in the *Turnbull Library Record* 8 (November 1951): 29.

¹⁶ Letter 8 December 1896 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2055. The cost for the new die was £3, see letter 7 December 1897 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2055.

The Zaehnsdorf firm was founded in London in 1842 by Joseph Zaehnsdorf (1816–1886), an Austro-Hungarian craftsman-binder who learned his trade in Stuttgart and Vienna. From the 1890s when Alexander Turnbull was building up his library and making decisions about his bindings, the Zaehnsdorf firm was at its height under the control of Joseph William Zaehnsdorf (1853–1930), son of the founder. A contemporary account in 1890 of a visit to “the new premises recently erected and occupied by the famous bookbinder, Mr Joseph Zaehnsdorf” refers to the proprietor (by this time Joseph William Zaehnsdorf) as the “acknowledged head of bookbinding in Great Britain.”¹⁷ The importance and standing of the firm is reflected in the writer’s description of the showroom:

It has been planned on the most palatial principles, and the broad sweep of the marble floor is fit for the foot of royalty. With light pouring in from all around and falling here upon the green leaves of palms and there falling upon the solid plate-glass of ebony show cases, filled with brilliant examples of cover decoration....¹⁸

Creating bindings for the upper end of the market at a cost of two to three hundred pounds each was an important part of the Zaehnsdorf business but this firm also met the needs of the lower end: “We take orders for bindings at a shilling. ... a large proportion of our business is done in half calf and half morocco bindings executed for the trade.”¹⁹ But even this binding was carried out to high standards and by hand. During the tour, the visitor commented:

In passing through the workshops the visitor cannot help but be impressed with the absence of machinery, especially when it is remembered what a large part machinery plays in a binder’s work. “We use no machinery,” remarked Mr. Zaehnsdorf, “Ours is all hand work.”²⁰

Turnbull certainly appreciated the Zaehnsdorf bindings, and they were also much admired by others in New Zealand. In October 1892 Turnbull wrote to Zaehnsdorf: “I am in receipt of your memo of 1st Sept. & in reply may tell you that your bindings have given me every satisfaction & they have been much admired here.”²¹ He makes a similar statement in another letter two years later in 1894.²² And then to Zaehnsdorf in December 1896 regarding particular bindings: “I haven’t expressed to you the

¹⁷ “Zaehnsdorf’s New Bindery,” 12.

¹⁸ “Zaehnsdorf’s New Bindery,” 12.

¹⁹ “Zaehnsdorf’s New Bindery,” 14.

²⁰ “Zaehnsdorf’s New Bindery,” 15.

²¹ Letter 11 October 1892 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2053.

²² Letter 4 October 1894 to Turnbull J. Zaehnsdorf, Alexander Turnbull “Letter Book Volume 2,” ATL qMS-2054.

delight your recent bindings are to me – the Hakluyt, Buccaneers, Sentimental Journey and Queen Elizabeth.”²³

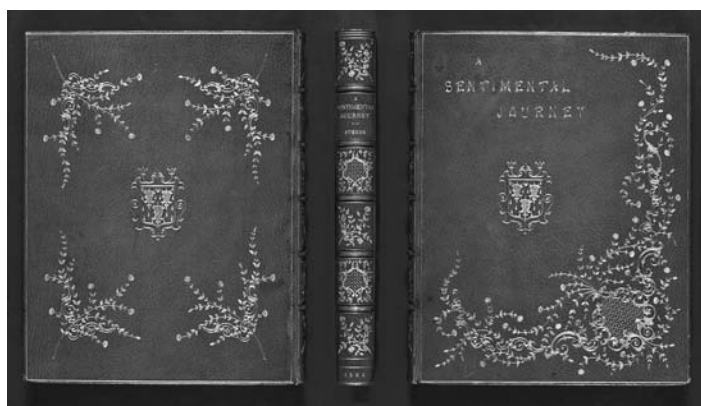
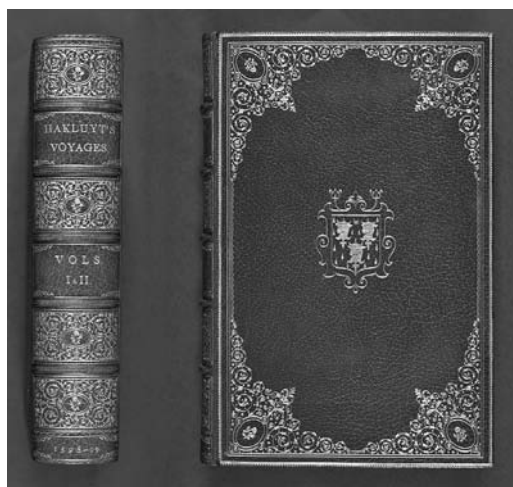


Figure 2: Two Zaehnsdorf bindings which delighted Alexander Turnbull.

Fig. 2a. *Principal Navigations (1598–[1600])*, 31cm.

Fig. 2b. Sterne, *Sentimental Journey (1884)*, 33cm.

ATL references: qREng HAKL Prin 1598 and qREng STER Sent 1884. Photos courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

²³ Letter 8 December 1896 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2055. *Principal Navigations ... by Richard Hakluyt* (London, 1598–[1600]), qREng HAKL Prin 1598; Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America* (London, 1684), REng EXQU Buca 1684; Laurence Sterne, *Sentimental Journey* (New York, 1884), qREng STER Sent 1884; Mandell Creighton, *Queen Elizabeth* (London, Paris, Edinburgh, 1896), G q920 ELI CRE 1896. Both the *Principal Navigations* and the Exquemelin are listed in Quaritch's *Little Catalogue of Geography* 1895, pp. 33 and 72. A copy of this catalogue is held at the Turnbull Library (uncatalogued). The Exquemelin (1684), not photographed, is bound in almost identical style to the Hakluyt.

Zaehnsdorf was also the binder for books purchased from further afield. A Washington purchase was sent back to Zaehnsdorf in London for binding.²⁴ And in May 1896 Turnbull wrote to the Edinburgh dealer, W. Brown:

With regard to Naval and Martial Achievement of Great Britain you describe this as in “fine state”: If this is really so i.e. if it is in “spotless” condition I wish you to send it to Zaehnsdorf in London for binding: Zaehnsdorf knows how to bind it as I have written to him about it.²⁵

In contrast, no letters from Turnbull to Rivière survive, nor does Turnbull make specific mention of this firm in his own extant outward correspondence. However, the inward correspondence implies that he must have asked for bindings from Rivière. On 24 May 1913 the book dealer, Herbert E. Gorfin, wrote:

The pamphlets which you are returning, i.e. Bronte and Matthew Arnold, have not yet reached me, but I note you wish me to have the Arnold bound for you in Levant Morocco by Riviere.²⁶

The evidence of Turnbull’s approval lies in the number of Rivière bindings on his shelves and the irrefutable presence of the stamp “Bound by Rivière & Son for Alex H. Turnbull” which appears in many books on the turn-ins in gold or on the front flyleaves as an ink stamp.²⁷

Robert Rivière (1808–1882) was a self-taught binder, who originally set up a business in Bath in 1829, but moved to London in 1830 where the high quality of his workmanship quickly became established. This firm became Rivière and Son in 1879 when Robert Rivière’s grandson Percival Calkin was taken into partnership, having already been working in the trade from the age of 13. A contemporary writer visiting in 1891 describes “the pleasure of going through the light and lofty workshops where the various processes of best bookbinding were in operation.” Unlike Zaehnsdorf, this firm did use machinery, but only for the cheaper work, “all the best work goes through the old processes of production and it is upon the best work that the firm relies.... We have two distinct sets of workpeople, and we make the best work our special study, relying upon that chiefly as the staple of the house....”²⁸ When describing some of the samples of bindings which filled the showroom cases, the writer comments “The books are beautifully finished and the

²⁴ Letter 4 April 1912 W. H. Lowdermilk to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, IV.

²⁵ Letters 12 May 1896 and 21 May 1896 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, and letter 12 May 1896 Turnbull to W. Brown, ATL qMS-2054.

²⁶ Letter 24 May 1913 Gorfin to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, V.

²⁷ For an example of Rivière and Son stamp, see Elizabeth Browning, *Epistle to a Canary*, shelved at REng BROW Epis 1913.

²⁸ “Robt. Rivière & Son (Messrs. P. & A. E. Calkin),” *The British Bookmaker* 4, no. 44 (February 1891): 5–7.

work is generally calculated to demonstrate the skill and resources of our London binders to hold their own against any outside competition....”²⁹

Both Rivière and Zaehnsdorf excelled in the retrospective binding style popular in the nineteenth century. The Rivière workshop even stored its tools classified by particular retrospective styles: Harleians, Groliers etc., while the Zaehnsdorf showroom had display cases with bindings representing the different schools.³⁰ In 1891 Percival Calkin had six or seven finishers constantly employed in tooling the fine work, much of which was ornamented with special designs that became the property of the book’s owner and were not used again.³¹ In addition to an elaborate style of binding, both firms excelled in a very restrained style using dyed leathers, usually goatskin, with the cover decoration consisting of a simple border of gold fillets framing an open central space, thus allowing the natural grain and texture of the leather to form the primary ornament; the major decoration appearing instead on the turn-ins and spine. There are many examples of both styles in Turnbull’s library.

Two other binders whose work is significantly represented are Ramage and Sangorski & Sutcliffe. John Ramage is a lesser-known binder today, but he was clearly appreciated by Turnbull. In February 1893, Turnbull wrote to H. E. Clarke, an employee of his London agents, Elders:

By this mail I am forwarding to you a registered book packet containing six unbound New Zealand pamphlets and a bound pamphlet to serve as a pattern. The 6 unbound ones I wish to send to RAMAGE, a bookbinder who did some considerable work for me in his line when I was at Home, for him to bind according to the sample. I am sending them to you because I have forgotten Ramage’s address; he used to work in one of the small streets running off Ludgate Hill.³²

Ramage was born in London in 1836, apprenticed to John Wright in 1851, and when he came out of his indentures in 1856, took the unusual step for an English binder of going to Paris where he worked under Lortic, one of the leading French binders of the day. In 1860 Ramage returned to Britain and purchased the Edinburgh business of Alexander Banks Jnr, stating in the 1861 census returns that he employed 8 men, 3 boys, 6 women and 1 girl. Three years later he moved his business to London where there was more work. He moved to larger premises in Warwick Lane in 1870, and from there he went to Warwick Square and in 1891 to Creed Lane.

²⁹ “Robt. Rivière & Son,” 7.

³⁰ “Robt. Rivière & Son,” 5; and “Zaehnsdorf’s New Bindery,” 13.

³¹ “Robt. Rivière & Son,” 6.

³² Letter 20 February 1893 Turnbull to H. E. Clarke, ATL qMS-2053.

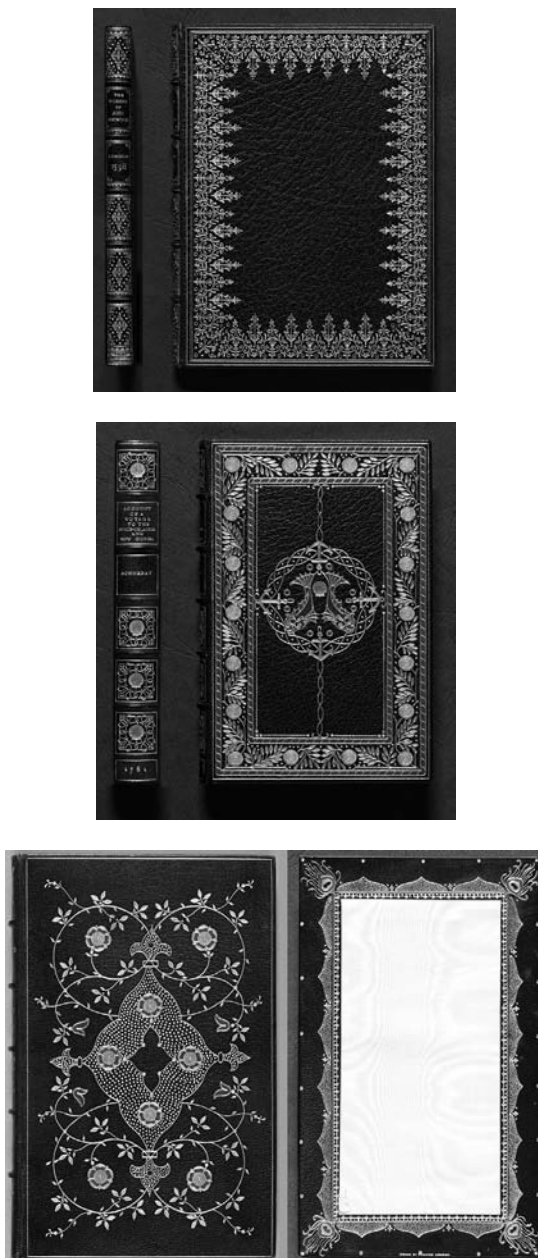


Figure 3: Bookbindings in Alexander Turnbull's library.

Fig. 3a. binding by Rivière & Son on Heywood, *Workes* (1598), 19cm.

Fig. 3b. binding by Sangorski & Sutcliffe on Sonnerat, *Voyage to the Spice Islands* ([1781]), 17cm.

Fig. 3c. upper cover and doublure by Ramage on Calverley, *Flyleaves* (1872), 18cm.

ATL references: REng HEYW Work 1598; REng SONN Acco 1781; and REng CALV Fly 1872. Photos courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

Conversely, Sangorski & Sutcliff were comparative late-comers to the London bookbinding scene. This leading firm of craftsman binders was set up in 1901 by Francis Sangorski (1875–1912) and George Sutcliffe (1878–1943). Both had studied at London’s Central School of Arts and Crafts under well-known bookbinding exponent Douglas Cockerell. There is no mention of Sangorski & Sutcliffe in Turnbull’s correspondence, so it is unclear how many of these bindings were directly ordered by Turnbull, but the number of bindings in Turnbull’s library confirms that he must have liked their work.

In addition to the above there are signed bindings from the workshops of other well-known late eighteenth- to early twentieth-century binders. Many of these would have been bound for earlier owners, including the ones from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Turnbull was happy to accept into his library items already in fine bindings. English binders from the late eighteenth to early twentieth century include Francis Bedford, Blunson & Co, Roger de Coverly & Sons, Fazakerley of Liverpool, James Hayday, Charles Hering, Kalthoeber, Kelly & Sons, Charles Lewis, Lloyd, Wallis & Lloyd, Morrell, W. Pratt, W. Root & Son, Harry Wood; and French binders Chambolle-Duru, Gruel, Lortic, Simier, and Taffin-Lefort.

Commissioning bindings

Immediately apparent from Turnbull’s correspondence and from looking at his bindings is that the bespoke tradition, sometimes thought to be dying out by the end of the nineteenth century, was alive and well and that Turnbull followed this tradition.

From time to time, Turnbull’s letter books contain references to various aspects of bookbinding. While these notes are usually incidental, brief and to the point, they help to build up a picture of the late nineteenth-century collector and how he went about acquiring his library and having it bound to his satisfaction. Instructions were addressed either directly to the binder, or to an intermediary, usually the book dealer. Some instructions were detailed; at other times Turnbull clearly left much to the discretion of the binder. Factors influencing his choices included condition, cost, durability, identity (matching of sets), and less often, the purely aesthetic.

Condition was paramount. Books would be rebound if their existing condition was poor; Turnbull liked his books in good condition externally as well as internally and his book dealers were well aware of this fact. In 1914, the London dealer, Pickering and Chatto, wrote to Turnbull: “The binding was old and shabby though the copies were good; and for your library rebinding was advisable.”³³

Some book dealers, having dealt with Turnbull over an extended period, knew his preferences and would go ahead and order bindings without waiting for specific instructions. In a letter of 1 November 1912 Gorfin wrote:

³³ Letter 4 May 1914 Pickering & Chatto to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1914.

As you will probably wish to receive the pamphlet with as little delay as possible, I have at once handed it to Messrs Riviere with the instructions to bind in warm brown full levant morocco extra, gilt top, other edges untrimmed. I have instructed them to wash out the name from the title-page, but not to interfere with the rule and pen lettering on the front wrapper, wrappers of course to be bound in. In all this I trust I am doing as you wish....³⁴

Durability was a factor, both of the covering material and the internal structure. In a letter of 19 December 1913 regarding copies of the multi-volume set of *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Quaritch wrote that he had located two sets of this work; the first set “sewed” and the second set in “new half binding.” Quaritch continues:

These copies are offered to me from the Continent & this second copy is presumably in the usual cheap continental publishers half binding & I think you would prefer me to get the sewed copy & bind strongly.³⁵

And on 23 June 1910 Quaritch wrote to Turnbull: “With reference to your remark about leathers there is no doubt that morocco is far more lasting than any other leather used in binding and levant is the best morocco.”³⁶

In the nineteenth century, booksellers commonly referred to goatskin as morocco. It was a hangover from the eighteenth century when this type of leather was imported through Morocco. Before this time it was primarily imported from Turkey and was then often called Turkey leather. Other goatskins are levant (traditionally goatskin obtained from the Near East), and niger (tanned and finished from native skins in Nigeria). Goatskin was, and still is, considered the best skin for fine bookbinding. It is also the most expensive skin. Calf and sheep were the other animal skins commonly available in England at this time, but goatskin was the favoured skin for English gentlemen collectors of the nineteenth century.³⁷ Turnbull usually expected or requested a goatskin binding but would sometimes ask for something else. In 1897, for example, he specifically requested that his two-volume *Ethnological Album* be bound in half pigskin with cloth sides.³⁸

While the binder usually made the decision on the style of decoration on the leather, on some occasions Turnbull made specific requests. On 28 November 1893 he wrote to Quaritch:

Voyage of “Erebus” & “Terror”: ... As the Zoology is in 24 parts I shall be glad if you will have it bound for me in dark green morocco with a thick & a thin gold fillet running round the sides & what is known I believe as a “panelled” back. I want the

³⁴ Letter 1 November 1912 Gorfin to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, V.

³⁵ Letter 19 December 1913 Quaritch to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1913, III.

³⁶ Letter 23 June 1910 Quaritch to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1910.

³⁷ Mirjam M. Foot, *Studies in the History of Bookbinding* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1994), 316.

³⁸ Letter 5 November 1897 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2055.

work done by Zaehnsdorf who will also, upon your instructing him, stamp my arms on the sides.³⁹

Sometimes, the style of the lettering for the spines was specified: "I have inserted a slip in each pamphlet as to the 'lettering' I require...."⁴⁰ Particular tools could be specified. On 12 May 1896 Turnbull wrote to Zaehnsdorf regarding the six volumes of James' *Naval History of Great Britain* (1886): "bind it in dark blue mor. top edges gilt. I only want a plain binding for this with my arms on the sides, and, if you have the tool, an anchor in each corner of the sides."⁴¹ This set, still held in the Turnbull Library General Collection, is evidence that Zaehnsdorf was able to accommodate this request.⁴²

While Turnbull could be specific regarding the style of decoration, he was more likely to make a more general comment:

I have instructed Mr. J. Grant, bookseller, of Edinburgh by this mail to send to you for binding a copy of Sterne's "Sentimental Journey through France and Italy".... Will you be good enough to bind this in full morocco top edges gilt and with appropriate tooling.⁴³

The result of the above request can be seen in Figure 2b. Even more brief were instructions sent to Quaritch to pass on to Zaehnsdorf for the *Bucaniers* and the *Hakluyt* (for the *Hakluyt*, see Fig. 2a). For the *Bucaniers* Turnbull wrote "Get these rebound for me by Zaehnsdorf if the binding is not good," and for the *Hakluyt* "Get rebound by Zaehnsdorf in morocco."⁴⁴ In his desire for a library in top condition, Turnbull may have been somewhat overzealous in our modern eyes in what he had rebound. Today's collector would probably have retained the bindings for both, since Quaritch described the *Bucaniers* in his 1895 catalogue as being a "fine copy, in calf (binding mended)" and the *Hakluyt* "in original calf binding, joints cracked."

Colour was important: co-ordinated colours for sets as might be expected, but also when the colour bore some relation to the textual content. Turnbull had his Andrew Lang series of red, blue, olive *etc* fairy books, for example, rebound in goatskin dyed in the appropriate colour by Ramage and also by Blunson & Co, and Morrell, retaining the original publisher's covers as pastedowns.⁴⁵ The decorative tooling on these volumes, however, is unique to each. In the case of sets, where it was important to have matching volumes for ease of identification, the tooling on

³⁹ Letter 28 November 1893 Turnbull to Quaritch, ATL qMS-2053. *The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Erebus & Terror* (London: E. W. Janson, 1844–1875), is shelved at P q919.9 RIC 1844–1875.

⁴⁰ Letter 30 April 1896 Turnbull to Sotheran & Co, ATL qMS-2054.

⁴¹ Letter 12 May 1896 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2054.

⁴² These volumes, bound according to instructions, are shelved at G 359.0942 JAM 1886.

⁴³ Letter 21 May 1896 Turnbull to Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2054.

⁴⁴ Letter 23 April 1896 Turnbull to Quaritch, ATL qMS-2054.

⁴⁵ These are all shelved in the ATL Children's Literature Collection at G J398.4.

the covers needed to match as well. If a volume from a set was bound incorrectly, it was returned to the binder to be re-bound in the style of the rest of its companions:

With reference to my recent order for vol. 6 of "The Historical Records of New South Wales," you have sent me a copy bound in half morocco, instead of in cloth. I return the volume herewith and shall be glad if you will forward me one bound in cloth as before, so as to make my set uniform.⁴⁶

Where a subsequent volume was added to a set and so that the decoration on the covers could be matched, binders and book dealers kept patterns and were expected to do this by their customers. On 23 June 1910, Quaritch wrote to Turnbull about a newly acquired copy of *The Corsair* which was to be added to Turnbull's matching set of over 50 volumes of Thackeray:

Early in 1908 I offered you a set of "The Corsair" to go with the set of Thackeray which you purchased just previously.... I presume you are still open to purchase it and have sent it to Rivere to be bound uniform with the set you have (I kept a pattern board).⁴⁷

And Turnbull wrote to Zaehnsdorf on 4 October 1894:

By this steamer I am sending to you 2 vols ... I wish you to bind this work uniform with the Flora of Tasmania and Zoology of "Erebus" and "Terror" which Quaritch had bound by you some time ago. No doubt you keep a record of the bindings you do so will not require any further information.⁴⁸

Sometimes Turnbull sent his own pattern to London: "The Maori library you will bind uniform with the pattern sent."⁴⁹ At other times he sent the actual volume; the reason for the different approach is perhaps due to the presence or absence of decorative tooling. On 4 October 1894, Turnbull does both, sending a pattern for the New Zealand pamphlets to the London dealer Sotheran & Co as well as an already-bound volume to act as a model for the serials:

By this steamer I am forwarding to your care a case of books ... and I wish you to get them bound for me.

The pamphlets on page 1 I have marked to be bound by Ramage as he has always hitherto bound my New Zealand ones but if you can get them bound equal to the pattern sent you can get your own binder to do them. They are to be bound separately & all covers and wrappers are to be bound in.

⁴⁶ Letter 2 March 1899 Turnbull to W. A. Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney, ATL qMS-2056.

⁴⁷ Letter 23 June 1910 Quaritch to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1910.

⁴⁸ Letter 4 October 1894 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2054.

⁴⁹ Letter 5 November 1897 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2055.

The list on page ii consists mostly of serial publications & I have sent a sample bound vol. with each set: You might take a note of the bindings so that when I send future years I shall not have to send a pattern of binding.⁵⁰

In the above quotation, Turnbull asks for the original covers and wrappers to be bound in. Turnbull was careful to ensure that in any re-binding process the temporary paper wrappers in which some books were issued or the original publisher's cloth bindings were retained (if they were in good condition and warranted preservation); thus retaining the integrity of the original publication. Where it was deemed preferable to leave a volume in temporary wrappers or boards without new hard-cover binding, separate cases were made in order to protect the artefact. This was especially so for the smaller formats. In these instances, the cases were usually constructed with spines to look like bound books when placed on his library shelves. Walter T. Spencer advised Turnbull to do just this in the following letter (in the following two quotations "never been bound" and "unbound" mean without permanent binding). Spencer wrote:

... and more especially as they are such lovely copies and are even in the sheets and never been bound, and so, most likely unique in such style, take my advice and don't you have them bound but have them preserved in cases; ...⁵¹

And on 31 January 1913 from Gorfin:

I am also sending you another copy of the Swinburne Pamphlets "Letters to the Press."

This I have not sent to Messrs Riviere for binding, as it is quite an important book, being 5/8th of an inch thick, and put up in boards with a white back-label. I thought that in this case you would wish to keep the piece unbound just as it is, or, as an alternative might like to have a drop case made for it. This latter would cost about 25/- or thereabouts. Should you wish this, it will not be necessary for you to return the book, as I have taken accurate measurements of it, which would suffice for the binder. I should mention that I have these cases made by Zaehnsdorf, not by Riviere, although of course the latter gentlemen would also undertake the work.⁵²

Turnbull replied in the affirmative as indicated by Gorfin's subsequent letter of 8 May 1913:

I am having the box made for your copy of Swinburne's Letters to the Press as desired, and am expecting to receive same in the course of the next few days. Messrs Zaehnsdorf advise me that there would be some difficulty in matching in Levant the colour of niger morocco in which the other pieces have been bound for you by Messrs

⁵⁰ Letter 4 October 1894 Turnbull to Sotheran & Co., Alexander Turnbull, ATL qMS-2054.

⁵¹ Letter 24 January 1908 Walter T. Spencer to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1908.

⁵² Letter 31 January 1913 Gorfin to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, V.

Rivière, and I have accordingly instructed them to make it in niger, so that the colour of the whole set may be kept as nearly as possible uniform.⁵³

Some of these cases were the new “fire-resisting” cases developed by the bookbinder, J. W. Zaehnsdorf.⁵⁴ Quaritch wrote to J. W. Zaehnsdorf of their effectiveness in a letter of 30 September 1896:

You were present when we tested your leather cases in a large bonfire in my garden. You recollect, in spite of fire, water and tallow candles the three cases (with books inside) were only damaged, whilst the books were absolutely uninjured. If your customer wants to hear more on the subject send him to me.⁵⁵

Cost was certainly a factor. Our visit to the Zaehnsdorf firm earlier in this article showed that this workshop provided a cheaper option of top quality hand-made construction, but without the full leather binding and gilding. Turnbull availed himself of these half and less often quarter leather bindings with cloth sides particularly for his small pamphlets, but also for some larger volumes.⁵⁶ Although a cheaper option, the spines of the more important items usually have raised bands and were more elaborately tooled, so that when they sat on his library shelves, they looked as attractive as the more expensively-bound full leather bindings. An invoice from Henry Sotheran dated 5 August 1896 lists a number of binding charges for half-bound calf volumes: these cost between 2/- and 3/- each, and two quarto bindings of half calf at 5/6 each, with a third binding at 4/6.⁵⁷ Rivière’s charges in 1913 were 5/6 for a half binding of goatskin with cloth sides on a small octavo book, and half levant bindings in 1916 ranged between 7/6 and 17/6 depending upon the size of the book.⁵⁸

An extant published trade price list from Rivière & Son dated 12 September 1921, shows a clear hierarchy of binding charges ranging from buckram or fancy cloth through half bindings (in ascending order) of roan, calf, niger morocco, vellum, levant morocco, to full bound calf, niger morocco, vellum, and, at the top end of the scale, levant morocco.⁵⁹ For example, the half levant morocco binding in crown

⁵³ Letter 8 May 1913 Gorfin to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, V. Swinburne’s *Letters to the Press* (1912), still preserved in its Zaehnsdorf case, is shelved at REng SWIN Lett 1912.

⁵⁴ For example, see A. C. Swinburne, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (London, 1913), REng SWIN Fleurs 1913.

⁵⁵ Cited in Frank Broomhead, *The Zaehnsdorfs (1842–1947): Craft Bookbinders* (Middlesex, England: Private Libraries Association, 1986), 27.

⁵⁶ Many of these books are shelved in the Turnbull General Collection and the Turnbull New Zealand and Pacific Collection.

⁵⁷ Invoice 5 August 1896 from Henry Sotheran, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1896.

⁵⁸ Letter 12 August 1913 Gorfin to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, V. The volume bound in 1913 was Richard Jebb, *Milton’s Areopagitica: A Commentary* (1872). This is shelved at G 821.4E Milton JEB 1872. See also invoice 31 January 1916 from Rivière & Son per Whitcomb & Tombs, London, for the list of levant binding charges in 1916. ATL MS-Papers-0057-113/1916, II.

⁵⁹ Held ATL, qREng RIVI Trade 1921.

octavo size, plain, or with centre tool cost 12/9; the full levant morocco, in crown octavo, plain with extra gold border inside cost 29/9. There were added costs for some items depending upon the condition of the volume in question.

Sometimes the cost of full binding is mentioned in Turnbull's correspondence and invoices, although the binding is not always itemised separately in the latter. Walter T. Spencer wrote in January 1916: "Johnsons Lives of the Highwaymen cost me 9/5/ at the London auction and 2/./ for binding it and Harriet Wilson cost me £4.15.-0 for the Binding alone; ..." ⁶⁰ Francis Edwards invoiced Turnbull £2 for re-backing the eight volumes of Churchill's *Collection of voyages and travels* (1744–46 and 1752); ⁶¹ and Sotheran & Co charged Turnbull £4.10 for stamping his arms on 166 volumes of *Punch*, *Fortnightly Review* and *Nineteenth Century*. ⁶² In 1894, Zaehnsdorf charged £2 per quarto volume for a binding of dyed goatskin with a gold fillet border, top text edge gilt, gold-tooled turn-ins, panelled back, and with Turnbull's arms stamped on the sides. ⁶³ And in January 1909 the octavo-sized author's proof copy of Elizabeth Browning's *Runaway Slave* (1849), for which Turnbull paid £8.8, cost an extra £1.7.6 for a Rivière goatskin binding (levant) with gold-tooled title and spine, and with top edges gilt. Rivière charged £1.15 for a binding in "Niger morocco" for a similar sized book in 1916. ⁶⁴

The binding could cost more than the volume itself. In January 1913 the Dutch dealer, Frederick Muller, invoiced Turnbull 96 Dutch florins for binding the two folio volumes of Kolbe *Beschryving van de Kaap de Goede Hoop* (1727) in gold-tooled vellum with gilt text edges. The volumes themselves had been purchased at 75 Dutch florins. ⁶⁵ And an invoice from the Edinburgh bookseller, John Grant, gave separate quotes for each volume and binding. A binding of "polished levant morocco back, cloth sides, gilt top" on six small volumes was a standard 5/-, with five of the six volumes having been purchased for between 6d and 4/6. ⁶⁶

Why did Turnbull have most of his books bound in London rather than in New Zealand? Books could certainly be bound here at the end of the nineteenth century,

⁶⁰ Letter 10 January 1916 Walter T. Spencer to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-113/1916, II.

⁶¹ Telegram 28 June 1912 Francis Edwards to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, IV. The volumes are shelved at qREng COLL 1744 and qREng COLL 1752.

⁶² Invoice 10 February 1893 from Henry Sotheran, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1893.

⁶³ See letter 22 June 1894 Quaritch to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1894 and invoice 29 August 1894 from Quaritch, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1894. The volumes bound in this manner include three volumes of *Flora Tasmaniae* and two volumes of *Flora Antarctica* under the title *The Botany of the Antarctic Voyage of H. M. Discovery Ships Erebus and Terror in the Years 1839–1843* (1844–1860). They are shelved at P q919.9 HOO 1844.

⁶⁴ Invoice 28 January 1909 from Rivière, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111/1909. The Browning is shelved at REng BROW Runa 1849. See also invoice 11 October 1916 from Rivière & Son per Pickering & Chatto, ATL MS-Papers-0057-113/1916, I. Swinburne *Poetical Fragments* (1916) is shelved at REng SWIN Poet 1916.

⁶⁵ Invoice 29 January 1913 from Frederick Muller, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1913, I. The Kolbe is shelved at qRDut KOLB Naau 1727.

⁶⁶ Invoice 24 August 1915 from John Grant, ATL MS-Papers-0057-113/1915, III.

and binders in Wellington included Lyon & Blair, W. Burrett, W. Lankshear, Dutton, Brown & Thomson, Whitcombe & Tombs, and the Government Printing Office. Apart from a colonial dependence upon the Mother Country, one reason was that Turnbull was already familiar with the work of at least Zaehnsdorf and Ramage (and possibly others) having used both when living in London. Additional reasons were cost and quality. It was still cheaper to have books bound in London rather than New Zealand, and standards in New Zealand were not always the best. Turnbull wrote in February 1893 to H. E. Clarke: "They can't bind out here to save their lives. I've just had some pamphlets completely spoilt already, remorselessly 'ploughed' into & shockingly stitched & they charge exorbitant prices."⁶⁷ New Zealand's General Assembly Library made similar statements about the high costs of New Zealand bindings in 1886.⁶⁸ This was something that New Zealand did not have on its own. The Washington bookseller, W. H. Lowdermilk noted in a letter to Turnbull of 19 October 1912, that "The cost of binding in this country is very much greater than in England on account of the higher price both of materials and labor..."⁶⁹

However, it should also be noted that London bindings were not always perfect! The binders of the material noted in the quotations below are not named, and were perhaps not Turnbull's usual binders, but on 27 October 1896 Turnbull wrote to Henry Sotheran in London:

The case of books arrived by "Gothic" and was satisfactory except in regard to some of the New Zealand pamphlets the binding of which was really quite bad in some cases such as a conscientious binder would be sorry to send out: I cannot explain here exactly in what respects the binding was defective but for one thing, the backs seem to have been made out of odd bits of leather and thick varnish put on to hide the cracks etc. I hope that the next lot will be all right.⁷⁰

And the letter of 7 August 1912 from Quaritch to Turnbull.

I am in receipt of your letter of July 1st and very much regret to hear of the careless binding of the German pamphlet and wish you would post it back to me that I may make the binder rebind it. I will gladly refund the postage. Please accept my sincere apologies for the mistake. I have remonstrated with the binder and trust you will not have cause to complain again of careless work.⁷¹

The artistic quality of the designs of the best London binders (the decorative work tooled onto the covers of the bindings) was certainly superior to what was

⁶⁷ Letter 23 February 1893 Turnbull to H. E. Clarke, ATL qMS-2053.

⁶⁸ See Ruth Lightbourne, "The General Assembly Library of New Zealand and the Book Trade," *Bibliographical Society of Australia & New Zealand Bulletin* 26, no. 2 (2002): 81–104, esp. 96.

⁶⁹ Letter 19 October 1912 W. H. Lowdermilk to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, IV.

⁷⁰ Letter 27 October 1896 Turnbull to Henry Sotheran, ATL qMS-2055.

⁷¹ Letter 7 August 1912 Quaritch to Turnbull, ATL MS-Papers-0057-112/1912, II.

available in New Zealand. On at least two occasions Turnbull informed Zaehnsdorf how much his bindings were admired “out here.”⁷²

Items that were bound in New Zealand included some serials, and books or pamphlets that Turnbull wanted back as soon as possible and where he was not prepared to wait the three-month return sea voyage to London plus the extra time it took for the binders to complete the task. The serials were bound sometimes in the publisher’s cloth binding which Turnbull requested from London, or in newly-created covers. The binder for this task was Whitcombe & Tombs.⁷³ In a letter to Jones and Evans, Turnbull wrote: “Also get for me ‘Black & White’ from June 27th 1891 to beginning of January 1892 & send to me cloth binding (publishers) to have numbers bound in.” And on 29 November 1893 again to Jones and Evans “Will you please forward to me the binding covers for vols 4 & 5 of *The Yachtsman* as issued from that paper’s office.”⁷⁴

And for some urgently required books or pamphlets, Turnbull wrote to Whitcombe & Tombs in April 1898:

Accompanying this note is a parcel containing 52 books and pamphlets to be bound, together with two bound volumes to serve as samples for some of the bindings as per list enclosed.

I must ask you to pay particular attention to the instructions in each volume and on no account to cut the fore edges of the books and to bind in all cases the outside wrappers. The top edges to be ploughed as lightly as possible. I am anxious to get this lot back as soon as possible.⁷⁵

For occasions such as the above, Turnbull had a die of his arms cast in London and sent out to New Zealand in 1896 for stamping on the binding of octavo books in this country.⁷⁶

Turnbull’s lack of confidence in the ability of New Zealand binders shows in his detailed instructions. In July 1899 Turnbull wrote to Whitcombe & Tombs:

I am sending you today, for binding, some valuable newspapers and I trust that you will exercise special care in binding them. Please see that the following instructions are carried out:-

Bind in half dark green morocco leather corners, cloth sides, the top edges to be gilt, the others uncut. My plate of arms to be stamped on the right hand upper portion of the leather at the side. Guards are to be left where the missing numbers

⁷² Letter 11 October 1892 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2053; Letter 4 October 1894 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2054.

⁷³ See for example: Letter 8 July 1899 Turnbull to Whitcombe & Tombs, ATL qMS-2056.

⁷⁴ Letter 6 October 1892 Turnbull to Jones & Evans, ATL qMS-2053. Also Letter 29 November 1893 Turnbull to Jones & Evans, ATL qMS-2053.

⁷⁵ Letter 1 April 1898 Turnbull to Whitcombe & Tombs, ATL qMS-2055.

⁷⁶ Letter 11 June 1896 Turnbull to J. Zaehnsdorf, ATL qMS-2054.

occur, and the bookplates are to be carefully removed and pasted inside the covers of the new binding. Extreme care should be taken in stitching the mutilated numbers.

In preparing the top edges for gilding where there is any chance of the plough cutting into the letterpress, then the edges should not be cut at all, but the gold simply dusted on.

The 'Independent' is to be lettered "WELLINGTON INDEPENDENT" and bound in yearly volumes, except that vol. 5 is to be bound in two parts, owing to the alteration in the size of the paper.

The 'Spectator' is to be lettered "NEW ZEALAND SPECTATOR" and also bound in yearly volumes, except that the first volume will contain part of the year 1844.

The "Otago Journal" and the "Otago Punch" are to be lettered "OTAGO JOURNAL" and "OTAGO PUNCH" respectively.

Finally as the books are important records, I look to you to use the utmost care in handling them, and to turn out a handsome and accurate binding.

The year is to be stamped on the back of each volume.⁷⁷

Turnbull did not re-bind all his newly-acquired books. If they were in good condition and already well-bound, they were left on his shelves as they were. These included publishers' bindings as well as bespoke bindings. Retaining works bound for an earlier owner could also be a cost-saving measure. In July 1892, Turnbull wrote to Jones & Evans: "Will you please send me Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* in some good ½ binding or if you can pick up a good 2nd hand copy cheap in whole binding that will do as well."⁷⁸

Other volumes left untouched were historic or special bindings. Turnbull's interest in these is confirmed by his collection of reference works about historic bookbindings and manuals on current bookbinding practice, and these can still be found on the shelves in the Alexander Turnbull Library General Collection. Turnbull also wrote the occasional comment about a binding on the flyleaves of some of his books. In the 1673 *English and French Dictionary*, for example, with its contemporary fine red and black goatskin binding in cottage roof style, Turnbull has noted a similarity to another red and black goatskin binding in one of his reference works.⁷⁹

Turnbull was a keen yachtsman, and his interest in things naval may well have been the reason for the purchase of Gander's *The Glory of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Anne, in the Royal Navy* (1703), but its early eighteenth-century fine binding of red goatskin onlaid in black and tooled in gold, with gilt and gauffered (tooled) text edges, and metallic varnish endpapers printed in gold on a green ground,

⁷⁷ Letter 8 July 1899 Turnbull to Whitcombe & Tombs, ATL qMS-2056.

⁷⁸ Letter 14 July 1892 Turnbull to Jones & Evans, ATL qMS-2053.

⁷⁹ *A French and English Dictionary* (London, 1673) is shelved at qREng COTG Fren 1673.

must also have added to its attraction.⁸⁰ It was bound ca. 1703 by the Geometrical Compartment Binder as a presentation copy, probably at the request of Gander (see Fig. 4 on front cover).

The Geometrical Compartment Binder, so named because of his liking for geometrical patterns, was a London binder active in the first two decades of the eighteenth century. His favourite geometrical pattern, the square with a semicircle in the centre of each side, can be seen at the centre of this binding. He bound at least four other copies of this work: three with very similar designs and a fourth in George III's library at the British Library in identical design. All have gilt and gauffered edges and, rather unusually in English bindings of the early eighteenth century, metallic varnish endpapers.⁸¹



Figure 5: Mid seventeenth-century fine binding.

Bible and Book of Common Prayer (1638), 44cm.

ATL reference: fREng BIBLE 1638. Photo courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁸⁰ Joseph Gander, *The Glory of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Anne, in the Royal Navy* (London: Printed for the authour, 1703). Shelved at REng GAND Glory 1703.

⁸¹ See Howard M. Nixon and Mirjam M. Foot, *The History of Decorated Bookbinding in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 80 and fig. 81; Mirjam M. Foot, "A Binding by the Geometrical Compartment Binder, c. 1703," *Book Collector* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 76–77; Howard M. Nixon, *Five Centuries of English Bookbinding* (London: Scholar Press, 1978), no. 56; Howard M. Nixon, *Broxbourne Library: Styles and Designs of Bookbindings from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* (London: Published for the Broxbourne Library by Maggs Brothers, 1961), no. 82. For more information on metallic varnish papers, see Mirjam M. Foot, "The Olga Hirsch Collection of Decorated Papers," *British Library Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 12–38.

Sometime after 1908, Turnbull purchased a large folio Bible and Book of Common Prayer printed in 1638 by Thomas Buck and Roger Daniel, printers to the University of Cambridge (see Fig. 5).⁸² On this occasion, Turnbull must have known he was purchasing something special since the volume was highlighted as one of the plates in the 1908 catalogue for the sale of Lord Amherst's library, where it was described as a "beautiful binding.... No finer copy could be desired."⁸³ The Amherst sale catalogue and other sale catalogues acquired by Turnbull as part of his book ordering are held in the Turnbull Library General Collection. This fine Cambridge binding, ca. 1640, of black goatskin with rich and elaborate gold tooling on both the cover and flat spine, was purchased at the Amherst sale by Quaritch for £39 and subsequently acquired by Turnbull.



Figure 6: Late nineteenth-century embroidered binding.

Rossetti, Ballads and Sonnets (1881), 20cm.

ATL reference: REng ROSS Ball 1881. Photo courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁸² *The Book of Common Prayer* [bound with] *Holy Bible* [and] *Whole Book of Psalms* ([Cambridge]: Printed by Thomas Buck and Roger Daniel, printers to the Universitie of Cambridge, 1638). Shelved at fREng BIBLE 1638.

⁸³ *A Classified List of the Books in Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge's Sale Catalogue of Lord Amherst of Hackney's Library* ([London: Dryden Press, 1908–1909]), Lot no. 118. The plate is on the opposite page. Shelved at G 018 AMH 1908.

One of Turnbull's major interests was modern English literature and he bought extensively in this line. Rossetti's *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881) with its embroidered cover was purchased sometime between 1915 and 1918 (see Fig. 6).⁸⁴ Bound in England, probably in the late nineteenth century for the book's publisher F. S. Ellis, this volume is covered in beige silk cloth with a mesh of gold thread oversewn with flowers and leaves in imitation of the cover Rossetti designed for the standard cloth binding. The spine title is embroidered in pink and cream thread and the endpapers are of pink and gold silk brocade. The top text edges are gilt and the fore and bottom edges are untrimmed. A pencilled note by Turnbull inside the volume attributes the binding to Miss E. Burden, and an enclosed letter from Herbert Ellis dated 1915, confirms that the book was formerly in the library of his father, F. S. Ellis.

Miss E. Burden, the embroiderer, was probably Elizabeth (Bessie) Burden (1842–1924), chief technical instructor at the Royal School of Art Needlework (London) from 1880. Ellis's interest in embroidered bindings is apparent from a letter he wrote in 1888 to the English binder, Thomas J. Cobden-Sanderson, explaining how he planned to ask professional and amateur women embroiderers to work embroidered covers for him and asking Cobden-Sanderson to supervise the binding. Ellis's scheme to accumulate 200 such volumes and then to put them up for sale at Sothebys did not eventuate, but Cobden-Sanderson is known to have bound at least two embroidered bindings for Ellis: one worked by Bessie Burden and the other by her niece May Morris. Whether Cobden-Sanderson also bound this volume using the embroidered cover remains unconfirmed.⁸⁵

At the other end of the scale is the binding of gilt embossed paper on the pamphlet-sized early voyage account, L'Hermite's *Iovrnael vande Nassausche vloot* (1626) (see Fig. 7).⁸⁶ These papers, sometimes called Dutch gilt papers, were developed in Germany in the late seventeenth century and were often used as covers for thin books or pamphlets.⁸⁷ While Turnbull is almost certain to have purchased this volume for its content, since he was an avid collector of early voyages, the retention of the cover is again evidence that he appreciated the historic value of the artefact as a whole.

⁸⁴ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Ellis and White, 1881). Shelved at REng ROSS Ball 1881.

⁸⁵ Marianne Tidcombe, *Women Bookbinders, 1880–1920* (London: British Library, 1996), 79–80. The May Morris embroidered binding is pictured in *Eloquent Witnesses: Bookbindings and Their History*, ed. Mirjam Foot (London: Bibliographical Society: British Library; New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 2004), 312.

⁸⁶ Jacques L'Hermite, *Iovrnael vande Nassausche vloot* (t'Amstelredam: by Hessel Gerritsz ende Jacob Pietersz Wachter, t'laer, 1626). Shelved at RDut L'HE Iovr 1626.

⁸⁷ Foot, "The Olga Hirsch Collection of Decorated Papers," 12–38. Also Richard J. Wolfe, *Marbled Paper: Its History, Techniques, and Patterns* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 22–23.



Figure 7: Temporary wrapper of gilt embossed paper.

L'Hermitte, Iovrnael vande Nassausche vloot (1626), 20cm.

ATL reference: RDut L'HE Iovr 1626. Photo courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

As revealed from his correspondence and from the volumes highlighted above, Turnbull took a great interest in how his books were bound and delighted in the finished result. This interest extended to the historic as well as to the recently bound. London's best binding workshops provided most of Turnbull's commissioned bindings, and these were ordered at a time when the practice of the bespoke binding was dying out. Turnbull sent letters of instruction, sometimes very specific, either to the book dealer who acted as intermediary or less often directly to the binder. The look of the artefact and of his library as a whole was a major factor behind his bookbinding activity. He wanted a library that was co-ordinated in colour and design and which exhibited quality, and where every volume taken off the shelves would give pleasure to the reader, as much for its external appearance and handling as for its internal content. In order to achieve this, Turnbull may have been more active than today's informed collector when it came to re-binding, but in this he was no different from his contemporaries. The end result is a library which has stood the test of time and increased handling over the last hundred years, and which

provides the researcher with a goldmine of sometimes exquisite examples of the craft of bookbinding over a much longer period. But as to the question: “Did he purchase for the binding alone?”; there are some tantalizing possibilities, but not enough concrete evidence to confirm this with any certainty. The nearest evidence is an invoice from the bookseller J. & J. Leighton, offering Turnbull some bindings by the late eighteenth-century binder, Roger Payne. Turnbull did purchase three of the titles offered but whether for the content or the binding remains unconfirmed.⁸⁸

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

⁸⁸ Invoice 12 April and 10 October 1916 from J. & J. Leighton, ATL MS-Papers-0057-113/1916, II. The titles purchased were *Memoires du Mareschal de Bassompierre*, 2 vols (Cologne: Chez Pierre du Marteau, 1666); *Ambassade du Mareschal de Bassompierre*, 2 vols (Cologne: Chez Pierre du Marteau, 1668); and *La Divina: Comedia di Dante* (In Vinegia: Appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, et Fratelli, 1555). Shelved at RDut BASS Memo 1666 RDut BASS Amba 1668 and RIt DANTE Divi 1555.