
A Tree is known by its Fruit
1896
Vinycomb. MR.IA.
Holywood co. Down.

# THE BOOKPLATES OF MR. JOHN VINYCOMB MRIA

## with special reference to his 'Celtic' designs.

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# The bookplate of Mr. John Vinycomb FRIA, with special reference to his 'Celtic' plates.

Contents:

SECTION A : INTRODUCTION.

This thesis will attempt to shed some light on the work of Mr. John Vinycomb of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne who, for the large majority of his life, worked in Belfast, residing in County Down, Northern Ireland. His working life lasted from the latter half of the 19th century until the early 20th century. There has been little or nothing written on the man or his work, even though he has left behind a huge reservoir of material worthy of study

It is his bookplates or 'ex libris' designs (as has been the fashion to call them) that I will mainly discuss, especially his Irish plates. I also wish to put Mr. Vinycomb into the setting in which he worked and from which he drew all his inspiration and direction. This paper will hopefully provide the reader with some kind of understanding of the man, his style, subject matter and his handling of Irish ornamentation in the work of his bookplates. It will be necessary to comment on the history of platemaking in the two islands, especially Ireland, mentioning the various fashions that arose over the last 500 years.

I have separated the thesis into several sections, making note of the different areas under discussion. The first section attempts to define what a bookplate is and how and why they were first used. It also attempts to lay down some reasons why bookplates have become such an absorbing area of study for so many people. Beginning with the 15th century and finishing in the present this section briefly lists the different people who together researched and compiled collections of bookplates and so preserved and stimulated interest in ex libris.

The second section deals simply with the various styles of plate design in the British Isles, briefly stating and describing each fashion in chronological order and their evolution and lifespan. Also, this section is closely related to the following one which will go on to discuss the history of heraldry and its use in bookplates.

Following on from that, the next section covers the situation in Ireland as far as plate production is concerned and seeks to give the reader some insight into the role Ireland played in bookplate history.

The next two sections are about Mr. Vinycomb, sketching his biographical history and working life, his love of antiquities and his involvement in the different cultural societies on both sides of the channel. It also covers the industrial revival in Belfast in the second half of the 19th century. It traces the rise of the well

known printing firm in Belfast: Marcus Ward and Company and Vinycomb's twenty years with the firm as head of their artistic staff. In addition to that, it also attempts to place Mr. Vinycomb into this Irish context and will go on to examine examples of his own Irish bookplates, commenting on each plate's character and subject matter and the client for whom it was designed. This section also contains a cross-section of the other styles of plates he executed and gives examples of these as well.

SECTION B: 'WHAT IS A BOOKPLATE?'.

It is believed that the origin of bookplates grew out of a tradition during the 15th century in scolastic circles where, because of the preciousness of the hand written manuscript, books were often secured with heavy chains and solemn oaths were sworn on the lending of them under heavy penalties to ensure their safe return. Later, when books became more numerous with the introduction of moveable type, their owners inserted printed labels upon the insides of the covers as proof of ownership. And that is essentially what a bookplate is - a mark of ownership. Initially these labels would have been chiefly used for the purpose of recording book legacies to institutions and colleges.

The most ancient bookplate known is dated around 1450 and is a crude woodcut belonging to a chaplin to a German family called Schonstett. His name was Jean Knabensberg, called Igler, and the plate shows a hedgehog with a flower in its mouth. Above the hedgehog is a ribbon-like scroll with the words: "Hanns Igler das dich ein igel kuss." The plate is about seven and a half inches by five and a half inches in size, rather larger than the modern plate. This was probably due to the restrictive qualities of the tools used so that a smaller, finer cut could not be obtained. Other German artists such as Durer, Burgmair and Hans Holbein did much to promote the spread of bookplates when they lent their talents to adorn books from the libraries of their friends and patrons. The term 'ex libris' comes to us from the time when latin was the universal language of the learned, who always prefaced their Latinised names upon their books with these words to indicate that the thus inscribed book was 'belonging to the library of' J _____ . It is hard to know by what name the plates were called before the 18th century as the first use of the term 'bookplate' was thought to have been in 1791, when John Ireland, a famous designer of plates, published the first two volumes of his 'Hogarth Illustrated', saying that 'shop bills and bookplates' were his first works. Also in 1798, Ireland refers to the 'bookplate' for Lambert, the heraldic painter, which Hogarth executed.

The collection and study of bookplates is now a recognised institution, although it is relatively recent when one compares it to other art forms. It was not until the early 1800s that the study of bookplates began to catch on and, even then, there were few serious researchers. Since the turn of the century, the fashion of plate collecting increased to quite a popular level.

*fig. 1*

Although bookplates are primarily marks of ownership in books, they are other things as well. It seems unjust for the 'uninitiated' to simply think of them as marks of ownership only, overlooking the fact that to so many booklovers these little works of art contain a wealth of information. Because of the variety of styles and the history of plates (spanning over 500 years) and the various people that have used them, each plate can say much about the era in which it was created, the artist who created it and the client for whom it was created. Therefore the bookplate merits attention, if only on these grounds.

Bookplates are fascinating for numerous reasons. To some, their historical background is important because they aid the historian in his task of arranging various areas of social and artistic history in chronological order. In addition to that, they are sometimes the only evidence of the publics' response to the graphic art of their time. For others, they are precious because of the particular artists who designed them or because of the client for whom they were designed. Another interesting observation is that bookplates often parallel stylistically other area of artistic activity, especially masonry, mapmaking, illumination, woodcarving and silver engraving. They provide a kind of 'backdoor' view into the personality of the artist, revealing his artistic tastes and personality.

For whatever reasons one might enjoy designing, studying or collecting bookplates, the one certain thing is that they are irrevocably connected with learning and culture. Consequently, the vast majority of ex libris lovers are people who appreciate reading books and acquiring knowledge and the reason why they are not found in every book brought is because not everyone is a booklover. In times past, the man of cultured mind, whatever the subject to which his attention was particularly directed, found his shelves laden with literary treasures which were his delight and comfort. Being a true booklover, he was not one to injure or deface a book or turn over the leaves with soiled hands. As a mark of ownership and a gentle reminder to the thoughtless borrower, he placed his own ex libris where it would not be overlooked, knowing assuredly that it would create respect for the book and it's owner. It was, then, for this very reason that ex libris were first designed and distributed, but they have now succeeded in becoming a subject onto themselves and are sought after, not just because of their practical use, but also because they themselves are objects worthy of study.

Before bookplates were first appreciated for their own aesthetic worth, few ventured to stretch their curiosity further than their own designs, possibly for fear they would be dubbed as slightly eccentric! Lord de Tabley, formely the Hon. John Leicester Warren, was one of the first people to seriously study ex libris. Commenting on a letter he wrote to his sister in 1874 on how fashionable bookplates had become, later said, "When I began collecting them, C___ came into my room and said she hoped I would keep it dark, for people would suppose me mad!" (A,pg. 6) After the publication of his book: 'Guide to the Study of Book Plates', the interest in and the collection of bookplates curiously increased to such an extent that by February 1891 the Ex Libris Society was formed and continued for 18 years, producing an intriguing journal packed with interesting articles on plates, designers and correspondance of members which contained snippets of useful information. And it is into this setting that Mr. John Vinycomb, with which this paper will mainly deal, is placed.

After the disbanding of the society in 1908, the Bookplate Exchange Club was born, which contained many of the original members of the former society. In the early twenties and thirties the enthusiasm for bookplates continued and many enthusiasts, such as American James Gutherie, looked also to the contemporary design scene, producing journals such as the 'Bookplate Magazine' and 'The Bookplate'. More recently, in 1971, the Bookplate Society was formed, and its headquarters being in London. It produces a quarterly newsletter and journal, the first of its kind in the English language for six decades, edited by a Professor W. E. Butler. And it now has over two hundred members throughout the world.

It has become clearly evident in recent years, from the demands made upon booksellers for original plates and books on the subject of ex libris, that the interest in bookplates is far bookplates is far from subsiding.

SECTION C: A BRIEF HISTORY OF BOOKPLATE DESIGN.

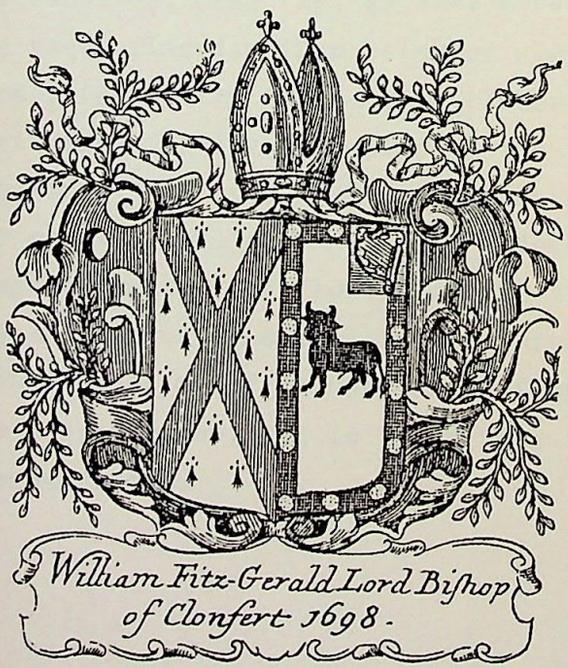
'Simple Armorials'

The use of bookplates in England did not begin until the late 16th century with the first recorded plate dated 1574, belonging to Sir Nicholas Bacon, the father of Francis Bacon. In contrast with Germany, England did not take to bookplates as readily as her European neighbour and neither was she as adventurous in design. The majority of plates produced in England at this time were simple armorials,(see fig. 2) plain shields of arms which were nearly always symmetrical in shape and crowned with a helmet. From the helmet more or less voluminus mantling is outspread, which in early examples ended in tassels before reaching the bottom of the shield. In later examples its heavy folds descended to the bottom and rose upward from the helmet to the level of the top of the crest, being either a bird or animal situated at the top of the helmet and was attached to it by a wreath. Below the shield there was usually a narrow, ribbon-like scroll for the motto (written usually in Latin and not always given). John Vinycomb in an article on the 'Heraldic Motto Scroll' for the Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society, said that it represented "a strip of vellum and as such, it has become conventionally treated in heraldic painting with the ends curled in various ways, sometimes split and tapered to the points, and curled in more or less folds, imitating the natural tendency of strips of parchment to curl on exposure to a warm atmosphere." (D pg. 135) Below the scroll at the base there was usually a bracket containing the owners name.

The mantling was not always foliage, sometimes it was in stiff folds of material behind the shield, its upper corners being tied up and tasselled. In England these armorial plates were simple and effective though rarely imaginative. One could only vary the mantling scrolls or crests and no significant variations in styles developed, nor did plates become popular until around the turn of the 17th century. It took a long time for bookplates to establish themselves in the two islands, especially in Ireland where they were almost unheard of in the 17th century.


S.r John Aubrey of Lantrithyd in the County of Glamorgan Baronet and of Boarestall in the County of Bucks 1698

fig. 2



William Fitz-Gerald Lord Bishop of Clonfert 1698.

John Sayer of Hornslow in the County of Midd.x Esq.r 1700

'Jacobean' plate

The term 'Jacobean' originally refers to the period of James the 1st's reign in Britain and it continues long after the death of the monarch to be applied to anything relating to, or having the style of, architecture characterized by a combination of late Gothic and Palladian motifs. Up until aproximately 1700, the 'simple armorial' design remained unbroken. But through gradual artistic variations in basic heraldry and the influence of ecclesiastical woodwork and masonry, with which ex libris design at that time was associated, a new style began to emerge. The Jacobean plate was most prevalent around 1730, but it began around the turn of the century and slowly metamorphasized to give way to the 'Chippendale' style around 1745 (yet these styles overlap and no hard and fast period can be established with which only one particular style of plate was used).

The Jacobean bookplates'"principle features", says John William Hardy in his book on bookplates, "was its heavy, carved appearance, evenly balanced porportions; the exact coincidence of the two sides of the design"(B). The shield was always of regular outline and was almost always situated on an ornamental frame. The background or 'lining' of the frame, as it is called, was either filled in with a fish scale pattern, pointed into diamond shapes or built up solidly with a wall of brick. The sides of the frame were coiled and folded with scrolls resembling carved wood elaborately decorating the plate, (see fig. 3).

Jacobean plates are clearly recognisable by their many and varied accessories, (see fig. 4) i.e; escallop shells, with the concave side in view, placed wither below or above the shield. These ornaments occur frequently in Jacobean plates. The helmet mantling is elaborate, decending far down the side of the shield. Very often, grotesque faces appear at the base of the shield and sometimes also, heads of demons or cherubs, whilst on the top ledges of the frame are often placed eagles, baskets of flowers or fruit. Frequently the frame is supported by two satyrs or such like creatures. In essence, the Jacobean bookplate looks as if it was carved from wood, giving it a solid and immutable appearance. It is noted more for its solemnity than for its gracefulness.

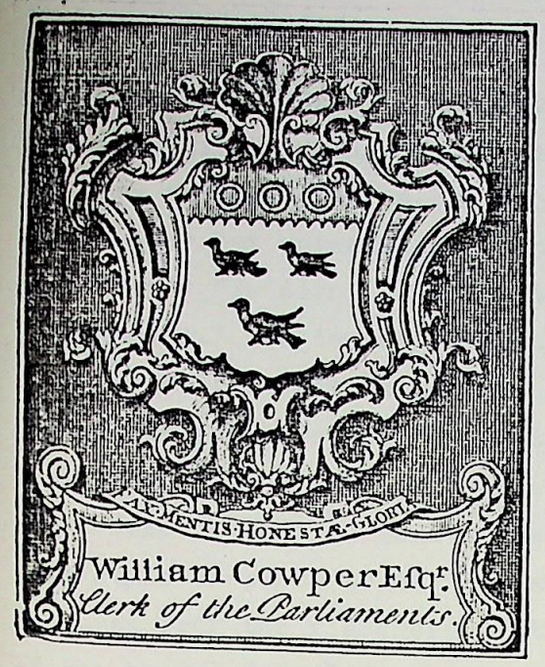



fig. 3


fig. 4

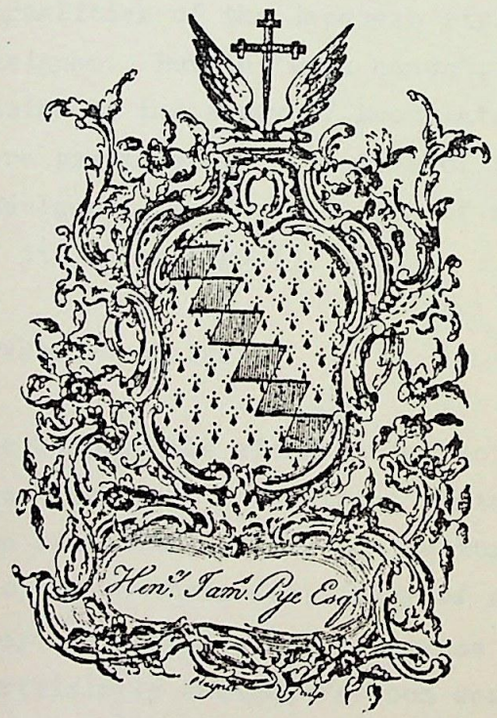



fig. 5

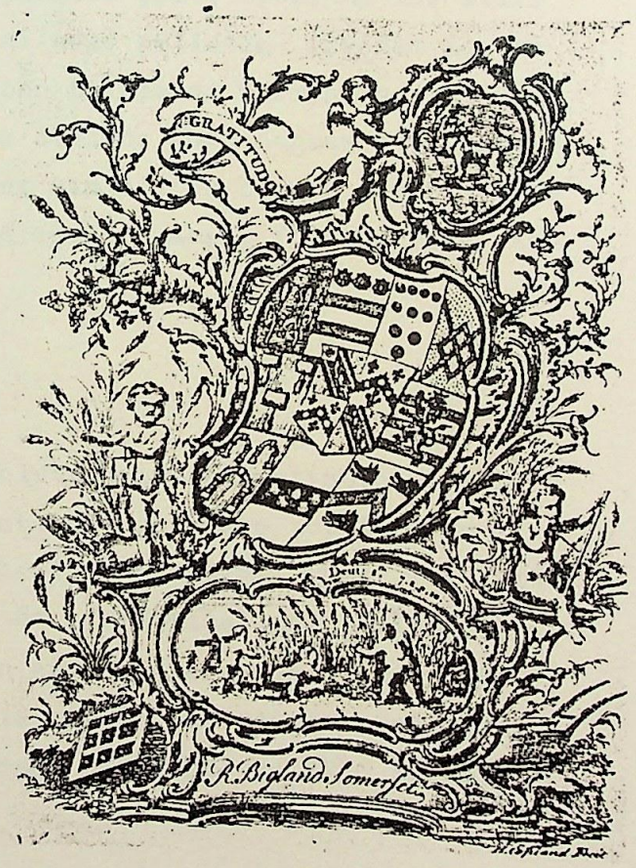


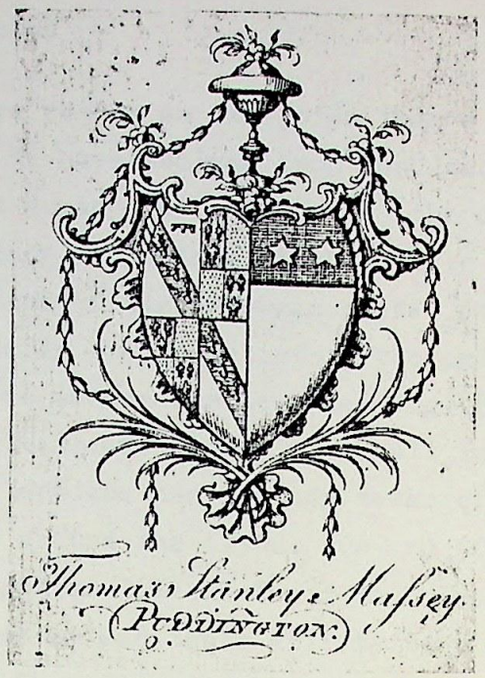

fig. 6

'Chippendale' plates

The Chippendale plate so named because of Thomas Chippendale, the famous furniture designer, closely followed the former design, becoming very popular after about 1750. It did definitely evolve from its predecessor but superseded it in ornamentation. "If the parent", says J. W. Hardy "Is dignified and stately, the offspring is dainty and progressive." Beginning with an air of lightness and grace, it served as a delightful contrast to the Jacobean plate, in that while it was attractive and generally freer than its parent, it had, says Hardy, "essential elements of weakness, which hardly able to resist development, were certain to be its downfall." The principle differences in this style of plate to the former, is the liberating of the decorative features from the rigidness of the 'carved look'. (see fig. 5) Instead of the heavy, formal wood-like appearance, the frame developed, unrestrained. The flowers and branches spring out from any angle instead of being carefully arranged in baskets. The helmet is rarely shown in Chippendale plates and consequently the mantling is missing. The shield does not conform to its original shape, but often looks like a red or green pepper or pear! The Chippendale plate broke up the stiff formalities of the Jacobean style and allowed artistic freedom to the designer. But in "weak hands", says John Leicester Warren in his 'Guide to the study of Bookplates' "the designs soon degenerated into mere prettiness." (C) Some of the later variations became rather over-indulgent with the addition of more and more ornament for the mere sake of it. (see fig. 6)

'Festoon' plates

The Chippendale after having enjoyed thirty years of artistic waywardness gave way to 'Festoon' plates. These designs were popular from the late 18th century to the turn of the 19th century. Their popularity was due to their simplicity of shape. So symmetrical and uncluttered, they achieved a perfect balance between arms and ornament. (see fig. 7) Surprisingly enough, Festoon designs did not become stereotyped and were a perfect compliment to leather-bound books of the 1780 to 1810 period.


Thomas Stanley Massey
Peddington

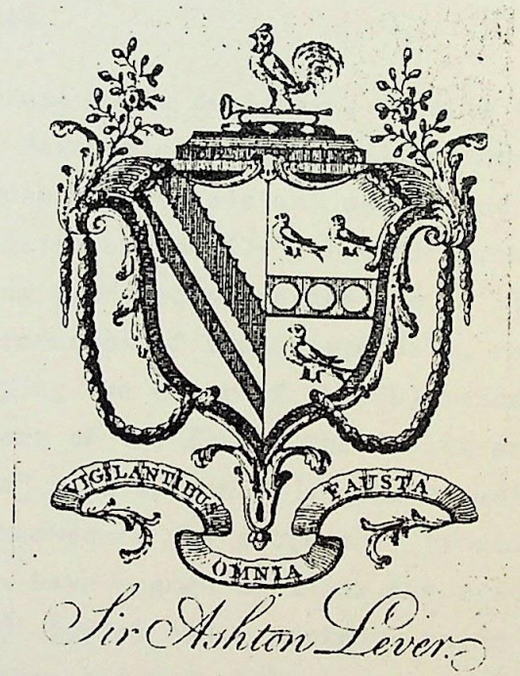

VIGILANTIBUS
FAUSTA
OMNIA
Sir Ashton Lever

fig.7

'Allegorical' plates

These designs were rather an exception than a continuous national style and are believed to have evolved from the Jacobean ex libris. It should be mentioned that during the period when the Jacobean design was most popular, other minor variations of this style developed that were based on the ornamentation of the Jacobean plate, adding more and more angels satyrs and eventually branching into mythological subject matter. Nothing about this mode was realistic. (see fig. 8) Olympus, Minerva, Appollos, thunderbolts and clouds, were all in, especially in France where allegorical designs had already taken off in a big way. They were very popular around the 1730s, 40s and 50s, more so on the continent than in the British Isles. Their main feature is their references to classical mythology and their ability to curiously represent things as they are not. The Allegorical design bears no affinity to the Chippendale ex libris but the dividing line between it and the Jacobean style is almost invisible.

'Landscape' plates

Of all the landscape plate designers, none is more well known than Thomas Bewick of Newcastle who popularized those little woodengravings of ruins and garden scenes, distant spires and mountains. The first Bewick plate is dated around 1797, but pictorial landscape designs were already being produced since the 1780s. These designs were a rather lineal descendant of the Chippendale, rather then of the Jacobean, developing the decor of the Chippendale namely by "adding to the free flowers of the frame, the fields and lands whence such blossoms had come" says Warren (C). These designs were immediately more appealing because of the scope they provided for individuality. Clients could now have scenes of their favourite "corner" or river or wood. (see fig 9) Bewick had a workshop under which he trained several pupils, one of those being Mark Lambert on which Vinycomb wrote a book (E). Bewick and his school established the 'Vignette' - a particular type of plate with the owner's name often graven on a rock in the middle of heavy foliage or sometimes with the spire of St. Nicholas' church in the background, or other Newcastle scenes.

One interesting point about these designs is that there is no heraldry included, except at the request of the client to include it, which is rather surprising because this was the first move away from it since bookplate beginnings and England, more than any other country, is an


REGIA
MUNIFICENTIA
GEORGIVS D. G. MAG. BR. FR. ET HIB. REX F. D.
J. Pine Sculp.

fig. 8

odd place for it to start, because armorial designs were so predominant and bookplate artists there were reluctant to break out of the accepted styles.

Other pictorials

Another favoured pictorial design was the 'monumental' plate with strong references to mortality and eternity, usually included pictures of urns containing ashes placed on top of old monuments, as one often finds in graveyard sculpture (see fig. 10) or scenes depicting old ruins overgrown with foliage. Occasionally one comes across a landscape plate with a picture of a grave digger doing his work, with the remains of a skeleton in view (an odd choice for an ex libris!). Another popular pictorial was the 'trophy' plate, this style like the others, was only popular after the 1750s. Often the subject matter was military and these designs have a longer history than landscape plates. One example is the Royal Hospital's bookplate, in Kilmainham, near Heuston Station. Designed in 1712, it is thought to be one of the earliest trophies (see fig. 11). This design comprising of the arms of the owner which is surrounded by a pile of implements of war, trumpets, drums, banners etc, was given to the hospital which was built in Dublin to house old and homeless soldiers of the Irish Army in 1684.

'Library Interior' plates

A popular pictorial design during the 19th century was the library interiors. These may have been a development of the early 'bookpiles' which were rather dull and consisted of three tiers of books around the arms or inscription (see fig. 12). It is thought that only about two hundred bookpiles exist and curiously enough, this style was chosen by a number of Irishmen. The style unobtrusively remained until the 19th century. It is not surprising that the Library Interiors became more popular, with their arbitary arrangements of books and curtain drapes. Quite a few of them included cherubs and gradually figures were added to make the composition more interesting.

20th century plates

After 1900, ex libris design began to move away from the fussiness and undue complexity that up until then had so dominated it. Although less plates have been designed this century than any previous century, the quality of the bookplates done have been the highest yet. This could be due to the fact that the latter half of the 19th century onwards,


fig. 9

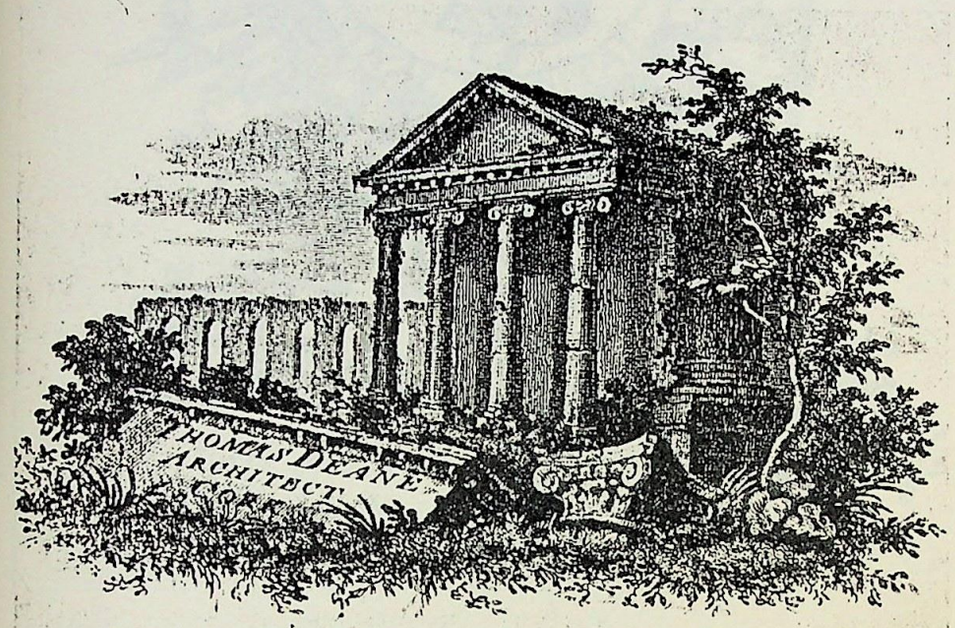
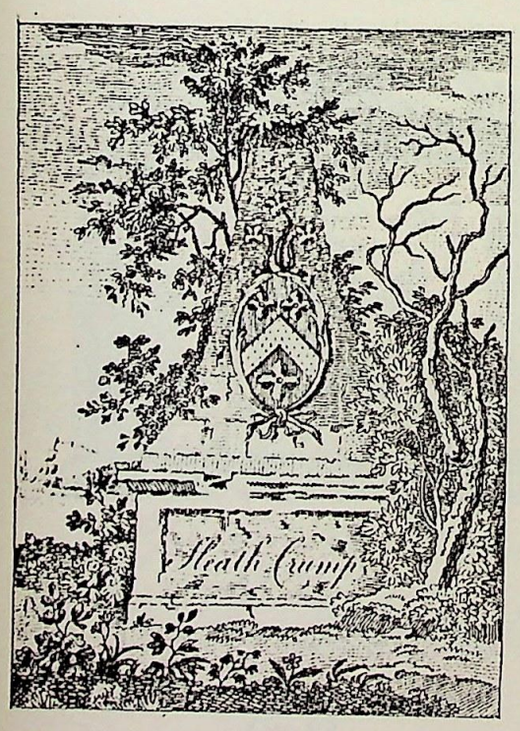
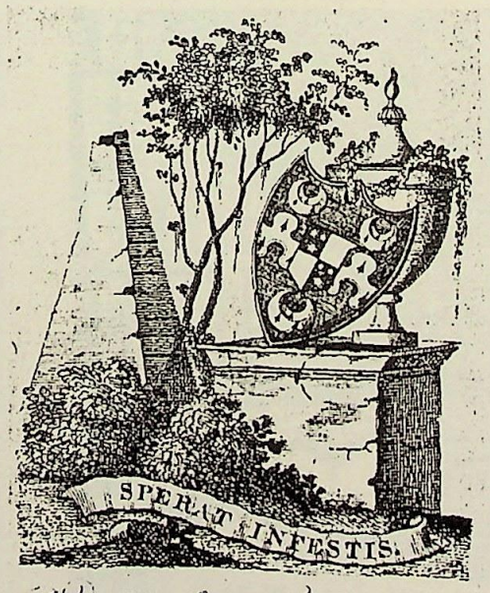



fig. 10




Rev.d Sidenham Teast. Wylde, A.B

BRISTOL 1779.

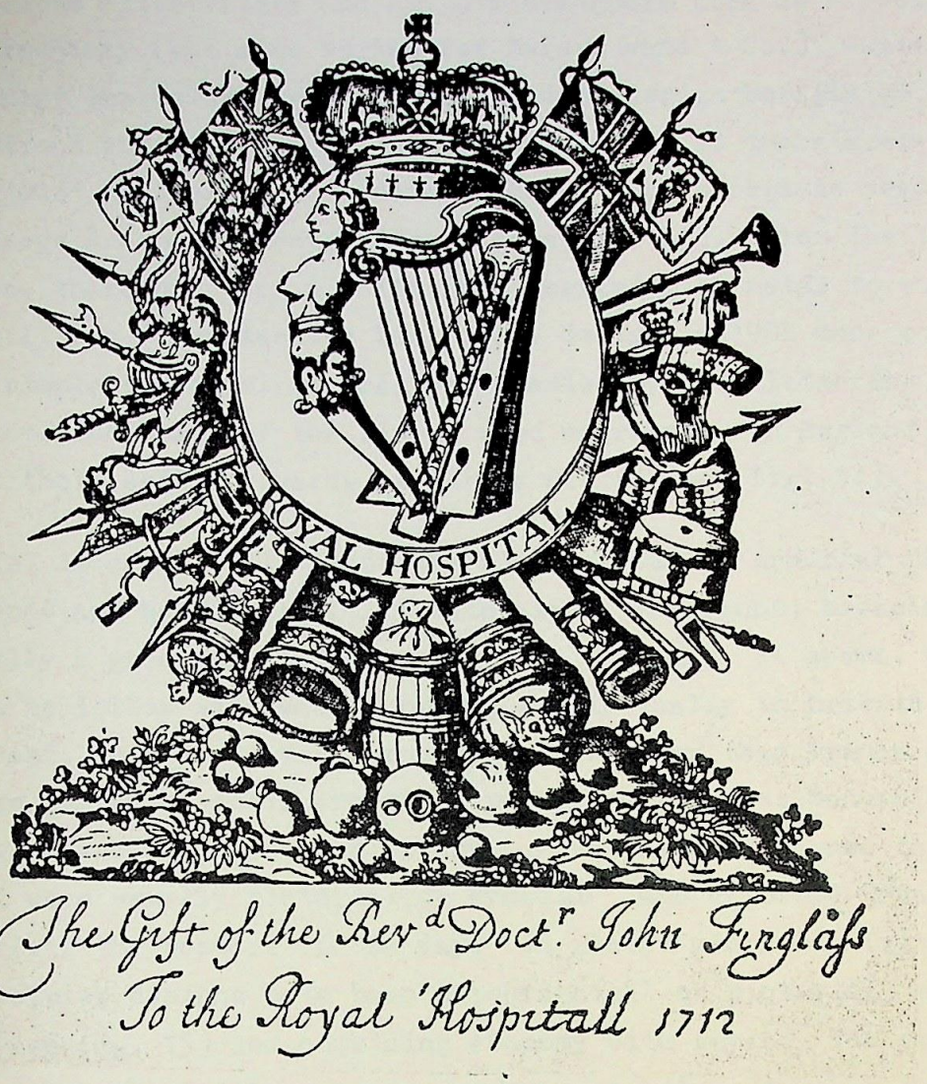

ROYAL HOSPITAL
The Gift of the Revd Doctr. John Fingläs
To the Royal Hospitall 1712

fig. 11

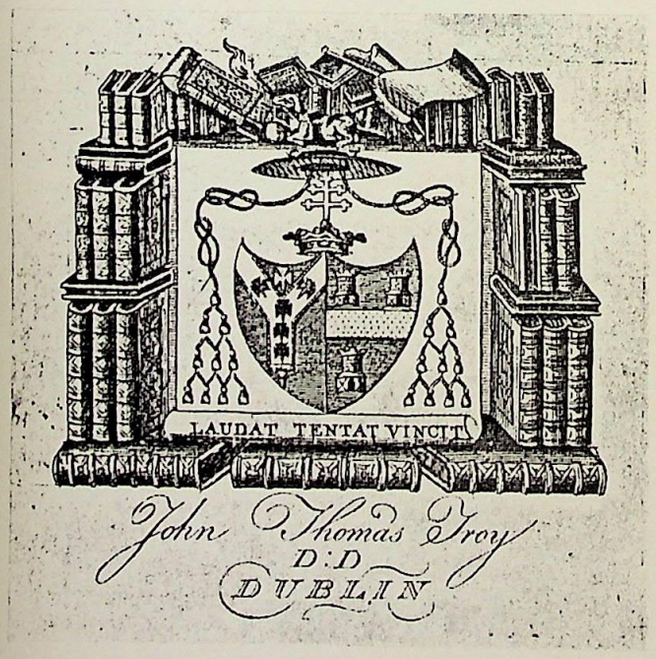
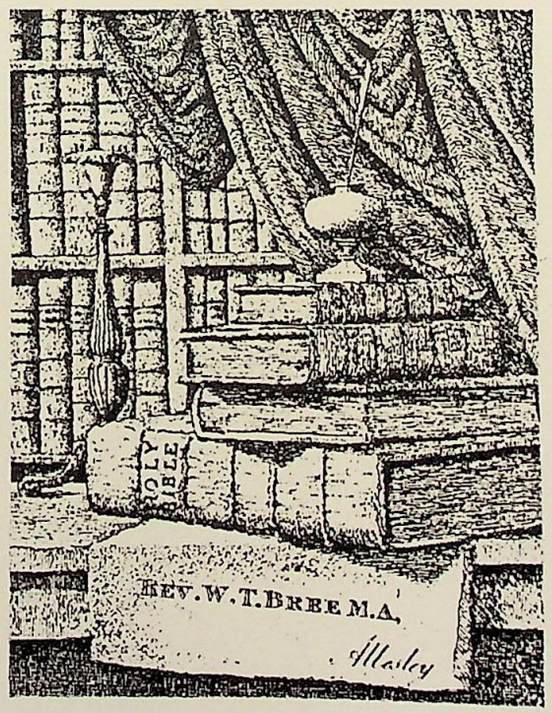

LAUDAT TENTAT VINCIT
John Thomas Troy
D:D
DUBLIN

fig. 12

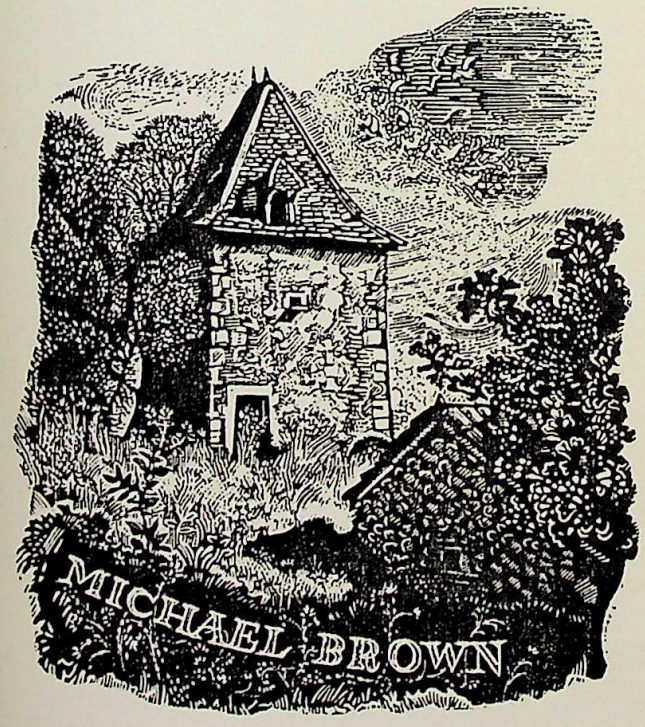

HOLY BIBLE
REV. W. T. BREE M.A.
Mosley

many famous illustrators and graphic designers such as Randolf Caldecott, Kate Greenaway (who also worked for Marcus Ward & Co.), Walter Crane and Audrey Beardsley, were commissioned to design bookplates for friends and patrons and by doing so, caused a reaction to the stereo-typed 'armorials' and served to redirect the path of bookplate design towards more large and ornate compositions (see fig. 13). From the 1930s onwards, there has been a shift from engraving on metal to wood. Eric Gill who first tackled book plate design in 1908 made popular those simple pictorial devices accompanied by good lettering and since his inovation, many of the finest wood engravers in England have turned their skills towards ex libris design (see fig. 14).

Britain, it seems still leads the field as far as armorial plates are concerned and has successfully maintained, throughout bookplate history, generally a good standard of execution. America, it seems, has always sought to follow what was happening stylistically in Britain. On the continent, heraldry never permeated any further than France and Italy, a large number of their armorials poorly reproduced, mechanically or otherwise and of mediocre blazonry. Most plates designed on the continent were usually pictorial or symbolic and of broad treatment, resembling the posters of the day. In recent years, in Britain, the most popular designs have been typographical or pictorial, engraved in wood (see fig. 15) and combining economy with style. The precision of the artist's skill in cutting wood is easily judged by these plates.


fig. 13


fig. 14



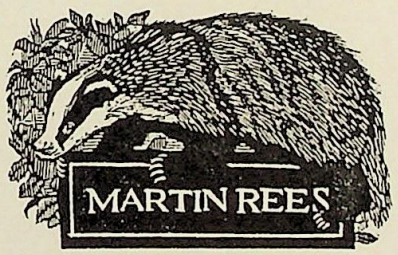




fig. 15

SCETION D: HERALIRY AND ITS USE IN BOOKPLATE DESIGN.

One may wonder why heraldry was originally the main subject matter for bookplates. Indeed, it is still used today, though not as frequently. Arising in Western Europe in Germany, France, Spain, Italy and England at much the same time (around the middle of the 12th century), it was first conceived to distinguish great military officers in battle via head dress, surcoates, banners etc. As the armour usually covered the whole body, it was simply a means of identifying a particular individual from a large group of apparently similar individuals. It is this distinguishing quality that makes it ideal for bookplate use. When knights with their kings went to battle, in order to prevent them killing their own side, devices were painted on their shields and other similarily decorated cloth trappings were worn over the armour in order that they could recognise their own men. Initially these markings were done in a random manner, but later the system became more organised. Symbolism such as one finds in heraldry has been used in warfare throughout recorded history: Troy of Greece, The Eagle of Rome, The Lion of Judah. In fact, on this subject John Vinycomb has written a delightful book called: 'Ficticious and Symbolic creatures in Art (with special references to heraldry) in which he traces comprehensively the beginnings of such symbolism and its use in bookplates.(G)

Other reasons why the use of heraldry increased could have been because of the crusades in Europe and the need to distinguish each nation and also the medieval tournaments with all their bright coloured trimmings and flags. The use of heraldry continued long after the warring associations, their military use being laid aside and heraldry being used since then as honourary ensigns by the nobility and gentry to distinguish themselves from each other and from those of a 'lower disposition', "they were applied to their possessions - their houses their silver, their books and, eventually their tombs". (H) And for, those legally entitled to hold arms, bookplates became the perfect means of communicating their ancestorial heritage to others. It is not surprising then that heraldry has for such a long time been the leading subject matter for bookplates and probably will always be.

The men particulary involved with armorial matters were the 'Heralds'. They were officers of the crown who regulated the use of armorial bearings, or settled questions of precedence or recorded names and pedigrees of those entitled to bear arms. The English crown gave rise to the records of Irish heraldry in the sense that the first Irish heralds were appointed until partition by the crown. It is doubtful

that the Irish chiefs used arms before they came into contact with Norman English invaders under Strongbow in 1172 and the adoption of arms by native families was a matter of custom and imitation. There were also resident officers of arms placed in a particular area to take care of matters in their location. These were called 'King of Arms'. The officer of arms placed in control of Irish arms was known as the 'Ireland King of Arms', first mentioned during the reign of Edward 4th. Little is known of how they carried out their functions. But this term 'Ireland King of Arms' was changed to 'Ulster King of Arms' during the reign of Edward 6th.

The 'Ulster King of Arms' was assigned to keep everything in order, his duty was to survey and record the armorial bearings and correct arms irregularly used. They had the power to grant arms on behalf of the sovereign. These men made regular circuits of the country, known as 'Visitations' but in Ireland these visitations were much fewer than in England,(only three are known to have taken place namely in Dublin county 1606, Dublin city 1607 and Wexford city 1618.) because of the unsettled state of the country with intermittent warfare and travelling conditions on the roads being far from suitable. It was in the late 15th century that the authority of granting arms and titles was brought under the crown's jurisdiction, even today the handing out of titles are the crown's perogative. The succession of Ulster kings continued unbroken from 1552 to 1940 when the last, Sir Neville Wilkinson, died. When the Irish free state came into being the office of Ulster remained until his death. He was the last appointed by the crown in 1908, so he continued as King of Arms for all Ireland under the Republic. When he died, the duties of Ulster were carried on by Mr. Sadleir, the deputy Ulster King of Arms until the Ulster office ended in 1943. The Irish Government, however, with a commendalle interest in heraldry, decided to appoint its own heraldic authority under the title 'Chief Herald of Ireland'. The first holder of the office was Edward MacLysaght, M.R.I.A. He possessed the Irish records of Ulster's office and occupied the old office of Ulster in Dublin castle.

SECTION E: THE SITUATION IN IRELAND AS REGARDS
BOOKPLATE DESIGN.

The bookplate situation in Ireland was in a very depressed state during the time of Vinycomb's entry into the country. There were a few engravers willing to turn their hand toward bookplate engraving, but the quality of the work turned out was far from satisfactory. Before the famine in Ireland it seems as if there were a lot of plates being made, but the records of these have been lost or destroyed. Most of these were simple armorials with no individuality about them. (see fig. 16)

Trying to find information on these early Irish bookplates was almost impossible. I came across a few references to Irish bookplates in the Ex Libris Journal but few took it upon themselves to study the subject. One man, Robert Day, a native Cork scholar and antiquarian was one of the few to do so. He sometimes wrote in the Ex Libris Journal promoting Irish plates.

'Ferrar' plate

One plate, mentioned by Robert Day in the Ex Libris Journal of volume 10 (K, pg. 54) is an armorial. This plate (see fig. 17), done for John Ferrar, a Limerick historian, who according to his ex libris was fifty years old in 1793, is a slight exception to the rule. Although it appears on first glance to look like a simple armorial plate, it is quite the contrary. We find Ferrar adopting a personal motto, "The cross of Christ is my crown" and as a play upon the motto, he rejects the three horse shoes of his ancient coat and replaces them with crosses. Another interesting point about this plate is that the martlet on the top right hand corner of the shield should not be there for this bird was only intended to be used by the fourth son of a family to show he had no land to light on. John Ferrar was the eldest son of an only child so the martlet did not apply to him. The floral wreath, is held aloft by an angel that reclines upon billowy clouds and just above the crest is a rayed crown within a serpent circle, the emblem of eternity. This plate is altogether symbolical and it is one of rare distinction being dated and aged. Unfortunately the artist's name is not given.

'Parsonstown Mechanics' Institute' plate

Robert Day also mentions in the Ex Libris Journal of 1902, volume 12 (L) a 'simple armorial', belonging to the Parsonstown Mechanics Institute (see fig.18), founded in 1840. The bookplate is the only remaining evidence of the institute's short-lived existence, as during the famine,

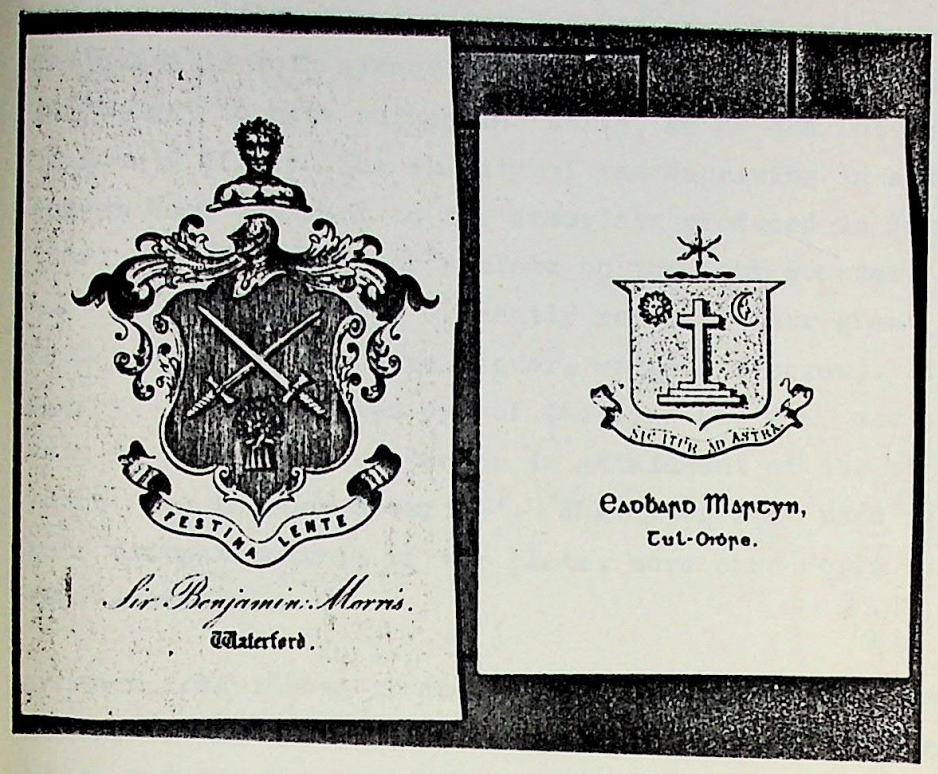



fig. 16

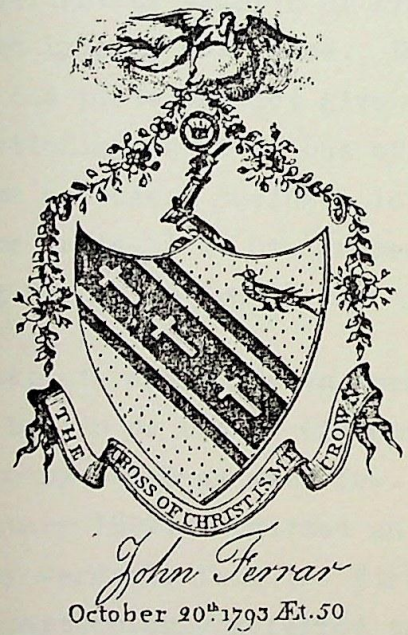



fig. 17

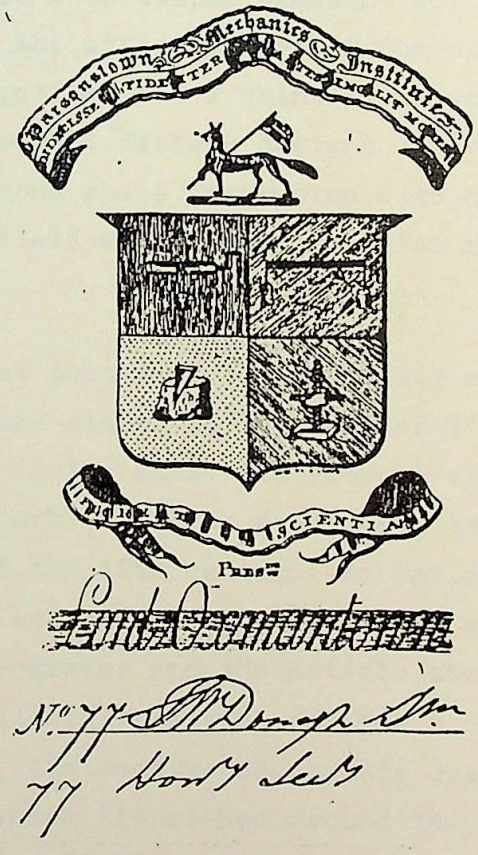



fig. 18

it's small library was dispersed and many of the books were distroyed. The plate is both signed and dated. It's engraver was R. Coffy, who is thought to have worked in Dublin, as he did not belong to Parsonstown in County Offaly. The quality of the engraving is extremely coarse and serves as a contrast to the armorials produced in England at the same time. The 'charges' or emblems on the four quarters of the shield are most peculiar and they evidently refer to four great principles in mechanics, (the windlass, lever, wedge and screw). The crest possibly suggests that the keen eye of the lynx (or fox) and a quickened intellect, is necessary to success in attainment of its objects. The motto reads 'May Science Flourish'. The typography used fails to enhance the poor draughtsmanship of the plate, more care could have been taken with the lettering.

Another contributor to the Journal was a William Chamney, who was a member of the Ex Libris Society of Elgin Road, Dublin, who compiled a list of Irish bookplates from his own collection which I was able to see at the Ulster Museum. Unfortunately, they were not sorted, so it was extremely difficult to place them in context. I have included a festoon plate from the Chamney collection (see fig. 19). One which is a delightful example of armoury combined with simple ornament for a Hugh Lyle of Coleraine. Unfortunately the artist's name or the date of the plate was not given in the collection, but I think it is worth mentioning as it is one of the most cheerful festoon designs I have yet come accross. Having a lozenge or diamond shape interwoven with a saltire cross, like St. Andrew's on the shield with the motto below reading (only virtue).

Bookplate designers in Ireland seemed at that time to congregate either in Dublin or Cork. Of course, there were others in the rest of the country but they were few. Robert Day in the Ex Libris Journal of January 1892, submitted an article on Cork ex libris designers, but they were all from the first quarter of the 18th century and earlier. He particularly referred to a Reverend Augustus Warren Colthurst who apparently was an amateur copperplate engraver and the article showed (see fig. 20), an example of one pictorial plate he did for a Mr Richard Caulfield. There is nothing distinctive about this design, done in the 'Bewick' fashion, a style which flourished around the late 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century.

Looking through W. H. Fincham's 'Artists and Engravers of British and American Bookplates', I counted over forty seven plates designers who

worked mainly in Dublin. But surprisingly enough, only two or three of those listed were working after 1860, Vinycomb being among the ones that were. Up until that time, all the plates that were done in Ireland were stylistically rough copies of what was being done in England, being coarsely rendered.

With the revival of Celtic ornamentation few artists ventured to design bookplates and I have only found a few plates worth mentioning. Both of these I discovered in a scrapbook donated to the National College of Art and Design, Dublin by Frederick Dickson, former president of the Old Dublin Society. The book is very old and appears to have been compiled by a celtic enthusiast. It is full of scraps and off-cuts of gaelic illustration and all varieties of Irish illumination. The first plate shown (fig. 21) done in 1897, is by a Mary Fitzpatrick of 192 Clonliffe Road, Drumcondra, who was a well known celtic illuminator and frequently executed Irish illuminated addresses, some of which are shown in Dickson's Scrapbook. It is for a W. P. Coyne, probably of Dublin, a fond reader of the classics. This plate is typical of the tyre of rich Gaelic ornamentation found in the large majority of graphic work in Dublin in the latter half of the 19th century. The geometric angles in this plate that form the frame are reminiscent of those found on the front covers of medieval manuscripts. John Vinycomb, too, has used similar methods of frame construction and ornamentation in his Celtic plates, but I think the similarity ends there. The Coyne ex libris appears a little cluttered, with too much emphasis on decoration and not enough on composition. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Fitzpatrick was not a bookplate designer by trade.

The second plate in figure 22 unfortunately, had been cut away by the collector so that only the image is left. It, too, looks like the work of Mary Fitzpatrick as it has a similar seal to the previous one, and also pays less attention to composition than to ornamentation. Because of this, these bookplates lose something of the nobleness that Vinycomb retains in his designs (see the Letts plate figure 52). In all the pictorial plates that John Vinycomb did, there is a depth that these plates sadly lack.

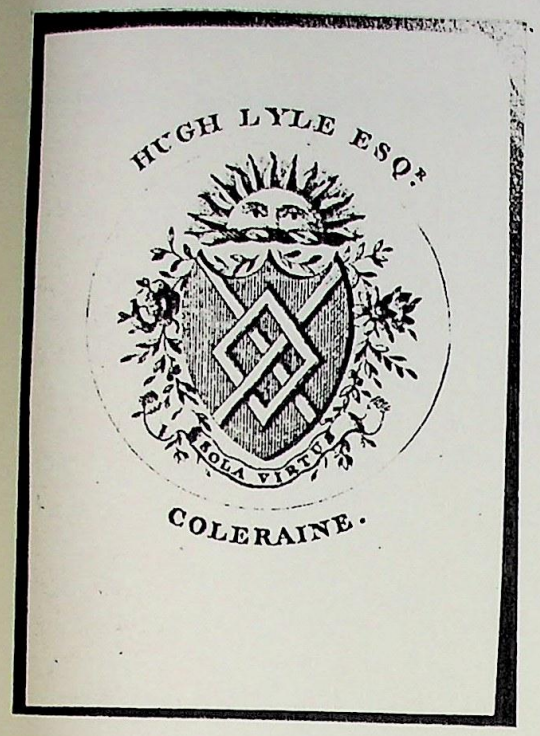



fig. 19

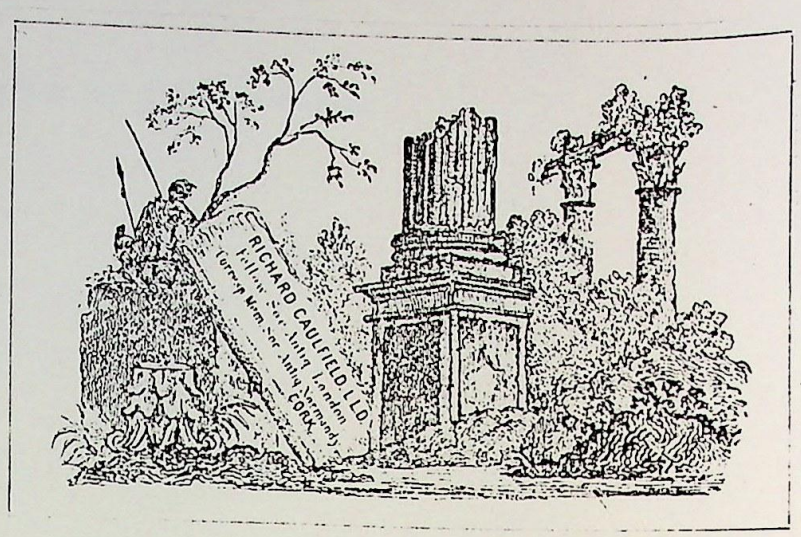



fig. 20

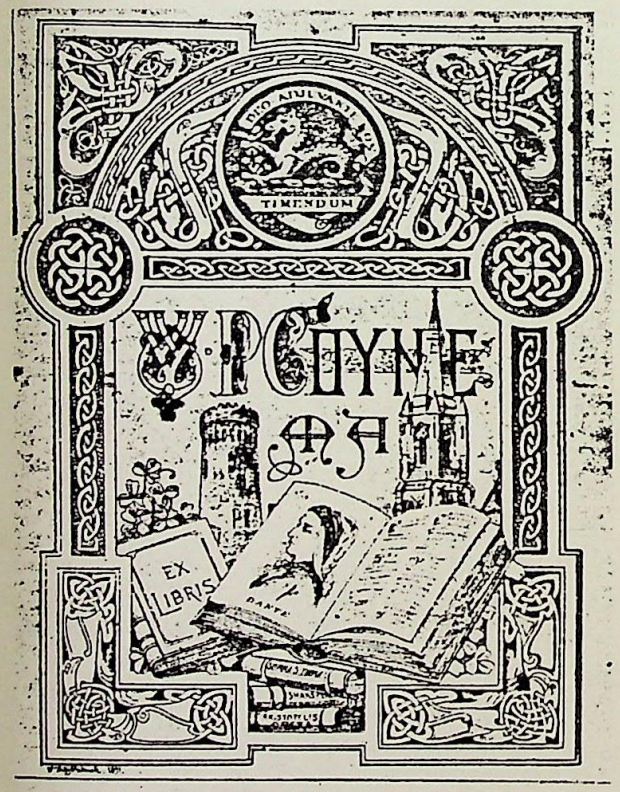



fig. 21

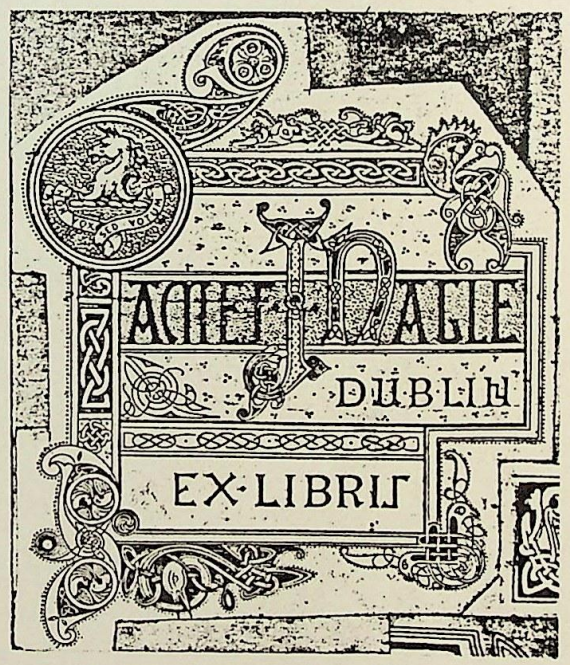



fig. 22

SECTION F: BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF JOHN VINYCOMB.

SECTION F: BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF JOHN VINYCOMB.

'Lord Dufferin, in his address at the conferring of degrees at the Royal University of Dublin (T.C.D.) in 1901, makes reference to Mr. John Vinycomb, whose son was one of the recipients of academical distinction on that occasion. "The name", said Lord Dufferin, was "one universally honoured in the North of Ireland as borne by an artist of great talent and extraordinary skill in executing illuminations after the best celtic patterns, as displayed in our most famous Irish manuscripts". To be praised by one who is himself praised is always the highest honour.

This extract was taken from a forward by Mr. Robert Day to Mr. Vinycomb's book of bookplates, consisting of 24 original designs, published in 1908 (F). Robert Day, a lifelong friend of Vinycomb and fellow antiquarian, paid tribute to an artist who, although is well known and respected in the North of Ireland, is scarcely heard of in the rest of the island or England, and if known, is rarely referred to.

This seemed strange to me when looking up various references to bookplate design in Ireland. The name John Vinycomb kept reoccurring throughout my reading so that I realized he must have been some sort of catalyst in the promotion of ex libris and indeed, other areas of artistic and cultural development in Ireland. Yet no one had really tackled him as a major subject of study. Mr. Vinycomb, although not an Irishman by birth, lived the majority of his life (which was quite long) in Holywood, Co. Down and Belfast claims him as one of her own. Born on the 4th of July, 1883 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, he was 22 years of age when he entered as an engraver to the rising firm of Marcus Ward and Co. Ltd, Belfast, who were then stationers and printers. Vinycomb, it appears, did much to increase the output and raise the quality of the work produced so much so that he was made the chief of their artistic staff. The firm began in 1843 by the original Marcus Ward who set up a small stationers and lithography business in the Cornmarket, Belfast and after expanding his interests, he brought his three sons into the business with him as partners: William, Francis-Davies and John. The firm developed its stock-in-trade: inkwells, pencils, blotters, diaries, illuminated addresses, fine art printing, chromolithography, book binding and book publishing as well as various other educational supplies.

I bring Marcus Ward and Co. into the picture because it was through them that John Vinycomb established himself as an artist of some merit and through them also that the majority of his work was published.

With Vinycomb head of the art department directing and maintaining the high standard of work produced, the firm's reputation rose within the British Isles and Marcus Ward began offering employment to young people of an artistic bent in and around Belfast. Around 1870, moves to set up a new school of art were made in accordance with the schemes and regulations of the Department of Science and Design and when a constitution was drafted, a board of managers was set up. Among thirty or so names on this board was the name of John Vinycomb and so was that of John Ward and Edward Harland of ship building fame. Not alone did Vinycomb and Ward involve themselves in this external venture, but Ward, who himself was a water colourist of some noteriety, organised art classes within the company out side of working hours superintended by Vinycomb, which stimulated a great deal of artistic activity for native talent.

During the latter half of the 19th century, Belfast was quickly becoming a prosperous town, with the ship building industry and its linen trade lifting it to the position of the Commercial Capital of Ireland by the turn of the century. Its expansion was both rapid and remarkable considering that in just the previous century it was hardly more than a village at the end of a tidal estuary. Its population grew to over 300,000 and found its peak expression in the building of the new city hall in Donegal Square in 1897-1907, which promised to be the centre of the city. It was here that all the main businessmen gathered and men of learning socialised. It was in and among this circle of people that John Vinycomb moved.

Most of the plates Vinycomb executed were done for his learned friends, people who like himself, had a genuine hunger for knowledge. Among these were merchants, architects, businessmen, historians, antiquarians and maybe the occassional self-made 'would be' striving for intellectual status of some sort. John Vinycomb was an extremely industrious man who always aimed at a high standard of excellence in his own work and expected the same standard in the work of others. He covered such a wide field of learning that it is difficult to include all his intellectual pursuits comprehensively in one essay. It appears that most of the people he knew were, like himself, members of various cultural societies. Their interests were similar and because of that they created a sort of community within their own social sphere. Vinycomb was highly respected and admired among those he knew and those with whom he worked. And his reputation was not limited to the North East of Ireland alone at that time. Being a member of the 'Royal Irish

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Academy' and vice-president of the 'Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland', Vinycomb interacted with many southern artists and scholars and kept up a life long correspondence with a large number of them. (Robert Day was one of the ones we mentioned earlier).

Across the water, Vinycomb achieved recognition as an illuminator of Royal and official addresses and in this area of work he was unparalleled. He was renowned as one of the first beautiful script engravers of his time. Figure 23 and24 show how he combined the beauty of the 15th century Italian painters' decoration in their religious paintings, such as Fra Angelico and his contempories (fig. 25) with the delicate skilled handiwork of the experts of the mediaeval monasteries (see fig. 26). In addition to these addresses, he also executed a substantial quantity of Celtic illuminated addresses. In figure 27, we see an example done for the 'Royal Society of Antiquaries' in 1898.

Vinycomb was a recognised authority on heraldry and this is perhaps one of the reasons why he ventured into bookplate design. He began his apprenticeship as an engraver in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, working on copper, silver, and whatever came to hand. He also worked on crests while as an apprentice and this could have been the initial stepping stone to his passion for heraldry. While being introduced to the various technical aspects of engraving, Vinycomb also regularly attended, during this period, the Government School of Art in Newcastle under a man called William Bell who was then the head master. Consequently Vinycomb received a good artistic training which was to stand to him in later years. He also did odd jobs in graphic design from business cards to bank cheques, bill heads and illustration, developing a taste for crisp, neat presentation. On completion of his apprenticeship, he moved to Belfast and began his career with Marcus Ward & Co., as we mentioned earlier. He continued engraving for several years and as the firm was directed towards fine art and lithography, Vinycomb was called upon to devote himself entirely to designing for engraving and litho. It could be partly due to this, that Vinycomb preferred the straight-forward lithographic reproduction of work to the long winded affair of translating work through the mind and hands of another engraver who may represent it. He knew what it was like to have to sit for hours tediously engraving on metal plates until his eyes grew sore and now, with the introduction of the new photogravure or the half-tone process, the exact representation of the artist's work could be reproduced, saving time while in no way depreciating the original quality. Most of Vinycomb's bookplates were

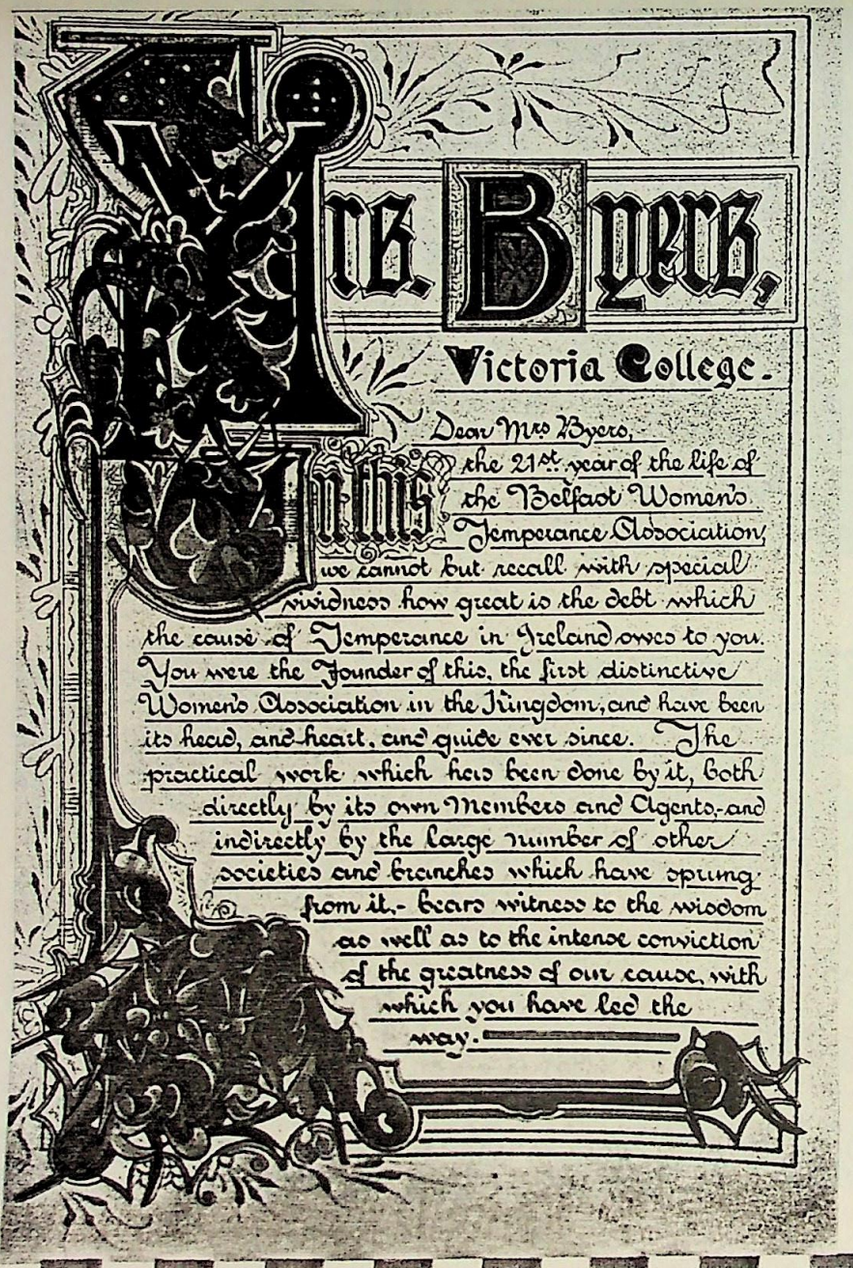

To Mrs. Byers,
Victoria College.
Dear Mrs Byers,
In this the 21st. year of the life of the Belfast Women's Temperance Association, we cannot but recall with special vividness how great is the debt which the cause of Temperance in Ireland owes to you. You were the Founder of this, the first distinctive Women's Association in the Kingdom, and have been its head, and heart, and guide ever since. The practical work which has been done by it, both directly by its own Members and Agents, and indirectly by the large number of other societies and branches which have sprung from it, bears witness to the wisdom as well as to the intense conviction of the greatness of our cause, with which you have led the way.

FIG. 23

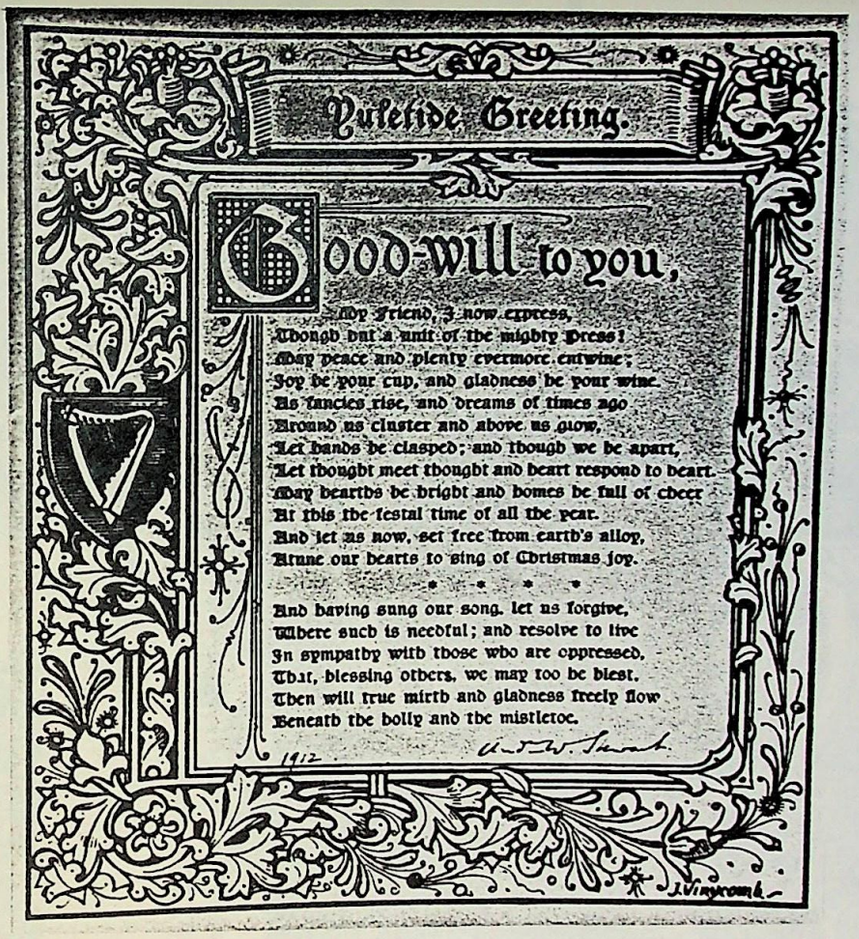

Yuletide Greeting.
Good-will to you,
My Friend, I now express,
Though but a unit of the mighty Press!
May peace and plenty evermore entwine;
Joy be your cup, and gladness be your wine.
As fancies rise, and dreams of times ago
Around us cluster and above us glow,
Let hands be clasped; and though we be apart,
Let thought meet thought and heart respond to heart.
May hearths be bright and homes be full of cheer
At this the festal time of all the year.
And let us now, set free from earth's alloy,
Attune our hearts to sing of Christmas joy.
* * * *
And having sung our song, let us forgive,
Where such is needful; and resolve to live
In sympathy with those who are oppressed,
That, blessing others, we may too be blest.
Then will true mirth and gladness freely flow
Beneath the holly and the mistletoe.
1912

FIG. 24

FIG. 25

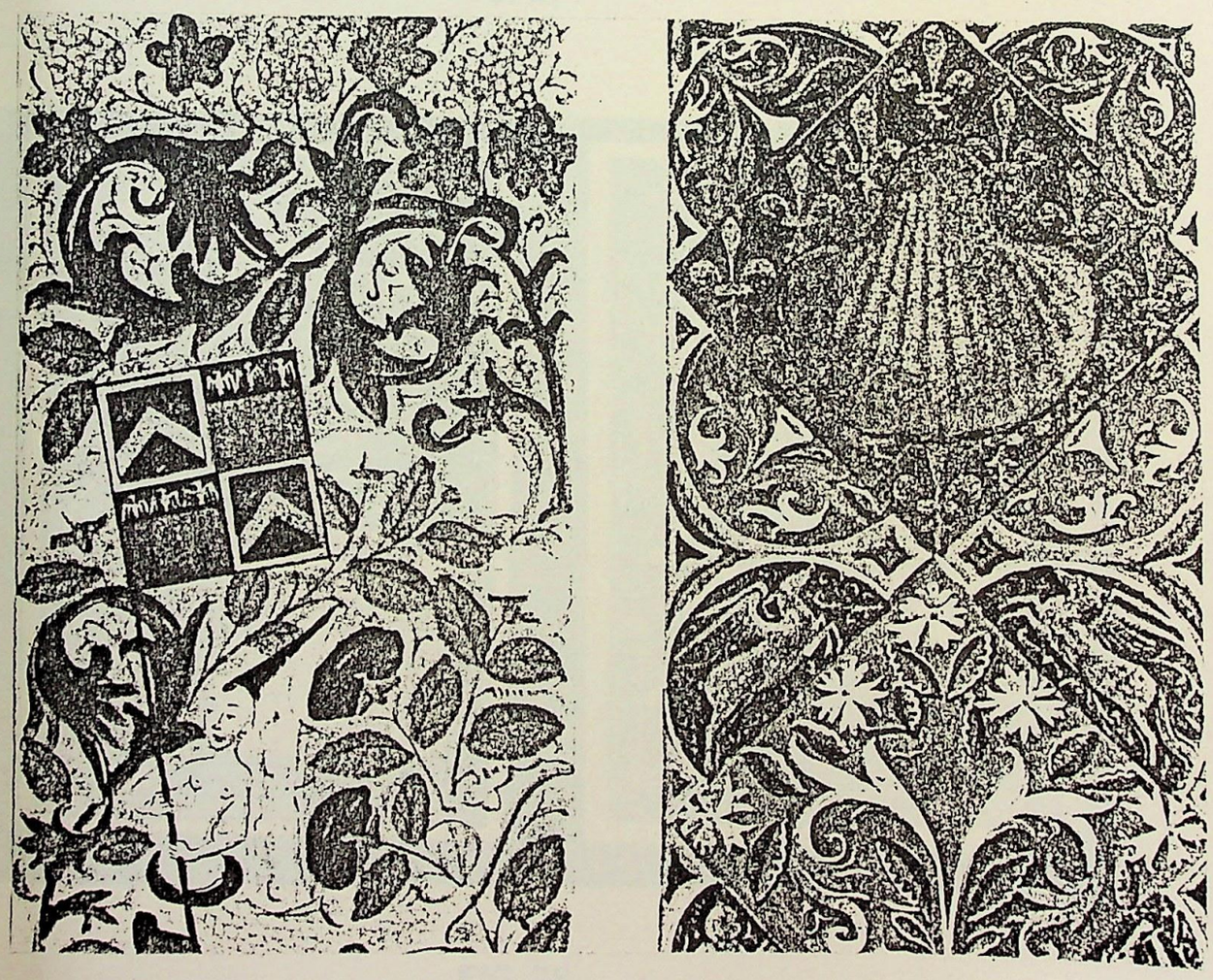


FIG. 26

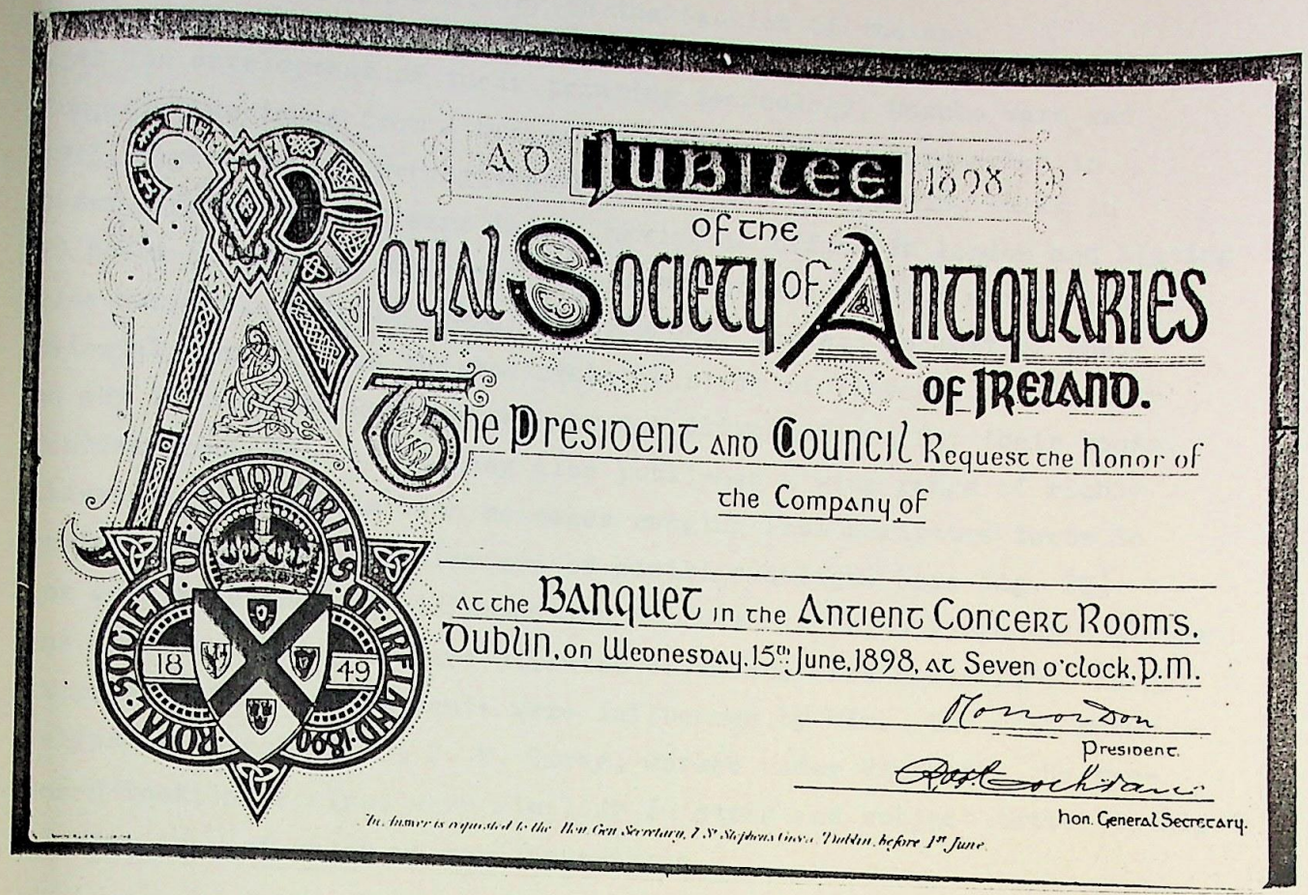

AD Jubilee 1898
of the
Royal Society of Antiquaries
of Ireland.
The President and Council Request the Honor of
the Company of
at the Banquet in the Antient Concert Rooms,
Dublin, on Wednesday, 15th June, 1898, at Seven o'clock, P.M.
President.
hon. General Secretary.
An Answer is requested to the Hon Gen Secretary, 7 St Stephens Green, Dublin, before 1st June.
ROYAL SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF IRELAND
18
49

FIG. 27

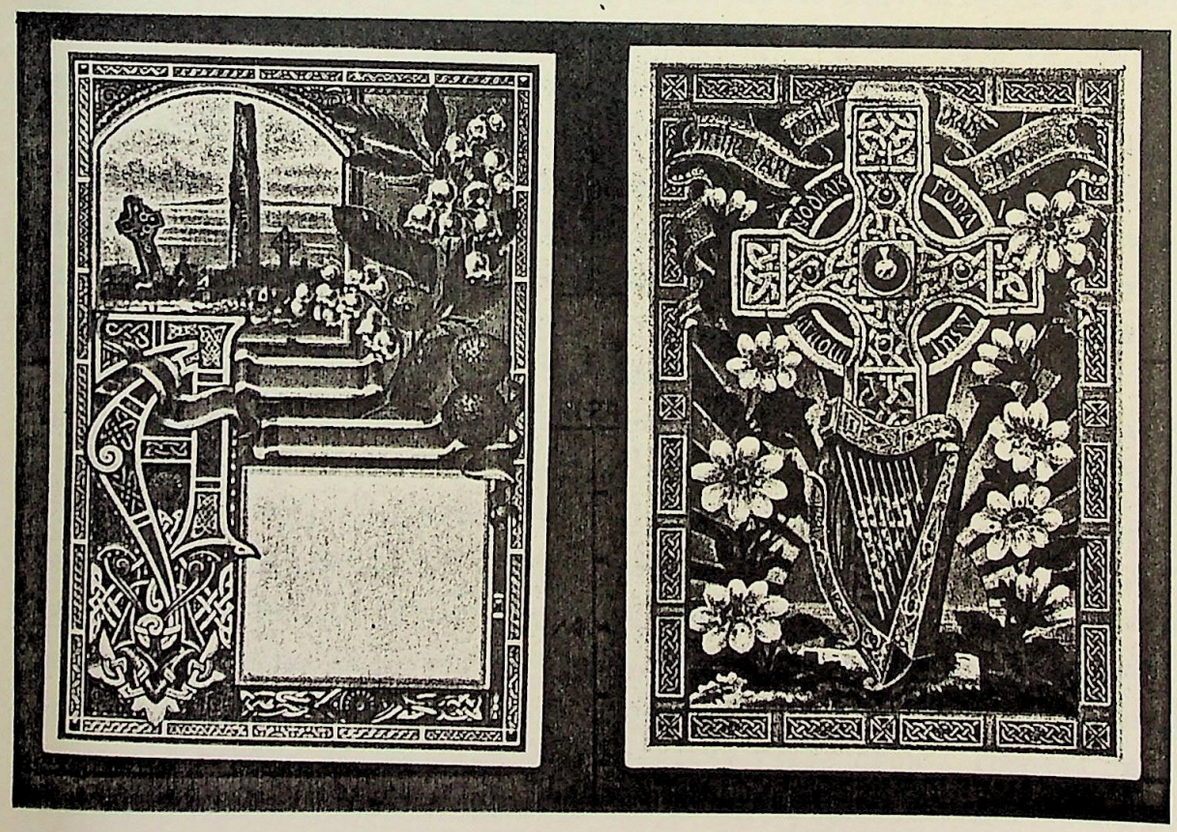


FIG. 28

produced in this way, contrary to the fashion of the day.

With the development of their printing technology, Marcus Ward and Company flourished from a humble stationers in the Cornmarket in 1843, expanding and purchasing the Royal Ulster Printing Works in Ormeau Avenue thirty years later, having an office in London and listing 150 books in their catalogue. The firm produced printed material of a wide variety, including Vere Foster's copy books. On most of their material, one can see the unmistakable stamp of Vinycomb, especially on any illuminated work or pen and ink illustrations for their books. Besides producing books, they also published a wide range of richly illustrated postcards with messages ranging from Scripture texts to various greetings and calendars of similiar design. (see fig. 28) One can trace the same illumination on these as is on Vinycomb's plates and addresses being the art director of Marcus Ward's staff, it is not surprising that his students were influenced by him. The well known Belfast watercolourist, J. W. Carey, worked under Vinycomb. He produced bookplates also, very similiar in style and subject matter to his teacher, one of which we have an example.

The state of the arts in Ireland during the mid 1800s, more particularly in the North, when compared with the rest of England was what one might call 'sadly lacking' for want of a kinder term. It was not that the potential was lacking, but there was no real effective promotion of the arts by any society or institution in the north at that time. In the late 19th century, many of the Belfast artists were trained at Marcus Ward and because of the enthusiasm of the firm half-a-dozen employees, Vinycomb among them, formed themselves into the 'Belfast Club' in 1864, making trips to places of local interest historically and visually. But the membership never rose to any more than sixteen and after a few years, the club broke up. In 1872, however, a group of women students from the new art school started a 'Ladies Sketching Club', which apparently must have inspired interest in other artists because two years later, evening students followed suit. In 1879 the Marcus Ward staff reformed themselves into the 'Ramblers' Sketching Club' with Vinycomb as president, meeting in the same 'Rainbow Tavern' where the first club had gathered. Their favourite subject matter was, on the whole, places of local curiosity and social aspects of village life in and around the Northeast. Vinycomb was also a member of 'Belfast's Naturalists Field Club', founded in 1863 and which did much to promote the study of the geology, botany, archaeology and history of the province, so it is probable that some

of the Rambler's work was related to these topics. After various minor exhibitions, the Rambler's Club and the Ladies Sketching Group amalgamated so that in 1890 the title of the organization was changed to 'Belfast's Arts Society'.

There can be no doubt that John Vinycomb was an underlying contributor to the promotion of knowledge and the arts in the North of Ireland during the latter half of the 19th century. He was acknowledged as a generous mentor and encourager of young and up and coming talent. There is a curious story attached to his meeting his wife. Vere Foster, a man who did much to help the socially deprived and starving Irish during the famine and who helped to build over 2,000 schools after realizing how bad the education conditions where in the country, learned of a young Cork girl whose father's death had left the family in dire straights. Vere Foster arranged for examples of her skill to be sent into the firm of Marcus Ward and she found a place in the illuminating department and ultimately married John Vinycomb, the chief designer. In due course a baby daughter was christened Vera in honour of the good man.

Towards the late 1890s, the company of Marcus Ward and Sons were finding it difficult to maintain the prestigeous position they once held because they refused to lower their standards of excellence in order to yield to economic pressures. John Vinycomb, who had grown up with the firm and become part of it during the twenty years of its increasing fame, remained until the break up of the company in 1899. At the turn of the century, there were rumours that he would be soon leaving for London and his companions and collegues presented him a purse with a hundred guineas in it, and to Mrs Vinycomb, two silver candelabra. However the family did not leave their home at 'The Scriptorium', Riverside, Holywood, Co. Down, until 1909 when they took up residence in Streatham, London. On leaving Marcus Ward, he devoted himself to the two branches of study he knew best: heraldry and illumination. He pursued both with rare enthusiasm and achieved considerable distinction. I have examples of the various advertising leaflets Vinycomb distributed in the North of Ireland and later in London when he moved there. (see fig. 29,30,31)

He also published three books, one on the subject of bookplates (I) one on on Mark Lambert, a heraldic engraver of bookplates from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (F) and one on the use of ficticious and symbolic creatures in art with special reference to heraldry.(G) He frequently

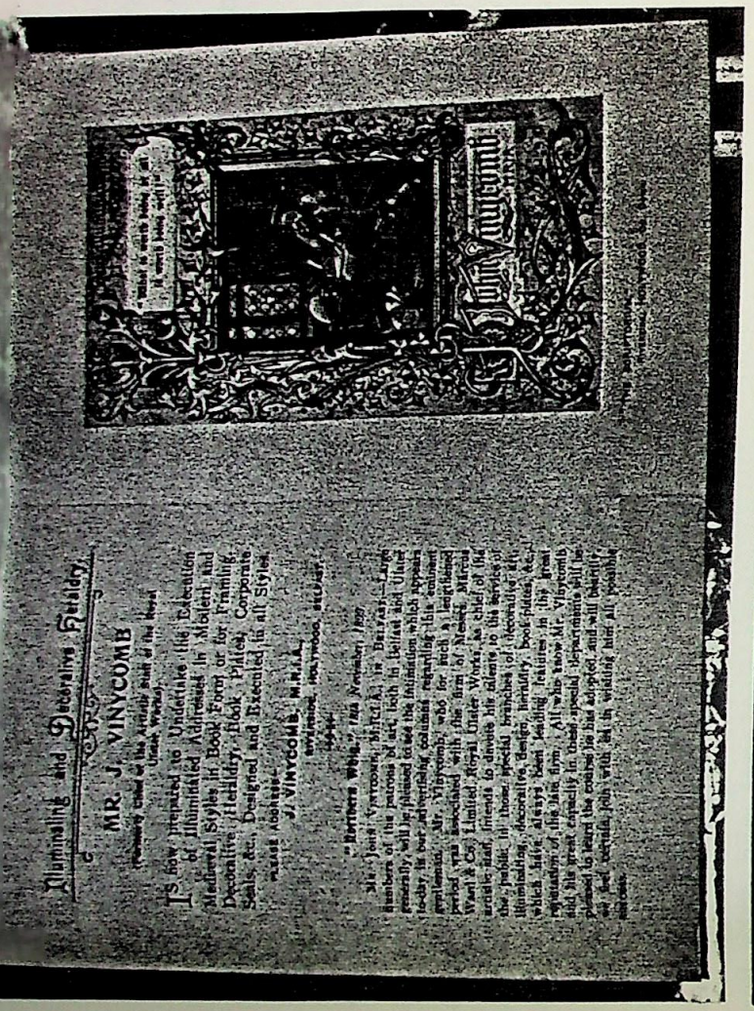



FIG. 29

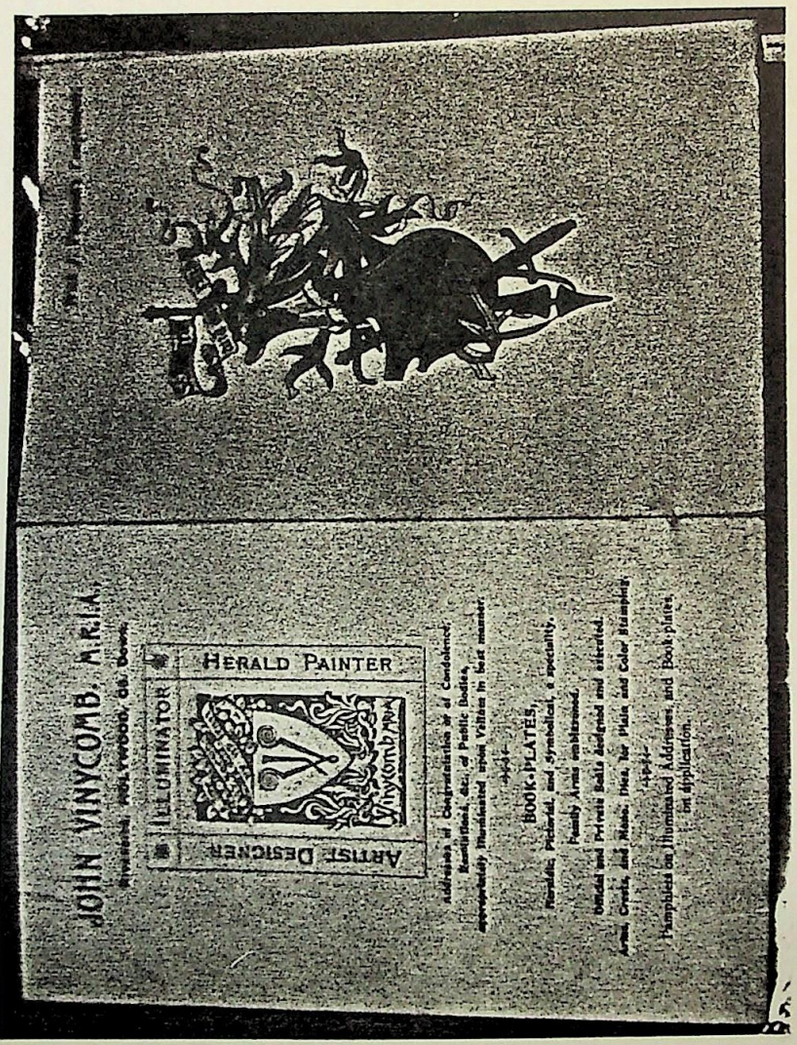



FIG. 30

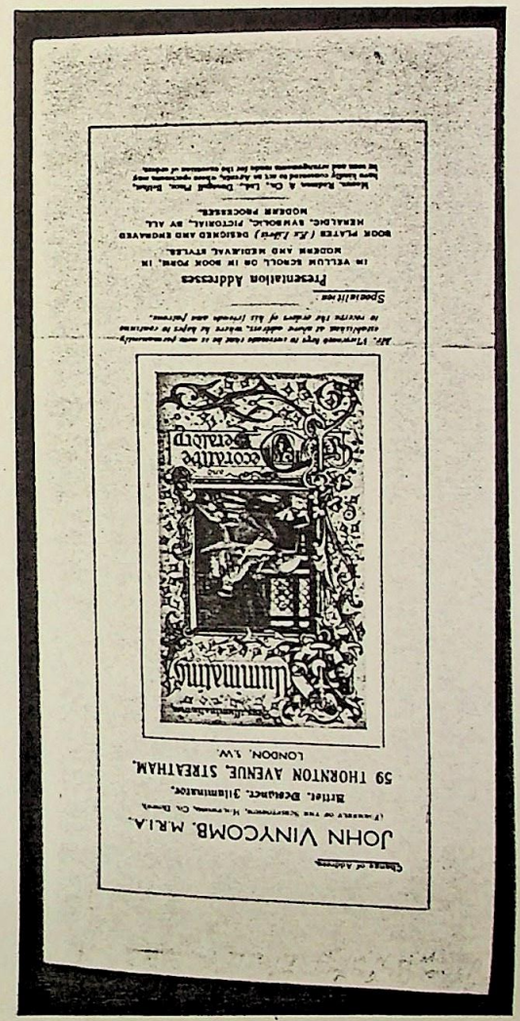
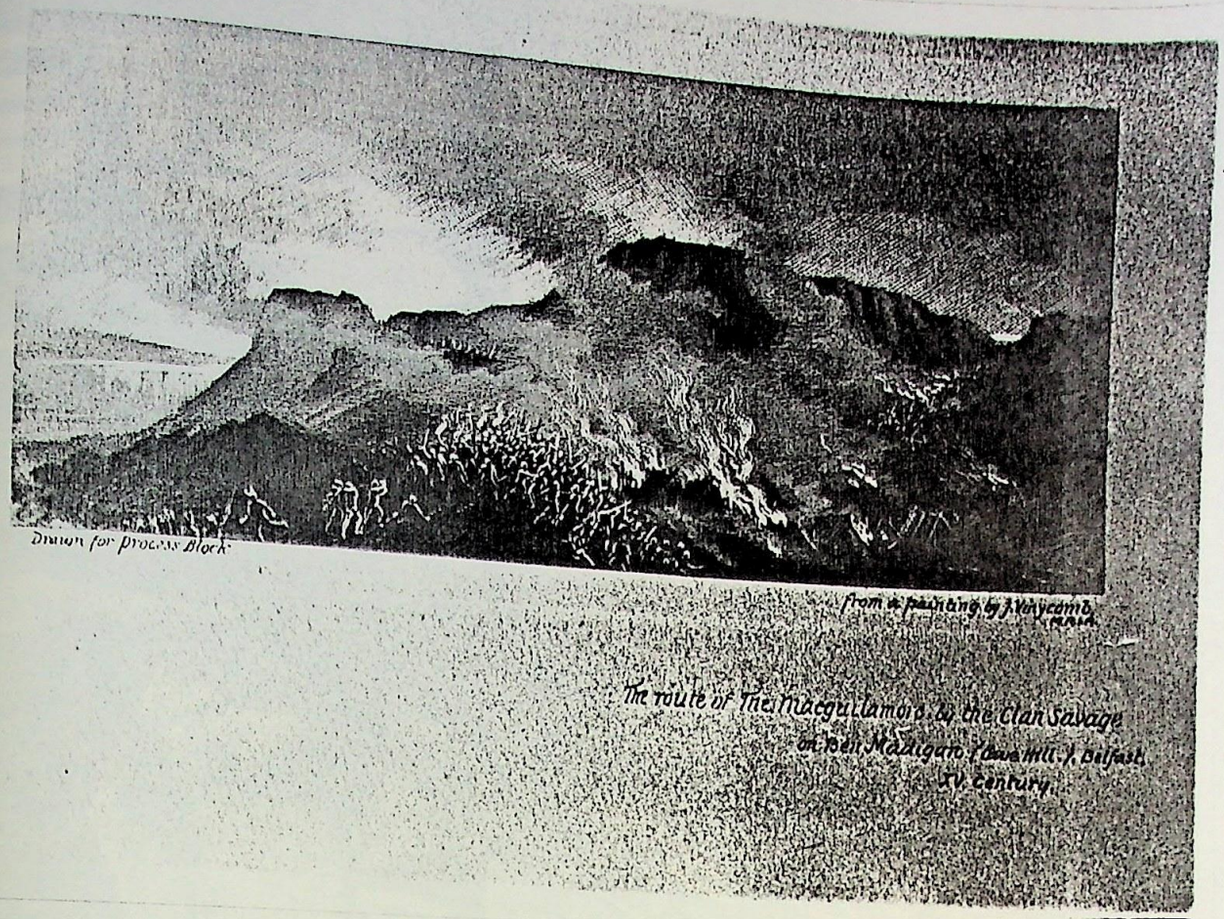



FIG. 31

contributed articles to the Ex Libris Society and the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, as well as other journals and newsletters on historical and artistic subjects, most of which are available in the Linenhall Library in Belfast.

John Vinycomb died in London in the early months of 1928 and was sadly missed by friends and relatives. A good few years before his death, at the request of a number of his friends, Vinycomb was presented with a portrait of himself painted by a Mr Ernest E. Taylor 1863-1907 in (see fig. 1a) appreciation of his services in the cause of art development and progress. It is now in the Ulster Museum. His total output of work, written and drawn is staggering. Between his many bookplates and vast number of illuminated addresses, his watercolours and his various illustrations for different archaeological and historial publications (see fig. 32) and with his involvement in numerous societies, he also designed amongst other furniture, a wooden linen chest, for the Princess Victoria Mary of Teck on behalf of the Ladies of Belfast as a wedding present. All this comprises his life's work. Many public bodies, as well as private individuals, treasure examples of his resource and skill. By virtue of his talents and services, not only his many friends, but also the city public, who are proud of his work and reputation have given him a place amoung the long line of 'Northern Worthies'.



Drawn for process Block.

From a painting by J. Vanycamb, R.H.A.

The route of the Macguilamors & the Clan Savage
on Ben Madigan Lane Mill, Belfast.
XV century.

FIG. 32

JOHN VINYCOMB.

SECTION G: VINYCOMB'S BOOKPLATES, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS 'CELTIC' DESIGNS.

The Vinycomb plates

Mr John Vinycomb was an expert on heraldry, both English and Irish. He frequently wrote in various journals of Irish archaeological societies both North and South on the subject, referring to various families and gentry in Ireland who bore arms. He was also an expert on city seals and arms having researched and written on them for the Ulster Journal of Archaeology. In one of his scrapbooks in the Ulster Museum, I found several rough sketches of the arms of towns in Northern Ireland, with rough notes attached probably prepared for such articles. The Ex Libris Society in which Vinycomb was the the vice president, made him their officer of arms to oversee heraldic matters in the society. And it is therefore not surprising that most of his bookplates were decorated armorials. Robert Day in a forward to one of Vinycomb's books said that "His own designs which were mainly of a decorative character, were always marked by good taste and true feeling for the subject." (F) This true feeling for the subject is what gives quality to Vinycomb's plates. There were few bookplate engravers in Ireland in his day that were as learned on the subject or as committed as he was to keeping strictly to the original principles of heraldry as systemised by the officers of arms. For a quality design of lasting character "Heraldry" says Vinycomb, "which has been the leading factor in ex libris for over 400 years, fulfills all the requirements." (J) And although he himself preferred heraldic insignia to other styles, he was not legalistic in his attitude to it. He only maintained that a bookplate should be a true work of art, whatever the style or class of subject it may be; even mere ornamentation could be beautiful if well handled. "Symbolism and pictorial reqresentations" he said, "offered wide scope for the artist's hand, while heraldry could be treated very artistically." (J)

It is quite difficult to ascertain exactly how many bookplates Vinycomb executed for there are no records at present. He had a long working life, designing right up until his death in 1928. I have been able to trace 111 plates, but I know there are many more because in the forward to Vinycomb's book of 24 original designs, Robert Day mentions 200 in all and that was in 1908. I came across one plate done for a Vera Grainger dated 1924!

I intend to continue researching on this subject after the thesis is finished for there is no catalogue of his plates as such and for the

benefit of the Bookplate Society in London and the Department of Local Studies in the Ulster Museum I intend to make such a list. For my present discussion of his work I have chosen a selection of Vinycomb's plates to give a good cross-section. In particular, his Celtic illuminated plates are of special importance because there are little or no records of any other such designs in Ireland previous to these and only a handful since.

Vinycomb's early plates were mainly straighforward armorials with the occasional pictorial among them, etched on copperplate, a more costly form of printing than litho. But Vinycomb, preferring the modern half-tone process and holding the previous method in small esteem, began to have his designs printed by this newer way, as the company of Marcus Ward was directed more towards that line of printing. There are a large number of small pictorial plates, some allegorical and symbolic, printed on a coloured background which should be mentioned. Some of these plates vaguely resemble the work of Walter Crane, who worked with Vinycomb in Marcus Ward and Company. (see fig. 33)

Vinycomb was fond of depicting wise bearded old men deep in study, redeeming their time by acquiring knowledge. Or sometimes he would show scenes of people busily working, making the most of their opportunity to prove themselves worthy through their workmanship. (see fig. 34 and34a )

It is possible to separate Vinycomb's plates into five categories, although some fit into several of these categories. In the first category, are straightforward armorials (see fig.35 ). These were Vinycomb's own speciality. A designer of arms, himself, he strove to faithfully bear true to the ancient heraldic principles. The majority of his plates, if not completely heraldic in character, contain a heraldic nucleus. The second category is Vinycomb's small coloured pictorials, as we described earlier. A few of these were Celtic and some bore traces of heraldry. The third catagory includes the Celtic plates. The plates in this section are larger and bolder than those in the previous two sections. It was not until the late 19th century that Vinycomb used Celtic illumination in his bookplates, even though he had designed and supervised the production of Marcus Ward's Celtic greeting cards. After the beginning of the 20th century, he eagerly turned out these Irish-styled plates, right up until his death. The fourth category of Vinycomb's plates bears much resemblance to his illuminated addresses. They are mainly decorative and rather 'English'

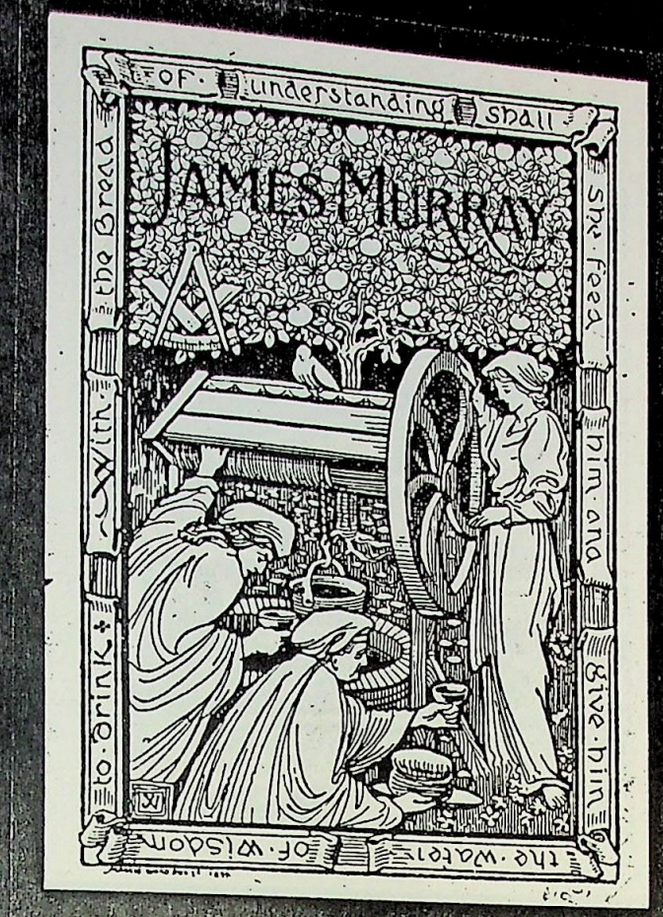



Fig 33.


fig 34

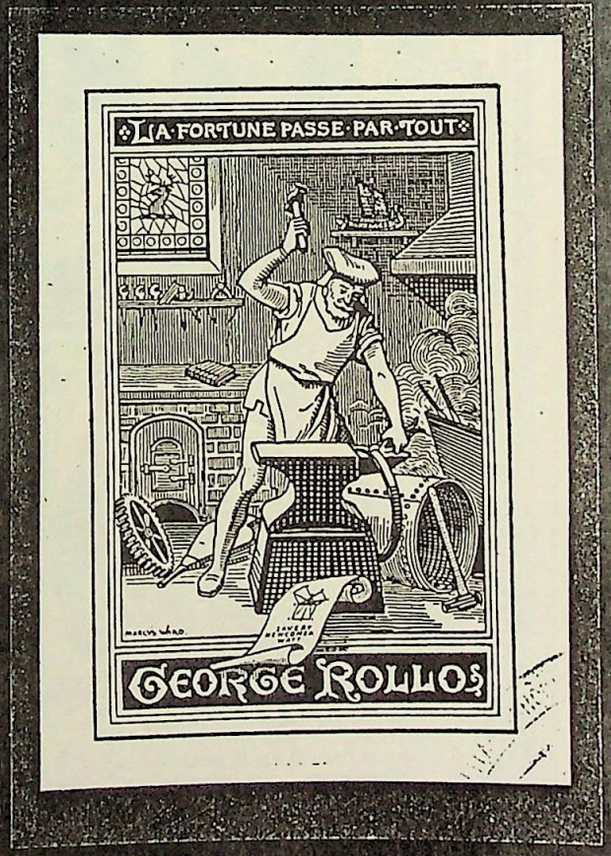
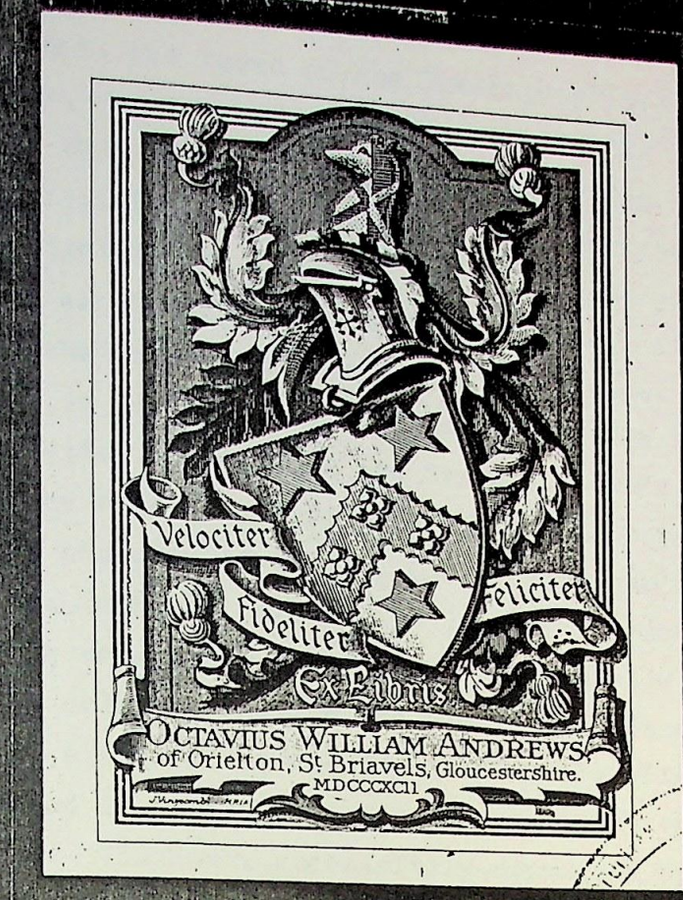



fig 34a.


Velociter
Feliciter
Fideliter
Ex Libris
OCTAVIUS WILLIAM ANDREWS
of Orielton, St. Briavels, Gloucestershire.
MDCCCXCII


QUOD
SUM
SUM RIS
VOLO
VIDERE
1899
Ex Libris
Stewart Blacker Quin


La Mort me suit
C. Perceval Bolton J.P.
Freeman of the City of Waterford
and County High Sheriff in 1895

Fig 35.

style, so to speak, was based on the Pre-Raphaelites' desire to revive the ancient past, and was a parallel to the 'Celtic Revival' (see fig. 36 and36a ). In this style, he designed a plate for his son Bernand Vinycomb, (see fig. 37), which shows the lamp of wisdom placed on a stand to give light to all around. The background is filled with foliage, having as the main element of the plate a scroll, neatly wrapped around the front and bearing his son's name. The format of some of these plates is slightly similiar to some of the later celtic designs, (probably the latter modelled on the former), having the image slightly to the right hand side and filling the left hand margin with rich illumination as shown in figure 39. One of Vinycomb's own plates is designed in this fashion, (see fig.38 ). The ornamentation is lavish and based on the same decoration as one finds in his illuminated addresses, of richly coloured foliage and flowers. Another interesting example of this style is a plate for a Newcastle client, J. Drew Appleby which he designed in 1903 figure 39. The composition of this plate works very well. Vinycomb, successfully draws our eye from the view of the spire of St. Nicholas' church in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, down to the large growth of spiralling foliage on the bottom left hand corner and back up towards the initials of the client. This plate is one of my favourites of Vinycomb's creations, for I think it conveys a feeling of Christmas because of the holly-like leafage of the decoration. Mr Appleby of Westmoreland Road, Newcastle, chose this church as the subject matter for his own plate and Vinycomb has captured a romantic evocation of Mr Appleby's subject. Finally the fifth and last category is small and contains other unusual subject matter and encompassess styles from the other four sections. These assorted subjects include library interiors (see fig. 40), one Jewish pictorial (see fig. 41) and one Chippendale plate as shown in figure 42. There is also an ex libris with a photograph in it namely of Robert Day's house in Cork. (see fig.43 ), for whom Vinycomb designed six or seven plates, all different in style. The library and Celtic plates were among the last designs Vinycomb ever did.


Fig 36

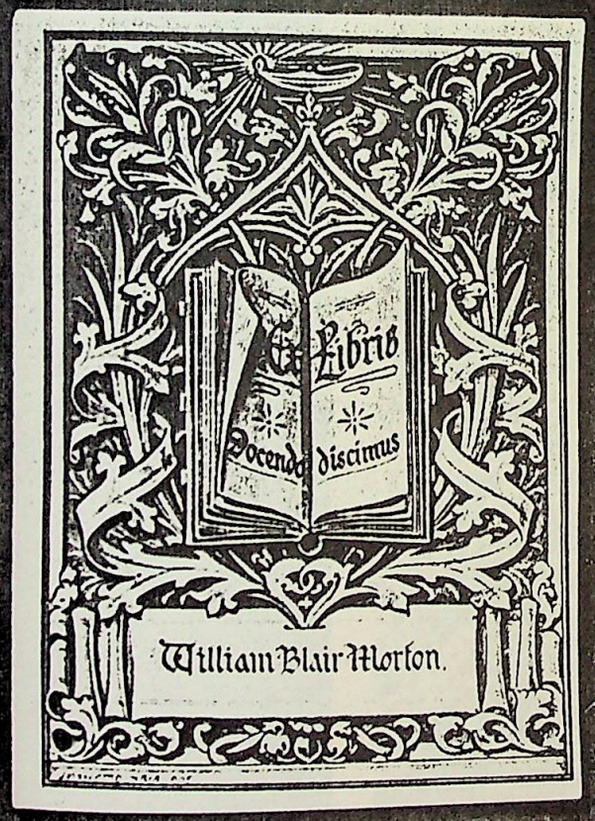



Fig 36a

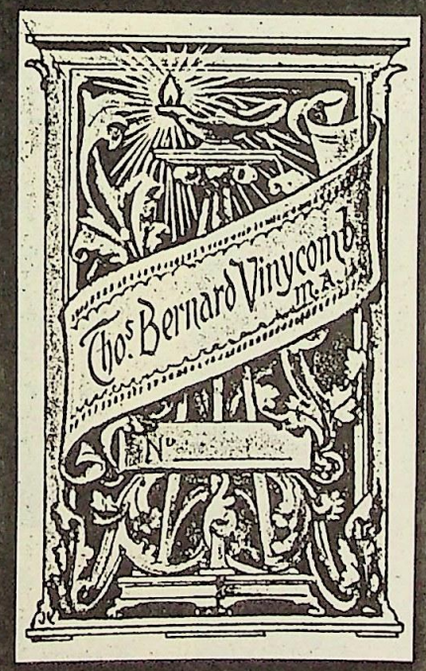



Fig 37.


Deus Illuminatio mea.
Ex Libris
John Vaughan.
MRIA

Fig 38


1903
Ex Libris
J. Drew Appleby

Fig 39.

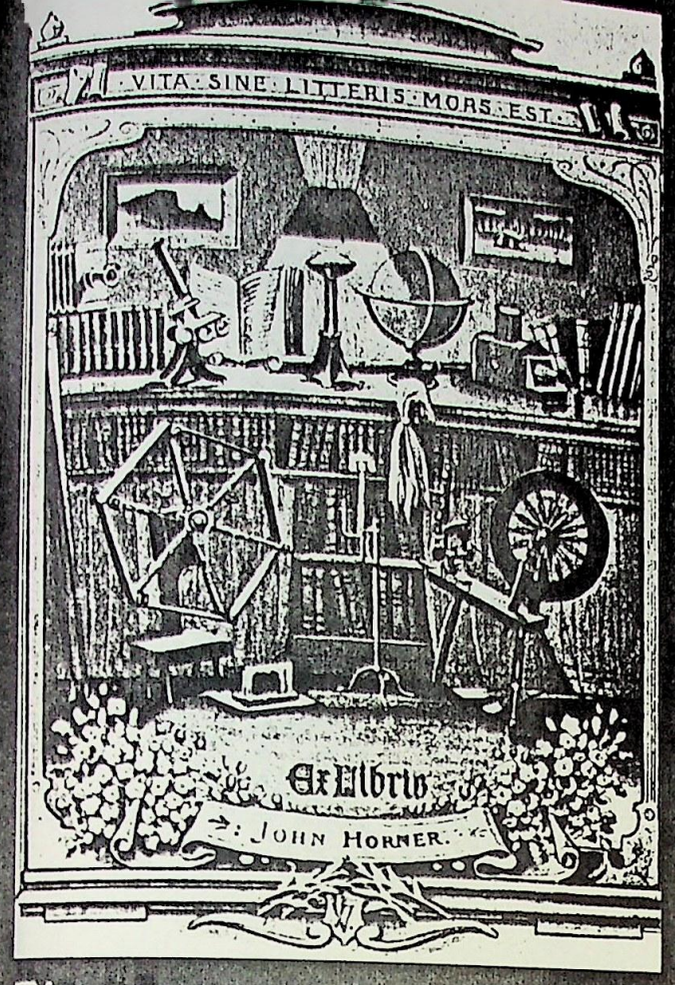



Fig 40


Fig 41

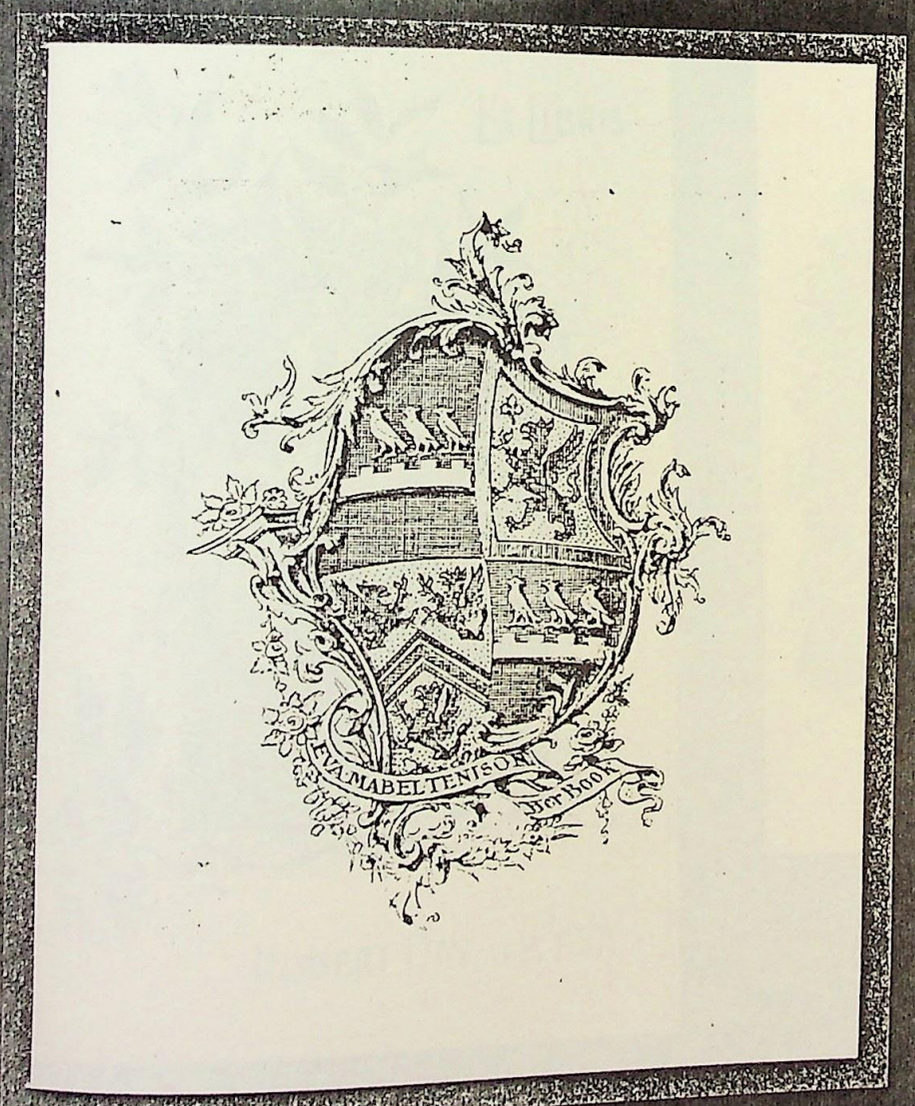
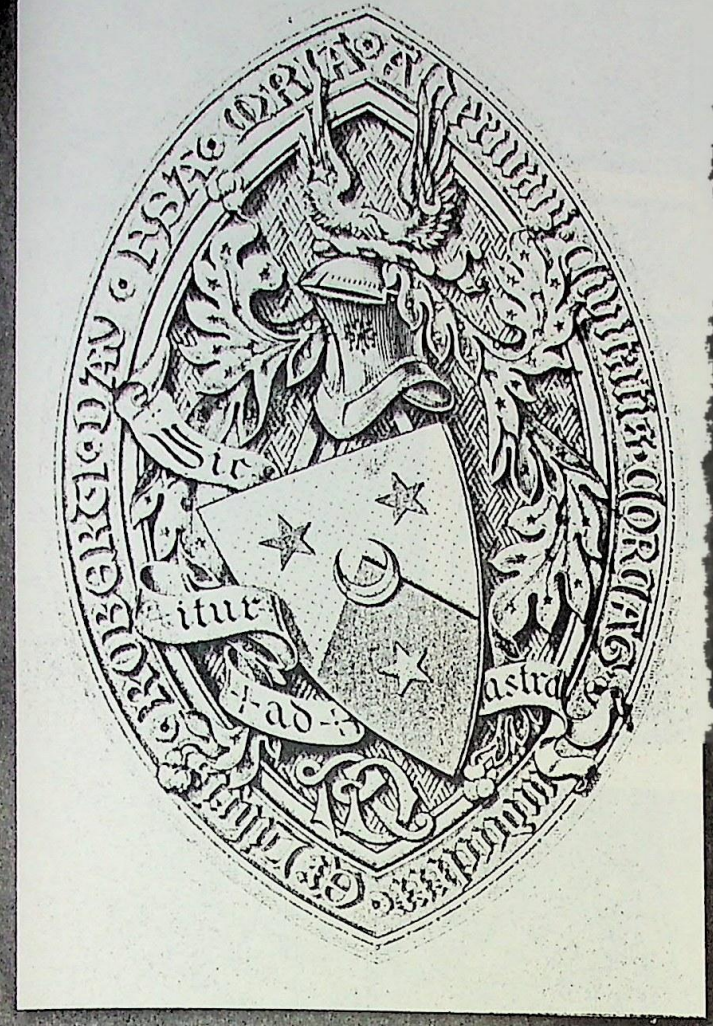
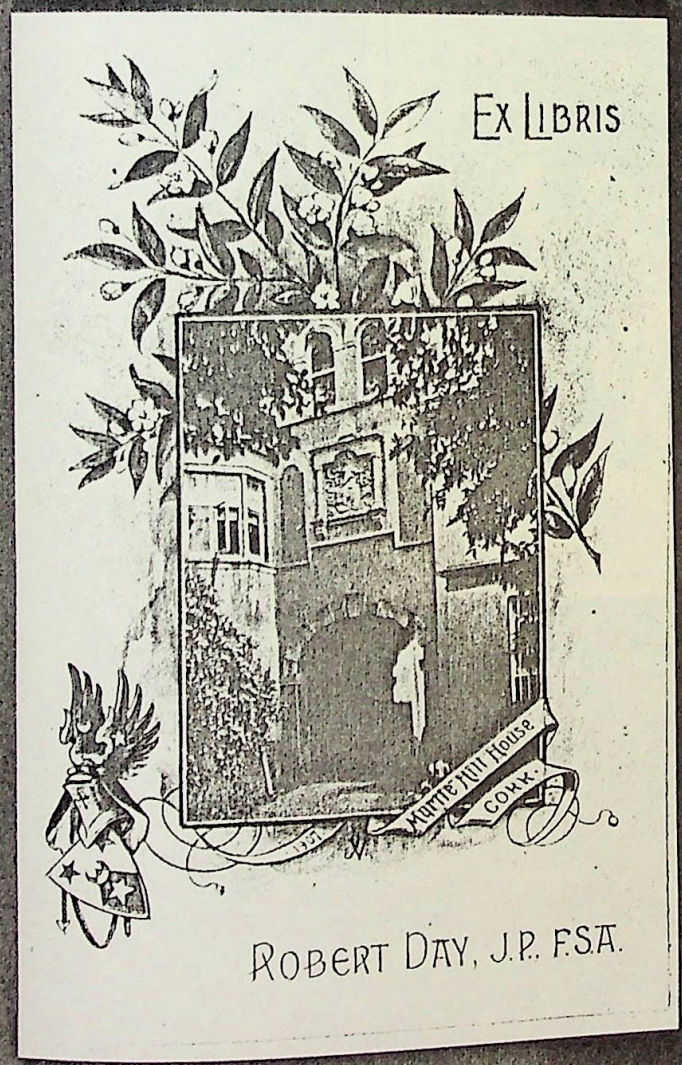



Fig 42.


Sic itur ad astra
1891


Ex Libris
Mount Hill House
Cork
Robert Day, J.P. F.S.A.

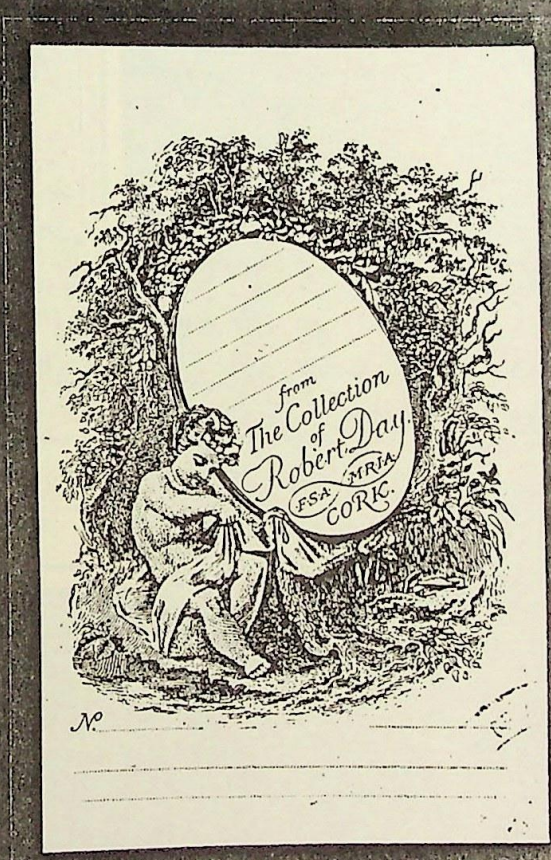
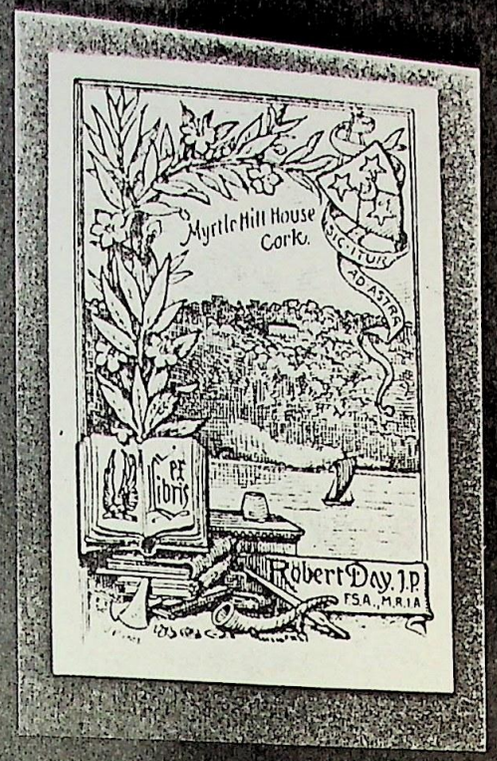

from
The Collection
of
Robert Day
M.R.I.A.
F.S.A.
Cork.
No.

Fig 43


Myrtle Hill House
Cork.
SIC ITUR
AD ASTRA
Ex
Libris
Robert Day. J.P.
F.S.A., M.R.I.A.


Robert Day. J.P. F.S.A.
Myrtle Hill House, Cork.

Fig. 43.

Celtic Revival

In discussing Vinycomb's plates, it is important that I comment on the Celtic Revival that took place in Ireland exactly during Vinycomb's working lifetime, which was a major influence on his work. Around the early 1840s in antiquarian circles in Dublin there was a growing awareness and pride in the special achievements of Irish artists of the early Christian period. The Irish Archaeological Society had initial letters from the 'Book of Kells' and other manuscripts for use in its own publication of important texts. The Celtic Society also used motifs from the 'Book of Durrow' and the 'Cross of Cong' on its bindings. This special interest in celtic ornamentation combined with the historical interest in the Irish relics of the past brought about the strongest force in Irish art for nearly a century.

Artists in all areas of work were affected by it. By the end of the 19th century ornamentation had been put into many varied uses, the most obvious being 19th century graphic decoration. The influence of the early Irish manuscripts became a major factor in the graphic work done in Ireland both North and South at that time.

This revival has on so many occasions been attributed to those in the South, but it is interesting to note that in the North, archaeological and other historical societies were also paving the way for the revival. The Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge, founded in 1792, carefully collected books in Irish for their library. United Irishman, Thomas Russell, hanged in Downpatrick in 1803 was the first librarian of the society. According to Johnathan Bardon in his book on the history of Belfast (M), "it could be said that Belfast Protestants had done most to found the 19th century Gaelic Revival which caused so much revulsion to their descendants." All forms of art were given a Celtic dressing: jewellery, ceramics, clothes, silverware, metalwork, embroidery, woodwork, coinage and medals. Marcus Ward, as mentioned earlier, used much Celtic ornamentation in their illuminated addresses and greeting cards and books. Out from the printing presses flowed various booklets of Irish interest, all laced with Celtic geometric pattern. (see fig. 44) The 19th century showed a great reawakening of interest in the heritage of Ireland which appeared to be sleeping up until then. The Royal Irish Academy, founded in the 18th century for the advancement of learning, was at the turn of the century in a depressed state. Even though scholars, antiquarians and topographical artists of the 1800s

# Aill Eumail Coimnail

Fig 44.

had shown an interest in Irish antiquities from time to time, it was not until they banded together to form the Irish Archaeological Society in 1841 that their studies bore fruit. They, too, decided to have a Celtic ornamental initial letter engraved for each work or tract that they produced, to be taken from "some remarkable Irish manuscript". Using Celtic letter-forms was not just important because it was a means of gathering together specimens of ancient Irish caligraphy, but it would endeavour also to:

"Assist in removing the prejudice, or sceptism, that has unreasonably prevailed on the subject of the ancient literature of Ireland; a prejudice which is founded chiefly, if not entirely, upon ignorance and which cannot be better assailed than by laying before the learned public specimens of what Irish artists of the middle ages really did effect. Since it must be evident, that a people whose literary remains are adorned with such exquisite designs of penmanship could hardly have been the rude and ignorant barbarians that it has hitherto been the fashion to represent them." (N)

Regardless of religious or financial difference, sincere antiquarians and other scholars effectively bridged these gaps and found that their desire for knowledge formed a common ground on which they could work and stand together.

John Vinycomb worked in this environment producing beautiful examples of Celtic ornament in his own work, not only in his bookplates but also in some of his many illuminated addresses. Looking at his work, one cannot help being struck by this, as well as his resource and taste in design and almost uncanny skill and delicacy in execution. He took so naturally to decorative art and fine detailed work that the Gaelic revival and the fashion for decorative design provided the perfect environment for him to come to the forefront of graphic design at that time. The majority of plates that Vinycomb produced were for his close friends, who like him were involved in artistic or historical work: his love of the past. It appears that he drew all his decorative inspiration from the work of the medieval illuminators and ancient local history both North and South. He was an ardent student of archaeology and antiquarian studies and he loved travelling around his home area, Co. Down and Belfast, studying its history and gaining insight into the culture of the country.

Before commenting on Vinycomb's Celtic pictorials, I wish to place two pictorials done two years before the 'Ulster Club' bookplate , to show the change of direction in the treatment of his Irish pictorial plates. The first plate (see fig.45 ) was designed in 1894 and printed by Marcus Ward and Co. by the half-tone process on a pale mint green coloured background. It is interesting but not surprising that Vinycomb did a plate for the Free Masons of Co. Down. In fact, a substantial number of his clients were members of guilds or masonic lodges. If one checks closely, a lot of his designs have the famous drawing instrument of the compass and rule neatly tucked into the composition. This bookplate is a symbolic pictorial, having also the shield of arms placed in front of the three pillars representing the three orders of Greek architecture from left to right called, 'Doric', 'Corithian', and 'Jonic'. Above, is the the sun representing the all-seeing eye of God and placed centrally below it is the shield which is divided into three parts. The two spinning wheels on the top represent the linen trade while the middle section with the sheaf of flax placed between two weaving shuttles again refers to the linen industry in the North. The lower section shows a merchant ship at the base of the shield resting just above the Latin inscription 'Industria', and it is reasonable to suppose that the ship signifies the Northern Shipbuilding Industry. Vinycomb has used the slide rule and compass to decorate both bottom corners and the masonic star in the centre. He forms the border of the plate with the name of the order. In the North, the Free Masons were a closed shop of stone masons, merchants, architects and other businessmen who have attracted a lot of rumours and curiousity among the public because of their supposed secret business deals and 'initiation ceremonies', although the majority of these rumours seem to be unfounded. This plate, although there is an absence of Celtic illumination and Irish motifs is symbolic throughout and has a mysticism of it's own which is different to the other Celtic designs.

Francis Joseph Bigger ( fig. 46)

Vinycomb was a life-long friend of Francis Joseph Bigger and he designed several plates of different styles for him. Mr Bigger, living in Ardrie, Belfast, was also a member of the 'Royal Irish Academy' and was one of the two editors of the 'Ulster Journal of Archaeology'. He was a Celtic enthusiast and knew a lot about Gaelic illumination. In one of Vinycomb's last letters, he recommends his correspondant to contact Mr Bigger about the merits of his illuminations:

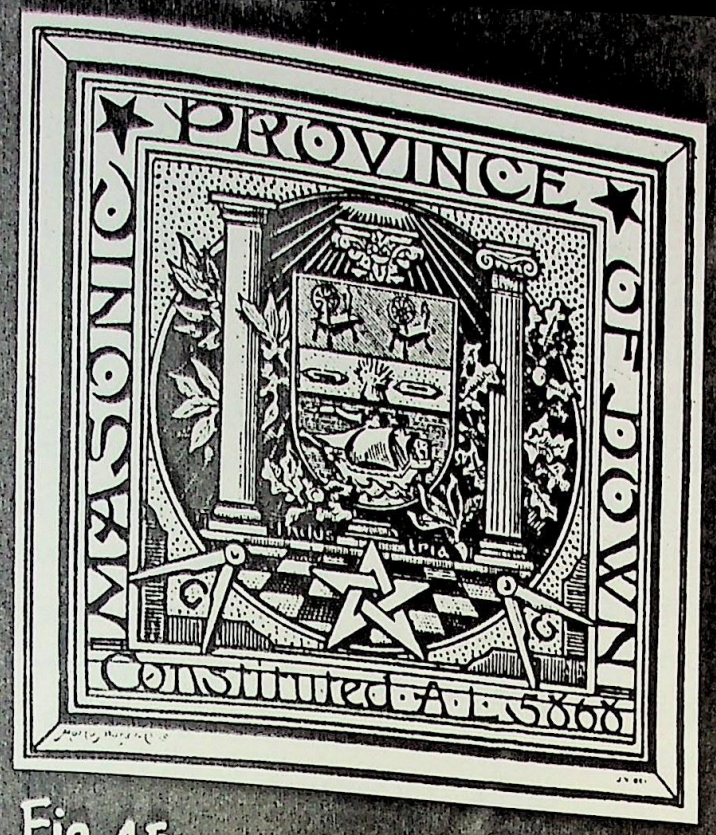

MASONIC PROVINCE OF DOWN
Constituted A.L. 5866

Fig 45.

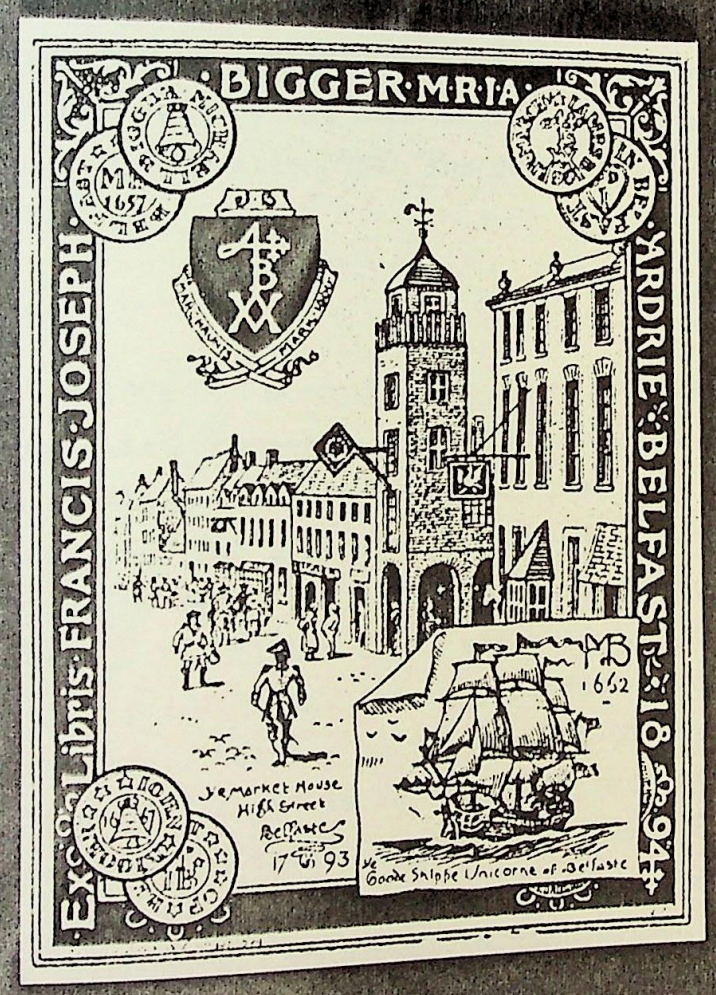

EX LIBRIS FRANCIS JOSEPH
BIGGER MRIA
ARDRIE BELFAST 18 94
1652
Ye Market House High Street Belfast 17 93
Ye Goode Shippe Unicorne of Belfaste

Fig 46.

As to the merits of my illuminating, you might ask Mr F. J. Bigger to write a paragraph about (it) he is so well made up in the ancient Celtic illuminating and who would sum up my merits better than anybody." (see fig.47). The Bigger's plate is a pictorial of the market place in Belfast in 1793, which was situated between Donegall Square and the Corn market area. It was always packed with traders and the tower you see in the centre was the old linen warehouse, famous in its day. The High Street, as it was then called, was the centre of corporate life in Belfast for a long time. Bigger's family were Belfast merchants going back to the beginning of the 17th century and Vinycomb has sought to create a bookplate that would recapture the atmosphere of the past, and convey the long merchant tradition of the Bigger family. He has placed at three corners of the plate, various 17th century traders tokens of the Bigger family. A map of a merchant ship, which was probably a well known carrier of home grown industry, is in the remaining corner. This plate, printed by Marcus Ward, is expressive of the industrial climate of Belfast at the time of its publication, when the city was one of most the prosperous in Ireland. The 'Bigger' plate has nothing mystical about it. Vinycomb has sought only to depict the mercantile community of Belfast's past and this he has done well. It is strange that he never included Celtic decoration into the design when Bigger was a Celtic enthusiast.

Ulster Club plate

This design done in 1896 in figure48, was one of the first moves Vinycomb made towards using Celtic ornamentation in his plates. In comparison to the other plates the decoration is somewhat subdued and perhaps not the strongest example of the selection. Again this plate is a wash drawing reproduced in light brown ink and printed in Marcus Ward's by the lithographic process. The Ulster Club, situated left of Castle place off Donegall Square, Belfast, was the city rendevous of country gents and wealthy businessmen. Holding up the arms of Ulster which is the red hand, the 'hound of Ulster' is depicted as 'rampant', that is, standing erect on its hind legs. Beside him, lies a crown with a sword placed across it. And the war banner again bearing the red hand is staked beside an Irish harp. This warlike composition is not one of the strongest of Vinycomb's designs. The legs of the hound are rather too near the earth and the draughtsmanship is not his best.

17th Oct. 1925.

Dear Mr Walch.

Thanks you so much for your letter telling
me of The Rt Hon. J Nicholls P.C. M.P. Editor of The D. Telegraph having
written to you to supply an article on my life & work in Belgium. I confess
I feel highly complimented to know of this. I don't think any other man
would be more conversant with my doings than yourself, & would try to help
you as far as I can with the facts & generally [illegible] as
you note in your letter. Which I shall try to answer. This will take some little
time but will do my best & think by Monday, or 2 days I shall be able
be able to send notes.

1st As to age. I was born in Newcastle on the 4th July 1833. that is in
the fourth year of the reign of William IV. curiously enough the 4th July is
memorable as American Independence day! Queen Victoria & myself were the only two
of the immortal fellows! & the month was called after him. & both of us were
godless family & queerly when I was.

As to the events of my life, you might ask Mr. Fyfe Clapp to send a paragraph
about it as he did with regards to the Imperial Press Conference & who would know of
my deeds better than anybody.

Meanwhile believe me Yours truly yours

Hengist

Fig 47.

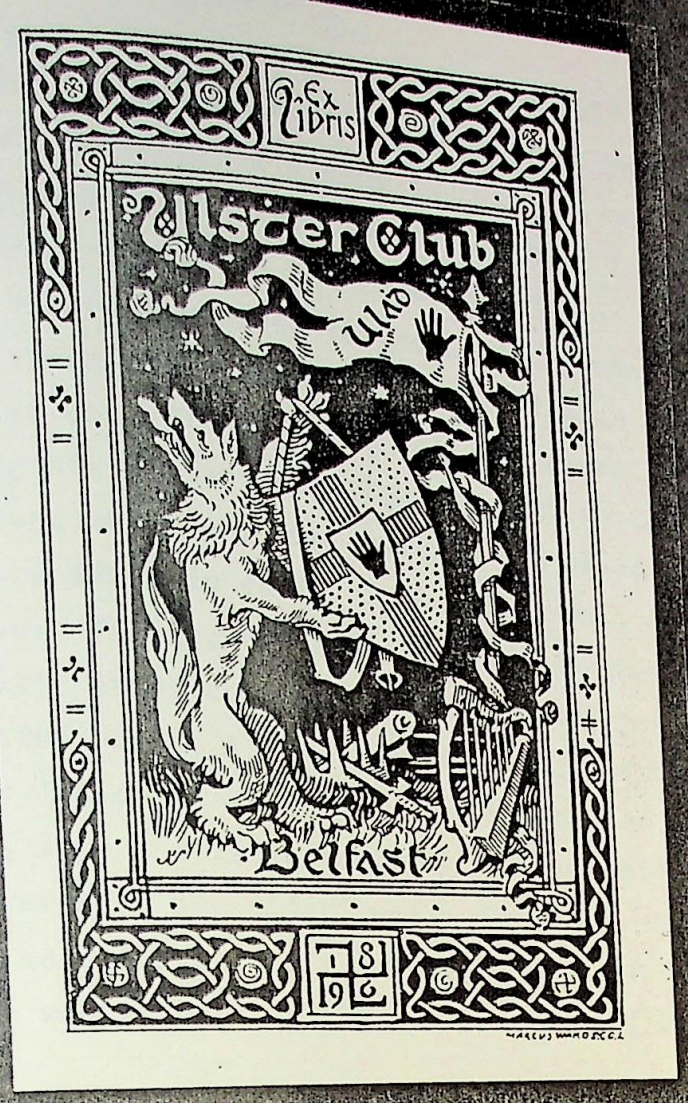

Ex Libris
Ulster Club
Belfast
1912

Fig 48.

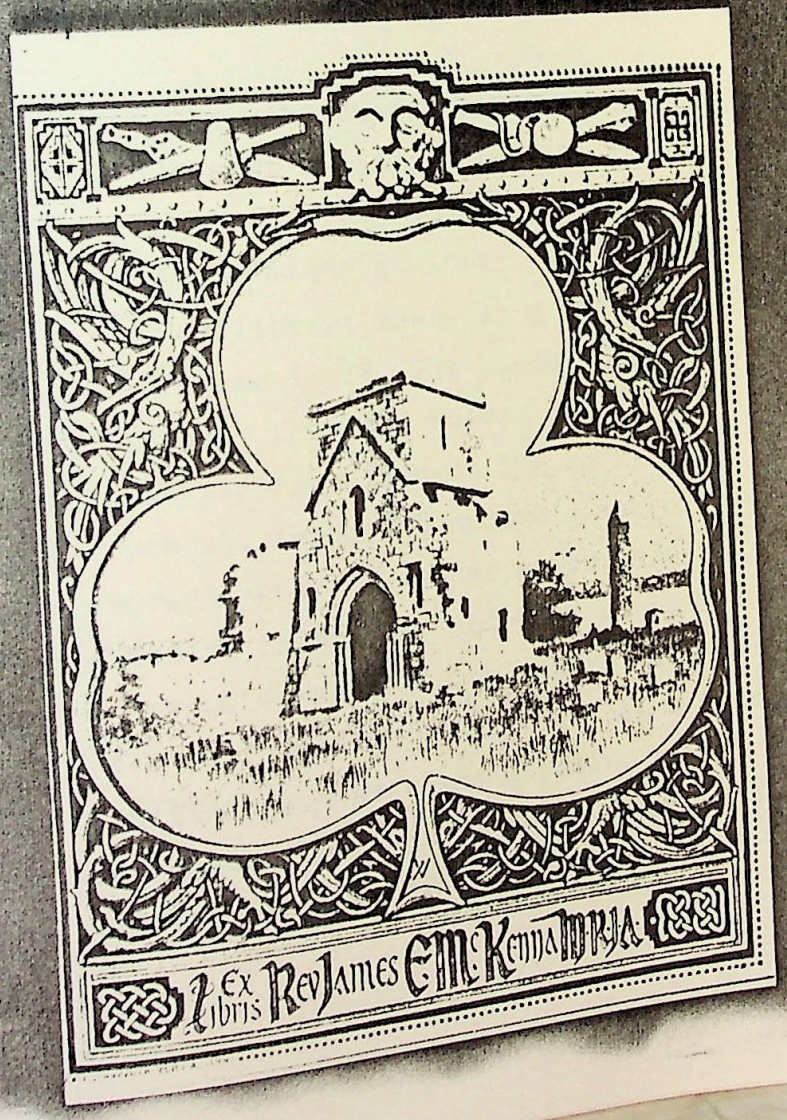

Ex Libris Rev James E. McKenna M.R.I.A.

Fig 49.

Reverend James E. McKenna plate

This plate (fig.49 ) done in 1900, a Celtic pictorial for a Reverend James E. McKenna, is different to our last plate and was executed four years later. There was a steady increase in the use of Celtic ornament in Vinycomb's work from the late 1800s to the early 1900s and esiecially with regard to the frame of the designs there is a marked change. Vinycomb started to use Celtic geometric pattern in composing the frames of these plates, including an outside border of small dots as one often sees in Celtic ornament. Since the 1900s, he began framing his pictorial bookplates with antiquarian motifs as can be observed in this plate, where he has placed a Grotesque face, such as one finds in early Irish stone work, between four copper spearheads. Framing and appearing to lie underneath the main subject, is Celtic interlacing, meticulously and painstakingly drawn. The image of Saint Mary's Abbey in Devinish Island on Lough Erne is cleverly placed inside a shamrock shaped window for the viewer to look through. Again, like the large majority of Vinycomb's plates, it is a wash and ink drawing. The client was a member of the Royal Irish Academy and an antiquarian and a subscriber to the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, he was a friend of Vinycomb's, living in Camber, Claudy, Co. Derry.

William Swanston plate

This plate in figure 50 , also done in 1900 and executed in wash, shows very clearly Vinycomb's ability to fill an area with many objects in such a way so that the composition remains balanced and the symmetry is not lost. Although there is little evidence of Celtic ornamentation in the ex libris, there is a wealth of information relating to Irish heritage in it. The plate almost tells a story of past and present Ireland, from the Dolmen in the top right corner, continuing anti-clockwise from towards the bookpile with the lamp of wisdom placed upon it. Perhaps Vinycomb's imagery here is a little predictable and stereotyped, but he has given this plate as antiquated appearance that a modern format may not have done. The motto reads: 'Let actions come before words'. In the centre lies a misty image of Carrickfergus Castle near Belfast, itself having a stormy history, dating from 1177. William Swanston was a fellow of the Geological Society and he was a conductor of the Ulster Journal of Archaeology and a frequent literary contributor who was also keenly interested in maps.

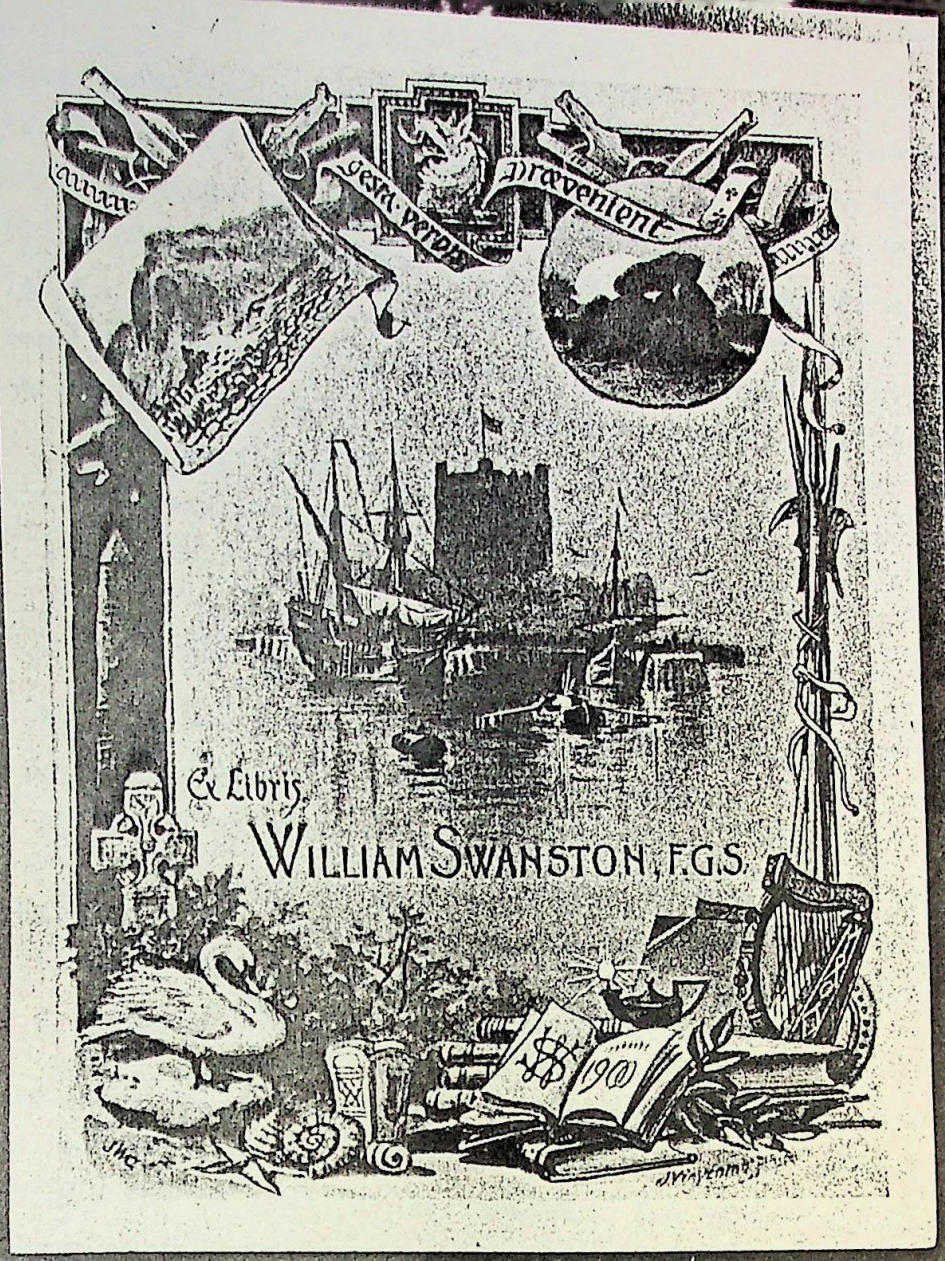



Fig 50

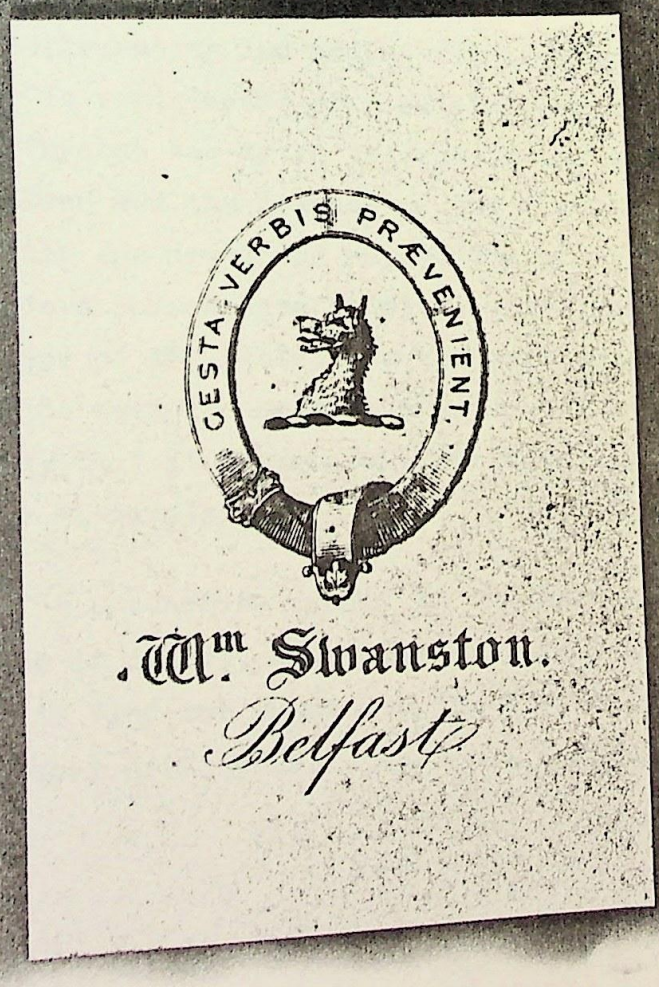



Fig 50a.

Again, one sees various spearheads of stone and copper used to decorate the top of the frame and right hand side also. William Swanston's monogram can be seen on the open book beside the date. The earlier bookplate of Swanston's is a simple armorial, which I found in the Chamney collection (see fig.50a ). This plate bears the same crest and motto and provides a striking contrast to the Vinycomb design. Although it is a modest and well executed plate, it does not reveal anything of the character or interests of its owner as does the latter, nor does it bear the signature of the artist who created it.

Sharman O'Neill plate.

One of the most beautiful of the Celtic plates Vinycomb did is the next example in figure 51, the Sharman O'Neill ex libris. This circular design has an almost three-dimensional quality about it. Vinycomb has achieved this by his skillful use of shading. When you study closely the wash drawing in his bookplates, you cannot help but notice how well he handled the medium. His draughtmanship and confident rendering reveals a firmness of hand that few could surpass.

As for balance and symmetry, this plate is an exquisite example. Vinycomb has balanced the circles within the design so well that the total effect is one that pleases the eye. The remaining shape left by the outline of the circles suggests a shamrock. His use of Celtic pattern, especially in the mantling from the helmet, is a superb piece of handiwork, complementing and adding richness to the composition. The whole design is reminiscent of a shield, echoing the shield in the centre. Again, Vinycomb has tried to capture the atmosphere of ancient mythological Ireland and the legends of the fighting clans of that time, ( O'Neill being the one mentioned here). The crest above the helmet, showing a victorious raised hand holding a club, helps to enforce the war-like appearance of the plate. The composition and design of this plate is one of the most economical and successful of all Vinycomb's Celtic bookplates, that it overshadows the majority of his other ordinary circular armorials.

Notice the use of the swastika symbol in the border. This ancient symbol is, believe it or not, an emblem of peace! and a symbol one finds frequently in Vinycomb's plates. The O'Neill plate was created in 1900 and like most of Vinycomb's designs, bears his signature, in

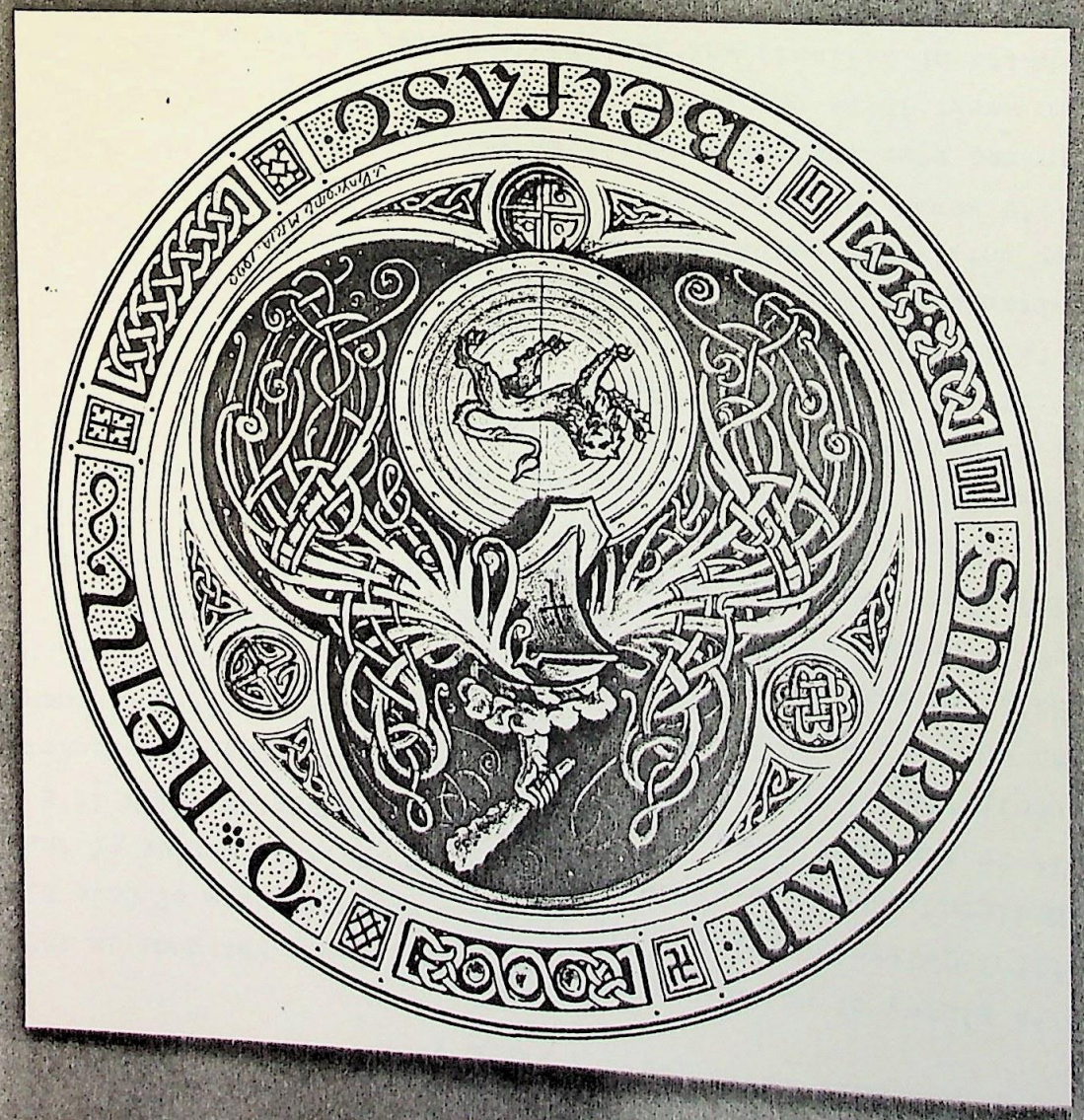



Fig 61.

Nancy Mc Guillamuire Letts plate ( fig 52 )

The Letts plate, of which I have an original print, was done in 1904. A beautiful Celtic ornament motif frames a dramatic view of Cave Hill ( Ben Madigan), which overlooks Belfast from the Antrim side of the city. It is the most prominent of the Belfast mountains, with it's bold precipitious cliffs and the great prehistoric fort of ' MacArt' standing out in striking relief on it's highest point. It was renamed 'Cave Hill' because of the numerous caves hidden in the mountain, one of which is depicted on the right hand side of the picture. This pictorial plate, executed in wash and fine penwork sets this hill in an early Irish, almost mythological setting. Done very much in the Celtic fashion, it has been reproduced by a fine half-tone block process, a newly introduced method of photographically etching upon a copper surface direct from the original drawing. This process has the advantage of faithfully reproducing every detail with exact delicacy and is simultaneously capable of achieving force and intensity of colour, which up until then was only attainable in wood engraving at its finest. This plate would have been drawn on a larger scale and reproduced to the required size photographically so that it loses nothing and retains whatever merit there may be in the original. The client, Nancy Mc Guillamuire Letts of Belfast, was probably a member of the Belfast's Naturalists Field Club, for Cave Hill was a favourite topic of study to members of the club.

It is interesting to compare this design with an attractive ex libris designed by J. W. Carey in figure52a) who worked under Vinycomb and subsequently rose to fame as a watercolourist in the North of Ireland. Carey's plate, done for Robert John Welch, who was himself, a close friend of Vinycomb's and a well known photographer for the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, is similiar in format and subject matter to the Letts plate, being also a view of Irish cliffs. Although the treatment of the medium is different, this being a pen drawing without wash, there is a familiar use of arranging the various motifs around the picture, as seen in a lot of Vinycomb's plates. The typography, also, bears some resemblance to Vinycomb's lettering and the Celtic ornamentation looks like it could have been done by him, but it lacks the complexity and refinement.


Fig 52.

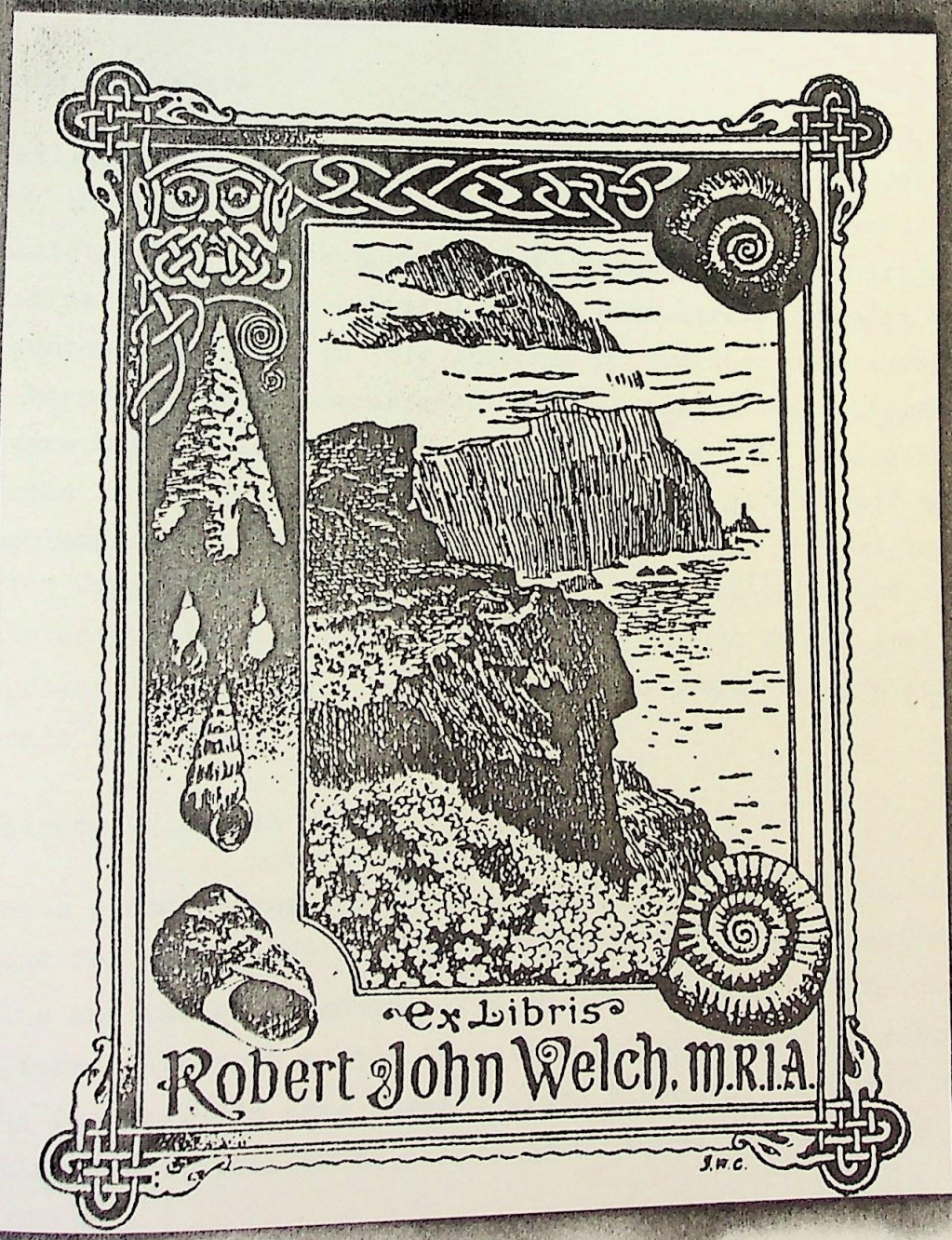



Fig 52a.

Linenhall Library plate (see fig.53 )

If ever you have the chance to visit the Linenhall Library in Belfast, now situated in Donegall Square, you will find not only the original art work for this plate, framed and on view to all, but the plate is used to denote the library's ownership on every book in the building as a constant reminder and testimony to a man who did much to promote education in his local area. On being elected a member of the Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge, Vinycomb in appreciation for the honour conferred on him, designed and offered this plate. The actual size of the original is 5¾" wide by 7½" in length and is execellently drawn. Celtic in character, the plate's inner border is filled in with a profusion of interlaced lines. Beneath the name of the library, Vinycomb has appropriately placed an open book. This design was exhibited in the Ex Libris Journal, Volume 13, and was designed in 1904.

William Grey plate

The William Grey plate, should be included in the Celtic section, even though there is no decorative elements in it. This design is the first completely illustrative bookplate Vinycomb ever did (unfortunately it has no date). It is doubtful if the semi-circle frame at the top of the composition works in this instance or whether more attention could have been paid to the arrangement of the name in the pictorial. The photograph shown here in figure 54 fails to show the stag discreetly situated in the far distance beside a lake, or give credit to the draughtsmanship of this illustration which is in the original. William Crey of Mountcharles, Belfast, was a geologist and also a Celtic enthusaist like Francis Joseph bigger and so the inclusion of the Dolmen and the Irish high cross are suitable subjects for such a person's bookplate.

Archbishop of Dublin plate

Vinycomb wrote frequently on the heraldic insignia of the bishops of Ireland for the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, making mention of the origins and use of Episcopal arms in Ireland. Many of the old Irish religious seals bore simply the effigy of the bishop or patron saints of the diocese. "In some cases", wrote Vinycomb, "heraldic bearings were introduced but, because of laxity with regard to the proper registration

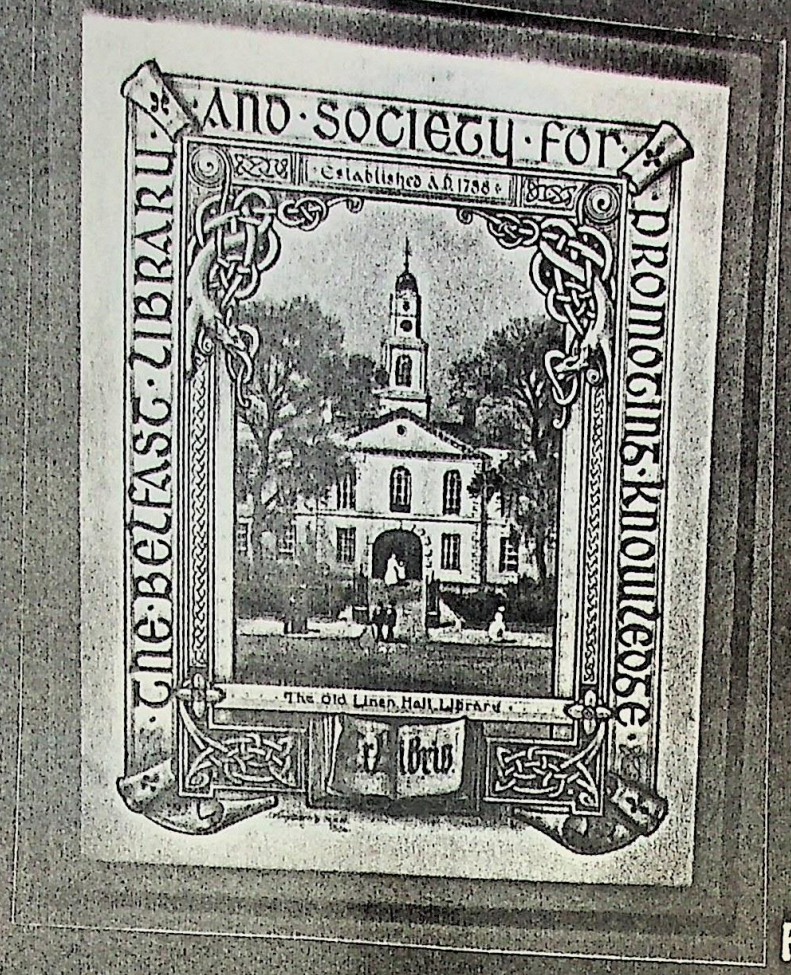
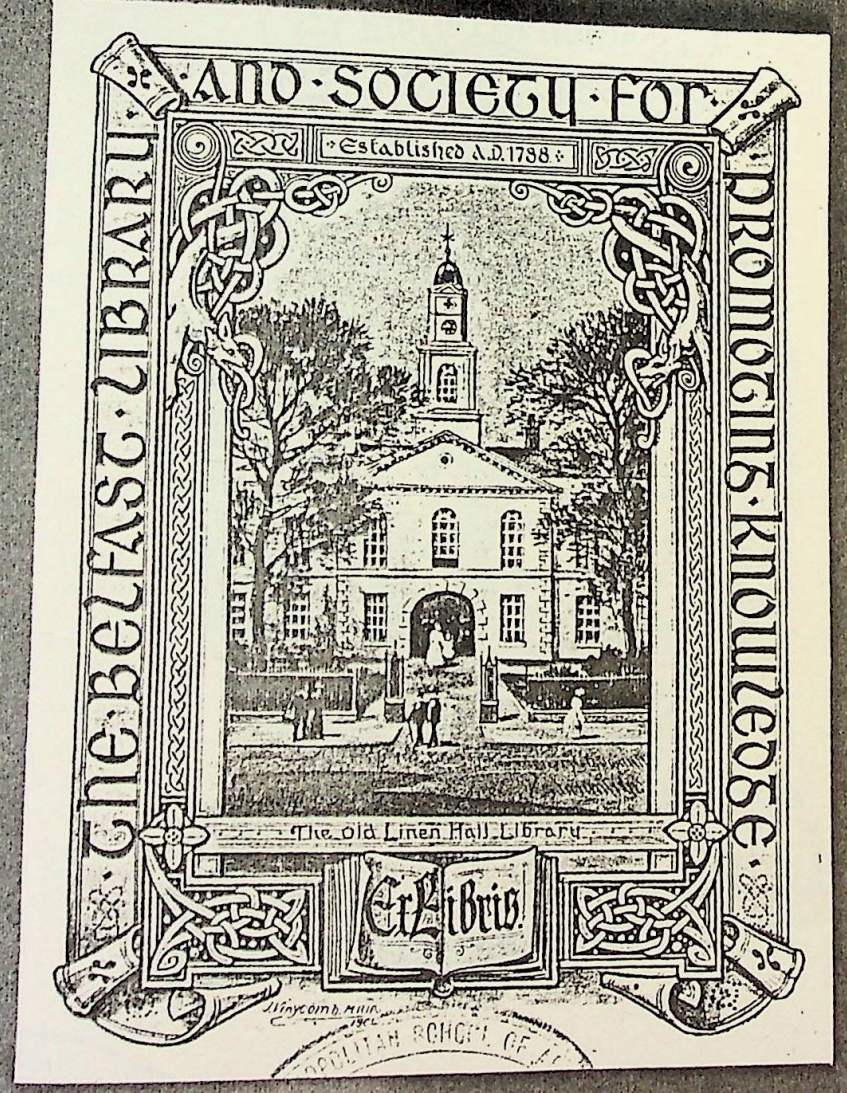

·THE·BELFAST·LIBRARY·AND·SOCIETY·FOR·PROMOTING·KNOWLEDGE·
·Established A.D. 1788·
The Old Linen Hall Library
Ex Libris

Fig 53.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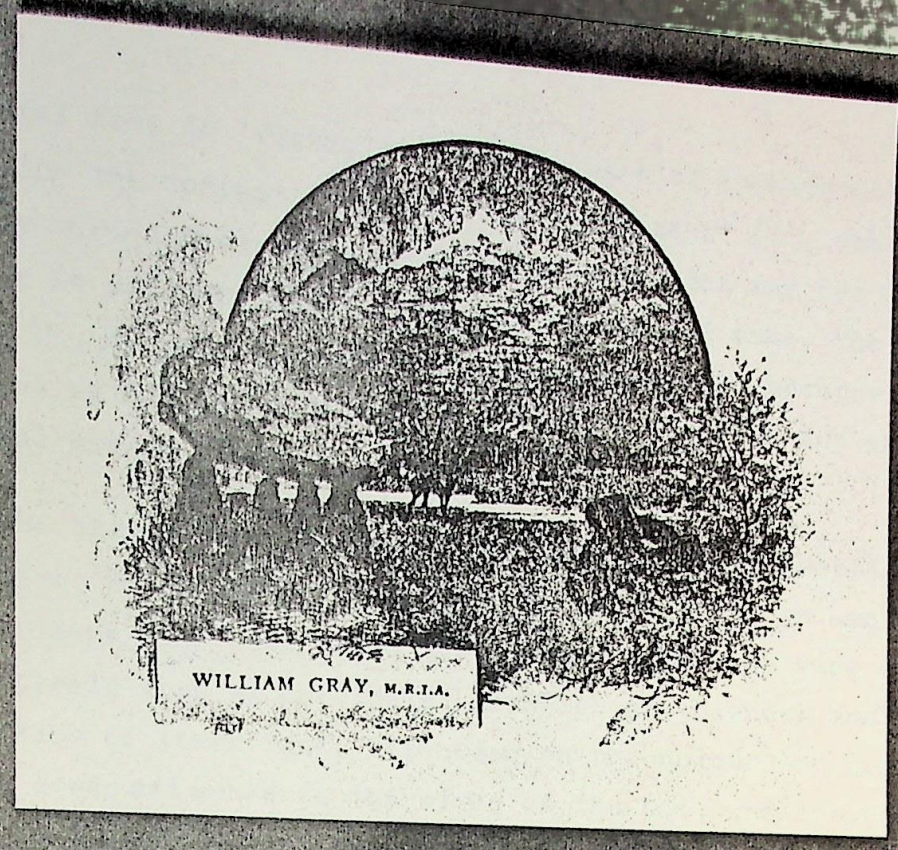
WILLIAM GRAY, M.R.I.A.

Fig 54.

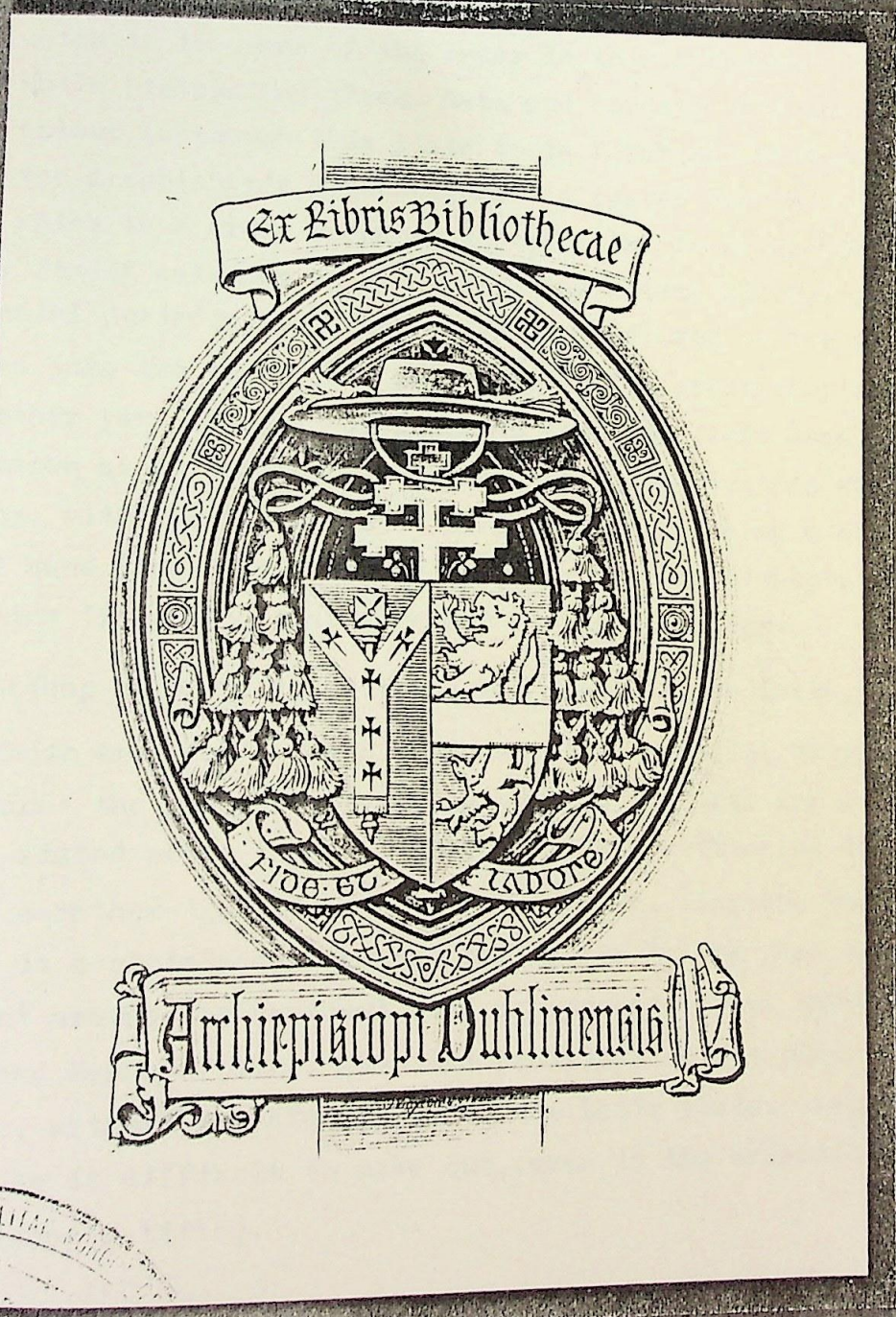
Ex Libris Bibliothecae
Archiepiscopi Dublinensis

Fig 56.

of episcopal arms in 'Ulster's Office', there is considerable difficulty in determing the correct blazon of the Irish sees" (C). The bishops frequently varied their arms in the most confusing way for in Ireland there were no definate rules about the bearing of arms. The ex libris in figure 55 , is what is known as a 'seal armorial' because it resembles a seal with a vague hint of a ribbon at both the top and bottom of the oval shaped plate.

Besides the 'Tiara' or 'Triple-crowned' head-dresses peculiar to the Pope and the 'Mitre' worn in religious ceremonies by an archbishop and a bishop, there were well known low crowned hats with wide brims and knotted tassels worn by cardinals, archbishops, bishops and other ecclesiastics of lower rank. Depending on the colour and cordals or tasselled cords attached to the sides of the hat, one could tell the rank of the bearer. A cardinal had five rows of tasselled cords on either side of his low brimmed hat, interlaced and red in colour. An archbishop, (which is the rank of the owner in this case) had four rows of tassels, while bishops had three. Hats and cordals of both ranks were green in colour (although this plate is in black and white). In this example, the archbishop's episcopal hat is placed over his 'Archiepiscopal cross' - which is a cross borne on a staff, the lower end pointed and the cross itself extended on all sides, indicating his metripolitan or provincial jurisdiction. The shield is overlayed on the cross and is divided into two parts, one part bearing the archbishop's official and the other part bearing his personal arms. The left hand part shows what is known as a 'pallium' or pall, a religious vesture worn by an archbishop, with five 'crosslets' on it, which rests on a staff. And the right hand side of the shield displays the archbishop's personal arms, a lion 'rampant', that is erect on his hind legs.

The archbishop of Dublin's motto on the scroll is in Latin, meaning 'Through faith and work'. Using parchment-like scrolls, Vinycomb neatly places the archbishop's title beneath the seal and a lesser scroll is fitted above the seal with ex libris written on it. This plate has a rather 'grand' atmosphere about it. Vinycomb has succeeded in giving it a stately appearance, partly due to the neat symmetrical arrangement around the vertical core as opposed to the casualness of the Reverend McKenna plate. Also the rendering of the plate is hard and linear, without the atmosphere of the Letts plate. Sadly, the date of the plate is difficult to make out, even in the original (below the archbishop's title).

Later Celtic plates

The next three examples, figures56,57 and58 are grouped together because they were all executed around the same time and are very similiar in format and design. These plates were some of the last Vinycomb did. He was eighty eight years old when he did these and he worked right up until his death in 1928. For a man of his age, the quality and skill of artistry in these plates speak volumes about the man's suprising ability and aptitude in his later years. Each bookplate is done in wash and pen and each are decorated pictorials. The frames of these plates are all variations on the same theme and they are not symmetrical, but the left hand side of each of them is more heavily decorated for the eye always travels to the bottom left hand side of a composition and that is where Vinycomb places the large circular 'stud', altered only in the Crawford plate.
These 'studs' imitate the ancient Gaelic metalwork on shields and are found also on the Letts plate. Again, like the Sharman O'Neill design, these have a three-dimensional appearance achieved with the use of shading. He has varied the Celtic illumination by wearing motifs arropriate to the client into the pattern. For example, the Crawford plate ( fig.56), was designed for a man who worked in India. He was a member of the Indian Civil Service who was also a keen zoologist, hence the picture of the tiger, elephant and butterfly in the border One might question Vinycoml's decision to combine these foreign elements with ancient Irish decoration and perhaps the other two plates are more successful in that there is nothing but Irish subject matter to deal with.


Ex Libris
ARTS
SCIENCE
LITERATURE
William M. Crawford
B.A. I.C.S. F.E.S. F.Z.S.

Fig 56.


Ex libris
PAX IN BELLO
Thomas Edens Osborne.
F.R.S.A.Ire.
J. Vinycomb jnr R.I.A.
1922

Fig 57.

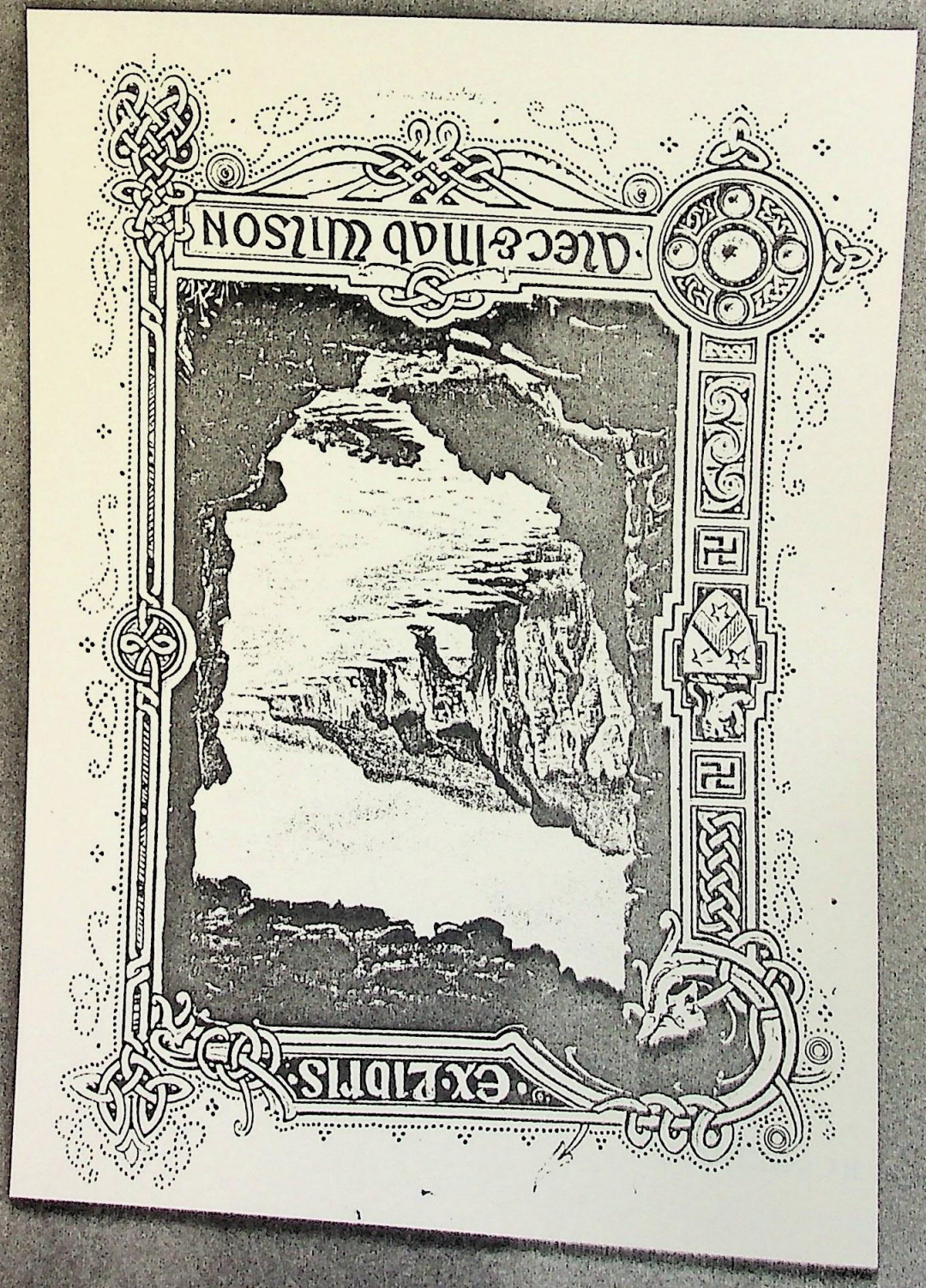


Fig 58.

SECTION H: CONCLUSION.

In beginning this study, I rarely imagined that the subject of bookplates would prove to be such an enjoyable adventure, The search for information increased the pleasure of the study of ex libris and slowly a new world of knowledge unfolded before me. And I can say that I gently, without being concious of it, slipped into this world and not regrettably so.

Being somewhat ignorant to this line of study, I eagerly absorbed whatever information I came across and even though my particular topic was set in the past, I looked with fresh curiousity and even awe at the relics left behind, being almost drawn into the very spirit of that era. At times, I grew quite fustrated at the pitiful lack of information concerning John Vinycomb's own bookplates and at the constant sifting through voluminus material just or order to get one snippet of information, but it proved worthwhile when I actually followed it through. One thing that has surprised me while doing this study, is that no one has touched on the artist before. Except for a few lines of information here and there, I could find no indication of any previous research, even in specialist circles, so that made me all the more determined to put something together.

On doing this thesis, my fasination for bookplates has increased to such an extent that I have decided to join the 'Bookplate Society', whom I went to see during March of this year. My perspective, also, of plates has changed obviously during the course of this study. Unaware, totally, of the complexity and diversity of bookplate history, I has no idea that the beginnings of ex libris design originated further back than the 20th century! I have also been surprised to discover how quickly I can now identify a plate's approximate date, style and method of printing.

It is just a shame that I have been unable to make a complete list of all John Vinycomb's bookplates at present, but I think that I have given enough of a cross-section to allow the reader to be able to identify a Vinycomb plate should they ever come across any anonymous designs. As to completing his collection, I know that he has still got a few living relatives, one in Scotland and one in the North of Ireland. Hopefully, on getting their addresses off contacts in the Ulster Museum, they may be able to give me some information as to the whereabouts of the remaining designs.

Several points I would like to mention about Mr. Vinycomb that I have discovered while doing this thesis. He was a dedicated man, who 'lived' his work. To him, it was not just a job, or even a hobby, but it was a vocation to which he was faithful to, even up until his last years.

It is quite clear from his work and the various societies he was involved with and the vast number of people he worked with, that his life was not a complacent one. His close friends testified to his 'rare industry'. And 'rare' is the key word here for John Vinycomb was a disciplined and highly skilled craftsman, who stood out even among those of his own calibre. He pursued his work, whatever it happened to be, either drawn, painted or written to the fullest of his capacity. He was a man who loved and appreciated the Irish landscape and the early treasures of Irish art and craftsmanship and his keen interest in history and the ancient past is obvious in his bookplates, where in nearly all his plates, he has captured the spirit of the period in which the subject matter originates. He faithfully bore true to his own motto: 'What is worth doing at all, is worth doing well'.

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