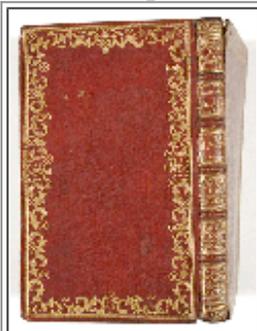
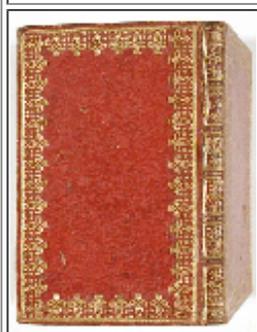


Students of Irish decorative bookbindings belonging to the period 1600 to 1800 are well served by Maurice Craig's standard study which appeared in 1954.¹ North American students of the bibliopagic art will be interested to know that the Rare Book Room of the University of Calgary has a small group of exemplars of Irish decorative bookbindings belonging to the second half of the eighteenth century. These bindings are not recorded in Craig's 'List of noteworthy bindings with their locations', nor in his companion 'List of published Irish bindings'.²

The bindings at Calgary, although unlisted, provide no surprises. Three of them represent the various styles of decorative morocco bindings found on Dublin almanacks of the period 1750 to 1800. The fact that each of these three bindings covers not one but two almanacks, printed and published by rival Dublin establishments, suggests that they are 'bespoke' and not 'trade' bindings. The fourth binding is on a set of the eight volume edition of David Hume's *History of England* published in Dublin in 1780. It invites, although unsigned, direct comparison with the signed bindings, on the selfsame book, bound by William McKenzie, printer and stationer to Trinity College, Dublin, which are to be found in the Royal Irish Academy and in the National Library of Ireland.³ Although the bindings at Calgary closely resemble similar bindings illustrated or discussed by Craig, none of them is exactly the same. As Craig gives only a handful of locations in North America, and none at all in Canada, the presence of these bindings in a Canadian institution is worthy of note.

As well as the four bindings described below, the University of Calgary Rare Book Room has five other examples of eighteenth century Dublin almanacks in decorative bindings. These are:

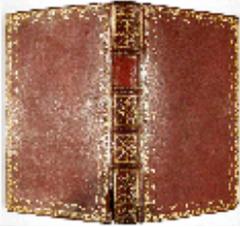
	<p><i>The Gentleman and Citizen's Almanack</i>, Dublin, 1757. Red morocco binding.</p>
	<p><i>The Gentleman and Citizen's Almanack</i>, Dublin, 1759. Red morocco binding.</p>



The Gentleman and Citizen's Almanack, Dublin, 1762. Red morocco binding.



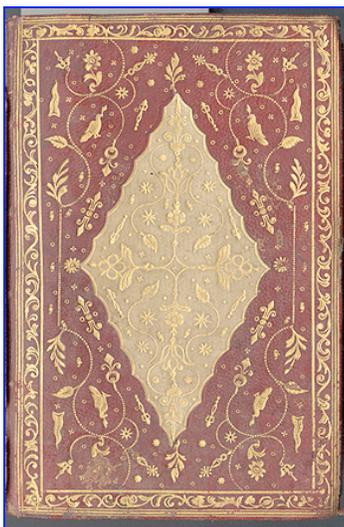
The Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanack, Dublin, 1769. Stained calf binding.



The Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanack, Dublin, 1779. Red morocco binding.

In view of Craig's dictum that: 'Almanacks have a double advantage to the student of bindings, for there is always a strong presumption that they were bound in the place of publication and in the year before that to which they refer',⁴ these five bindings are probably datable Dublin bindings. Their gilt decoration, however, is modest compared with the other exemplars, and none of the tools used seems to me to be exclusively or distinctively Irish. As I have no clues as to their provenance previous to their acquisition by the [book collector, Edgar Osborne](#)⁵, a decision on their 'Irishness' must await further study of their decoration.

Notes on the four bindings which are unmistakably Irish follow:⁶



Binding A (see illustration A. Click image for full-size)

This binding covers two almanacks of the same year bound together. They are:

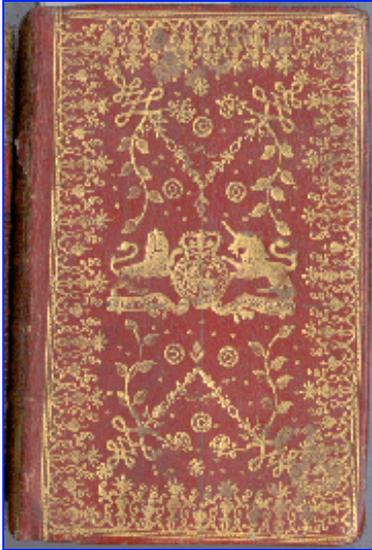
- a) *The Gentlemen's & Citizen's Almanack*, compiled by Samuel Watson, Bookseller, For the Year of our Lord, 1776 ..., Dublin: Watson and Stewart, 1776. 8vo. in fours. (A)B-1/2.⁴ Sections B & C interleaved with blank pages. 136p. (minus interleaves).
- b) *The English Registry for the Year of Our Lord, 1776* ..., Dublin: John Exshaw, 1776. 8vo. in fours. (A)B-R.⁴ 112p. (4 unnumbered pages and 108 numbered.)

The red morocco binding measures 6" x 1/4" x 3 3/4". The spine is divided into five panels. The coloured date piece is missing from panel 2, and the date has been inserted in black ink. Panels 1 & 4 are decorated by gilt wavy lines; panels 3 & 5 are quartered, with a flower and dot design. The front and back covers have a narrow gilt border enclosed within triple and single fillets. The centre of both covers carries a

lozenge onlay of stiff white paper, heavily tooled in gilt. The area is between the border and the lozenge is tooled in gilt, using characteristically Irish 'flame', 'leaf-carrying bird' and 'undulating spray' tools. The binding has gilt edges and the endpapers are white.

NOTES:

This binding has a strong generic resemblance to that illustrated by Craig as Plate 47. Craig's exemplar covers the 1772 edition of the first of the two almanacks covered by the binding at Calgary. One of the main differences between the two bindings, which probably emanated from the same workshop, is the absence from the example now at Calgary of the solid, straight vertical tool on either side of the obtuse corners of the lozenge. The binding was purchased by the University of Calgary in November, 1971, through the good offices of Mr. H. Campbell, Chief Librarian, Toronto Public Library, from Mr. Edgar Osborne.⁵



Binding B (see illustration B. Click image for full-size)

This binding also covers two almanacks having exactly the same bibliographic description as those listed under Binding A, except that the almanacks are for the year 1777. The red morocco binding measures 6 x 1/4" x 4". The spine is divided into 6 panels. Panel 2 carries a dark-green lettering piece, giving the date. The other five panels are quartered and decorated with acorn tools. The front and back covers are enclosed in a triple fillet and a deep gilt border. Within the border are rose tools and elaborate leaf sprays. The symmetrical flourish pointing to all four corners is a popular Irish tool. In the centre of both front and rear covers is the Royal Coat of Arms. The edges of the binding are gilt. The endpapers are [comb-marbled](#).

NOTES:

This binding is a close relative of the one illustrated by Craig in Plate 49, which covers a copy of a 1776 almanack. According to Craig, the presence of the Royal Arms may suggest that these bindings were done for officials in Dublin Castle. While the provenance may not be as precise as this, there seems little doubt that they would be created for members of the Anglo-Irish community in Dublin. Purchased from E. Osborne, 1971.



Binding C

A similar binding to that described under B, this time on a pair of almanacks dated 1775. Like Binding B, it carries the Royal Coat of Arms, but differs in the details of the rest of the tooling. This binding measures 6 x 1/4" x 3 3/4", and has gilt edges and comb-marbled endpapers. It is too badly damaged to warrant either illustration or full description. Purchased from E. Osborne, 1971.



Binding D

There are matching bindings on all eight volumes of *The History of England. . . by David Hume. A New Edition Corrected . . .*, Dublin: J. Williams. 1780. The volumes are large 8vo, and the bindings measure 9" x 5". The bindings vary in condition from volume to volume, and are made of sturdy tree calf. The spines are flat-backed and are divided into seven panels. Panel 2 contains a red lettering piece carrying a gilt title *Hume's England*. Panel 5 carries a dark



green lettering piece with a red oval centre for the volume number. There is no gilt decoration on the front and back covers other than the gilt [prize book stamp](#) of Trinity College, Dublin. The bindings have white endpapers.

NOTES:

The Trinity College prize stamp is a less delicate one than that illustrated by Ramsden in *Bookbinders of the United Kingdom (outside London) 1780-1840*, Plate XV. There is no binder's ticket but the bindings are very close in appearance to the McKenzie bindings on the same book at the Royal Irish Academy. (Craig, item 150.) A full description of William McKenzie, printer, stationer and bookbinder to Trinity College, Dublin, can be found in Ramsden, pp.241-2. McKenzie flourished from 1783 to 1817. This binding does not illustrate McKenzie's 'Dublin style of lettering' with the place of the publication at the head of the spine and the date at the foot, on strips of red leather laid on. There can be little doubt, however, that it is McKenzie's work. In addition to the TCD prize stamp, and the close resemblance to the signed binding at the Royal Irish Academy, volumes 1-5 of this set carry a prize ticket which tells that the book was awarded as a prize to one John Madden in the Michaelmas term, 1792. The engraved [prize ticket](#) carries the legend: *McKenzie, Printer & Stationer to the University*. (Illustration C) Ramsden seems to have seen some TCD prize tickets with McKenzie's name given as bookseller and printer to the University. The volumes were acquired by the University of Calgary in 1967, and were formerly in the collection of R. Travers Smith, St. Bartholomew's Vicarage, Dublin, whose book-stamp is to be found in all eight volumes.

FOOTNOTES

1. Maurice Craig, *Irish Bookbindings 1600-1800* (London, 1954).
2. These lists are to be found in Craig, 27ff; and pp.38-40.
3. Cf. Craig, p.35. Items 149 and 150.
4. Craig, p.2.
5. The noted collector of children's books. 6. I am indebted to Dr. K.M. Glazier, Chief Librarian, University of Calgary, for permission to study the bindings, and to [Ms. Apollonia Steele](#), of the Rare Book Room, for facilitating my work. [Robert Hay Carnie](#) is Secretary to General Faculties Council and Professor of English at The University of Calgary.

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