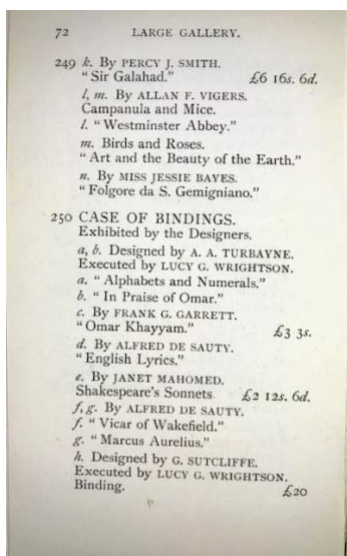
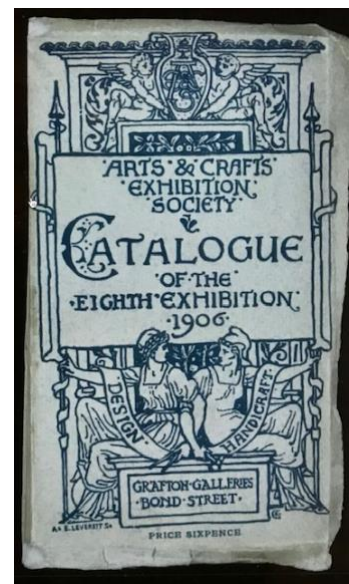


A. A. Turbayne's Designed Bindings Executed by Lucy Gilchrist Wrightson

Philip R. Bishop

The eighth exhibition of the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society opened on January 15th in its new quarters at the Grafton Galleries, corner of Crafton St. and Bond St. The distinguished Walter Crane headed the Society and its exhibition of hand-drafted items from many fields, including drawings, needlework, pottery, jewelry, fabrics, metal-work, furniture, and of course book decoration and bindings. "Great beauties in hand binding"¹ were exhibited from the Doves Bindery, and some under Douglas Cockerell's inspiration. Crane notes that "...among the many [crafts] represented, as being rather the especial growth in recent years of revival—namely, book-binding, calligraphy and illumination..."² Bindings exhibited in the "Large Gallery" were listed on pp. 58-73 including the cases of books printed at the Doves Press and many of the other presses of the day, and those bound at the Doves Bindery, but also those by lesser known craftsmen and craftswomen.³



Of special interest for purposes of this paper, in Case #250 of eighteen bindings (entries 250a-250r) the first two entries recorded bindings designed by A. A. Turbayne and executed by Lucy G. Wrightson who is also listed as having bound a book designed by George Sutcliffe (entry 250h), her mentor at the bookbinding firm of Sangorski & Sutcliffe⁴ where she trained. Wrightson's bindings are on *Alphabets and Numerals* (authored by A. A. Turbayne) and *In Praise of Omar*. It is my contention that these two bindings designed by Turbayne, though very different than the Art Nouveau or Arts & Crafts designs he usually employed, are in fact the two bindings pictured below.

Albert Angus Turbayne (1866-1940) had become known as a prolific cover designer of cloth publishers' bindings, mostly in the Art Nouveau style. His overall reputation as a binder in this manner continues to this day and many examples of his work can be seen on publishers' cloth bindings along with his distinctive scarab mark, or another monogram mark. Yet his work as a designer was broad ranged.

Turbayne was Boston born, but educated in Canada and then later moved to England. On the Victorian Web, Simon Cooke records that Turbayne was:

...one of the most distinguished binding designers of the final decade of the nineteenth century, and worked in several styles. Some of his commissions took the form of elaborately tooled bindings in leather which were directed at the expensive tastes, while others... were trade bindings for the modest (or middle-class) pocket.

Often linked to the Arts and Crafts designs of William Morris, and credited as one of those who sought to improve public taste by promoting work of the highest quality, he is also viewed as a sophisticated proponent of Art Nouveau, whose bindings bear comparison with those of Laurence Houseman and Charles Ricketts. Framed by Morris's Kelmscott Press and the extravagance of Aubrey Beardsley, Turbayne occupies a complex position within the discourse of Victorian book design.

Famous among his contemporaries, and known principally for the ‘Peacock edition’ produced by Macmillan and Co. in the 1890s, Turbayne was hailed by critics as a ‘genius’ (J.S.R., p. 213). H. Orrinsmith, the art director of Burns and Co., described him in 1898 as a designer of exceptional ability, praising his bindings as those which ‘come nearest perfection’ (Haslam, p. 73). Other eulogies followed. Favorable reviews appeared in *The Artist* and *The Sketch*, *The Inland Printer*, *The Art Journal* and elsewhere, and his name was featured a selling point in advertisements for each publication. This was an important development in a period when binding designers were mainly anonymous, and Turbayne’s achievements were promoted on both sides of the Atlantic. Impressive when placed on a shelf, it is quite likely that his books were purchased for the beauty of his covers rather than their contents; working within a long Victorian tradition, Turbayne’s edition were objects to be seen not read...

Their status as fine art was often remarked and their value as artifacts was acknowledged in 1900, when Turbayne won third prize... in the book binding competition at the Exposition Universelle in Paris; he continued to design cloth covers in the early part of the twentieth century. His reputation has endured into our own time, and features in every account of the period. Yet Turbayne’s life and work have never been the subject of a detailed monograph [let alone a book].⁵

Cooke’s Turbayne article on the Victorian Web includes a detailed overview of the two major strains of Art Nouveau that Turbayne drew upon in presenting his curvilinear design work, but also points out the geometric complexity of his designs which by 1907 prefigured Art Deco, as in his Mackintosh reminiscent “austere and imposing” binding with “abstracted flowers” design for G. S. Layard’s *Suppressed Plates* of 1907. Although many of Turbayne’s designs were found on cloth publishers’ bindings, he also produced designs for leather art bindings executed by accomplished binders whom he commissioned. As mentioned above, one particularly notable event was his third prize win in the bookbinding competition at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900. The Art Nouveau designs he created were covered in *The Artist* ⁶ which can be seen [here](#). The seven bindings pictured (plus two doublures and a decorated fore-edge) are notably along the lines of Morris’ Arts & Crafts floral, vines and tendrils, and repetitive elements of Art Nouveau, even placing a peacock design on one—Turbayne’s signature motif popularized by Macmillan in the very late 19th century.

Five years after the Paris Exposition Turbayne’s design work would be changing. He was a master of many styles, but he started to lean toward the proto-Art Deco design of the 1907 *Suppressed Plates* (London: A & C Black). Turbayne would be experimenting with other designs which, roughly speaking, changed from curvilinear forms to more rectangular, tighter geometric designs. This period in Turbayne’s life roughly coincides with his founding ca. 1905 of the Carlton Studio in the Strand, London, along with four other Canadian artist-designers who together began this venture to centralize design work for hire.⁷ This was also the time that he put forth his two books, *Alphabets and Numerals* (1904) and *Monograms and Ciphers* (1905). In preparation for an upcoming showing at the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society’s eighth exhibition opening on January 15, 1906, A. A. Turbayne commissioned two leather bindings of his designs to be executed by Lucy G. Wrightson: one being on his own publication of *Alphabets and Ciphers* and the other on an American publication by Thomas Bird Mosher, *In Praise of Omar*. Both bindings were stamped-signed by Wrightson: 19L.G.W.05

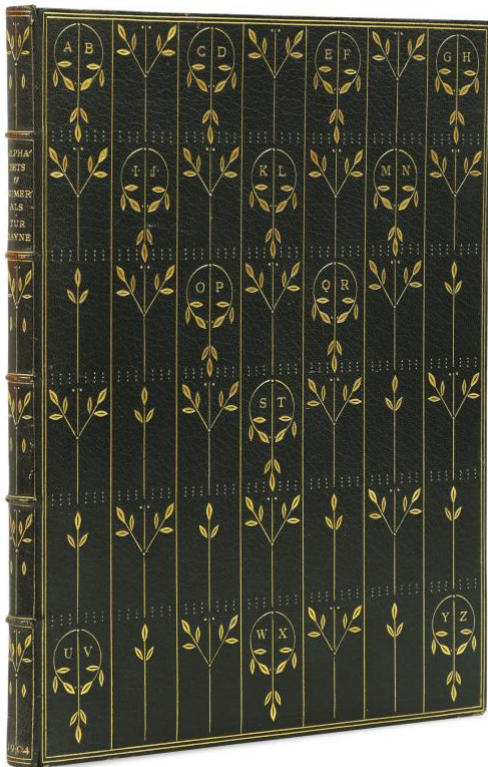
Both of the bindings display a design choice quite different from Turbayne’s more commonly recognizable accomplishments. Gone are the curvilinear designs employing flowers and tendrils moving across the open surface. In their place are designs remarkably more rectilinear, displaying a complicated grid-work with small leaf or blossom embellishments obviously meant to accompany the grids, and not the other way around. Front and center is geometric display. The *Alphabets and Ciphers* also employed a very creative interlocking of the alphabet with each letter of the A-Z alphabet coupled with one other running across the front cover and so down to the next next levels for a total of thirteen conjoined latters of the alphabet (see binding pictured below on the left). In following this layout one begins to appreciate how the geometric elements of the binding unfold giving a pattern like:

AB CD EF GH
 IJ KL MN
 OP QR
 ST
 ///////////////
 UV WX YZ

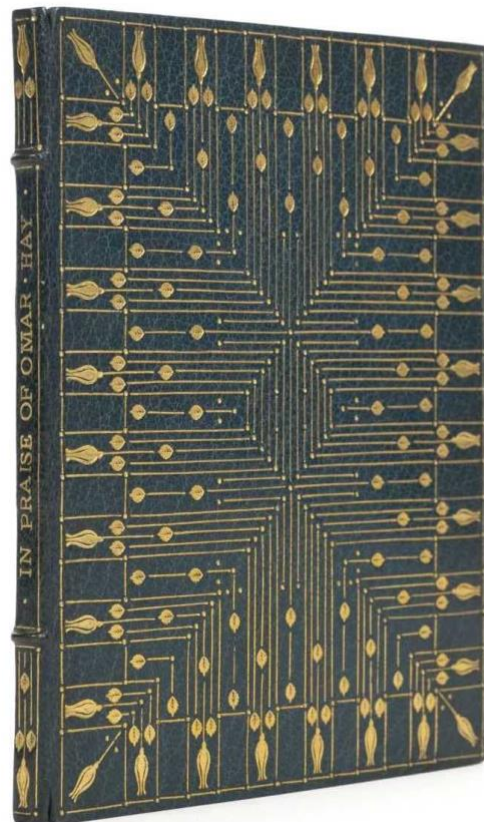
While maintaining the overall grid-work which is accentuated by five strings of small, vertical lines between each set of letters and running across the cover in this fashion: ||||| . This is all very highly inventive and is furthermore accompanied by straight vertical stems, some culminating in a double branched leaves, and others a single stem and leaves without the branching. Nothing random about them. The designs accompany the alphabetic groupings. Moving from top to bottom down the cover's six horizontal regions one sees:

- (1st level) three double branches on the first level (interspersed among the AB CD EF GH);
- (2nd level) four doubles on the second (IJ KL MN);
- (3rd level) and then a surprising single stem on either side of three double branches (OP QR);
- (4th level) then a remarkable double-single-double-double-single-double (ST);
- (5th level) followed by an alternating single-double-single-double-single-double-single (no letters)
- (6th level) and lastly a single-double, double-single going across the bottom region.

The complexity of the design (with more-or-less standard work on the spine) is truly a sight to behold, and is an obvious display of a master designer.



Alphabets and Cyphers



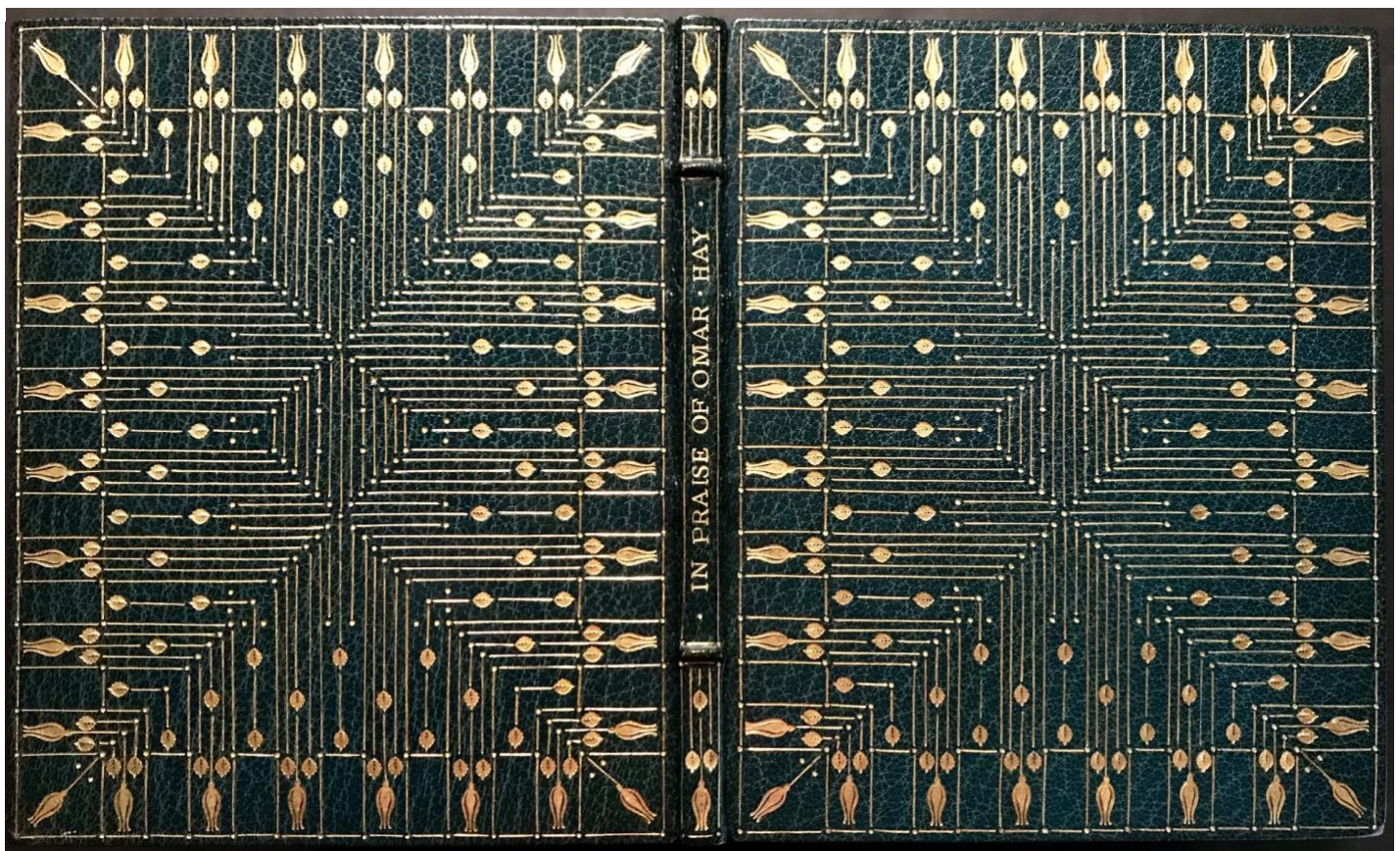
In Praise of Omar

The *Alphabets and Cyphers* (London and Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1904) book in this binding was last seen for sale at Lyon & Turnbull's January 15, 2014 auction, lot No. 255 which can be seen [here](#) (present ownership unknown). It was also pictured in the *Art Workers' Quarterly* of 1906.⁸

The second binding, that on *In Praise of Omar* (Portland, Maine: T. B. Mosher, 1898) appeared at the Dominic Winter Auctioneers sale of March 4, 2020, lot No. 390 which can be seen [here](#) and which was

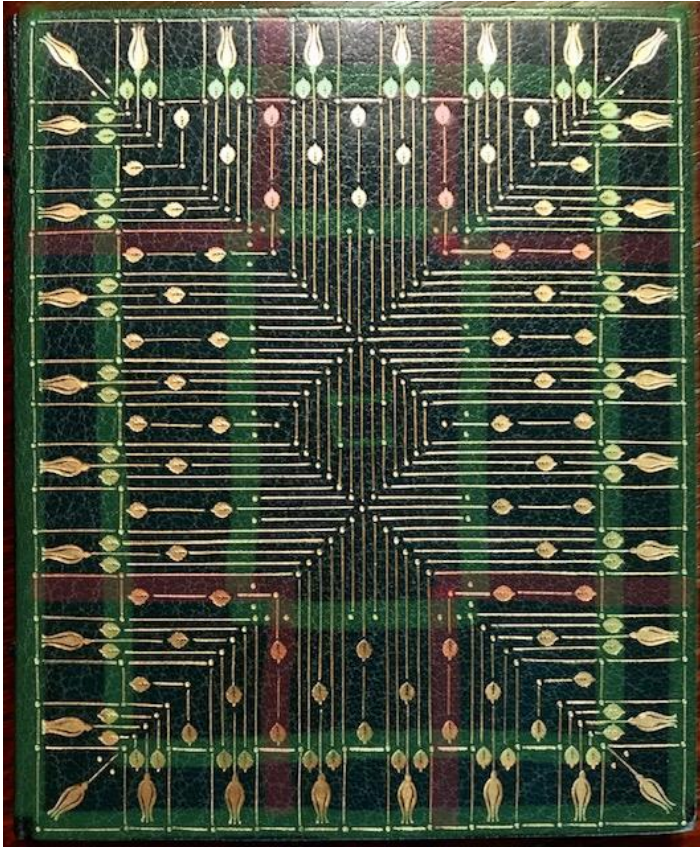
described as “richly gilt with geometric pattern of fillets and dots enclosing repeated seed-head and leaf tools.”⁹⁹ The drawing power of the binding and its design still has its effectiveness even to this day, which is why Dominic Winter Auctioneers used it for the cover of their auction catalogue. It was bought by Jarndyce Books of London and subsequently sold to the Bishop Collection of Thomas Bird Mosher & the Mosher Press in the U.S.A. Like its counterpart in the exhibition, it too is a masterful work of complex geometric design. With the slightest tilt the gilt tooling reveals inner forms within the front cover design which is repeated on the back cover, Incidentally, the inner covers remained essentially unadorned. Following a picture of the fully opened binding below, look to **Example A** pointing out several rectangular shapes within the cover’s design, from the outermost rules inward to the square in the middle (**green**) including large corner squares (**red**). In **Example B** we see the further nesting of squares at each large corner (**blue**) and the angular quintal sectioning of the cover design (**red**) creating five regions, including the central diamond. These geometric unfoldings simply show what one can find while gleaning patterns within the overall design and its complexity.

Besides the intricate line work, the design only employed two floriated tools used repetitiously. On each cover the 28 terminal floral buds-on-stems with two leaves on either side surround the perimeter of the cover. These four sides meet up with each of the four corners consisting of the same floral bud-on-stem configuration but with only two dots on either side of the stem. On the spine is the same floral bud-on-stem arrangement with two leaves flanking the top panel of the spine, and a third leaf added at the bottom panel. Overall this is a very intricate design for such a small binding.



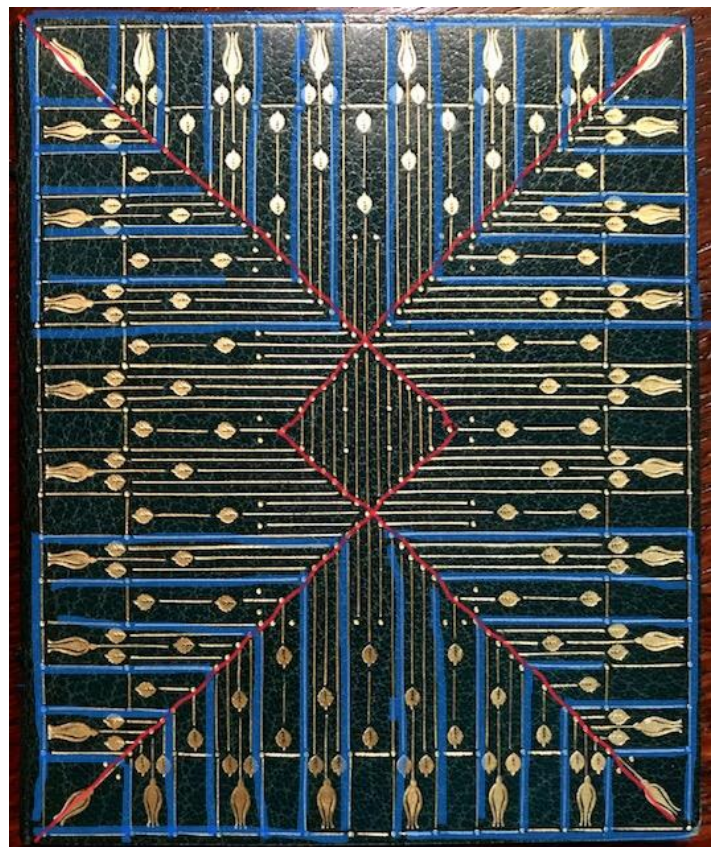
5 5/8 "(h) x 4 3/4"(w)

Nested rectangles and four corner squares



Example A

Five regions created, and within each large square there are three more smaller nested squares



Example B

Turbayne's binder of choice to implement his binding designs was Lucy Gilchrist Wrightson. Marianne Tidcombe indicates that in 1904 she was one of the pupils of Francis Sangorski and George Sutcliffe.¹⁰ In 1905, the same year that she bound the two Turbayne-design bindings, she was awarded the first prize in a bookbinding competition sponsored by London's *Arts & Crafts* magazine¹⁰ (the article can be seen [here](#)). At the 1906 Exhibition Society's show she also bound a book to the designs of her mentor, George Sutcliffe (entry 250h). Little more appears to be known about Wrightson who left England for America arriving in NYC on Sept. 11, 1908.¹² What happened between her arrival in NYC and burial in Devon, England is mostly unknown,¹³ but in 1910 she once again bound two books to Turbayne's designs for the 1910 Society exhibition¹⁴ and was listed as living at Ockenden, Cuckfield, Sussex in England.

Any research on A. A. Turbayne and his design work of the period needs to take into account these two bindings. They had not been identified as being designs by A. A. Turbayne by either of the two auction houses, nor by the bookseller of the Omar and remained unknown until acquired for the Bishop Collection. That these are both bindings by Wrightson was certainly established by all parties involved, but one must query. Could either or both of these two bindings be some of Wrightson's other work and not the A. A. Turbayne designed bindings that were exhibited? Are some other bindings "out there" still to be discovered? The likelihood is very slim, for the following reasons:

1. The bindings had to be completed before the January 15, 1906 opening. Both bindings are stamped by Wrightson in 1905 which is when they would have been completed in time for the exhibition.

2. Wrightson's own work, as exemplified by her *Arts and Crafts* magazine's prize competition binding (see link to her prize entry above), was very different in style, and included fully decorated doublures. These two bindings were executed for their cover designs only, as both have minimal tooling inside the covers. These are not discoveries of Wrightson's own design and execution, but just of her execution of the outer binding.
3. That these two bindings recently uncovered should appear with the exact titles listed in the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society's catalogue for its eighth exhibition, both stamp-signed by Wrightson in 1905, with their rectilinear design work giving them a sort of "family resemblance," make it highly probable that they are indeed one and the same. The bindings are indeed the design work of A. A. Turbayne and were both displayed at the 1906 exhibition.
4. The binding on Turbayne's *Alphabets and Numerals* was confirmed by the *Art Workers' Quarterly* picture of the binding as being designed by A. A. Turbayne and executed by Lucy C. Wrightson.
5. Lastly, as of 1906 there was no other imprint of John Hay's *In Praise of Omar* on either side of the Atlantic save that as published in America by Thomas Bird Mosher.

It is hoped that this paper identifies both of the A. A. Turbayne designed bindings and will aid in the far wider research into Turbayne's work. Likewise, to clearly identify these as having been executed by Lucy Gilchrist Wrightson links the story of Turbayne with that of Wrightson. It's not everyday one has the opportunity to make such identification. Should more need to be seen or described of the Turbayne/Wrightson copy of *In Praise of Omar*, the Bishop Collection remains open and available for further scholarly inquiries.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank the following people for their assistance in reviewing this paper, or in providing information needed: Simon Cooke, David Lowden, Jeff Stikeman, Nolan Goodman, and Susann Bishop.

¹ Cox, Mable. "The Arts and Crafts Exhibition—London, 1906" in *House and Garden*, Vol. IX, No. 5. Philadelphia, PA: The John C. Winston Co., May 1906, p. 214.

² Crane, Walter. Foreword in the *Catalogue of the Eighth Exhibition*. London: Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, 1906, p. 14.

³ Cases of books included some bindings, and Case #234 bindings designed by Douglas Cockerell but executed by others; Cases #235-36 the Doves Press and Bindery; Case # 237 filled with leather work and bindings; Case #242 just of bindings by C. R. R. Ashbee, Miss Power, and Alex Millar. To see the full catalogue, click [here](#).

⁴ Crane, p. 72

⁵ Cooke, Simon. "Albert Angus Turbayne: Art Nouveau binding designer" on the *Victorian Web*. <https://victorianweb.org/art/design/books/cooke7.html>. 18 April 2021

⁶ "A. Turbayne's Book-Bindings at the Paris Exhibition" in *The Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* (American Edition). Vol. 28, No. 248. September, 1900, pp. 212-217. Courtesy of JSTOR.

⁷ Haslam, Malcome. *Arts and Crafts Book Covers*. Shepton Beauchamp, Somerset (England): Richard Dennis Publications, 2012, p. 73.

⁸ *The Art Workers' Quarterly: A Portfolio of Practical Designs for Decorative and Applied Art*. Vol. 5. London: Chapman & Hall, 1906, p. 86 (binding pictured, see [here](#)). Reporting on the Exhibition Society's 1906 show, they state: "In the realm of bookbinding decoration, Misses Nelia Casella, E. G. Woolrich, Messrs. Pissaro, Reginald Knowles, and A. A. Turbayne take rank amongst the most gifted designers." (p. 50)

⁹ "Printed Books, Maps & Documents—Books from the Library of Dawson Turner (1775-1858) / The Reference Library of John Lawson, Bookseller" Cirencester, Gloucestershire, UK: Dominic Winter Auctioneers, 4 March 2020, cover and p. 132.

¹⁰ Tidcombe, Marianne. *Women Bookbinders, 1880-1920*. New Castle, DE and London: Oak Knoll Press & The British Library, 1996, pp. 29, 172, 189.

¹¹ A.F.P. (ed.?) "Our Bookbinding Prize Competition" in *Arts and Crafts: a monthly practical magazine for the studio, workshop & the home*. London: Hutchinson & Company, July 1905, pp. 73-75, 126-127.

¹² AHR *net* (Art History Research *net*) See [here](#). “In 1908 Wrightson left Liverpool for America on the steamship ‘Arabic’. She arrived in New York City on 11 September 1908. No further information has been traced on her and it is not known if she continued to work as a binder.

¹³ Internet information sourced on Geni, <https://www.geni.com/people/Philip-Bishop/6000000176349964877>, includes Lucy (December 20, 1872-September 2, 1945), her parents and a number of siblings (4 sisters; 4 brothers). Her occupation is listed as bookbinder. Findagrave.com shows her burial site at St. Margaret and St. Andrew Churchyard in Littleham, East Devon District, Devon, England, plot Y248 along with other members of the family.

¹⁴ *Catalogue of the Ninth Exhibition*. Foreword by Walter Crane. London: Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, 1910, p. 45. The Turbayne binding designs were on *Poems* by Shelley (147r) and on a “Guest Book” (entry 147u). For viewing of the 1910 exhibition catalogue, click [here](#).