

A recent purchase for Special Collections in the Baillieu Library

Pam Pryde

Special Collections recently acquired an important early English binding. The work in itself is special, being a very early printing of the first two (of four) of Origen's Works, titled *Origenis Adamantii Operum tomi duo priores cum tabulis & indice generali proxime sequentibus* and published in Paris in 1512. We have been unable to find an earlier edition of this work, and could find no other holdings in Australia. However, what really captured our attention was the contemporary signed Cambridge binding by Nicholas Spierinck, done in around 1520. The work is bound in full calf over wooden boards, with a distinctive blind-stamped pattern of dragons, wyverns and griffins, interspersed with Spierinck's monogram seal. The binding represents one of the finest examples known of a Spierinck binding, and is the only known such binding in Australia.

Nicholas Spierinck was born in around 1475 into a family of stationers, illuminators and booksellers in the town of Zwijndrecht near Antwerp, and graduated from law at Louvain in 1495. He moved to England in the early 1500s, and was well known as an importer of printed books to Cambridge University by 1505. Over the years he also became well known as a bookbinder, with

records revealing that by 1515 he was binding important works.

By 1520 Spierinck and fellow bookbinder Garrett Godfrey had become the two principal stationers in Cambridge. Both were also prominent identities in Cambridge, each serving as the churchwarden of the university church of Great St Mary's. Spierinck, Godfrey and a third bookbinder, Segar Nicholson, became the first official University Printers and Stationers at Cambridge, being given the title in 1534.

Spierinck's bindings represent the last of the medieval style at Cambridge, where his bindings grace both early printed books and illuminated manuscripts. His work is highly distinctive, with his best work featuring a dramatic array of imaginary beasts in a roll tool, blind-stamped into the calf along with his monogram *NS*. Spierinck invariably used a pair of brass clasps in his bindings, which were decorated by hand; unfortunately there are no known intact clasps extant. Our volume still has remnants of the clasps on the back cover. Very few examples of Spierinck's bindings remain, and those that do are mostly fragments rebaked onto later bindings.

The acquisition of this very early and important English binding by

one of the first official Printers and Stationers to Cambridge University is a significant addition to the University of Melbourne's collection of books on Cambridge,¹ and was made possible through the generosity of the Ivy May Pendlebury Bequest.

Pam Pryde is the Curator of Special Collections in the Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.



Notes

- ¹ This collection, largely donated by the late Pierre Gorman, is considered to be the most extensive outside Cambridge itself. See Pierre Gorman, *Catalogue of books on Cambridge: The university, the town and the county, arranged alphabetically by author, otherwise by title*, Parkville: University of Melbourne, 2008.

Origen, *Origenis Adamantii Operum tomi duo
prios cum tabulis & indice generali proxime
sequentibus*, Paris: Venundatur cum reliquis Ioanni
Paruo: Jodoco Badio: et Conrado Resch, 1512.
Binding by Nicholas Spierinck, c.1520.
Special Collections, Baillieu Library.
Purchased 2008 with funds from the
Ivy May Pendlebury Bequest.

Opposite: Detail of binding showing
Spierinck's monogram.

