This paper provides a background of early book and bookbinding history, followed by a survey of English bookbinders and bookbinding of the Arts & Crafts period, 1880-1930. The role of the Industrial Revolution and William Morris in stimulating this period of a return to fine bookbinding, during the growth of the mass production of books is elucidated. An in-depth examination of binders of the period is presented, including T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, the leader of the movement in binding, as well as three leading women fine bookbinders, Sarah Treverian Prideaux, Katharine Adams, and Sybil Pye.
A HISTORY OF ENGLISH ARTS & CRAFTS BOOKBINDING, 1880-1930

By
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Introduction

A respected authority on bookbinding, Mirjam Foot, writes that “considerably more attention has been given to the technical side of bookbinding—manufacture, design, and ornamentation—and not nearly enough to the binders themselves, their role in the workplace, and the larger, social world in which they lived” (1993, p. 3). The aim of this master’s paper is to partially fill that gap in history by exploring the lives and work of turn-of-the-century, Arts & Crafts bookbinders in England.

This topic is important for several reasons. Studying the history of bookbinding furthers the history of the book, an important field in librarianship. It is also important for a general study of history. Moreover, in an increasingly virtual world, but one in which there is a renewed appreciation for the handmade arts, bookbinding is physical. The craft of binding is also ancient and historical, an art and a science, and it has an appeal as a mysterious but very basic craft. Bookbinding can be decorative and beautiful, but its original purpose was to hold the book together.

Arts & Crafts binding is a period in bookbinding that deserves more attention. The binders discussed in this paper are unknown to the average person, yet they produced incredibly beautiful, original work. Theirs was a resurgence of old ways of binding, pitted against the new.
This master’s paper contains a prolonged literature review, first surveying early book and bookbinding history, and then focusing on English craft bookbinders of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

**Glossary**

- blind-tooling
  
  "a method of decoration whereby a heated binding tool makes a plain impression in the leather or cloth (gold leaf or colours are not used)."

- case
  
  "boards, spine and cover made separately from the text block (often associated with edition bindings)."

- codex
  
  "structure comprising covers and writing material fastened at one side to open like a book, as opposed to scrolls."

- doubliure
  
  "ornamental lining in leather or cloth used in place of a pasted down end-leaf."

- end-leaves
  
  "papers (decorated or plain) pasted or sewn in to protect the text block from the covers. Comprises the paste-down (pasted to the inside cover) and the fly-leaf, or free end-leaf, which lies next to the text block."

- finishing
  
  "a technical term for decorating the binding, particularly gold-tooling."

- forwarding
  
  "the process of making the structure of a binding."

- gold-tooling
  
  "a method of decoration involving the impressing of heated tools through gold leaf into the leather or cloth."
headband  “small core (e.g. leather or vellum) wrapped with threads, which projects slightly beyond the top of text block spine. It is protective and decorative.”

journeyman “a trained craftsman who did not own his own business but hired out his skills.”

morocco “a type of goatskin which originated in Morocco.”

parchment “sheep or goatskin (with the hair removed) which has been split, soaked, limed, and dried under tension, not tanned like leather.”

pointille “term used to describe motif outlined with dots.”

publisher’s binding “binding, (often cloth), commissioned by a publisher in which the text block is made independently from its enclosing cloth case. A whole edition would be produced in this format.”

russia “tanned hide treated with birch-bark oil, frequently diced (incised with intersecting diagonal lines).”

stamps/tools “engraved or cast dies which impress decorative motifs. Traditionally the term ‘stamp’ has been used when describing early (e.g. fifteenth- and sixteenth-century bindings, and ‘tool’ refers to the later period.”

text block “the sections which make up the text of the book.”

trade binding “pre-nineteenth-century books which were not bound up to the taste of the purchaser, but bound before sale, as with nineteenth-century publishers’ bindings.”
vellum

“calfskin, which has been soaked, limed (with the hair removed) and dried under tension, not tanned like leather.”


**Literature Review**

**Background—Early History of the Book**

Before there was bookbinding as we know it, there was the book. Prior to the book, there was the papyrus roll. These scrolls date back to at least 2500 B.C. (Diehl, 1946). The progression from scroll to codex occurred in about 100 A.D. in Ancient Rome (Avrin, 1991). “Romans wrote on pugillas or codices regularly, for personal letters, dispatches, schoolwork, authors’ first drafts, diplomas, notices, documents, and especially for legal matters (hence our legal ‘codes’ and ‘codicils’)” (Avrin, 1991, p. 173).

The codex, which originated with the writing tablet, “was the predecessor of modern book structures...[it] comprised two boards enclosing sheets and the whole structure was sewn at the back” (Marks, 1998, p. 10). At first, the sheets of the codex were made of papyrus, but by the fourth century they were replaced by parchment made from animal skins, which was easier to sew than the fragile papyrus (Marks, 1998). Paper, which was invented in China in 104 A.D., “was not manufactured in Europe until the twelfth century [and did not] replace
parchment [until] the introduction of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century" (Marks, 1998, p. 10). By then, paper-making was faster and cheaper than using parchment, and paper was better-suited for printing (Marks, 1998). Overall, “the book form has gone through very few changes in physical appearance since its inception” (Diehl, 1946, p. 3).

The use of the codex “runs parallel with the Christianization of the Roman Empire” (Foot, 1993, p. 5). Avrin writes that:

> The parchment codex is often considered a Christian innovation, associated with the city of Rome where St. Mark wrote his Gospel…. Christianity was illegal and Christians were often persecuted, and missionaries kept a low profile. In recording their own literature they were left to their own devices, and therefore could have been more practical and, in the end, more creative makers of books. (1991, p. 175).

On the other hand, “pagan works continued, due to their conservatism, to be written on scrolls” (Avrin, 1991, p. 174). In fact, pagan literature was not written on codices until the fourth century A.D. (Foot, 1993).

Following the Roman era, monasteries “were the chief source of book production” (Diehl, 1946). Within the monastery “walls…most manuscripts were written, bound, and illuminated, at least until the thirteenth century [in Europe]” (Avrin, 1991, p. 205). The vast majority of scribes were men, as “the Church [did not] see any value in educating women, even in most convents” (Avrin, 1991, p. 207). The aristocracy was the only sector of society that could read and write in the Middle Ages (Avrin, 1991), and “the only way a layman could obtain an education was to study with one of the religious orders” (Avrin, 1991, p. 205).

By the late thirteenth century, the monasteries “began to decline” (Diehl, 1946, p. 48), while universities arose in cities like Paris, Bologna, Oxford, and
Salamanca, where there was a need for textbooks (Diehl, 1946; Kilgour, 1998). Scribes were brought in to work for the universities (Diehl, 1946). The shift from monasteries to universities was slow (Diehl, 1946). There was a broadening of learning at this time, and the study of philosophy, art, law, and medicine were included (Diehl, 1946).

Eventually, “manuscript copying could not satisfy the hunger for books” (Kilgour, 1998, p. 81). Then, twelve hundred years after the codex first appeared, printing was invented by the German nobleman Johannes Gutenberg, in about 1450 (Kilgour, 1998). This is the second momentous event in the history of the book, following the earlier appearance of the codex. The third highly significant occurrence in the history of the book was the mechanization of book production during the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century.

**Early History of Bookbinding**

**Europe**

The purpose and definition of bookbinding is as follows:

Bookbinding is the process whereby the pages of a manuscript or printed book are secured in a particular order and encased by protective covers….Charles Lamb wrote: “To be strong-backed and neat-bound is the desideratum of a volume. Magnificence comes after.” The technical process of binding a book reflects this. It is split into two stages: ‘forwarding,’ the sewing of the leaves and attachment of the covers…and ‘finishing,’ the decoration of the covers, commonly achieved by the impression of brass tools. (Marks, 1998, p. 9)
Further, “the structure and decoration of a binding depends on its use” (Marks, 1998, p. 11). A medieval religious text would have heavy wooden boards with clasps to keep the vellum pages flat and bosses to protect the covers from the lectern or shelf on which it was stored. A school text book would be bound in cheap leather with minimal decoration. An illuminated manuscript, bound as a gift from one monarch to another, would require the most costly materials and lavish decoration. (Marks, 1998, p. 11)

In addition, a design can be influenced by many factors: the artistic trends of a particular nation or period, the skill and vision of the binder, the demands of the patron, the quality of the materials used, and even the political climate (the trade in leather, for example, was sometimes disrupted by war). (Marks, 1998, p. 11)

The history of bookbinding begins with the codex (Avrin, 1991). The earliest existing leather-bound codices came from seventh- and eighth-century Egypt (Avrin, 1991). These are known as Coptic and “were the ancestors of both Islamic and European leather bookbindings” (Avrin, 1991, p. 309). “Geometric and interlace patterns” (Avrin, 1991, p. 309) are seen on Coptic book covers (Avrin, 1991). This style is continued in Islamic leatherwork in Egypt, then North Africa (Avrin, 1991). What is more unusual is that there is a “seventh-century English book cover with obvious Coptic designs” (Avrin, 1991, p. 310), the Stonyhurst Gospel (Figure 1.)

Avrin discusses medieval books below:

Leather-bound books for reading and study were kept in the monastic library, sometimes on chains to prevent their removal. The more sumptuous bindings of gold, gilt silver, or gilt copper with semiprecious stones and ivory were made for members of the Carolingian and Byzantine courts or for high churchmen. The design [was] usually
figures of Christ, the Madonna, or saints in medallions. (Avrin, 1991, p. 310)

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, blind-tooled leather covers appeared (Avrin, 1991). Today, these are called monastic, Romanesque, or Gothic bindings (Avrin, 1991). "Tools used for blind-stamping [tooling] depicted small flowers, geometric ornaments, birds, animals and grotesques, mermaids, centaurs, and human figures. They were frequently stamped in repeat-patterns, covering the whole surface of the leather, which was calf skin or sheepskin" (Avrin, 1991, p. 310).
With the advent of printing, and for centuries thereafter, the printers were generally not responsible for binding books (Avrin, 1991). Instead, the bookbuyer or bookseller would contract for the binding (Avrin, 1991). Famous Renaissance book collectors, such as Jean Grolier (1479-1565), Thomas Mabieu (Maioli, d. 1572), and François I and Henri II of France gave their names to styles of binding (Avrin, 1991). Their favorite binders’ names were also renowned (Avrin, 1991). By the second half of the sixteenth century, France became “the trendsetter of bookbinding style.... Compared to French Renaissance books, English bindings at first seem austere” (Avrin, 1991, pp. 318-319). Not surprisingly,

many collectors... prize[d] their bindings highly. They loved the art of binding for its own sake and wanted their collections to include examples by the most accomplished binders.... A beautifully bound book was a work of art, indicating the owner’s taste, wealth and social position (Marks, 1998, pp. 22-23).

The new rich established their status by creating great libraries (Marks, 1998). Royalty and aristocrats commissioned bindings, including to be given as gifts to assure “good will or patronage” (Marks, 1998, p. 25).

Until the nineteenth century, binderies were generally “small establishments” (Marks, 1998, p. 14). The binder and his family and one or two apprentices “lived above his workshop” (Marks, 1998, p. 14). At work, the binder was assisted by a journeyman (a binder who could not yet afford his own shop), and they worked long hours, “from six in the morning to nine at night, six days a week” (Marks, 1998, p. 14). Binders were sometimes forced into itinerancy when looking for work (Marks, 1998). There was a substantial immigration of German
binders into eighteenth-century London, for example (Marks, 1998). Fortunately, “unlike some professions, the tools of a binder’s trade could be carried around relatively easily” (Marks, 1998, p. 15).

**England**

Moving to English binding specifically, “In England the destruction, first at the suppression of the monasteries under Henry VIII and then by the Puritans of Cromwell’s time, made sure that very few monastic bindings survived” (Foot, 1993, p. 7).

Nevertheless, as has been seen in the discussion of European bookbinding, book production was centered in the monasteries “from the fall of Rome to the thirteenth century” (Clough, 1957, p. 10). In England, the religious centers were St. Albans, Canterbury, Durham, London, and York (Clough, 1957). These centers achieved a national, and even “international reputation for the books they produced and bound” (Clough, 1957, p. 11). With book production concentrated in the monasteries for six centuries, it is no wonder that the bookbinding techniques perfected by the monks formed the “basis of all subsequent binding, so that today the hand techniques are clearly related to these early methods” (Clough, 1957, p. 11). According to one source,

The earliest English bindings were plain and substantial. The boards were usually of oak, and leather covered the spine and extended part way over the boards. No attempt was made at decoration. The gradual development of ornamental effects on the cover followed the same
course as in French and Italian bindings. (United States Government Printing Office [G.P.O.], 1950, p. 13)

The first English bookbinder known by name was Thomas Berthelet (G.P.O., 1950). He was “printer and binder to Henry VIII from 1530 to 1555” (G.P.O., 1950, p. 13). He made satin, velvet, and leather bindings, and imitated the gold tooling of the Italian binders (G.P.O., 1950).

In the seventeenth century, the bindings “associated with the nuns of Little Gidding” (G.P.O., 1950, p. 14) were significant (G.P.O., 1950). This was a religious community established in Huntingdonshire to escape the plague in London (G.P.O., 1950). Another very well-known binder was Samuel Mearne (d. 1683), who served as Charles II’s binder during the time of the Restoration, about 1660 (Avrin, 1991; G.P.O., 1950).

In the early eighteenth century, two binders named Elliot and Chapman produced some superlative work for the library of Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford (G.P.O., 1950). This style of binding is known as Harleian (G.P.O., 1950). “It generally consists of a rich centerpiece with a broad tooled border” (G.P.O., 1950, p. 15).

Also of great note in the 18th century, was the famous or infamous Roger Payne (1738-1797) (Avrin, 1991). “Generally speaking, both design and workmanship in bookbinding had been deteriorating when the art was suddenly revived by Roger Payne” (G.P.O., 1950, p. 16). He “was an excellent workman. His books were durably bound and his finishing showed not only skill but good taste” (G.P.O., 1950, p. 16) (Figure 2.) Payne
sewed his books with silk and lined the back with leather before covering them…He used…russia or morocco for covers. The spines were tooled elaborately and the sides were rather plain….Payne…cut his own finishing tools of iron and produced beautiful designs with a meager assortment of small ornaments. (G.P.O., 1950, p. 16)

There were two foibles for which Roger Payne gained a reputation. First, were his intromost bills (Avrin, 1991). For example, for his binding on a book now in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, he wrote:


Avrin writes that: “Fortunately, Payne used his tools with greater restraint than he did his pen. The greater subtlety of English bindings eventually influenced the taste of French collectors. Many sent their books to England to be bound” (1991, p. 321). Payne’s other foible was a weakness for strong drink (Diehl, 1946).

It is important to note that “until the nineteenth century, an English binder would carry out all stages of the binding process himself” (Marks, 1998, p. 13). This is in contrast to the nineteenth century, when “craftsmen in larger workshops were frequently allotted different tasks (‘craftsmen’ being paid more than ‘forwards’)” (Marks, 1998, p. 13).

In addition, binding shops grew up near their markets. Towns and cities with royal residences, or important government, legal, religious and educational institutions would also be centres of binding. Binderies were located near the booksellers and stationers who provided most of their custom. In London, the area around St Paul’s Cathedral was devoted to the book trade. Busy thoroughfares like Paternoster Row were lined with booksellers’, stationers’ and printers’ premises, with the side alleys like Ivy Lane and Ave Maria Lane housing the binderies (since binders did not rely on passing trade). (Marks, 1998, p. 13)
The field of bookbinding was late in joining the Industrial Revolution, but major changes were in store by the early nineteenth century. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, edition bindings were produced, especially for textbooks, consisting of bindings of paper boards, with occasional leather “stuck over them” (Avrin, 1991, p. 321). Also, “binding factories began to displace the small shop as the size of publishers’ editions increased to meet the heavy demand for information and entertainment” (Walker, 1984, p. 9). In the 1820s, instead of individual hand binding, “machines were invented which allowed the text blocks and cases to be produced separately and in quantity” (Marks, 1998, p. 11; Avrin, 1991, p. 321). By the 1830s and 1840s, cloth bindings became popular “for large editions” (Avrin, 1991, p. 321). Also, “sometimes books were bound in...cheap leather, especially in roan, sheepskin that imitated morocco” (Avrin, 1991, p. 321). In addition, manual labor was gradually replaced by the machine, first for trimming (the guillotine) in the 1850s, then for sewing in the 1880s. By the early twentieth century, all aspects of bookbinding were mechanized: folding, gathering, cutting, rounding and backing, trimming, casemaking, and casing-in. (Avrin, 1991, p. 322)

Hand binding was supplanted by mechanization because of the “slowness of production and prohibitive cost [of traditional methods]” (Diehl, 1946, p. 40).

Indeed, the “industrial bookmaker worked for the impecunious mass reader who owns, reads, and treasures his literature, such as it is, sometimes with
as much pleasure as the collector” (Comparato, 1971, p. 5). Avrin adds that, “mass-produced books demanded faster and cheaper binding methods” (1991, p. 321). Comparato points out that, "until the beginning of the industrial revolution...the scarcity of books had not only inflated their...value, it created an awe and appreciation for literature and education which still endures” (1971, p. 5). And, according to Johnson, “the Industrial Revolution stimulated demands for books and bindings; many families were proud to possess a small collection of leather-bound books and every large house had a library” (1978, p. 17).

Some writers view the Industrial Revolution as the death knell of hand bookbinding (Clough, 1957, p. 17). Alternately, “thousands of books are produced in place of the sumptuously bound book for either prince of the Church or State” (Clough, 1957, p. 17). Certainly, bookbinding was to divide into two camps, which consisted of: “Craft workshops, which produced a relatively small number of unique bindings made by hand in the traditional way; and large mechanised workshops capable of producing whole editions of a publisher’s work in leather, cloth or paper and at a low cost” (Marks, 1998, p. 11).

**William Morris and the Arts & Crafts Movement**

Next, “a turning point in English binding” (Johnson, 1978, p. 17) occurred in the 1880s with the Arts & Crafts Movement headed by William Morris, “architect, poet, painter, interior decorator,...calligrapher, type designer, and printer” (Comparato, 1971, pp. 61-62). Johnson writes that “this versatile man
inspired many craftsmen, and new ideas flourished under his direction” (1978, p. 17). Comparato notes that “after hectic decades of industrial speed and ugliness, it seems natural a counterforce should develop. An ‘archenemy of the modern machine’ materialized in the life and work of William Morris” (1971, pp. 61-62). Diehl elaborates:

One can imagine the abhorrence with which William Morris regarded these machines when he began to turn his attention to book decoration. He who detested speed and worshiped the hand product revolted against the idea that was tending to drive man away from the quiet life where the muses had their sway. He rose up in wrath and anathematized the makers of shoddy products. In his wake followed a few craftsmen who strove to revolutionize the standards of arts and crafts; and thus began a new movement which projected itself into the craft of binding books. It reinvigorated the art of hand bookbinding from its declining level and gave it an impetus that it had lacked for at least a century. (1946, pp. 41-42)

**Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson**

Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, influenced by his friend William Morris, was the leading Arts & Crafts bookbinder. He was born Thomas James Sanderson in Alnwick, Northumberland, England on December 2, 1840 (Tidcombe, 1984). His father was a tax official and he had two sisters (Tidcombe, 1984). The family moved around England then settled in London in the early 1860s (Tidcombe, 1984).

At age 16, Sanderson “at his own wish, was apprenticed to a ship builder” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 1). “He worked in the draught room for about a year before
he came to dislike the business” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 1) and left it (Tidcombe, 1984).

In 1860 he enrolled at Cambridge, intending to “enter the Church” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 2), but was disappointed by both the university and the priesthood and “left without a degree in 1863” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 2). He did make friends at university, though (Tidcombe, 1984).

Sanderson still did not know which profession to pursue (Tidcombe, 1984). He moved home and spent his time reading and trying to sort through his philosophical beliefs (Tidcombe, 1984). He was disappointed with himself, suffered from depression, and thought of suicide (Tidcombe, 1984). Fortunately, his family and friends comforted him (Tidcombe, 1984).

In May 1866, Sanderson’s family collapsed financially (Tidcombe, 1984). Sanderson was very upset and stayed at a castle for five months to recover (Tidcombe, 1984). When he came back to London, he was a changed man, and “took a much more positive and determined attitude towards his life” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 3). He moved out of his parents’ house and decided to pursue law as a career (Tidcombe, 1984).

Next, Sanderson undertook a mammoth legal assignment involving the London & North-Western Railway Company (Tidcombe, 1984). At age forty, he was a “confirmed bachelor” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 4). When he finished the railway project in 1881, he went to Italy to recuperate (Tidcombe, 1984).

On April 11, he met Annie Cobden, whose party included Jane Morris, wife of William Morris, in front of the Duomo in Siena (Tidcombe, 1984). “It
may have been love at first sight, and in any event his life from that moment was not the same” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 5). They became engaged in 1882: “He was forty-one and she had just turned twenty-nine” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 6). Tidcombe writes that “Annie was a spirited woman who believed in the liberation of women, doing one’s duty to the poor, and living simply” (1984, p. 6). Annie also had an inheritance, and her father, Richard Cobden, was a prominent English politician (Tidcombe, 1984). Annie “was looking for a marriage which would allow her the freedom to pursue her own interests, and provide her with a secure place in society; her income was protected by the recent Married Women’s Property Act” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 6).

For his part, “Sanderson could not resist [Annie’s] attraction. ‘Her active and practical mind gave to my own that feeling for reality which it had long been in want of’” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 6). Sanderson and Annie married on August 5, 1882, and Sanderson added Annie’s name to his own, becoming Cobden-Sanderson (Tidcombe, 1984). (Figure 3.)

The following year, Cobden-Sanderson thought about a change of career (Tidcombe, 1984). He wanted to do something with his hands (Tidcombe, 1984). On June 24, 1883 William Morris’s wife Janie suggested to him bookbinding as a career (Tidcombe, 1984). Two days later, Cobden-Sanderson apprenticed himself to the bookbinder Roger de Coverly (Tidcombe, 1984). He was challenged as to why he left the Bar, but he was in earnest in pursuing his new career (Tidcombe,
Figure 3. "Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson and Annie Cobden-Sanderson, c. 1890." (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 21).

Cobden-Sanderson stayed with de Coverly for a year, then went to work on his own (Tidcombe, 1984).

Tidcombe writes that "Cobden-Sanderson quickly came to be accepted as a designer craftsman alongside Morris...and others who were making attempts to reform the way decorative objects were made" (1984, p. 19). (Figures 4 and 5.) Cobden-Sanderson made his own tools, and "his bindings became even more distinctive" (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 18). He won prizes for his binding, spent much time with committees and lecturing on bookbinding, and he and Annie raised two children, Richard and Stella (Tidcombe, 1984). "Like Morris, he had the 'transcendent capacity of taking trouble' which Carlyle called genius" (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 27). In addition, Cobden-Sanderson "viewed all his work, and all his life, as an experiment" (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 27). He would not bind a book if he disagreed with it (Tidcombe, 1984). Oscar Wilde commented on "the flair with
which [Cobden-Sanderson] donned his apron—Carlyle’s badge of the working man” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 23).

Cobden-Sanderson’s solo binding career was ended by his development of sciatica in his hands and arms, and fatigue, from “the long hours of blind and gold-tooling” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 23). This often “led to violent outbursts of rage when his work was not going well” (Tidcombe, 1984, p. 16). Still, Cobden-Sanderson’s bindings had a positive effect on other London binders (Middleton, 1996, p. 272). Most binders would not
Figure 4. William Morris, The Life and Death of Jason. "Gold-tooled blue straight-grain goatskin, by Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson." (Foot, 1986, p.15).
search for fresh ideas, except within the limits of certain well-trodden paths. For more than half a century many binders such as Lewis, Bedford, Ramage, Zachsdorf, Riviere, Morrell and many others had unashamedly copied the works of the past, ranging from the [16th to 18th centuries]. Just as bad in other quarters was the Victorian mania for novelty and over-elaboration. Cobden-Sanderson showed the way by designing with simplicity and in a way which allowed the basic leather to be seen, and its beauty to be enhanced. (Middleton, 1996, pp. 272-273) (Figure 6.)

In fact, Cobden-Sanderson "did a great deal of good in creating a consciousness of the necessity of attaching more importance to sound construction and the high quality of materials than to mere superficial "finish"" (Middleton, 1996, p. 272). Cobden-Sanderson once said: "I charge as much for my restraint as I do for my elaboration" (Avrin, 1991, p. 323).

Johnson says that Cobden-Sanderson's "published articles showed he was a scholar who thought deeply about the craft and made it a scientific study" (1978, p. 17). For instance, Cobden-Sanderson wrote that "the aim of bookbinding is twofold—(1) to preserve books; (2) so to preserve them, in certain cases, that the act of preservation is an act of homage to the genius of the writer whose book is bound" (1888, p. 259). He saw "bookbinders, at their best, [as] a kind of poets" (1888, p. 260). About cover design, Cobden-Sanderson wrote:

Pattern must be articulate. Its parts seem, that is to say, in some way to belong to one another. Then pattern must be like the imprint of tender finger tips, touching or caressing what it loves. All other pattern is soulless and dead, and the book had better be plain and untouched—lettered only. (1969, p. 390).
Doves Bindery

After ten years of solo bookbinding, Cobden-Sanderson opened up the Doves Bindery, opposite William Morris’s Kelmscott Press in Hammersmith, London, along the Thames River (Tidcombe, 1993). At this time, Cobden-Sanderson was the

"most famous binder in England. The beauty and originality of his designs ensured that his bindings were sought after by collectors and booksellers in both Britain and America. However, he had always suffered from poor health, and now, although he was only in his early fifties, he did not have the strength to carry on working (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 1).

William Morris suggested that Cobden-Sanderson "start a bindery" (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 1), and his wife Annie provided the financing (Tidcombe, 1993). "Cobden-Sanderson was financially dependent on Annie, who had a practical mind, and all their decisions were made together" (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 4).

Cobden-Sanderson wanted to continue designing, and sought to open a "workshop with a division of labor and still maintain high standards of artistry and craftsmanship" (Tidcombe, 1993, p. 204). In order to do that, he supervised all aspects of the work, making sure it was carried out to his exact instructions. He selected the books, the type of binding (goatskin, sealskin, half pigskin with oak boards, or limp vellum), and such details as headbands, end papers, and the method of sewing. He created all the designs for gold tooling and worked out the paper patterns with unique tools. Only the execution, that is the actual work of sewing, forwarding, and finishing, was done for him. (Tidcombe, 1993, pp. 204-207)

Further,

an idealist all his life, and influenced by his socialist wife, [Cobden-
Sanderson] foresaw a workshop in which men and women were there not just to earn a wage, but to take an intelligent part in producing good work, and where the employer’s first priority was not the greatest profit, but the pleasure to be gained from the quality of the work produced, the happiness and harmony of the workers, and the honour in forming and maintaining a tradition. Now, he thought, was perhaps the time to put his ideals into practice. (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 2)

Cobden-Sanderson hired three first-rate workers from Riviere’s: Bessie Hooley, the sewer; Charles Wilkinson, the forwarder; and Charles McLeish, the finisher (Tidcombe, 1993, pp. 204-207). There was also an apprentice, Douglas Cockerell, who would become famous in his own right, and who advanced Cobden-Sanderson’s ideas (Nixon & Foot, 1992, p. 107). The three professionals were paid higher than average wages, while Cockerell was not paid much, but received room and board (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 8). The working conditions were superior and relaxed (Tidcombe, 1991, pp. 10-11). The staff worked the “new” 48-hour work week, from 8:30 am to 6:30 pm, with a half day on Saturday (Tidcombe, 1991). During the week, they had an hour lunch, from 1:00 to 2:00, and a half hour of “tea and relaxation in the afternoon” (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 10). The staff members also belonged to a trade union (Tidcombe, 1991). They received “four weeks paid holiday a year, a week each at Christmas and Easter and two in August, an exceptional and very generous arrangement at the time” (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 11). Furthermore, Cobden-Sanderson and Annie socialized with the bindery workers on weekends (Tidcombe, 1991). They had tea together, and took outings to the National Gallery, exhibitions, the theater, or boat races (Tidcombe, 1991).
Indeed, the staff was hired to work as a harmonious team and “to produce the kind of work Cobden-Sanderson wanted,” (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 10) and there was every indication that this occurred (Tidcombe, 1991). “Because the bindings were a team effort, they were signed by the name of the bindery” (Tidcombe, 1993, p. 207).

In 1901, Cobden-Sanderson started the Doves Press with Emery Walker (Tidcombe, 1998, p. 153). “The Doves Press was devoted to producing Cobden-Sanderson’s ‘Ideal Book,’ that is, monumental editions, beautifully printed, but without any illustrations or decorations other than the occasional calligraphic heading or initial” (Tidcombe, 1998, p. 158). Cobden-Sanderson had a rocky relationship with Emery Walker, and the partnership ended in 1908, with Cobden-Sanderson carrying on alone (Tidcombe, 1993, p. 209). At this point, “the press and the bindery merged and Cobden-Sanderson subsequently bound only the output of the press and the backlog of books he had on hand” (Tidcombe, 1993, p. 209). Later, some of Cobden-Sanderson’s pressmen were called to World War I and “binding materials became difficult to obtain” (Tidcombe, 1993, p. 210). The last Doves Press book was published in 1916, and Cobden-Sanderson “threw the Doves Roman type into the River Thames.” (Tidcombe, 1993). The bindery closed shortly before his death in 1922 (Tidcombe, 1993).

The Doves Bindery’s “books were bound in the best and most expensive manner, with the highest quality materials available” (Tidcombe, 1991, p. 84).
Figure 7. Matthew Arnold, Poems. "Bound in brown goatskin by the Doves Bindery."

This contrasted with the over-ornate treatments of the leading trade binderies (Tidcombe, 1991). Cobden-Sanderson favored binding quality editions of
classical and nineteenth century writers, including the Brownings, Carlyle, Goethe, Keats, Milton, Morris, Rossetti, Ruskin, and Shakespeare (Tidcombe, 1991). (Figure 7.)


Women Bookbinders

The earliest reference to an English woman binder is to “Dionisia le Bokehbyndere” in fourteenth-century London (Marks, 1998). “Historically, women were employed in binderies for sewing and headbanding. These were women who needed to work for their living. In the nineteenth century, middle-class women became binders in their own right” (Marks, 1998, p. 22). These women could study with teachers, such as T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, or take courses (Marks, 1998). Later, in the twentieth century, there were a number of famous women bookbinders, including Queen Victoria’s granddaughter, Princess Victoria of Wales; Virginia Woolf; and Vanessa Bell (Marks, 1998, pp. 27-28).
Described below are three distinguished English women binders, from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

**Sarah Prideaux**

Sarah Treverbian Prideaux was a bookbinder, teacher, and wrote prolifically about binding (Tidcombe, 1996). (Figure 8.) Born in London in 1853 to a well-to-do family, she studied at Cambridge for a little over a year, leaving to take care of her father (Tidcombe, 1996). Prideaux then taught English for awhile, but in her thirties was “advised to take up less sedentary work” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 104). Prideaux decided to become a bookbinder (Tidcombe, 1996).


![Figure 8. Sarah Prideaux. (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 104).](image)

From 1894, the quality of Prideaux’s bindings greatly improved, “and they suddenly [began] to look like the work of a professional binder” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 107). Prideaux merely designed her bindings; they “were executed by
the Frenchman Lucien Broca" (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 109), who also worked in London (Tidcombe, 1996).

Tidcombe describes Prideaux’s bindings as follows:

While some of her bindings lack excitement, they all have a restrained beauty about them that continues to appeal to book collectors. Anything pictorial or gimmicky would have been anathema to her, and she leaned instead toward clean, crisp floral motifs. Her covers are always within the traditional limits of good bookbinding design, avoiding over-intricate tooling which hides the beauty of the leather. (1996, p. 109). (Figure 9.)

Sarah Prideaux’s bindings are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Library, and “every major collection in Britain and America seems to have at least one example” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 112). She produced over 300 bindings during her lifetime, and her prices ranged from a few pounds to 30 pounds, with an average of 10 pounds apiece (Tidcombe, 1996).

Tidcombe notes, “Sarah Prideaux’s friends said her finely modelled features and distinguished profile brought to mind the words ‘nobility’ and ‘dignity’ but clearly there was a robustness about her” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 114). She “participated in sports,…could expertly handle a boat,…ride and shoot” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 114). Prideaux went on long cycling trips with a friend.
through France, Switzerland, and parts of Austria, and regretted not taking up flying (Tidcombe, 1996). She died in 1933 at the age of 80 (Tidcombe, 1996).

**Katharine Adams**

Katharine Adams was born in 1862 in Berkshire, the daughter of a rector (Tidcombe, 1996). Growing up, she lived next door to William Morris, and "played with his two daughters" (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 131). Her father and Morris had attended Marlborough and Oxford together, and Adams’ father officiated at Morris’s funeral in 1896 (Tidcombe, 1996).

Adams tried binding during her childhood and teenage years, only becoming a bookbinder in her thirties, when she needed to “earn some money” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 132). “For three months in 1897 she went to Sarah Prideaux for lessons and then to Douglas Cockerell who had recently left Cobden-Sanderson to set up on his own….She stayed with Cockerell for one month, as this was all she could afford” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 132).

Adams then set up a workshop, and “worked very hard, alone, for a year” (Tidcombe, 1906, p. 132). Her first success was in May 1898, “when she won First Prize in Amateur Bookbinding at the Oxford Arts and Crafts Exhibition” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 132).

In 1901, Adams moved to Gloucestershire, where her father was serving as rector (Tidcombe, 1996). “She had two female assistants who worked with
her. She gradually built up a reputation for sound plain binding, and restrained tasteful designs” (Tidcombe, 1996, pp. 133-134). Adams stayed in Gloucestershire until 1915 (Tidcombe, 1996). (Figure 10.)

In 1913, Adams “married Edward James Webb, who was nine years her senior” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 135). He never worked during their marriage (Tidcombe, 1996).

Katharine Adams bound about 300 books during her career (Tidcombe, 1996). Prices for Adams’ work were generally below 10 pounds (Tidcombe, 1996). She exhibited in England and abroad (Tidcombe, 1996), and said her life as a bookbinder was “full of joy and delight and wonderful friends” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 136). Katharine Adams is “especially known for her tasteful and intricate pointille work, with which she began to experiment from a very early stage” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 146). She died a month before her ninetieth birthday, in 1952 (Tidcombe, 1996).

**Sybil Pye**

Anna Sybella Pye was born in London in 1879 (Tidcombe, 1996). Her father had a wine business (Tidcombe, 1996). She attended Cambridge University and was a kindergarten teacher from 1900 to 1903 (Tidcombe, 1996). Because of poor health (possibly a heart condition),
she had to give up teaching and “all other stressful interests” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 147), but was assured she could lead a normal life (Tidcombe, 1996). (Figure 11.)

Sybil was interested in “art, literature, music and drama” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 147), like her artist sister, Ethel, and “they lived and worked together throughout their lives” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 147). They befriended artists such as the poet Rupert Brooke (Tidcombe, 1996).

Sybil claimed to be completely self-taught as a binder, using only Douglas Cockerell’s manual, Bookbinding and the Care of Books (Tidcombe, 1996). Her forwarding was merely competent, though, “consistent with her having learned the techniques in isolation” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 148). She started binding in about 1906 (Tidcombe, 1996).

Sybil Pye is most famous for her colorful, inlaid bindings (Figure 12.) which reviewers have called “cubist,” at least in part because “Picasso became popular at about the same time” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 152). “She made a complete break with... traditional... Western bookbinding, and was the only binder in England, and one of the few anywhere, whose specialty was inlaid leather bindings” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 153). Pye was “the first truly modern craft binder” (Tidcombe, 1998, p. 173). There were Eastern influences on her binding, and “the relationships of the various elements in her designs are fascinating. There is nothing random or casual about her designs, and her use of lines and symmetry is... interesting” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 153).

Sybil Pye “disliked the designs of most binders [and] she seems to have had no contact with other women binders” (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 153). She
completed 164 bindings in fifty years and "gave up bookbinding three years before her death in 1958" (Tidcombe, 1996, p. 154). She exhibited internationally from 1910 to 1946 (Tidcombe, 1996).

Methodology

This master’s paper employs the historical method. According to Busha & Harter,

the historical method entails the following steps: (a) the recognition of a historical problem or the identification of a need for certain historical knowledge; (b) the gathering of as much pertinent information about the problem or topic as possible; (c) if appropriate, the formulation of hypotheses that tentatively explain relationships between historical factors (variables); (d) the rigorous collection of and organization of evidence, and the verification of the authenticity and veracity of information and its sources; (e) the selection, organization, and analysis of the most pertinent collected evidence, and the drawing of conclusions; and (f) the recording of conclusions in a meaningful narrative. (1980, p. 91).

The historical method has been chosen for this paper because it best suits a bookbinding history. If not a "historical problem" (Basha & Harter, 1980, p. 91), there is at least a "need for certain historical knowledge" (Basha & Harter, 1980, p. 91) to be filled by a history of turn-of-the-century English craft bookbinding.

Per Busha & Harter, a painstaking, exhaustive literature review, including older materials, was conducted. This material was verified for "authenticity and veracity" (Basha & Harter, 1980, p. 91). Relationships between variables have been noted. The most relevant data were selected, and conclusions were drawn, and will be discussed in the conclusion section of this paper. As Powell (1991) writes, "the most significant and useful results of any basic research lie in the generalizations or principles which are derived from the factual data" (p. 141).

This history is "as complete and accurate as possible" (Basha & Harter, 1980, p. 99) and free from bias. A wide-ranging study of bookbinding history led
the writer to focus on this aspect of English bookbinding. This shows that history writing is an inductive process, rather than deductive.

Conclusion

In the late nineteenth century, against a backdrop of the Industrial Revolution, William Morris influenced the course of bookbinding. Arts and Crafts bookbinding came to be, and it was an original trend in English binding, which to some extent was original from the start (Diehl, 1946). This method of hand binding became an occupation for middle class binders, who had the time, money and inclination to explore and innovate. Led by Cobden-Sanderson, bookbinding also became a suitable occupation for middle class ladies, for a time. Indeed, “hand binding in fine leather never ceased completely during the time cloth and separately manufactured case binding became popular” (Avrin, 1991, p. 323).

As Tidcombe writes:

In London, at the turn of the century there were more than fifteen thousand men, women, boys, and girls employed in various aspects of the bookbinding trade. For many reasons, including improved book cloth, mechanization, and the deteriorating quality of leather, the volume of fine hand bookbinding in England began to decline, and today it consists primarily of restoration and conservation. However, there are still private presses whose limited editions are sometimes bound by hand, binders who produce works of art for exhibition, and classes in bookbinding as a useful craft. Just as the candle was finally perfected about the time that gas and electric lighting were introduced, Cobden-Sanderson’s nearly perfect bookbindings were produced at a time when books were beginning

Despite the Arts & Crafts Movement’s reaction against the Industrial Revolution, and in particular, to the mechanization of binding, the latter allowed a mass public to read, and afford reading—it democratized reading.

In addition, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson and his followers did not have much of an influence on mainstream binding; their effect was felt much more on artistic binding.

After World War I, the craft increasingly went over to mechanization (Tidcombe, 1998). After this time, “designer bookbinders” (Tidcombe, 1998, p. 184), got their training from colleges of art (Tidcombe, 1998). Today,

the potential for variety in materials used for binding the book is limited only by the imagination of the designer-binder.... All materials are possible, from fabrics of all kinds to plastics to fur—even electronic parts and growing grass have been set into book covers. (Avrin, 1991, p. 325)

Furthermore, Kilgour writes: “It is not possible to anticipate the demise of the printed book in terms of dates, but one can anticipate that the acceptance of the yet to be introduced successful electronic book will bring it to an end” (1998, p. 160). Indeed, electronic books seem attractive, with their paper-like screens, small size, light weight, soft covers, and long-lasting batteries. Still, it remains to be seen whether e-books will completely replace paper books. It seems doubtful for no other reason than that reading a paper book offers the more sensuous experience.

Finally, despite its allegedly endangered status, craft bookbinding is still popular in some quarters. In England, well-known modern bookbinder Philip
Smith sells his work for at least 15,000 pounds each. There are others, and they create frequently unreadable books, which are “highly collectible...and fetch large sums at auction” (Blackburn, 2006). Surely, an objection can be made that these books are impractical and often impossible to read. Yet these books are decorative and meant for collectors, not to be useful. Indeed, “People interested in contemporary bookbinding tend to be lovers of both books and modern art, for this is a medium where the two come together” (Blackburn, 2006). There is a book about dragons in the shape of a wooden dragon, and more (Blackburn, 2006). What would Cobden-Sanderson think?
References


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