

**Part I**

**DEALERS AND THE MARKET**



## Chapter I

# **BERNARD QUARITCH LTD., BIBLIOPHILIC CLUBS, AND THE TRADE IN MIEVEAL MANUSCRIPTS ca. 1878–1939**

PIERRE-LOUIS PINAULT

THE MEMBERS OF famous bibliophilic clubs such as the Roxburghe Club, Grolier Club, or Société des Bibliophiles français who collected medieval manuscripts are now much better known than the booksellers who helped them assemble or dispose of their collections. An exception to this generalization might be the London dealer Bernard Quaritch, whose business is still trading today (Figure 0.1, top left). Dealers were generally not accepted as members of European bibliophilic groups. The second article of the original statutes of the Société des Bibliophiles français stated the position clearly: “*Article 2. Aucune personne faisant le commerce de livres ne pourra être admise dans la Société.*”<sup>1</sup> A draft disclaimer from the papers of the secretary of the Bibliographical Society of London made an exception, though with a significant nuance:

(To all members of the Bibliographical Society who are connected with the retail book trade)...The Society is in no way a trade organization and is not carried on for profit. It is purely a private association of persons interested in bibliography and is entirely carried on by voluntary workers who receive no remuneration whatever for their labours. It cannot refuse to admit to membership such booksellers and others connected with the book-trade as are otherwise qualified, for many of these are distinguished bibliographers who have done much to advance the study of bibliography; but it only admits them *as bibliographers and not as traders*, and only, as has been already mentioned, on the express condition that their membership is not used for trade purposes or for their own monetary profit.<sup>2</sup>

However, club and society members' access to manuscripts depended on whether the books ended up in public institutions or in private hands following sales, a process in which dealers played a major role. At the same time, the trade had its own clubs, both professional and social, some of which imitated some of the activities of collec-

---

1 “No one involved in the book trade will be admitted to the Society.”

2 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 8106. It is unclear whether this note ended up being published in the transactions of the Bibliographical Society or circulated among members.

---

**Pierre-Louis Pinault** is a PhD candidate at the University of London as part of the CULTIVATE MSS project. His thesis studies the role of clubs and societies in the trade in pre-modern manuscripts. He is grateful to Laura Cleaver and Nigel Ramsay for their feedback and advice.

tors' clubs. In my doctoral research as part of the CULTIVATE MSS project, I have been exploring the following questions: to what extent did members of the same club use the same dealers? Were manuscripts that bibliophiles particularly wanted written about by clubs or societies? And if not, does this tell us something about the limited influence of clubs and societies on the trade in pre-modern manuscripts? There is a noticeable correlation between being a club or society member and high prices at auction: other members might decide to bid for items when they knew that the previous owner was a club or society member—and such a connection could, in turn, raise the value of their own collection.

Bernard Quaritch Ltd. offers a rich case study, as the founder of this bookselling company created his own club and maintained links with numerous other bibliophilic groups. The business was founded in London in 1847 by the Prussian-born Quaritch.<sup>3</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century Quaritch came into contact with elite collectors, valued collections for probate, and gained pre-eminence in the trade not only in Great Britain but also in continental Europe and in the United States of America. After Quaritch's death in 1899, his son Bernard Alfred—known as Alfred to distinguish him from his father—took over the business until his death in 1913 at the age of forty-two. One of the firm's employees, Edmund Hunt Dring, then served as manager from 1917 to 1928, when he was succeeded by Frederic Sutherland Ferguson who held the post until 1960. The archives maintained by Bernard Quaritch Ltd. preserve commission books and letters exchanged with members of bibliophilic clubs, often bound at the end of sale catalogues. While not admitted as members in these groups, dealers like Quaritch therefore offer some of the most useful archival evidence to document how members of bibliophilic clubs built their collections.

This chapter explores how Quaritch and his successors connected the activities of two bibliophilic groups: the Roxburghe Club and the Sette of Odd Volumes. It sets out two principal points: first, that the Quaritch firm carefully maintained business relationships with members of the Roxburghe Club because it valued them as reliable contacts for its trading activities; and second, that the Sette of Odd Volumes, Bernard Quaritch's own creation, was partly inspired by the Roxburghe Club, albeit with some additional idiosyncrasies pertaining to its links with actors in the trade in rare books and manuscripts.

## Quaritch and the Roxburghe Club

Founded in London in 1812 “to discuss the sale of the Valdarfer ‘Boccaccio’ for the record sum of £2,260 at the sale of the library of the Duke of Roxburghe,” the Roxburghe Club is the oldest bibliophilic club still in existence.<sup>4</sup> A highly select and

<sup>3</sup> See Nicolas Barker, “Bernard Quaritch,” *The Book Collector: A Special Number to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Bernard Quaritch Ltd.* (1997) 3–34; see also Quaritch's entry in *ODNB*.

<sup>4</sup> “Literary Notes and News,” *Westminster Gazette*, June 20, 1898, 3. For an account of the early history of the Roxburghe Club, see Shayne Husbands, *The Early Roxburghe Club 1812–1835: Book Club Pioneers and the Advancement of English Literature* (London: Anthem Press, 2017). See also

prestigious club limited to forty members, “aristocrats and millionaires...formed [its] nucleus.”<sup>5</sup> Several generations of landed families have been well represented in its ranks since its beginning, including six Dukes of Devonshire, six Dukes of Buccleuch, five Dukes of Northumberland, and three Earls of Ellesmere. Members of the club were originally divided into three informal classes: those who inherited libraries, those who collected them, and those who controlled them. Until the second half of the twentieth century, the men meeting at the Roxburghe Club were part of socially homogeneous overlapping circles. By the end of the nineteenth century, a good proportion of members of the Roxburghe Club were well-established in elite late Victorian gentlemen’s clubs in London such as the Athenaeum. James Ludovic Lindsay, twenty-sixth Earl of Crawford and ninth Earl of Balcarres, who was elected to the Roxburghe Club in 1877, was also a member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club and one of the founding members of the Bibliographical Society of London formed in 1892. However, not all Roxburghe Club members were actively interested in manuscripts. Some of the members who were not involved in collecting manuscripts benefited from Quaritch’s services to acquire early printed books or profited from his advice regarding the dispersal of a collection.

Pre-eminent actors in the trade in pre-modern manuscripts such as Quaritch, his son Alfred, and the subsequent directors of the firm unsurprisingly had close links with members of bibliophilic clubs such as the Roxburghe Club. Having established his business in 1847, Quaritch soon seems to have attracted aristocratic clients, including William Amherst Tyssen-Amherst, first Baron Amherst of Hackney, who first entered Quaritch’s shop in 1858, aged twenty-three, and built his taste for rare books in his proximity.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the century, Quaritch was well established, and he received frequent orders from wealthy clients, including members of the Roxburghe Club.<sup>7</sup> For example, at the Phillipps, Ashburnham, and Morris sales that took place between 1897 and 1898, Quaritch bought extensively for Lord Amherst, the Earl of Carysfort, the Earl of Crewe, Ingram Bywater, and Henry Yates Thompson, all of whom were members of the Roxburghe Club.<sup>8</sup> Other members of the Club who sent commissions for manuscripts to Quaritch in the 1910s and 1920s include Charles W. Dyson Perrins, Sir William Osler, Lord Aldenham, the Earl of Rosebery, Lord Crawford, and Alfred Chester Beatty. This situates Quaritch as the favoured supplier of rare books and manuscripts for members of the Club. Moreover, shifts in purchasing habits could occur: Perrins bought his first manuscripts from Robson and Co., a rather minor firm, then shifted to Quaritch (and others

---

Nicolas Barker, *The Roxburghe Club: A Bicentenary History* (London: Roxburghe Club, 2012).

**5** Wilfrid Blunt, *Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, Friend of Ruskin and William Morris and Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (London: Hamilton, 1964), 192.

**6** The main source for this is Toronto, University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, William Amhurst Tyssen-Amherst Papers (MS COLL 00206), which include early correspondence between Bernard Quaritch and Lord Amherst.

**7** See *A Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts Issued to Commemorate the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Firm of Bernard Quaritch 1847–1947* (London: Quaritch, 1947).

**8** London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., Archives: Commission Book (1895–1899).

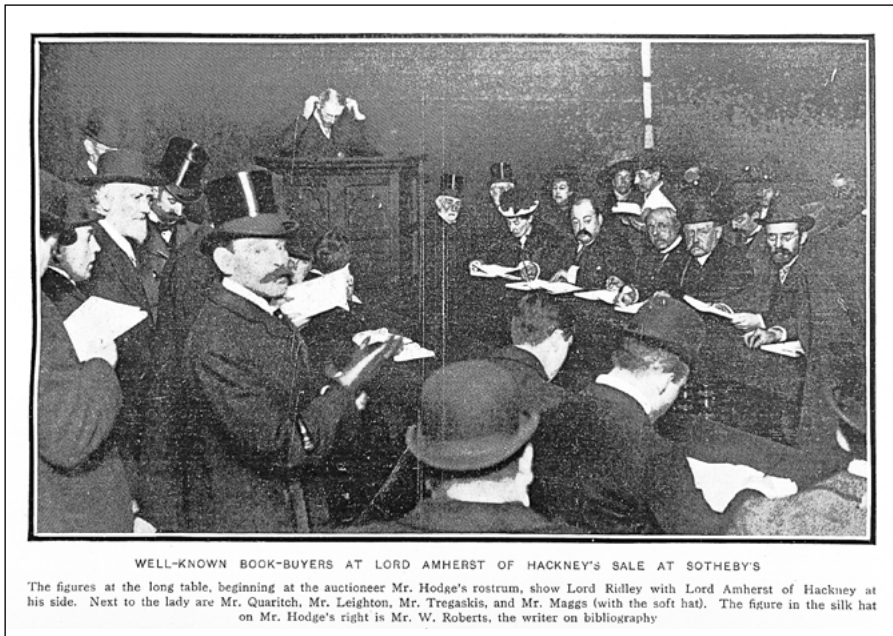


Figure 1.1. "Well-Known Book-Buyers at Lord Amherst of Hackney's Sale at Sotheby's," from *The Sphere*, December 12, 1908, 21, public domain.

such as Leo Olschki) and started spending substantially larger sums of money around the time of his election to the Roxburghe Club in 1908.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Perrins, who joined the Roxburghe Club in his mid-forties in the middle of creating his manuscript collection, and the Earl of Crawford who was elected to the Club at the age of just thirty, some bibliophiles who did business with Quaritch only became members of bibliophilic clubs at a later period of their life, sometimes towards the end of it, or at least well after the peak of their buying fever at auction. This was also a consequence of the restricted membership of clubs including the Roxburghe Club, which compelled them to wait until a place became available. For such men, election could stand as a sort of reward, a symbolic recognition of their long-term efforts gathering rich private collections of manuscripts and early printed books. Sir Robert Leicester Harmsworth is a relevant example: the director of Amalgamated Press, he only became a member of the Roxburghe Club in 1932 at the age of sixty-two. Nevertheless, he commissioned Quaritch to buy two pre-modern manuscripts for him at the Dewick sale held at Sotheby's on October 17–18, 1918.<sup>10</sup> Lot 108 was a fourteenth-century English manuscript of the

<sup>9</sup> Laura Cleaver, "Charles William Dyson Perrins as a Collector of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts c. 1900–1920," *Perspectives médiévales* 41 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4000/peme.19776>, accessed November 1, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., Archives: Commission Book (1917–1920).

*Oculi Sacerdotis* with no significant decoration apart from initials, which was bought for £35;<sup>11</sup> lot 121 was the prayer book of Lady Catherine Parr, queen consort of Henri VIII, dated 1541, which was bought for £29. At the Leighton stock sale held at Sotheby's on November 14, 1918, Harmsworth again bought two pre-modern manuscripts through Quaritch, including lot 620, an early fifteenth-century manuscript of John Wycliffe's *Poor Caitiff*, for £61.<sup>12</sup> Like Perrins, Harmsworth had started purchasing pre-modern manuscripts with small sums, and then moved to Quaritch and started spending more as he dedicated more resources to building his collection.

In addition to buying manuscripts, Roxburghe Club members occasionally decided to sell them. In 1908 Lord Amherst, who had been a member of the Roxburghe Club since 1887, had to part with his library after discovering that Charles Cheston, his solicitor and co-founder of the masonic lodge "Tyssen Amherst," had defrauded him, causing the loss of most of his fortune.<sup>13</sup> Alfred Quaritch tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with J. P. Morgan (who would be elected to the Roxburghe Club in 1912) and also with John D. Rockefeller to buy the Amherst Library *en bloc*.<sup>14</sup> In the end, the library was auctioned at Sotheby's in 1908 and 1909 (Figure 1.1). At these sales, Quaritch bought nineteen manuscripts. Of these books, lot 216, a fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Brut English Chronicle*, went into stock and was sold on to Harmsworth;<sup>15</sup> lot 332, an eleventh-century Gospels in Greek,<sup>16</sup> and lot 398, a thirteenth-century Gradual from a German monastery,<sup>17</sup> were sold on to Perrins (who had just become a member of the Roxburghe Club).

Several other Roxburghe Club members purchased early printed books through Quaritch at the Amherst sales: Lord Rosebery bought lot 737; lots 718 and 719 went to Lord Carysfort; lots 714, 734, and 759 to Lord Aldenham; lot 940 to Ingram Bywater; and lot 957 to Charles St John Hornby. Having learnt about the results of the Amherst sale, Lord Carysfort told Quaritch that he was "sorry to have lost the Charles 1st Bible," and added: "I suppose you bought it for some other client."<sup>18</sup> Quaritch had indeed bought this seventeenth-century printed copy of the Bible with royal provenance (lot 117) for Morgan for £1,000 plus £50 (5%) commission, that is twice the bidding limit set

**11** Now Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Libraries, MS Codex 721.

**12** Now Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Eng. 701.

**13** London, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, Freemasonry Membership Registers: reg. no. 2242, fol. 18.

**14** Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Lost Gutenberg: Obsession and Ruin in Pursuit of the World's Rarest Books* (London: Atlantic Books, 2020), 57.

**15** This manuscript was last sold by Sotheby's at the sale of the sixth portion of the Harmsworth Trust Library on October 15, 1945 (lot 1951, £825).

**16** This manuscript was last described in H. P. Kraus, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, catalogue 117 (New York: Kraus, 1967), no. 1.

**17** Now Zürich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum, LM 26117.

**18** Letter from Lord Carysfort to Bernard Alfred Quaritch, December 5, 1908. The letter is bound at the end of a copy of the Amherst sale catalogue at London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., Archives.

by Carysfort (£500).<sup>19</sup> This reveals how information was sometimes shared unevenly between a dealer and his clients. This also raises the question: were these fellow members of the most prestigious British bibliophilic club direct or indirect rivals in the auction room through the same dealer?

Direct competition did occur between fellow members of the Roxburghe Club and Quaritch was sometimes involved. The firm would occasionally receive multiple commissions to bid for the same book at auction. This informed them about their clients' interests, but also made it difficult to keep all their customers content. The founder and owner of the Ashendene Press, Charles St John Hornby became a member of both the Sette of Odd Volumes and the Roxburghe Club (to which he was elected in 1911). Among members of the Roxburghe Club, Hornby was one of Quaritch's most consistent clients when it came to purchasing (or attempting to purchase) pre-modern manuscripts. At the Huth Library sales, which began in 1911, he set a bidding limit of £150 for lot 3838, a fifteenth-century manuscript of Horace with decorated initials, which he lost at £240 to Leighton;<sup>20</sup> and a limit of £157 for lot 5734, a fifteenth-century manuscript of Petrarch with one large miniature, which he lost at £380 to Franco Moroli, who was also an occasional client of Quaritch's. At the 1918 Vernon sale, Hornby left a commission with Quaritch for lot 518 with a limit of £500.<sup>21</sup> This was a fifteenth-century Italian manuscript of Virgil with sixteen full-page miniatures.<sup>22</sup> It was lost at £710 to Henry Yates Thompson, who bought the manuscript at auction, without Quaritch's help. Yates Thompson was one of Quaritch's most lucrative clients and Hornby's fellow Roxburghe Club member. This masterpiece of late medieval Italian illumination put these two members of the same bibliophilic club at loggerheads as Yates Thompson had deemed it worthy to enter his one-hundred-item collection of the most select manuscripts and he was willing and able to pay a much larger sum. Quaritch also held a bid from Charles Ascherson for the same lot (£250 increased to £300), which shows that it was not only desired by Roxburghe Club members. Quaritch held yet another bid from the British Museum for the same lot (£100), further emphasizing how dealers were enmeshed in the fate of manuscripts. It was not uncommon for Quaritch to hold multiple bids for the same manuscript, but it seems that he tried to avoid commissions from Roxburghe Club members for the same items, perhaps aware that it was likely that they would exchange information.

Several members of the Roxburghe Club were allegedly not just Quaritch's clients but also his friends, including the aforementioned Earl of Rosebery and Lord Alden-

---

**19** London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., Archives: Commission Book (1903–1909). Belle da Costa Greene also had the whole set of Caxtons bought privately for Morgan, of which Carysfort was aware.

**20** London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., Archives: Commission Book (1910–1913). This manuscript was subsequently owned by Eric George Millar, who was elected a member of the Roxburghe Club in 1932. It was sold at Sotheby's on July 13, 1977 (lot 57).

**21** George John Warren Venables-Vernon, fifth Baron Vernon, was elected a member of the Roxburghe Club in 1838.

**22** This manuscript subsequently ended up in Hornby's collection, and then was owned by Major Abbey and auctioned by Sotheby's on March 25, 1975 (lot 2968, £23,000).

ham.<sup>23</sup> Despite his reputation for being ill-tempered, “the Bismarck of the book trade” declared: “I like to be friendly with everybody.”<sup>24</sup> Friendship between an aristocrat and their bookseller may sound improbable, but it appears to have been less incongruous in Great Britain than in France during this period.<sup>25</sup> Quaritch maintained an extensive correspondence and privileged relationships with the Crawford family, notably with the twenty-sixth Earl of Crawford. Not only was the latter among his most loyal customers, but Quaritch presumably named his first son Bernard Lindsay after him.<sup>26</sup> However, claims of friendship between dealers and collectors have sometimes been overstated to build a narrative celebrating the trade.<sup>27</sup> Instead, Margaret Davis has concluded that:

The close relationship between Amherst and his hard-charging mentor and dealer couldn’t be rightly called a friendship...[Quaritch] courts, cajoles and carefully stays on his side of the line as he guides his client’s methodical collecting.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, writing to Alfred Quaritch in 1899 about the recent death of his father Bernard, whom he had known “for nearly fifty years,” Lord Amherst said he had “lost a true friend.”<sup>29</sup> The complex relationships between dealers and clients thus challenge the sharp division created by the rules of some elite clubs. In this context, it seems that by his late fifties Quaritch’s experience with members of the Roxburghe Club led him to create a group with similar aims, in which he would not only be admitted, but also in command.

### **The Sette of Odd Volumes: a Purpose-Built Club for Quaritch’s Business?**

In 1878, along with the printers Charles W. H. Wyman, who took the nickname “Typographer,” and his brother Edward F. Wyman (“Treasurer”), Bernard Quaritch (“Librarian”), created the Sette of Odd Volumes. Among the founders were also Henry Bickers (“Publisher”), William Mort Thompson (“Historiographer”), and Edward Renton (“Herald”). The Sette was originally limited to twenty-one members, the same num-

---

**23** Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530–1930) and Their Marks of Ownership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 166.

**24** “A Chat about Books with Mr. Quaritch,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 19, 1884, 6.

**25** See François Avril, “The Bibliophile and the Scholar: Count Paul Durrieu’s List of Manuscripts Belonging to Baron Edmond de Rothschild,” in *The Medieval Book: Glosses from Friends and Colleagues of Christopher de Hamel*, ed. James H. Marrow, Richard A. Linenthal, and William Noel (t Goy-Houten: Hes & De Graaf, 2010), 366–76.

**26** See Nicolas Barker, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana: The Lives and Collections of Alexander William, 25th Earl of Crawford and 8th Earl of Balcarres, and James Ludovic, 26th Earl of Crawford and 9th Earl of Balcarres* (London: Quaritch, 1978).

**27** For example, de Ricci had a vested interest in promoting the trade.

**28** Davis, *Lost Gutenberg*, 46–47.

**29** Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. lett. d. 410, fols. 28v and 30r.

ber as the volumes of Shakespeare's *Variorum* published in 1821. Each member was an Odd Volume, so that the Sette was only perfect when all of them were gathered. As was common in Victorian clubs including the Roxburghe Club, the Sette did not admit women as members and had a black ball policy, meaning that a single negative vote (or in some cases a set number) could prevent a candidate from being elected. Even though it was chiefly dedicated to bibliography and printing history, the Sette of Odd Volumes had some peculiarities (including idiosyncratic rules) that distinguished it from similar groups such as the Roxburghe Club or the Philobiblon Society.<sup>30</sup> Less well-known than the Roxburghe Club, the Philobiblon Society was active from 1853 to 1883.<sup>31</sup> Bibliophilia was also its main purpose and several of its most important members were simultaneously members of the Roxburghe Club, such as Henri d'Orléans, duc d'Aumale, then exiled in Twickenham, whose library is now in the Musée Condé in Chantilly. The Sette of Odd Volumes imitated and often parodied these earlier clubs.

The monthly dinners and after-dinner talks of the Sette of Odd Volumes made it a hybrid entity, somewhere between a dining club, a bibliophilic group, and a publishing society.<sup>32</sup> As with the Roxburghe Club (which held an annual dinner), publication was central to the Sette. Edward Heron-Allen, elected in 1883 with the nickname "Necromancer," proposed adding a rule asking each Odd Volume to present a book at some point (much like what was expected from members of the Roxburghe Club). This was accepted as: "7. Every Odd Volume shall be expected, within a reasonable period of the date of his admission, to make a literary, scientific, or artistic contribution to the Sette."<sup>33</sup> From 1880 onwards, the publications committee of the Sette produced numerous books, ranging from thin pamphlets to substantial volumes, dispatched in multiple series such as yearbooks, miscellanies, and opuscula.<sup>34</sup> These have become desirable for their rarity and bibliographical curiosity to both members and non-members, although, in theory at least, the publications were not for sale: some bore the note "*to be had of NO Bokesellers [sic]*."<sup>35</sup> The British art historian George Charles Williamson, a member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club and of the Grolier Club of New York, collected books issued by the Sette, of which he was elected a member in 1912 (nicknamed "Horologer").<sup>36</sup>

**30** See Colin Franklin, "B. Q. and the O. V.," *The Book Collector: A Special Number* (1997): 199–200; see also William Roberts, "Ye Sette of Odd Volumes," *The Bookworm* 3rd ser., no. 34 (1890): 305–11.

**31** See David McKittrick, *The Philobiblon Society: Sociability and Book Collecting in Mid-Victorian Britain* ([London]: Roxburghe Club, 2019).

**32** The Sette inspired the Club of Odd Volumes founded in Boston in 1887. It also had an ephemeral counterpart in Hong Kong which published a journal, *The Book-Plate*.

**33** *Odd Volume Year-Boke. No. V. 1892–93* (London: Sette of Odd Volumes, 1893).

**34** Charles W. H. Wyman, *B. Q.: A Biographical and Bibliographical Fragment* (London: Wyman, 1880).

**35** The note is found, for example, in the front-matter to *The Year-Boke of the Sette of Odd Volumes*, 50, 1927–1928 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).

**36** George Charles Williamson, *Behind My Library Door: Some Chapters on Authors, Books and Miniatures* (London: Selwyn and Blount, 1921), 129–39. Colin Franklin was also a collector and had Major Abbey's set.

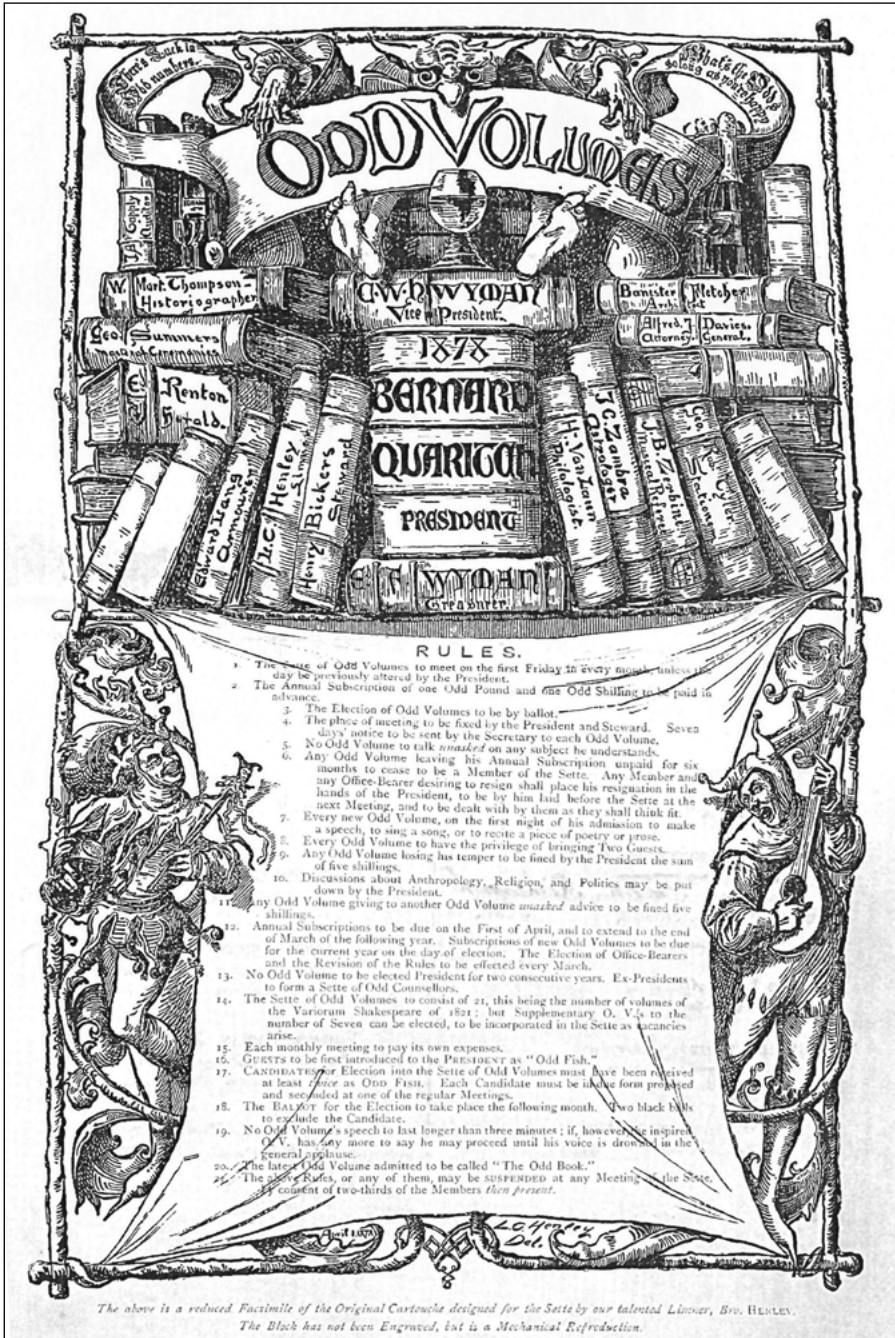


Figure 1.2. L. C. Henley, Facsimile of the Original Cartouche designed for the Sette of Odd Volumes, 1878. Courtesy of London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd.

In 1932, Vyvyan Holland, Oscar Wilde's second son and a member of the Sette from 1926 with the nickname "Idler," gave a detailed account of the complete publication series of the Sette which he too collected.<sup>37</sup> At that date, the publications included a Miscellanies series numbered 1–20 and an Opuscula series numbered 1–93 on subjects ranging from *Chinese Snuff Bottles* to *Irish Wine*.<sup>38</sup> Manuscripts were occasionally mentioned in the irregularly issued *Year-Boke*. They were more thoroughly described in exhibition catalogues giving details of Quaritch's purchases at previous auction sales, which I shall discuss below. In total, four of the Sette's publications during Bernard Quaritch's lifetime concerned manuscripts.<sup>39</sup>

Although mainly a social club, the love of books was the Sette's unifying theme.<sup>40</sup> Several members were alternately in charge of illustrating the invitations or menus for upcoming meetings and these too became collectibles. This collective contribution to the imagery of a club is one of the Sette's singularities which is rarely seen on such a scale within other similar groups. Books were a recurring theme in the designs. The name of each Odd Volume would typically appear inscribed as the title of a bound book drawn on top of the rules and lists of members (Figure 1.2). Moreover, some members took nicknames that suggested a particular association with books. Henry Benjamin Wheatley, a member of the Early English Text Society and of the Bibliographical Society, and Hornby, a member of the Roxburghe Club, were both members of the Sette of Odd Volumes, with the respective nicknames "Recorder" and "Chapman." Edmund Dring was elected a member in 1920 with the nickname "Palaeographer," while the collector and benefactor of the Bodleian Library James P. R. Lyell, elected a member in 1924, was "Bibliographer."

The motto of the Sette of Odd Volumes, reproduced on its headed stationery, was: "Conviviality and mutual admiration." Another motto can be found on the early cartouche and lists of members: "There is divinity in odd numbers." This esoteric quote from Shakespeare has a particular meaning when one considers Quaritch's and other early club members' close links with freemasonry. While it is unclear whether Quaritch was a freemason, many of his associates were, including several of his fellow Odd Volumes members: most notably Charles Wyman was initiated at the Athenaeum Lodge

**37** Vyvyan Holland, "The Publications of the Sette of Odd Volumes," *The Book-Collector's Quarterly* 2.5–8 (Autumn 1932): 1–20.

**38** Respectively Opuscula no. 37 by Marcus B. Huish (1895) and no. 84 by Maurice Healy (1927). Holland, "Publications of the Sette," notes that no. 76 of the Opuscula series, published in 1924 by Ralph Straus, then the Sette's "Scribbler," included a comprehensive bibliography of the publications of the Sette of Odd Volumes up to that year. See Franklin, "B. Q.," 211.

**39** *Catalogue of Manuscripts and Early-Printed Books Exhibited and Described by Bro. Bernard Quaritch, the Librarian of the Sette of Odd Volumes, at the Freemasons' Tavern, Great Queen Street* (London: Quaritch, 1885); Bernard Quaritch, *Opuscula No. XIV. A Short Sketch of Liturgical History and Literature. Illustrated by Examples Manuscript and Printed* (London: Wyman, 1887); *Odd Volumes' Year-Boke* (1889–1890), which includes the catalogue of the 1889 exhibition; Bernard Quaritch, *Palaeography. Notes Upon the History of Writing and the Medieval Art of Illumination* (London: privately printed, 1894).

**40** See Franklin, "B. Q.," 212.

in Islington in 1874.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Quaritch's old friend the twenty-sixth Earl of Crawford became a freemason while studying at Cambridge.<sup>42</sup> Alfred Quaritch was initiated at St Martin's Lodge on October 25, 1899.<sup>43</sup> The influence of freemasonry on the Odd Volumes' founders can be seen in the way they organized the Sette: it was designed as a brotherhood and members were solemnly called "Brethren." Several meetings were held at the Freemasons Tavern on Great Queen Street.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, some members took nicknames such as "Alchymist," "Architect," "Magnetizer," or "Necromancer," reminiscent of freemasonry or the occult. Indeed, a number of members of the Sette of Odd Volumes seem to have had close links with the occult: the Irish poet John Todhunter ("Bard" or "Playwright") and Scottish lawyer John Brodie-Innes ("Master of the Rolls") were both prominent members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret society which flourished in late-nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>45</sup>

The vast range of publications issued by the Sette was meant to promote books sold by Quaritch as well as the printing and illustrating skills of his fellow members. The club thus operated as a professional club intended for people involved in the trade and craftsmanship around the book. Some publications were based on exhibitions organized by the Sette, such as one of manuscripts and early printed books from Quaritch's stock held at the Freemasons Tavern on June 5, 1885, for which a catalogue was issued.<sup>46</sup> This included twelve pre-modern manuscripts and each manuscript except no. 7 was given an "estimated value," with a total of £4,189. The highest "estimated value" was £1,000 for no. 9, an early fifteenth-century illuminated book of hours which had once belonged to Sir John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury (1387–1453).<sup>47</sup> It subsequently entered Yates Thompson's collection. The exhibition was reported in the press, together with the prices for some manuscripts, meaning that it reached an even wider audience.<sup>48</sup> The Earl of Crawford was among the guests and was one of the very few Roxburghe Club members (if not the only one) who accepted an invitation to the Sette's meetings.

In 1887, the Sette of Odd Volumes issued as no. 14 of its *Opuscula* series a catalogue of ninety-seven liturgical rare books and manuscripts preceded by a thirty-eight-page *Sketch of the History of the Liturgy* by Bernard Quaritch. The pre-modern manuscripts that were featured, mixed with early printed books and classified chronologically, were

<sup>41</sup> London, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, Freemasonry Membership Registers: reg. no. 1491, fol. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Barker, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana*, 235.

<sup>43</sup> London, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, Freemasonry Membership Registers: reg. no. 2455, fol. 218.

<sup>44</sup> *The Year-Boke of the Odd Volumes: An Annual Record of the Transactions of the Sette. Eleventh Year* (London: Wyman and Chiswick Press, 1890), 55.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, R. A. Gilbert, *The Sorcerer and His Apprentice: Unknown Hermetic Writings of S. L. Mac Gregor Mathers and J. W. Brodie-Innes* (Wellinborough: Aquarian Press, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> See Franklin, "B. Q.," 203.

<sup>47</sup> Now Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 40-1950.

<sup>48</sup> "Exhibition of Manuscripts and Early Printed Books," *Otley News and West Riding Advertiser*, June 12, 1885, 2.

meant to serve as “examples” to illustrate the points made in the study. A bibliography with eight references was provided at the end.<sup>49</sup> Though the value of the books was not consistently noted, it was another opportunity for Quaritch to make his bibliographical rarities visible and appeal to customers. By the same logic, the Golden Gospels of Henry VIII was exhibited at the Sette of Odd Volumes in 1889 and valued at £2,500, with reports in local newspapers.<sup>50</sup> One of the Sette’s subsequent publications gave an account of the acquisition of this manuscript by Quaritch at the Hamilton sale in 1889 along with a catalogue of the manuscripts displayed at this “*soirée*.”<sup>51</sup> The purpose of such exhibitions, with the associated publicity, may have been to find a potential buyer for this expensive manuscript, for which Quaritch had paid £1,500, and which would cross the Atlantic and be sold to Theodore Irwin of Oswego less than a year later, on May 26, 1890. By that time, Quaritch, who sent his son Alfred on a business trip to the United States, would start warning his British clients that new American customers were entering the antiquarian book market in a predatory manner and threatened to “confiscate” part of Britain’s written heritage.<sup>52</sup> The New York bookseller and Grolier Club member Frank H. Dodd was introduced by Bernard Quaritch as guest of the Sette during the year 1894–1895, which illustrates the ongoing transatlantic shift of the trade in rare books and manuscripts.<sup>53</sup>

No. 15 of the *Miscellanies* series issued by the Sette of Odd Volumes in 1886 reflected Quaritch’s interest in bibliophilic clubs and learned societies.<sup>54</sup> It was limited to 255 copies “for private circulation only” and consisted of a seventy-page bibliographical list of publications issued by British, Scottish, and Irish learned societies and printing clubs. The introduction, written by William Mort Thompson, declared that an address by Quaritch and an exhibition of publications preceded this publication and was heard by a large audience. While a minority of these publications dealt with manuscripts, the fact that they were publicly displayed provided yet another overview of Quaritch’s stock.

In 1894, the Sette of Odd Volumes issued a book based on an expanded lecture about palaeography and illumination which Quaritch had given to the members of the Sette the year before. It featured a ninety-three-page chronological study followed by an index and twenty-two full-page colour plates of manuscripts, some from Quaritch’s stock,

**49** See Franklin, “B. Q.,” 200. Franklin quotes an article from the *Dictionary of National Biography* which expresses doubts about Quaritch having prepared this type of work on his own.

**50** Now PML, M.23. See *St. James’s Gazette*, June 18, 1889, 8; Franklin, “B. Q.,” 204–5.

**51** *Odd Volume Year-Boke. No. II. 1889–1890* (London: Wyman, 1892), 44–45.

**52** Leslie A. Morris, “Bernard Alfred Quaritch in America,” *The Book Collector: A Special Number* (1997): 180–97; see also Danielle Magnusson and Laura Cleaver, *The Trade in Rare Books and Manuscripts between Britain and America c. 1890–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

**53** William Manning ed., *The Year-Boke of the Odd Volumes, Seventeenth Year—1894–95* (London: Sette of Odd Volumes, 1897), 148.

**54** William Mort Thompson, *O. V. Miscellanies No. 15. Report of a Conversazione given at Willis’s Room, King Street, St. James’s, on Tuesday, June 8th, 1886, by his Oddship Bro. Geo. Clulow, President, with a Summary of an Address on Learned Societies and Printing Clubs, then Delivered by Bro. Bernard Quaritch, Librarian* (London: Wyman, 1886); see Franklin, “B. Q.,” 201.

reproduced by William Griggs. In the foreword, Quaritch humbly acknowledged that the leading reference work in this field remained a book published the year before by Edward Maunde Thompson, then Principal Librarian of the British Museum and a member of the Roxburghe Club since 1892.<sup>55</sup> Copies of this lecture by Quaritch were gifted to his clients and acquaintances in Great Britain and overseas, including no fewer than five members of the Roxburghe Club: Lord Aldenham, Lord Crawford, Lord Rosebery, Maunde Thompson (who thanked him for his tribute), and Yates Thompson, but also to Léopold Delisle in Paris, the collector Robert Hoe in New York, and the dealer Ludwig Rosenthal in Munich.<sup>56</sup>

The example of the Sette of Odd Volumes under Bernard Quaritch's leadership shows that a club could also be a place where a professional dealer could take on the role of a putative scholar for the purpose of his own business. In one former member's opinion, the Sette was "a quaint, but in certain respects a moderately erudite body."<sup>57</sup> Clearly not created solely for the disinterested purpose of fostering scholarship on pre-modern manuscripts and early printed books, the Sette was used to promote items that Quaritch proposed for sale, and this was even stated as a central aim in one of its early publications: "The Sette has been in existence for many years chiefly as a trade advertising medium for some of our Brethren."<sup>58</sup> It did mimic some features of the senior Roxburghe Club, though with humour.

## Conclusion

The relationships maintained by Bernard Quaritch and his successors with members of the Roxburghe Club demonstrate a clear strategy to secure long-term outputs for their trading activity in rare books and manuscripts. Sometimes the lines between professional relationships and friendships became blurred, but Quaritch (and his fellow dealers) would never be accepted into the clubs that brought together elite collectors. Quaritch's desire to gain an even more influential position in this market may have in turn benefited, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, from his creation of the Sette of Odd Volumes, which showcased the manuscripts in his stock through exhibitions and publications, reaching a range of audiences.

---

**55** Edward Maunde Thompson, *Handbook of Greek and Latin Palaeography* (New York: Appleton, 1893, reprinted 1912).

**56** Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. lett. d. 411.

**57** Holland, "Publications of the Sette," 20.

**58** *Catalogue of Manuscripts and Early-Printed Books Exhibited and Described by Bro. Bernard Quaritch*, 206.

