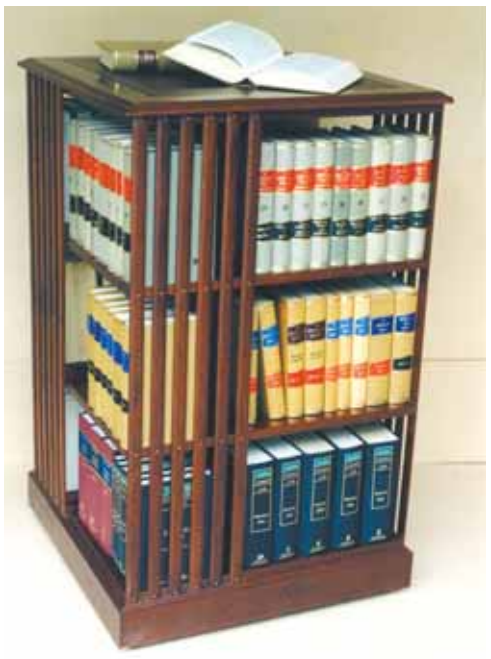


YOUR BOOKS DESERVE A FINE LIBRARY, so why not invest and indulge?

As expounded by Jean Latham in *Victoriana* (1971 Stein and Day), Victorian gentlemen's libraries, by and large, were rooms 'dark with wood and leather.' Ceilings were usually high, encouraging richly mounted cornices. Bookcases lined the walls and were usually free-standing. Frequently there would also be a contrived door lined with sham volumes whose titles followed a traditional but amusing pattern. For instance, the poet Thomas Hood (1799-1845) invented sham titles including *Annual Parliaments: A Plan for Short Commons*.

The bookshelf would be filled with handsomely bound books whose authors and subject matter differed little from one library to another. Reference books of the time included *The Annual Register*; *The Racing Calendar* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Bound copies of *Punch* and *The Illustrated London News* were also found in such bookcases.

An indispensable adjunct of a country house, the good family library contained a collection of books to which a country gentleman owed his culture and learning. The room housing the library would be used to carry out estate duties and business, or was a sanctuary for the master of the house who would spend long hours there of enjoyable reading and meditation. Hence, it was deemed necessary to provide furniture conducive to male comfort.

Diamond buttoned or stamped leather upholstered chairs, usually with padded arms, were often of the Gothic or Elizabethan style – tall, straight-backed and some featured carving. Some chairs would have a small reading desk attached on one side, or a pull-out to rest the book upon.

The room contained a stately clock and a lovely Victorian fireplace would offer a warmer position for winter days and the cool 'change of season' nights. A gorgeous setting for Christmas, in the hope that Saint Nicholas soon would arrive.

Small display cabinets housed collections of ancient coins, seals, fossils, semi-precious stones, butterflies and stamps. Two of the most important items in the room were a large round mahogany or rosewood 'loo' table on a pedestal base, and an equally large knee-holed writing desk (or a roll-top or fall front desk). For the lady of the house, a small *bonheur du jour* or Davenport was commonplace.

There has always been a lot of interest in creating libraries for beautiful large homes. Despite, or indeed because of the technological age we live in, increasingly people are commissioning or revamping libraries. The splendour and refuge libraries offer are increasingly sought as lives become more hectic. An unexpected bonus is that it is quite enjoyable being able to trace interests through the books. As you peruse your books they evoke memories and recollections to enjoy all over again. Those who enjoy collecting books and rarities find there never are enough shelves or cabinets.

This article is illustrated with some of the finest libraries and bookcases we have made.

The awe-inspiring classical solid ebony library made from rare and precious ebony (featuring classically turned columns with papyrus-like carvings), was installed in an inner city office.

A library in an original inner city residence is the new home for our exquisite George III gothic style mahogany bookcase, which features hand bevelled glass in astragal door frames, flame mahogany panels, and finely reeded columns with carved acanthus corbels.

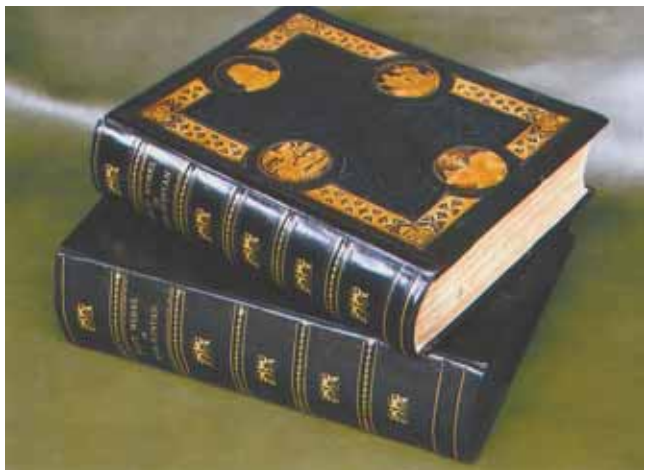
The early Australian cedar bookcase features a triple breakfront and dental mouldings and is of the same style as the residence architecture.

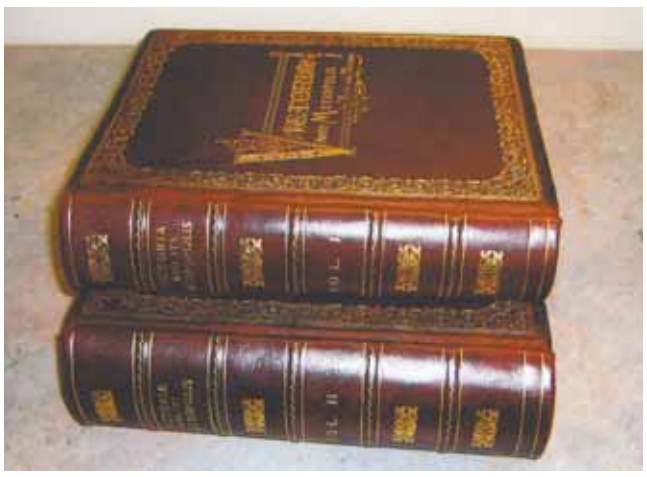
The Regency Style Library offers soft and stately beauty giving the room expansiveness and breadth, belying its true dimensions. The bookcase accommodates the exquisite vitrine in a most complementary fashion, the new being French polished to match the rich colours of antiquity. The decorative brass door panels and English escutcheons and the gilded fluted columns effectively mirror the vitrine's ornate ormolu mounts.

There are plenty smaller homes as well as offices that feature suitably proportioned bookcases. I have included photos of a couple of smaller, exact replicas we've crafted: an early Australian mahogany bookcase and a dwarf walnut bookcase. The custom-sized revolving bookcase for a barrister's chambers was purpose built to also take manila folders.

All our libraries are built from solid timber using traditional cabinetmaking methods. This means they are strong and long lasting. It also means removal or restoring them in the future is both possible. They are worthwhile investments and are antiques of the future, increasing in value over time.

Some are fitted with glass doors and custom gilded leather shelf edging to minimise dust and climatic change (important for valuable books). Usually we fit fully adjustable and reversible bookshelves with the feature timber jointed to the strong, traditional a-grade hoop pine. Our strong designs ensure shelves don't sag and even if they do, you can flip them over to keep an even line. The fittings are mostly of solid English brass.





PROFESSIONAL bookbinding service

Perhaps many clients are unaware of another service we are able to provide –that of bookbinding. AT GN Olsson Mastercraftsmen is a team of skilled English and European trained, authentic traditional bookbinders. Our professional bookbinding service specialises in traditional gold finishing, hand stitching, restoration and conservation for both private and public collections. One-offs and custom small runs are our specialty.

Whether a family heirloom book or bible, a high use or favourite book, or an antiquarian manuscript, we do basic repairs, sympathetic restoration and conservation work, by hand, to exacting standards. Any book which is falling apart, or which has seen better days will be returned to its former glory. We pride ourselves on retaining as much of the original book as is possible, utilising original covers and spine when rebinding.

Our services also include re-sewing, headbands and paper restoration. In cases where the cover is completely missing, we bind using methods and materials appropriate to the era and country where the book was originally bound. We can also replicate most binding, should you require an exact match. As our custom covers enable an almost limitless array of options, we are able to meet a client's request.

We use 23.5 carat gold, and a wide variety of bookbinding cloths, leathers and colours are sourced locally and from overseas. A store of authentic old papers and where necessary, reproduction papers, ensures an excellent match wherever replacement is required. Our English artisan provides us with magnificent hand marbled papers made in time honoured fashion.

A SPECIAL gift idea

For that unique, exquisite, personalised gift (or corporate gift) look no further than a rebound book with a personalised cover. Perhaps to encourage the budding poet, author, photographer or artist you could bind their creative outpourings into what would surely become an heirloom. Likewise, you may have professionally bound an academic work or corporate manuscript. Special journals, personal writings or family history records could be bound, or pages and images covering a special occasion – become a legacy for future generations. Your imagination is the only limitation.

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