P R O T E C T I O N O F A U T H O R ' S C O P Y R I G H T

This copy has been supplied by the Library of the University of Otago on the understanding that the following conditions will be observed:

1. To comply with s56 of the Copyright Act 1994 [NZ], this thesis copy must only be used for the purposes of research or private study.

2. The author's permission must be obtained before any material in the thesis is reproduced, unless such reproduction falls within the fair dealing guidelines of the Copyright Act 1994. Due acknowledgement must be made to the author in any citation.

3. No further copies may be made without the permission of the Librarian of the University of Otago.
NEW LAMPS FOR OLD
The activities of Sir Rex de Charemback Nan Kivell
as a collector and dealer of fine art

Oliver Stead

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Otago, Dunedin,
New Zealand

Date: December 20, 2003
Frontispiece: Silver kettle and spirit lamp given by Queen Charlotte to Sir Joseph Banks, height 20 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK29, National Library of Australia.
Abstract

Sir Rex Nan Kivell (1898-1977) was a New Zealand-born art dealer and collector, who was managing director of the Redfern Gallery in London’s Mayfair from 1931 to 1965. His birth was illegitimate and the father is not known. His name was registered as Reginald Nankivell. He was brought up by his grandparents, a fisherman and a domestic servant of New Brighton. He was educated at New Brighton School and subsequently worked as a trainee bookbinder at A.C. Andrews Ltd in Christchurch. In 1916 he joined the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, arriving in England in 1917. He was invalided out of the trenches in France with influenza and listed as ‘sick’ for the remainder of the war. Around 1918 he affected the name Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell. Following his discharge he formed a friendship with a spinster in Wiltshire, Fanny Hulbert, who made him her ‘adopted son’ and heir. In 1925 he joined the staff of the Redfern Gallery, an art gallery specialising in works by staff and students of the major London art schools. He also worked as a servant to the Assize Court Circuit. He began to collect historical material relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. In 1930 he gifted a collection of Bronze Age artefacts to the Devizes Museum. Nan Kivell steered the Redfern Gallery successfully through the aftermath of the stock market crash. His personal wealth increased through the 1930s due to an inheritance from Hulbert and his efforts as a dealer. Between 1938 and 1946 he became the leading private collector of Australian and Pacific historical material in London, investing the profits from his contemporary art dealing into his ‘Australasian’ collection. In 1946 he began negotiating the transfer of this collection to the Commonwealth National Library in Canberra. Following protracted negotiations the Australian Commonwealth purchased the collection in 1959 for £70,000. He gifted a second collection to the National Library of Australia, and was awarded a CBE, in 1966. During the Second World War Nan Kivell cemented the Redfern Gallery’s position by continuing to trade through the Blitz, making the gallery a focal point for British patriotism in the visual arts. After the war Nan Kivell was recognised as one of London’s leading dealers. As prices soared for modern paintings the gallery's profits increased. Nan Kivell retired around 1965, passing the managing role to Harry Tatlock Miller. He spent the last twelve years of his life at his house ‘El Farah’ in Tangier, Morocco, working on his grandiose book Portraits of the Famous and Infamous (London, 1970). He died in June 1977, leaving a substantial personal estate. The estate sold an important collection of twentieth-century British printmaking in October 1977. Nan Kivell's obsession with honours may have derived from his illegitimate birth and anxiety about social status. In the 1960s he affected the Danish Order of Dannebrog, almost certainly spuriously. He was knighted for services to the arts in 1977, on the recommendation of the Australian Government, ending a long personal quest for this honour.
Preface

I first became aware of the tracks left through twentieth-century art history by Sir Rex Nan Kivell when I was working at Dunedin Public Art Gallery in the early 1990s. There I began to investigate the collections of prints given to New Zealand by Nan Kivell in 1953. As I probed further I realised that this trail led into the heart of the London art market, at a most interesting time in its development. I also realised, as I began this study, that the man whose trail I was following was a master at covering his tracks, and that he had consciously left only as much as he wanted others to find. In this sense the project, which has evolved into this thesis, has been a tantalising, even at times a frustrating exercise. Much work could still be done to determine more precisely which important works of twentieth-century art were actually owned outright by Rex Nan Kivell, and when. More will certainly be done by many scholars working on the Nan Kivell Collection in Canberra, to establish the precise identification of individual artists and subjects represented there. Throughout the project I have been alternately disappointed when one or other assertion of Nan Kivell’s proved false, and delighted when some apparently bizarre claim turned out, on investigation, to be perfectly true. At times concerned that I was chasing a shadow-man, at the end of the exercise I feel rewarded in rediscovering a remarkable individual who made a genuine contribution to his times.

In my efforts to separate fact from fantasy in Nan Kivell’s story I have been helped by the following people over the past several years: my supervisors, Associate Professor Peter Suppes and Dr Roger Collins, at the University of Otago; at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Peter Entwisle; at the Hocken Library, Tim Garrity and Linda Tyler; at the Alexander Turnbull Library, Marion Minson; at the National Library of Australia, John Thompson, Graeme Powell, Barbara Perry, Michelle Hetherington, Sylvia Carr; at Te Papa, Tony Mackle; at the British Museum, Stephen Coppel; at the Elam Library, University of Auckland, Niki Jackson; at the Redfern Gallery, Margaret Thornton and Harriet Onslow. I would like to record my deep gratitude to Graeme Powell at the National Library of Australia for allowing me unfettered access to the Nan Kivell papers, MS4000, in the Manuscript Collection. Karl and Kay Stead carried out field assignments in London at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Tate Gallery.

People to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude for patient support are: my supervisors; Dr T.L. Rodney Wilson; Virginia Stead; my family.
Table of Contents

Abstract

Preface

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Chapter One
  Introduction: Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell –
  Biographical Fact and Autobiographical Fantasy

Chapter Two
  The Collector

Chapter Three
  The Collection

Chapter Four
  The Exasperating Cross-trumper

Chapter Five
  The Deal

Chapter Six
  The Redfern Gallery 1923-1938

Chapter Seven
  Carrying On – The Redfern Gallery 1939-1945

Chapter Eight
  Mixed Grill – The Redfern Gallery 1946-1965

Chapter Nine
  Portraits

Chapter Ten
  Conclusion: The Midas Touch

Select Bibliography
List of Illustrations

Frontispiece: Silver kettle and spirit lamp given by Queen Charlotte to Sir Joseph Banks, height 20 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK29, National Library of Australia. p. ii

Figure 1. Reginald Nankivell c. 1916, in the uniform of the NZEF. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 285

Figure 2. Reginald Nankivell and friend, c. 1917. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 286

Figure 3. Page from Rex Nan Kivell’s album showing Rex Nan Kivell and friend (possibly Fanny Hulbert), England, c. 1920s. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 287

Figure 4. Photographs from Rex Nan Kivell’s album, c. 1920s. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 288

Figure 5. Rex de Charembo Nan Kivell, c. 1920s. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 289

Figure 6. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; Negro fandango scene, Campo St. Anna, Rio de Janeiro c. 1822; watercolour; 21 x 34 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/98, National Library of Australia. p. 290

Figure 7. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; A bivouac of travellers in Australia in a cabbage-tree forest, day break c. 1838; oil on canvas, 118 x 82 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK14, National Library of Australia. p. 291

Figure 8. Conrad Martens 1801-1878; View of Fort Street and the North Shore, from Flagstaff Hill 1843; oil on canvas; 31.3 x 79.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK19, National Library of Australia. p. 292

Figure 9. George Carter 1737-1795; Death of Captain Cook 1781; oil on canvas; 151.2 x 213.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2, National Library of Australia. p. 293

Figure 10. Charles Meryon 1821-1868; Death of Marion du Fresne at the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 12 June 1772 1846-8; crayon, pencil and chalk on paper with linen backing 100 x 200 cm. Alexander Turnbull Library. p. 294

Figure 11. Joseph Banks’ house-front, diagram by Bruce Godward. Hocken Library. p. 295
Figure 12. John Webber 1752-1793; *A chief of the Sandwich Islands* 1787; oil on canvas; 147.3 x 114.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1, National Library of Australia.  


Figure 14. Rex Nan Kivell, 1950s. Portrait photograph by James Mortimer. MS4000, National Library of Australia.  

Figure 15. Rex Nan Kivell handing over his collection to Senator the Hon. Sir Alister McMullin, President of the Senate, at a ceremony at Australia House, London, 16 January 1959. National Library of Australia.  

Figure 16. Photograph of Rex Nan Kivell, Richard Smart, Mrs Ethelbert White and Ethelbert White, c. 1920s, from Rex Nan Kivell’s album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.  

Figure 17. Cyril Power 1872-1951; *Whence and Whither*; colour linocut; 310 x 242 mm. Auckland Art Gallery, gift of Rex Nan Kivell, 1953.  

Figure 18. Paul Nash 1889-1946; *Mansions of the Dead* 1932; pencil and watercolour on paper; 578 x 394 mm. Tate Gallery T03204, purchased 1981.  

Figure 19. Paul Nash 1889-1946; *Swanage* c. 1936; Pencil, watercolour and photographic collage on paper; 400 x 581 mm; Tate Gallery, T01771, purchased 1973.  

Figure 20. Christopher Wood 1901-1930; *The Yellow Man* 1930; oil; 20” x 24”. Collection of Sir Binsley Ford CBE. Ingleby, 1995, pl. 30.  

Figure 21. Christopher Wood 1901-1930; *Zebra and Parachute* 1930; oil; 18.25” x 21.75”. Private collection. Ingleby, 1995, pl. 51.  

Figure 22. Christopher Wood 1901-1930; *Tiger and Arc de Triomphe* 1930; oil on cardboard; 18.25” x 21.75”; The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.  

Figure 23. Max Ernst 1891-1976; *The Entire City* 1934; oil on paper laid on canvas; 502 x 613 mm. Tate Gallery N05289, purchased with assistance from the Knapping Fund 1941.  

Figure 24. Edward Burra 1905-1976; *Soldiers at Rye* 1941; gouache, watercolour and ink wash on paper; 1022 x 2070 mm; Tate Gallery N05377, presented by Studio 1942.
Figure 25. Jankel Adler 1895-1949; *The Mutilated* 1942-3; oil on canvas; 864 x 1118 mm. Tate Gallery T00372, presented by Robert Strauss 1960. p. 309

Figure 26. Michael Ayton 1921-1975; *The Temptation of St Anthony* 1942-3; oil on wood; 581 x 752 mm; Tate Gallery T03611, purchased 1983. p. 310


Figure 28. Francis Bacon 1909-1992; *Painting* 1946; oil and tempera on canvas; 198 x 132 cm; Museum of Modern Art, New York (Purchase Fund) 1948. p. 312

Figure 29. Chaim Soutine 1893-1943; *Landscape at Céret* c. 1920-1; oil on canvas; 559 x 838 mm; Tate Gallery T00692, purchased 1964. p. 313

Figure 30. Henri Matisse 1869-1954; *The Red Studio* 1911; oil on canvas; 181 x 219.1 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York. p. 314

Figure 31. Patrick Heron 1920-1999; *Boats at Night* 1947; oil on wood; 450 x 495 mm. Tate Gallery T06554, presented by the National Art Collections Fund 1992. p. 315

Figure 32. Patrick Heron 1920-1999; *Vertical: January 1956* 1956; oil on hardboard; 2438 x 1219 mm. Tate Gallery T06744, purchased 1993. p. 316

Figure 33. Rex Nan Kivell and Harry Tatlock Miller at the Redfern Gallery, 1957. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 317

Figure 34. Sir Sidney Nolan 1917-1992; *Inland Australia* 1950; oil on hardboard; 1219 x 1524 mm. Tate Gallery N05993, purchased 1951. p. 318

Figure 35. Alan Reynolds b.1926; *Summer: Young September's Cornfield* 1954; oil on board; 1022 x 1549 mm. Tate Gallery T00105, presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1956. p. 319

Figure 36. Page from Rex Nan Kivell's album with photograph of one of Graham Sutherland's studies for *Christ in Glory*. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 320

Figure 37. Ceri Richards 1903-1971; *The Pursuit* 1949; colour lithograph; 410 x 540 mm. Dunedin Public Art Gallery, gift of Rex Nan Kivell, 1953. p. 321

Figure 38. Peter Cochrane, Rex Nan Kivell, unidentified man, Mizoumi Nouani with work by Utrillo, Redfern Gallery, c. 1950s. Photograph from Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia. p. 322

Figure 40. Detail of photograph by Alec Murray from *The Queen*, 25 November 1958, showing Bryan Kneale and Charles Laughton with Kneale’s portrait of Laughton, and portrait of Rex Nan Kivell. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.

Figure 41. Detail of portrait of Rex Nan Kivell by Bryan Kneale [1957], reproduced in *The Studio*, February 1957.

Figure 42. Bryan Kneale b. 1930; *Portrait of Rex de C. Nan Kivell* 1960; oil on composition board; 127 x 71.2 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK9530, National Library of Australia.

Figure 43. Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp 1594-c. 1651; *Portrait of Abel Tasman, his wife and daughter* [1637]; oil on canvas; 106.7 x 132.1 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK3, National Library of Australia.

Figure 44. Robert Park 1812-1870. *Natives of Ahuriri, Hawkes Bay, alive in 1851* [1851]; watercolour; 25 x 35.2 cm; attributed to Robert Park. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK203, National Library of Australia.

Figure 45. William Strutt, 1825-1915; *Hare Pomare, his wife Harriett and infant son Albert Victor, and a Maori chieftain who accompanied them to England* November 1963; oil; 28 cm (circular). Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia.

Figure 46. Sir William Beechey 1753-1839; *Portrait of King George III* [c. 1800]; oil on wood panel; 29.2 x 23.9 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6229, National Library of Australia.

Figure 47. Mary Ann Musgrave, fl. 1821-1847; *Portrait of William Nan Kivell* [c. 1840]; oil on canvas; 150 x 71 cm; attribution by NLA Pictorial Section. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK4397, National Library of Australia.

Figure 48. H. Ainsworth; *Man of the island of Nukahiwa, Marquesas group* [c. 1820]; oil on canvas; 53.1 x 43.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2649, National Library of Australia.

Figure 49. M. Jilt; *Queensland native with tribal decorations* [c. 1860]; oil on canvas; 76.5 x 51.3 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK3646, National Library of Australia.
Figure 50. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; *Portrait of Bungaree, a native of New South Wales, with Fort Macquarie, Sydney Harbour, in background* [c. 1826]; oil on canvas; 68.5 x 50.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK118, National Library of Australia. p. 334

Figure 51. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; *Desmond, a N.S. Wales chief painted for a rarobb [i.e. corroboree] or native dance* [1826?]; watercolour; 25.7 x 17.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/61, National Library of Australia. p. 335

Figure 52. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; *Amoko, a New Zealand Girl* [1827?]; watercolour; 19.1 x 18.1 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/88, National Library of Australia. p. 336

Figure 53. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; *A native of the Island of Tucopa [i.e. Tikopia]* [1827?]; watercolour; 24.8 x 22.2 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/90, National Library of Australia. p. 337

Figure 54. Charles Meryon 1821-1868; *Toma Keke, chef de tribu de la Nouvelle Zélande* 1846; charcoal; 47 x 35 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK127, National Library of Australia. p. 338

Figure 55. Paul Gauguin 1848-1903; *Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ* [1889]; oil; 38 x 46 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. p. 339

Chapter One
Introduction: Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell – Biographical Fact and Autobiographical Fantasy

Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell, C.M.G., collector, connoisseur and Mayfair businessman, spent a lifetime concealing or blurring the facts of his childhood and parentage, so that it is very difficult to penetrate the web of subtle deception he left behind him concerning his true identity. Nan Kivell was fascinated by honours, titles, pedigree and genealogy. As a colonial expatriate working among England’s upper classes at a time of enormous transformation in British society, he was acutely self-conscious about his dubious social status. He oscillated between a deep desire to participate in the traditions of Britain, and an awareness of the terminal state of the British Empire, the record of whose expansion in the Pacific he sought to preserve. He was also shrewdly aware that his status as an outsider in British society enabled him to operate outside the imaginative restrictions imposed by the British class system. He realised that his astute collecting of the primary materials of colonial history gave him the power to deal directly with the governments he sought to impress. Much of his life’s work was directed towards the rescue of materials of colonial identity from the war-shattered ruins of European imperialism. Nan Kivell hoped the colonial societies of New Zealand and Australia, to whose history his own identity was bound, could fashion from these relics of exodus and genesis a sense of heritage of which they could be proud. By collecting old pictures, manuscripts and books which recorded the history of these emergent nations from the period of first European contact, he tried to find a collective context for Pacific peoples within the great enterprise of European colonialism. He sought to preserve the diminishing links between the colonial world from which he came and the disintegrating British Empire at the centre of which he remade his own identity. This is especially true of the enterprise represented by his dictionary of portraits, Portraits of the Famous and Infamous, where identities, rather than art, are the overriding theme. Who then was Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell, and what was his pedigree?

Some answers to this question can be found in a collection of personal papers which Nan Kivell bequeathed to the National Library of Australia. The collection, MS4000, is held in the Manuscripts Collection of that institution. MS4000 contains correspondence between Nan Kivell and the many artists, dealers, and collectors with
whom he was in regular contact, and covers the period from 1938 until his death in 1977. There are also to be found here Nan Kivell’s last will, newspaper clippings concerning his activities, and two large bound albums or scrapbooks which are filled with photographs, reproductions of works of art, passports, official letters and invitations, and other mementoes of a lifetime of art collecting and dealing. MS4000 is not a very complete collection of letters, nor is it often an especially personal one, for Nan Kivell rarely showed his hand or let his professional guard down when dealing with his business acquaintances. Most frustratingly, there are no letters among this collection which date from the years between Nan Kivell’s initial employment at the Redfern Gallery in 1925, and his assumption of the role of managing director in 1931. Fortunately this gap is partially compensated for by correspondence between Paul Nash and the Redfern Gallery which is held in the Tate Gallery Archive. The overall impression created by the MS4000 papers is that the group has been carefully edited by its originator in preparation for its consignment to posterity, and that much has been deliberately left out.

Nan Kivell was not a great writer. The pages of his correspondence, for the most part carbon copies of typescript, do not glitter with witty asides on art and life in twentieth-century London, nor are they filled with deep reflections on the meaning and significance of the works of art which furnished the writer’s world. Nan Kivell’s literary repertoire was limited. His prose, though coherent, is undistinguished and often clumsy, though he was capable of expressing himself very clearly on paper when moved beyond his normally artful patter by some passion or annoyance. His phrases are often arch rather than original or elegant, betraying a lack of literary education that would have denied him membership of the inner circles of Bloomsbury between the wars, although he was certainly in touch with its artists and critics. He relied rather heavily on glib clichés. The powers of descriptive prose which one might hope to discover in the writings of a great collector of art, are hardly in evidence in these letters. Nan Kivell’s business correspondence adopts an unvaryingly formal, stilted tone of ingratiating professionalism, tempered with caution and enlivened by the occasional burst of flowery effusiveness. At best the Canberra papers provide a bare sketch of the development of an unusual and interesting career, which although it had a very public face, was conducted with great discretion. On the other hand letters to Nan Kivell by a range of correspondents often reveal a good deal more about this
fascinating career than the collector’s own. Many articulate writers approached Nan Kivell on matters of mutual interest, among them a few, like Bernard Smith, who did much to define the category of artistic enterprise represented by the Nan Kivell Collection. If not a brilliant correspondent himself, Nan Kivell was at least a conscientious one. His business and collecting activities alike depended on the sort of regular written enquiry which all libraries, museums and art galleries, public and private, engage in as a matter of course. The growing volume of enquiries recorded in MS4000 from institutional sources – libraries, museums, universities, governments in many parts of the world – demonstrates that by the mid-1950s Nan Kivell’s activities as a private collector were on an institutional scale.

The other major documentary source for Nan Kivell’s collecting career is the extensive file held by the National Library of Australia on its dealings with the collector. This file records in minute detail the negotiations and manoeuvrings leading up to the acquisition by purchase of the first Nan Kivell Collection in 1959, and the subsequent acquisition by gift of the second Nan Kivell Collection in 1966.

The Nankivells of Canterbury

The facts of Nan Kivell’s birth, so far as they are recorded, are these: he was born on 8 April 1898, at Christchurch. His 18-year-old mother Alice Maud Nankivell was unmarried at the time of his birth. He was named Reginald Nankivell and his status was recorded as ‘illegitimate’ in the Christchurch Register of Births. The identity of his father is not recorded, and remains a mystery. Alice lived with her parents, George Henry and Annie Nankivell, at 25 Bligh Street, New Brighton, a small beach settlement on the Canterbury coast. George had until recently worked as a butcher in Christchurch, but was now earning his living as a fisherman. Annie was employed as a domestic servant.¹ When Alice married Noah Clegg a year later and left the family home Reginald was brought up by his maternal grandparents as their own son. The grandparents apparently concealed the truth about his birth from the community, perhaps even from the boy himself.² So it was that Sir Rex de Charembac

¹ Ashley Electoral Roll 1882-84; New Zealand Post Office Directory 1883-84; New Zealand Post Office Directory 1885-86; Avon Electoral Roll 1890; Avon Electoral Roll 1897
² Information given to Marion Minson by a Nankivell relative, 1991, and conveyed to the author in a letter, Marion Minson to Oliver Stead, 18 May 1995. I am grateful to Marion Minson for this story.
Nan Kivell, collector and connoisseur of Pacific exploration, was raised the illegitimate son of a fisherman’s daughter. Bligh Street, named presumably after the captain of the *Bounty*, backed onto New Brighton Beach, a windswept stretch of white sand facing east into the vast emptiness of the South Pacific. At this most appropriate address, with its romantic connotations of maritime adventure, its real life proximity to the sea, the collector spent the idyllic childhood he remembered in his few autobiographical writings, beachcombing, boating and reading accounts of Pacific explorations.

Given Nan Kivell’s interest in colonial history, his near-obsession with the social status represented by titles, and the illegitimate birth which complicated his own identity, it seems appropriate to investigate the origins of that side of his family which gave him his name. The history of the Nankivell family is typical of many families whose sons and daughters left a depressed rural England in the middle of the nineteenth century and set sail for the remote colonies of the South Pacific in search of a better life. The Nankivell family tree has branches in England, America, South Africa, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand. Several Nankivells have attempted to document the family’s history. Colonel John H. Nankivell, whose successful expatriate career provides an interesting comparison to Rex Nan Kivell’s, compiled one of the more coherent of these investigations in 1941.¹ John H. Nankivell was a first cousin of Nan Kivell’s mother Alice. Born in Christchurch in 1886, he emigrated to the United States before the First World War. During the war he enlisted as a private in the United States Army. In 1944 he returned to New Zealand as a military attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Wellington and wrote a history of the New Zealand Armed Forces.² Based on his account of the family history, together with additional material found in a more recent genealogical newsletter, the *Nankivell Notebook*, compiled by family members, it is possible to gain a general picture of the fortunes of this Cornish family in the generations preceding the emigration of Rex’s great-great grandfather Robert Rogers Nankivell to New Zealand in 1839.

The name Nankivell and its variant forms are derived from two Cornish Celtic words, ‘Nan’, a valley, and ‘Kivell’, a horse - the name means ‘The Valley of the Horse’. In characteristic form, Rex Nan Kivell later modified this translation to the

² Ibid.
more fanciful, and less masculine, ‘Nest of the Woodcocks’. The name first appears at the end of the fifteenth century, when according to tradition a Typett or Tippett of St. Columb Major, Cornwall, was made a King’s Herald and endowed with the estates of Nanskeval or Nankevill and incorporated the name of the estate into his own, becoming Tippett-Nankevill. Tippett-Nankevill became the family name for many generations until the Tippett was eventually dropped and Nankivell became the standard form of the name. Lt. Col. Nankivell notes dryly that some family members have adopted spellings such as Nankiville and NanKiville, which give the name a Norman-French appearance, but the name is decidedly Celtic in origin.

The family fortunes seem to have flourished in its early history. A descendant of Tipett-Nankevill, Richard Nankevill (b. 1555) acquired the estate of Killignock by his marriage to his second wife, the only daughter of Killignock of Killignock.

Chechenock, now Killignock in this parish (St. Wenn), was another district taxed in the Domesday Book 1087, from which was denominated an old family of gentlemen surnamed Killignoch, where they flourished in good fame for many generations, till the time of Henry VIII when the only daughter and heir of Thomas Killignoch was married to Richard Nanskevall, of St. Colomb, which marriage brought these lands into his possession, where for three or four descents his posterity flourished in genteel degree, till the latter end of the reign of King Charles II when Matthew Nankevill (Typpet), Gent., that married Ringwood of Braddock, having encumbered his estate with much debts, sold this place and the manor of Borlace Varth to Mr Joseph Hawkey, his attorney-at-law, to pay costs ... and left his son and heir a beggar.¹

After the sale of Borlace Varth by Matthew Nankivell the family became somewhat scattered; William his eldest son remained in St Columb, and John the youngest child moved to the parish of Parranzabuloe. From this point, the main line of the family apparently produced a series of professional men - surgeons, military officers and clergymen. The 14th successor to Tippett-Nankevill, Dr Herbert Nankivell (1843-1912), was a well-known physician, heart specialist and philanthropist who founded a Home for Consumptives in Bournemouth. However the junior branches of the family seem to have sunk rather lower in the social scale.

The branch of the family to which Reginald belonged was descended from William Nankivell (b.1679), the ninth in direct succession from Tippett-Nankevill. William Nankivell’s grandson Thomas (1748-1817) was mayor of Truro 1784-1786. Two other Nankivells subsequently held this office - a James Nankivell from 1803 to

¹ Davies Gilbert, The Parochial History of Cornwall, 4 volumes, 1838, quoted in J.H. Nankivell’s genealogical notes, op. cit., above.
1805, and a John T. Nankivell in 1826-1827. Thus it appears that some of the family remained reasonably well established within the Cornish middle-class in the early years of the nineteenth century. Thomas Nankivell had a son, also called Thomas, who was born in Truro in 1788, and became a miner. At the end of the eighteenth century a number of Nankivell families settled at a pair of villages in Devon, Marytavy and Blackdown, in the vicinity of which copper, tin, lead and silver had recently been discovered, attracting tin miners from Cornwall. Thomas Nankivell married Ann Rogers at Marytavy in 1811 and in the same year the couple had a son, Robert Rogers Nankivell. Robert was an engine driver at Wheal Friendship Mine and an itinerant Wesleyan preacher. In 1839 he and his younger brother William became the first of this branch of the family to emigrate to the colonies.1

On November 1 1839 Robert Nankivell sailed from Falmouth on the New Zealand Company ship the *Bolton*, arriving in Wellington on April 21, 1840. He was twenty-eight years old when he embarked, and was accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, also 28, and their five children, John, 7, George, 6, Selma, 4, Thomas, 3, and Robert, 1. Of these children the two youngest died at sea. Also on the *Bolton* were Robert’s younger brother William, aged 20, his wife Ann, and a baby girl aged six weeks. The Nankivell brothers and their wives received a free passage, having been selected by Thomas Woolcombe, Esq. Robert’s trade or calling before emigrating is listed as ‘miner’, and William’s as ‘agricultural labourer’.2

The humble state of the embarking Nankivell families jars somewhat with Rex Nan Kivell’s later representations of the Nankivell family as Cornish gentry. Clearly the fortunes of Robert Rogers Nankivell’s branch of the family had declined further in the 1830s. Robert’s and William’s example was followed by many other family members who subsequently emigrated to New Zealand, Australia and the United States, the majority to Maldon in Victoria, and it is thought by family genealogists that by 1861 all of Robert’s immediate relations had left England.

Robert Nankivell was a resourceful man. Despite his lowly status as a ‘Labourer with Free Passage’ on the *Bolton*, in 1841 he entered the service of the New Zealand Company as Assistant Surveyor under Captain William Mein Smith, and

---

1 *Nankivell Notebook*, unpublished genealogical newsletter of the Nankivell family.
2 *New Zealand Company, Register of Emigrant Labourers who have received a Free Passage to New Zealand; “Bolton”,* pp. 114-115.
worked on surveys in Wellington and Manawatu.¹ This suggests that he had received some sort of professional training in England before emigrating, perhaps in relation to his work as a miner. Although it was usual for surveyors to have attended one or other of the professional schools in England in order to qualify for surveying work for the New Zealand Company, surveying in the new colony was competitive and open to tender from any competent tradesman who could demonstrate his ability to carry out the work.² He was a good surveyor, ‘very attentive and diligent in his duties’ and Mein Smith recommended him for a rise in salary.³ Unfortunately however the New Zealand Company ran out of money in 1843 and he was laid off.

After leaving the New Zealand Company Robert worked as a private building contractor, tendering for barracks building and road maintenance in Wellington before removing to Port Cooper (Lytton) in 1849 to build a barracks for the first New Zealand Company Settlers before they arrived in 1850. In November 1849 he was contracted to build the Canterbury Association Office in Lyttleton. At the commencement of the surveys for the Canterbury Settlement Captain Thomas, the Principal Surveyor to the New Zealand Company in Canterbury Settlement, employed him as a contract surveyor. Nankivell was engaged with John and Thomas Hughes to make detailed surveys of the Torlesse and Boys areas in the northern district.⁴ After completing these surveys he returned to building work in partnership with his son John. He advertised in the Lyttleton Times in March 1851 that he could ‘undertake and execute buildings in wood, pisé and cob and all kinds of excavations’.⁵ In addition to his surveying and building activities, Robert Nankivell was the first Lay Reader appointed by the Wesleyan Organisation from Wellington to Canterbury, giving readings in his carpenter's workshop until the arrival of the first Wesleyan minister to the district.⁶

² Ibid.
⁴ Lawn, 1977, p. 118
⁶ See E.W. Hames, 'Out of the Common Way: The European Church in the Colonial Era 1840-1913', in Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society of New Zealand, v. 27, n. 3-4, 1972, pp. 3-4, 14. In 1840 lay readings were held in Petone in a group of houses known as ‘Cornish Row’. See also W.J. Williams, Centenary Sketches of New Zealand Methodism, Christchurch: Lyttleton Times, [1942], p. 126.
In 1852 Robert Nankivell left Lyttleton for Victoria to join the gold rush. This abrupt move apparently followed a particularly bitter financial dispute with his wife Elizabeth, in the course of which he placed advertisements in the *Lyttleton Times* warning readers not to have anything to do with her financially.¹ He left his wife and children in Canterbury. John, the eldest, married into the prominent Day family of Sumner in 1852, whose family home he had helped his father to build in 1850. George, Robert’s second son, followed his father to Maldon, Victoria, where he married in 1854. In 1857 father and son were joined by Robert’s mother Ann, and his younger brother John, who had been prospecting in Ireland and America and had returned to England to escort his widowed mother to Victoria. In 1858 Robert became a founding partner in the Great Eastern Quartz Mining and Crushing Company, and later became Mining Surveyor and Electoral Registrar of Maldon. In 1859 he married a second time, to Isobel Chadwick, a widow with one child, with whom he had a second family of eleven children. The youngest of these, Reginald Ashton Nankivell, became the head draughtsman at the Rand Gold Company, Brakpan, South Africa, and was killed in the Boer War.² Possibly Nan Kivell was named after this relative, though it is hard to know whether the Australian and New Zealand sides of the family maintained much contact.

It seems likely that Robert’s second marriage was bigamous. While he prospered in Victoria, the fortunes of his first family in Canterbury did not enjoy an equal measure of success. These circumstances are rather at odds with Robert’s moral role as a Wesleyan preacher, (though perhaps entirely consistent with the itinerant status that accompanied this aspect of his life), and with his portrayal as a paragon of puritan virtue in James Hay’s *Recollections of Early Canterbury*, where he is described as ‘an excellent tradesman, very silent and reserved in his manner’.³ His second wife Isobel died in 1877, but Elizabeth outlived the old patriarch, coming to Maldon herself in 1894 when he died, and living there for nine years until her death in 1904.⁴

Robert Nankivell’s Wesleyan faith may also have contributed to his decision to leave Canterbury in 1852. Although the Wesleyans were loosely allied with the

¹ Information provided by Mrs A. Williams. Letter to O. Stead from A. Williams, 17 July 1996.
Church of England, there was considerable antagonism at the time between Church of England settlers and members of other Protestant denominations.\(^1\) Prominent in this conflict was the Presbyterian leader Ebenezer Hay, whose house at Pigeon Bay Robert had not quite finished building when he left New Zealand.\(^2\) But Methodism may also have been a contributing factor in Nankivell’s emigration from Devon in 1839. This dimension to his character deserves some further investigation in passing because it helps to establish the social and political background of the Nankivell émigrés to New Zealand.

In the early years of the nineteenth century the Wesleyan movement was enormously influential among the working classes in Britain and was especially strong in the Southwest. Wesley’s teachings were as much a social as a religious movement, and had a powerful appeal to the oppressed rural and industrial poor created by the industrial revolution. Methodism placed less emphasis on the leadership of the clergy in moral and social matters and more on the individual’s own relationship with his God. Consequently Wesleyan laymen were as important as clergymen in promoting the religious leader’s social agenda, and the movement depended on a large number of itinerant lay preachers like Robert Nankivell, who were workers and close to the common people but also literate and competent, to carry the message through the countryside. The socialist agenda that accompanied the Wesleyan rhetoric was seen as highly iniquitous and threatening to the landed middle classes in Britain. Something of the resulting antagonism had transplanted itself to Canterbury at the time of Robert Nankivell’s brief stay there, and in view of his role as Lay Reader it is hard to believe that he would not have been caught up in it. With these things in mind we can assemble a picture of Robert Rogers Nankivell as a competent, hardworking tradesman whose dour exterior concealed a political radical and a ruthless opportunist, whose ambition was probably stoked by a family tradition of lost wealth which he was determined to regain in the colonies, at any cost.

After Robert’s departure in 1852, the Nankivell family is not conspicuous in the recorded annals of Canterbury history. No Nankivells left substantial estates in

---

\(^1\) Hay, 1915.
Canterbury before 1914.\(^1\) As Robert Nankivell died in Australia, he left no estate in New Zealand, and it is unlikely that he left his children in New Zealand much in the way of financial support. Certainly John Nankivell (1833-1902) suffered financial setbacks in Canterbury while his father prospered in Victoria. After marrying Susannah Day in 1853 he became the licensee of the Heathcote Arms tavern. In 1871 he was declared bankrupt when a large amount of unpaid rent was called in at short notice. Thereafter he became a butcher. The G.R. McDonald *Dictionary of Canterbury Biography* lists him as builder, publican and licensee of Heathcote Arms, butcher.\(^2\)

The fortunes of John Nankivell’s son George Henry Nankivell were even less glamorous than those of his father. In 1882 he owned land to the value of £100 at Cust, a tiny rural settlement some forty miles by rail to the northwest of Christchurch.\(^3\) Between 1882 and 1884 he appears to have sold or lost this modest landholding. Between 1883 and 1884 he was still resident at Cust, working as a butcher, but sometime in 1885 moved to 13 Cambridge Terrace, Christchurch, possibly to work for his father whose butcher shop was nearby at 223 Barbadoes St.\(^4\) Around 1890 the family moved to 25 Bligh Street New Brighton.\(^5\) In 1897 Annie Nankivell was contributing to the family income by performing domestic duties, and when their daughter Alice Maud was married in 1899 to Noah Clegg, a farmer of Bromley whose father was a manufacturer in Lancashire, George’s profession appeared on the marriage registration as ‘fisherman’.\(^6\)

Despite the sea changes in George Henry’s career, the Nankivell family environment seems to have been a relatively stable one. Unfortunately Nan Kivell’s recollections of his childhood are heavily coloured by romanticisations and embellishments, which are so suggestive of invention that it is difficult to give them much credence. However untrustworthy, his reminiscences do throw up some themes characteristic of his interests, tastes and obsessions, and help to uncover the underlying motives of his later collecting.

\(^1\) There are no land holdings by Nankivells recorded in *Province of Canterbury, NZ: List of Sections Purchased to 30 April 1863*, and no Nankivells appear in Nancy McLauglin, *Canterbury Death Duty Index 1867-1914*.
\(^3\) Return of Freeholders of New Zealand. 1882.
\(^4\) Wise’s New Zealand Post Office Directory 1883-84, 1885-86.
\(^5\) Avon Electoral Roll, 1890.
\(^6\) Register of Marriages in the District of Christchurch, 99/2680, No. 38.
In 1903 New Brighton was described as a ‘seaside resort’, within six miles of Christchurch. It was reached by two tram lines, on which trams ran at intervals all day, and the main road was also much used by bicyclists, especially on Sundays and the weekly half-holiday. The settled population was about one thousand, but this increased substantially during the summer, when many Christchurch residents took seaside cottages. New Brighton had a public domain of three hundred acres which was thickly planted with trees, and a long and rather spectacular pier jutting straight out into the Pacific. A Beautifying Association was busily occupied in planting an avenue of cabbage trees from the bridge over the Avon to the sea.¹

Despite its less than patrician appointment, Reginald Nankivell’s home was evidently a clean one, and his grandmother a virtuous housekeeper, as one visitor discovered. ‘My grandparents had an Englishman named Warburton staying with them at New Brighton’, he wrote,

and during dinner he remarked that it was his boast that he “had never washed up a cup in his life”. My grandmother got up from the table and said “Mr. Warburton to prevent any possible degradation to yourself through contact with my cups I will say goodbye now as I presume you will be leaving very early in the morning”. My grandfather’s remark was “Warburton you asked for that and now have certainly got it to remember all your life”.²

Nan Kivell remembered this incident himself, and it is significant that his only recorded memory of his grandmother relates to her sense of wounded class pride. Annie’s affront clearly stemmed from self-consciousness about her status as a domestic servant, and it is tempting to see in her sense of social inferiority the source of Nan Kivell’s life-long obsession with status. Yet the Nankivells of New Brighton were not quite so humble as their trades might lead one to expect. They were intermarried with the respectable Day family, one of the more prominent settler families. There was an expectation of social elevation among the family which was quite characteristic of the labouring classes in New Zealand in the early years of the century - after all, why had their forebears come to New Zealand in the first place, if not to seek prosperity? It was to this class of person that Sir George Grey had pitched his most effective speeches against the Canterbury squattocracy in 1879.³ George Nankivell, whose mother was Suzannah Day, is remembered by descendants as

¹ The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand v. 3, Wellington: The Cyclopaedia Company, 1903, p. 408.
extremely dapper, and of great personal neatness, even to the extent of plying his
trade as a fisherman dressed in a suit. Annie Nankivell, despite her humble calling as
a person of ‘domestic duties’, was regimental in her discipline of a large household,
and exceedingly proper. A formal photograph exists of the Nankivells *en famille* circa
1900, in which Annie presides over a scene of the utmost Victorian propriety,
surrounded by an elaborate dinner service and various trappings of petty bourgeois
domestic taste. In such a setting it is small wonder that the sexual incontinence of her
daughter and the later proclivities of the resulting offspring were savagely repressed.

The Nankivell home was separated from Pegasus Beach by hills of beautiful
silver sand. ‘I was always on the beach’, he remembered,

...my major find was a superlative small dinghy in perfect condition. It had obviously been
washed off a very well equipped cargo boat... I was only 14 years old but that didn’t prevent
my becoming the Prince of Dinghys in the River Avon and the Heathcote Estuary. Another
find was a seaman’s high-legging boot and inside the skeleton of a leg and foot...Another find
was a bottle with a message from the missing liner “Wharatar” [sic]... but sad to say my
message was declared a fake. What excitement when I discovered a semi-decomposed
middlesized whale wash up near our house. I buried it under the sand and when it was dry I
carried all the rib bones up to our orchard and built a garden house.

Boats played a prominent part in Nan Kivell’s childhood, not surprisingly
given his grandfather’s occupation, although helping his grandfather was not one of
the things that he chose to remember later. Instead, he remembered his ‘brothers’,
who were his mother’s siblings, building boats at New Brighton.

My brothers were all older than myself but that didn’t prevent them ordering me to scour the
beach at Pegasus Bay and dragging home every piece of burnable matter and then attend to the
fires under the water tanks in order that they could mould the planks they were fitting to the
side of the boat they were building. They built superb boats, two of the ones I remember most
are the “Seahorse I” and the “Seahorse II.” The “Seahorse II” was commandeered by the
Lyttleton Naval Squad. For use at the Dardanells [sic].

As well as boats, the brothers built ‘whares’ in the bush on Banks Peninsula,
and Nan Kivell remembered staying ‘in the Whare my elder brothers had built there,
at one of the bays half way round Lyttleton Harbour. I knew the sides of the harbour
long before the original “bush” got completely destroyed’. The brothers’ boat-

---

1 In the possession of a Nankivell family member in Australia. Pers. comm. John Thompson to Oliver Stead.
3 Ibid.
building activities even extended into Nan Kivell's bedroom, where, according to his rather fanciful account, they built him a ship's cabin, complete with bunks and portholes, and bookshelves which they kept well supplied with books about early voyages of exploration.¹

Reading between the lines of some of his manuscript and recorded reminiscences one suspects Reginald's childhood was rather more solitary than these memories suggest. In one instance he recalled that his playmates only visited once a year, when the whitebait were running in the Avon. His 'elder brother' Frederick used to come down from Wellington to superintend at the netting. Maori friends, whom he always thought and spoke of as 'Kaipoi', came too.² The implied vacuum of friendship between whitebait seasons suggests a certain bathos in Nan Kivell's portrayal of himself, but it fits in with the picture of a child isolated from his peers by his position as an illegitimate lovechild growing up in his grandparents' home, abandoned by his mother, and having for company not his own siblings but the much older brothers and sisters of his mother. The brothers no doubt treated him indulgently, but there are no such fond memories of his grandfather. The are no accounts of fishing trips or boating expeditions with the father figure in his life, nor any reference to books or learning in which George Henry Nankivell plays any part. Though he was much given to acknowledging the help of people to whom he felt indebted for encouraging his interests, Nan Kivell never expressed gratitude to his grandfather for knowledge of boats and things maritime, let alone books. Instead, he remembered relationships with older men outside the family who encouraged his imagination. The grandfather's absence from Nan Kivell's memoirs suggests the relationship was strained one, perhaps complicated from the start by Reginald's illegitimate status, and its apparent concealment. One presumes the boy's illegitimacy was hidden by the family for reasons of moral propriety, to protect him, and themselves, from the shameful stigma. But late in life, when reminiscing about Banks Peninsula in a letter to an acquaintance, Nan Kivell recalled making a garden of native shrubs at Mr Clegg's house, in one of the bays, and wondered if it was still there.³ As we have seen, Noah Clegg was Nan Kivell's mother's husband. Although he does not

¹ Ibid. See also unpublished transcript of interview with Hazel Berg, 1970. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² Rex Nan Kivell, unpublished MS, no date, after 1976, 'personal notes as requested by Mr Richard L. N. Greenaway'. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
³ RNK to Dr Peter Maling, Christchurch, 30 March 1976. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
explain his relationship to Mr Clegg in the letter, this small admission reveals that Reginald did have contact with his mother’s family.

Nan Kivell’s later boast that he ‘must have had the best library in New Brighton’ suggests that his early collecting was a source of pride and a way of making an identity for himself separate from his family and peers. Through the window of illustrated travel accounts the young Reginald found for himself an imaginative realm beyond his working-class home environment, where education and literature did not play an important role. At the same time, he developed an ability to form relationships with older, educated men who appreciated his enquiring nature and were prepared to act as mentors. This pattern in his relationships developed quite early, continued after his demobilisation in England in 1919, and probably helped him to find employment after the war. Later he would enjoy playing the role of mentor to younger men. One early role model was the headmaster of the New Brighton Public School, George William Bishop.

Mr Bishop was a native of Canterbury, born on Banks Peninsula, and an undergraduate of Canterbury College, where he studied for two years. On gaining his D2 certificate he was sent to New Brighton to establish the Public School in 1889. The school began in a small building belonging to the Wesleyan church, but by 1903 occupied two acres of land fronting Sea View and Hawkes Streets, a single-story wooden building with three classrooms. There were 275 pupils on the roll, with an average attendance of 240. Mr Bishop was assisted by three certificated and two pupil-teachers.¹ Nan Kivell remembered the headmaster as a man of ‘superb character and tolerance’ who after school used to get him to help trim the dividing hedges between his garden and the school playground. While doing this he taught the boy poetry, Mr Bishop reciting one line and Reginald the next. ‘I was expected to learn the whole poem as a lesson at home’ he wrote, demonstrating with recitations of parts of ‘The Execution of Montrose’ and ‘The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam’.²

Nan Kivell also claimed to remember a Catholic priest called Fulton, whom he said he met at Christ’s College, who interested him very much in ‘history,

---

¹ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* v. 3, 1903, p. 409.
² Rex Nan Kivell, no date, after 1976, ‘personal notes as requested by Mr Richard L.N. Greenaway’. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
geography and the voyages of all the early explorers'. This seems an unlikely story, especially as Nan Kivell did not go to Christ's College, nor, as an Anglican institution, would that school have encouraged Catholic priests.

While he was still a schoolboy, Reginald's literary interests were further stimulated by a friendship with an antiquarian book dealer, whom he identified as 'Sidney Smith'. Smith allowed the boy to mind his bookshop, introduced him to rare editions of Pacific voyages, and encouraged him in what was to become a lifelong obsession with illustrated books and bookbinding. Speaking to Hazel Berg in 1970 Nan Kivell remembered that 'Sidney Smith' had a bookshop in Christchurch, and 'used to let me spend hours reading there, and lent and gave me books to take home... Times came when he allowed me to keep shop, and so that was possibly the genesis of my going into picture dealing when I decided to stay in London at the end of the first war'.

The theme of books remains strong in the scant biographical evidence of Nan Kivell's adolescence. In 1915 Reginald Nankivell was employed as a bookbinder by A.C. Andrews, Christchurch. Andrews and Co. was a manufacturing stationer and bookbinder founded in 1891. Its proprietor, Arthur Andrews, 'was born in the Colonies and served his time at the trade in Christchurch'. By 1903 his firm occupied a premises of 4000 square feet in Cathedral Square and had the necessary machinery and plant for carrying out a large manufacturing trade in library binding, school stationery and account books. Andrews and Co. was an excellent place to learn the trade, as the material used in the business was 'largely imported direct from the best makers'. This is the first evidence of Nan Kivell's professional involvement in the book trade, to which he was intimately connected for the rest of his life.

A family tradition has it that Reginald's true identity was kept from him until he was well into his teens. Finally a cruel taunt from a sibling revealed to him the truth about his parentage. According to the story this was so shocking to the boy that he immediately signed up underage for the war in Europe. This is another of the many unreliable stories about Nan Kivell, but at its core is the suggestion that he was

---

2 Ibid.
3 Occupation given on Reginald Nankivell's military enlistment form, June 1916.
4 *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, v. 3, 1903.
5 See note 2, above.
unhappy in New Brighton and keen to escape. The suggestion is borne out by the fact that once embarked for Europe, he never returned.

Expatriate

For whatever reason, in June 1916 Reginald Nankivell, Bookbinder, joined C-Company, Canterbury Regiment, part of the 17th Reinforcements of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force [Figure 1]. He gave his next of kin as Mrs George H. Nankivell (mother), 25 Bligh Street, New Brighton. He had had some previous military training, having been No. 75 in the Senior Cadets. He enlisted with a relative, presumably a cousin, a Lawrence Nankivell, Builder, who gave his next of kin as Andrew Nankivell (father), Breezes Road, Bromley, Christchurch. The two were given consecutive serial numbers, but were assigned to different Companies. Reginald's Company left New Zealand on the Pakeha on 23 September 1916, Lawrence's two days later on the Devon.¹

After disembarking at Devonport on 18 November 1916, he was marched into the NZEF camp at Sling in Wiltshire, a part of England that remained close to his heart for the rest of his life. Although he later claimed to have been gassed at Messines,² he never fought at the front. Instead he contracted influenza in France while waiting to take part in a major assault on the town of Messines in which the Canterbury Regiment played an important and costly role. On 7 August 1917, the day of the assault in which many of his compatriates were obliterated, Reginald Nankivell was admitted to the New Zealand military hospital at Codford, Wiltshire, where his true age was discovered.³ When he was discharged three days later he was temporarily demobilised and allowed to attend classes at the Royal College of

---
¹ NZEF, Military History Sheet, Reginald Nankivell.
² Nan Kivell’s claim that he was gassed became a self-perpetuating myth. As recently as 1990 John Thompson stated that Nan Kivell was ‘gassed at the Somme and invalided out of the army’. John Thompson, ‘The Nan Kivell Legacy’ in Marion Minson, Encounter with Eden: New Zealand 1770-1870: Paintings & Drawings from the Rex Nan Kivell Collection National Library of Australia, Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library, 1990, pp. 7-11. A careful reading of the transcript of Nan Kivell’s interview with Hazel Berg in 1970 reveals two versions of the story given consecutively to the interviewer by Nan Kivell. In the first he was gassed at Messines, in the second, he was discovered to be ‘under age’ and removed from the front just in time to escape the gas attack which devastated his company. Rex Nan Kivell, unpublished transcript of interview with Hazel Berg, 1970. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
³ NZEF, Casualty Form - Active Service, Reginald Nankivell.
Science. His military record lists him as ‘sick’ for the rest of the war, but this did not prevent him getting into trouble [Figure 2]. Among the misdemeanors noted in his file are insolence, for which he was awarded 168 hours detention, and being absent without leave. Shortly before his final demobilisation on 13 May 1919 he was disciplined for stealing a warrant and using it to travel first class on a train trip from Codford to Londonderry, and when the journey was completed, masquerading as an officer and attempting to pass the warrant as genuine. For this final delinquency he was docked 28 days’ pay. A military will he made in October 1918, of which only the covering page survives, records the first instance of his new identity: it is signed both Rex de Charembac Nankivell and, with a flourish, Rex de C. Nan Kivell.

Nan Kivell’s whereabouts 1920-1923 are difficult to ascertain. His military record suggests that in 1923 he was still resident at Overton House, Codford, Wiltshire, which was his forwarding address when he was demobilised in 1919. This is the least well documented period of the collector’s career, but it was one in which he apparently made important friendships, and formed a special bond with the English county of Wiltshire which remained constant for the rest of his life. At some point during this period Nan Kivell made a crucial friendship with a woman who became his first patroness and financial backer, Fanny Louise Hulbert. It seems likely that Nan Kivell met Fanny Hulbert during his period of convalescence in Wiltshire, and probable that she offered him board and lodging. The relationship between Nan Kivell and Fanny Hulbert must have been very important to both. Nan Kivell later referred to Miss Hulbert as his ‘old godmother’ and ‘devoted friend’.

When she died in 1934, Miss Hulbert left her entire estate to her ‘dear adopted son’, Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell, comprising a house in Wiltshire and interests in the Redfern Gallery, valued for Probate at £2,069.16.0. Nan Kivell was buried with Miss Hulbert in the Hulbert family vault at West Lavington Churchyard, Devizes, in 1977. His own will provided for an inscription on the tomb to read ‘He did reap’. ‘This text is something only Miss Hulbert and I could appreciate’, his will states cryptically. A photograph in one of Nan Kivell’s albums shows a kindly-looking, rotund, middle-aged woman, seated together with a young, rather callow Nan Kivell,

---

1 Ibid.
2 The net value of the estate after estate duties had been paid was £1249.9.0. Last Will and Probate of Fanny Louise Hulbert, 1934
in deckchairs on a southern English beach [Figure 3]. That this person is possibly Miss Hulbert is suggested by the self-conscious, adolescent appearance of Nan Kivell, and the maternal expression of the woman.¹

Other photographs from Nan Kivell’s album provide few clues about his life in the early 1920s. The affectation of smart dressing, which he maintained all his life, seems from early in his career to have been one of his principal methods of ingratiating himself in polite society. One image shows him impressively kitted out in plus-fours, in a hallway whose wooden panelling is bedecked with a large number of closely hung framed images. This photograph strongly suggests the patronage of a wealthy person with an abiding interest in pictures. Another image shows Nan Kivell and another young man, possibly the cousin with whom he enlisted, dressed like Oxford undergraduates and looking rather brash and confident [Figure 4].

Two notebooks dated 1920 offer some insight into Nan Kivell’s efforts to educate himself during this period, possibly motivated by a desire to fit in with a more literary environment.² These small black books are filled with hundreds of quotations from various writers, mostly moralisms of one kind or another, mottos, aphorisms and emblematic phrases, all written out very neatly in black ink in Nan Kivell’s flowing, elegant handwriting. The writers are many and various, including Milton, Stevenson, Richter, Shakespeare, Longfellow, Carlyle, Emerson, Browning, Ruskin, Blake, H.G. Wells, Dante, Thackeray, Raleigh, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Wesley, Franklin, Plutarch, Swift, Hawthorn, William James, Jonson, to list only a few. The lines give the impression of having been collected almost as trophies, proofs of explorations into literature, that might be memorised and brought out at opportune moments in polite society. Nan Kivell was clearly a conscientious student of literature, though hardly an insightful one, as there are no comments of his own beside these meticulous copyings to suggest the exercise of anything more than rote learning of quotations. Nevertheless there is something rather disarming about these earnestly performed literary exercises which suggests the sort of open, Antipodean charm which undoubtedly helped the young collector to ingratiate himself into English country life in the early years of the jazz age. It is tempting to read some of these quotations as deliberately selected for the character he was inventing for himself as Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell:

¹ Nan Kivell album, MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² Rex Nan Kivell, MS4000, series 2, folder 10, National Library of Australia.
Marcus Aurelius: Everyman is worth just as much as the things are worth, about which he busies himself.

E.M. Barker: A lantern in the hand is worth a dozen stars, be a lantern then with all your might.

Ruskin: Perfect taste is the faculty of receiving the greatest possible pleasure from those material sources which are attractive to our moral nature in its purity and perfection; but why we receive pleasure from some forms and colours and not from others is no more to be asked or answered than why we like sugar and dislike wormwood.

Defoe: Great families we show, and Lords, whose parents were the Lord knows who.

After ‘abandoning his studies’ at the Royal College of Science,¹ Nan Kivell began a part-time job as Marshall to the High Court Judges. This required him to travel between London and the provincial towns to attend at sessions of the Court of Assizes. Though the precise dates of his involvement in this role are difficult to pin down, the likely range is 1920 to 1935. A Judge’s Marshall was a sort of non-professional clerk who accompanied the Judge into the court, and assisted him with various personal tasks between sessions. The position was an honorary one, and amounted in effect to that of a personal servant to the Judge, almost a valet. The duties were typically performed by young men for a specific Judge, who then extended his protection and patronage to the Marshall.² This was an environment in which Nan Kivell thrived, an atmosphere which appealed to his awe of the British establishment with its pomp and titles, and which encouraged his inclinations towards older, educated men who could act as patrons and mentors. He was ‘happy in his Judge’.³ Later he recounted an incident which typified his experiences in this role:

One amusing incident shows you human vanities. I had discovered that when we opened the Assizes at Salisbury, I could just make the time by leaving London in the early morning, if the train was on time. I chanced it, but the train was late & the Cathedral procession had started. I slipped in behind the Judge & in front of the Lord Lieutenant of the County who said, ‘What the Hell are you doing?’ I said “S’shush, Heaven please” He was so angry he knocked my top-

---

² Senior Master, Queen’s Bench Division, Royal Courts of Justice to Paul Grimshaw 15 November 1996. I am grateful to Paul Grimshaw for this information.
³ Ibid.
hat out of my hand & it bowled along the aisle. I chased after it & by the time I got back the Judge had convinced the Lord Lieutenant that my place definitely took precedence to his.¹

Although he never set down anything more than a fragment of his experiences in the English courts, he remembered something of the human dramas regularly enacted before him. Intriguingly, perhaps even tellingly, the one incident he did choose to write down involves the complicated genealogy of a Cornish family. Perhaps it stuck in his mind because it suggested some insight into his own heritage:

The Assize stories are certainly revealing. The love, hate, avarice, kindness, cunning, brutality is all there... & much of the worst of it comes from those with the faces of choirboys. What about a Cornish father having a daughter by his daughter & then a daughter by his granddaughter? The relationships of all concerned would keep a genealogical expert busy for a while.²

This then was the emerging persona of the collector. He was young, colonial, with an undistinguished war record and an even less distinguished pedigree. He was largely self-educated in bibliographic matters, but was already a collector of books and pictures, having resolved to assemble the materials of a pictorial history of the South Pacific while aboard the troop ship to Britain. He had few close emotional ties in his homeland, other than an abiding nostalgia. He was ambitious, charming and outward going, and he was careful to dress well. In spite of his lack of education, his engaging personality and eager interest in the arts helped win him influential friends among older men and women, whose patronage he responded to with warmth and gratitude. He was also hard-working, self-motivated and especially keen on gardening, which no doubt helped to ingratiate him into Wiltshire society. But he was also at pains to conceal the humble nature of his upbringing. He chose to do this by the affectation of a spurious French middle name suggestive of Continental breeding, and by the separation of his family name into two words which gave it a Franco-Norman, rather than Celtic, appearance. He lost no time in establishing an emotional relationship with an older woman which was neither sexual nor family-oriented, but which gave him a private allowance. And he acquired a part-time job as a servant to the Assize Court, which not only permitted him the freedom to indulge his increasingly sophisticated tastes in collecting, but also introduced him, by way of the judiciary whom he served, to the upper classes [Figure 5].

¹ Rex Nan Kivell, undated manuscript c.1976. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² Ibid.
Collecting and dealing

In 1924 Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell began a new collecting activity - unearthing buried treasure. He had formed a friendship with a Canon E.H. Goddard, who was a member of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society, and an old hand at excavation. In 1924 Nan Kivell began a series of excavations at Cold Kitchen Hill, Brixton Deverill, Wiltshire. This site had been mentioned in Sir Richard Colt Hoare's *Antient Wils, South*, but had remained unexplored until 1896, when Goddard undertook some slight excavations in a mound there. Nan Kivell carried out his own excavations to the south and west of the mound, evidently with advice from Goddard:

... I never excavated at the large mound at Cold Kitchen Hill, I ran my shallow trenches to the west and south of the mound. They were not real trenches because the earth on the top of the Cold Kitchen Hill ridge was only, in average, 18 inches deep. It was because of the places I selected to dig, made Canon Goddard jocularly to remark to me that I was a 'trinket hunter', and left the real hard work to men like himself.\(^1\)

Trinkets he certainly found, in large numbers. The site yielded objects from a pre-Roman settlement, including bronze and iron brooches, bangles, rings, beads, coins and pottery. The finds included several brooches identified as belonging to the La Tene I and La Tene II cultures. Nan Kivell published his finds in a meticulously documented article in the *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine* in 1927,\(^2\) identifying the site as late Celtic, of Romano-British and pre-Roman occupation, abandoned at about the end of the fourth century. The article takes the form of a detailed catalogue of over one hundred objects, each of which is painstakingly illustrated with a line drawing in three-quarter scale by the author. Although they are no more than simple illustrations of archaeological specimens the drawings are admirably clear and capture the inherent rhythms of the Celtic designs effectively. They demonstrate that in addition to being a collector of illustrations Nan Kivell could be an able illustrator himself when the need arose. He also refers to a detailed map and notes on the diggings which have 'been kept for reference', and are now preserved in the Devizes Museum.

The article is a highly disciplined exercise in the documenting of a collection, with a concentration on the description of the objects which goes well beyond 'trinket-hunting' and betrays the delight of the collector in its details. The descriptions

---

1. RNK to P.H. Robinson, Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 7 July 1975. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
are articulate and knowledgeable, demonstrating that Nan Kivell had acquired more than a passing familiarity with archaeological methodology, probably under the tutelage of Canon Goddard. Significantly he notes in his text that ‘all the objects found will eventually be placed in the Devizes Museum, to accompany those of Mr. Goddard’s excavations from this site, and others found and deposited there since’. Eventually, but not yet: Nan Kivell waited until 1930 before donating these finds and others he unearthed on subsequent digs to the Museum.\(^1\) He was awarded a life membership of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society for this, his first act of public generosity, though it is worth noting that today the owner of the land, rather than the archaeologist, would be acknowledged as the donor.\(^2\) In the meantime he could enjoy the pleasure of possessing his first major collection. He made a second excavation at Cold Kitchen Hill in 1925, again publishing descriptions and illustrations of the resulting finds in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*. A third article details finds he made at the same site in 1926, among which pre-Roman brooches are once more the most prominent items.\(^3\)

After 1926 Nan Kivell’s digging activities petered out, overtaken by his busy responsibilities at the Redfern Gallery. However he continued to regard his archaeological work as a major personal achievement. The recognition he gained from the Wiltshire Historical and Archaeological Society was an inspiration to further achievements. It is likely that by the mid-1930s his imagination had become fixed on an ideal trade in which he would exchange beautiful objects for honours and titles to add to his already elaborate name. As he became more successful in the art business, and his personal collections grew, Nan Kivell’s preoccupation with exchanging collections for public accolade evolved into a quest which he was to pursue almost to the end of his life: Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell desired a knighthood. He had two main motivations for his obsession with honours. The first was personal, and was driven by his insecurity about his own birth. The second was professional. As a dealer in contemporary art he was required to act as the middleman between the earnest young artists whose work he represented, and the relatively small number of buyers who were prepared to pay for work by unknowns during some of the most difficult

\(^1\) *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 45 1932, p. 278.
\(^2\) Paul Robinson to Oliver Stead, 12 April 1995.
years for art sales in the twentieth century. His business partners, and many of his clients, were well educated, wealthy and well born, and his acute anxiety about his own failings in all these social attributes led him to make up spurious autobiographical details to bolster his credibility. His salesmanship depended on the affectation of wealth and breeding, and he set himself to acquiring the appropriate trappings with great single-mindedness. Apart from inventing aristocratic-sounding elaborations of his name, and telling numerous lies about his heritage, Nan Kivell’s main vehicle for social elevation was collecting. Through collecting he began to weave around himself the persona of the gentleman connoisseur.

Little trace of the tracks by which Nan Kivell reached the Redfern Gallery is to be found among his papers, but we do know that he joined the gallery, possibly as a junior partner, in 1925.¹ The senior partners were wealthy City businessmen A. Knyvett Lee and A. Maxtone Graham. They had established the gallery in 1923 as a non-profit affair intended to help struggling young contemporary artists by providing a West End exhibition space and sales. Nan Kivell at first divided his time between his duties on the Assize Circuit and working in the gallery. Lee and Graham were well connected. The Redfern enjoyed an almost continuous write-up of its exhibition programme in *The Studio* from its inception, and this guaranteed a high profile for exhibitors. The gallery was well patronised and attracted a clientele made up of Bloomsbury intellectuals and members of the aristocracy with a sympathy for the avant-garde.

From his earliest association with the gallery Nan Kivell was required to assume the role of a Bond Street dealer. He had had little to prepare him for this other than a natural aptitude for the business, and a knowledge of literature acquired, as it were, in the bush, while working with books as a bookshop assistant and bookbinder. He was not well educated, especially by the standards of his clients. No doubt Miss Hulbert coached him well in the skills of Wiltshire etiquette, while in his work as a court official he learned the intricate workings of British class and privilege. Armed with these rather meagre credentials Nan Kivell began his lifelong association with the British art world and its financial backers. He proved himself an able dealer, purchasing many works of modern Continental and British art between the wars which appreciated enormously after 1945, among them several widely acknowledged

masterpieces. While he collected modern paintings and assembled one of the two greatest collections of twentieth-century British prints of his era, it was not these collections with which he sought to impress people in positions of authority. Rather it was the collection he made of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century images of the Pacific which became his principal vehicle for self-aggrandisement.

Nan Kivell’s choice of material for his personal collection was directly related to his compromised sense of identity. Each of the items in his ‘Australasian Collection’ can be seen as an attempt to answer the question ‘where do I come from’? Although this was in the first instance a personal quest, as a dealer Nan Kivell shrewdly recognised that his material would be of enormous interest to the populations of Australia and New Zealand. He always acknowledged his identity as a New Zealander, never, in his many guises, attempting to pass himself off as an Englishman. By the end of the Second World War Nan Kivell’s ‘Australasian’ collection had grown to encompass ‘about 200 pictures, several volumes of sketches and drawings, something under a thousand volumes, and a number of manuscripts’. He was now in a position to bargain for its disposal, in all probability with an honour already in mind.

Nan Kivell’s initial approach to the Australian authorities was made in 1946, and the first 1259 works in the collection were dispatched as a loan to the Commonwealth National Library in 1948. Discussions with the library over the eventual disposal of the collection followed, and in 1952 the suggestion that the collection might be exchanged for a knighthood entered the negotiations. The suggestion appears to have been introduced to authorities in both Australia and New Zealand by Nan Kivell himself, although he tried to cover this up. Unfortunately the plan backfired, and Nan Kivell did not achieve his aim of obtaining a knighthood in exchange for the collection from either Australia or New Zealand, although the possibility was seriously considered by Australia. Nan Kivell’s revenge on New Zealand for its lack of interest was bitter and complete. He ruled out any further possibility of any part of his collection finding a permanent home in New Zealand. He complained bitterly of the narrow-mindedness and pomposity of New Zealand.

3 Ibid.
government bureaucrats, and in the end he left nothing to New Zealand in his will. He continued to negotiate the disposal of his collection with Australia, and in 1959 finally signed a deal which made the collection over to the Commonwealth of Australia for £70,000 to be paid in two equal instalments, the first immediately, the second in 1966.

Following the sale of the collection to Australia Nan Kivell was enjoying a high point of fame and fortune in his career as a dealer and patron of contemporary art in London, but he still had not earned the official honour he craved. It was at this point in his life that he began to publish spurious autobiographical details which gave the impression of a career distinguished by official recognition. Chief among these autobiographical falsehoods was the award of an honour by Denmark. He claimed that in 1935 King Christian X of Denmark had awarded him a Danish honour, the Order of the Dannebrog, in recognition of his services to archaeology. He also elevated his rank during the First World War from Private to Captain. These deceptions have a desperate quality about them, suggesting the acute hunger and impatience of the collector for some sort of redeeming acceptance by an establishment he felt himself excluded from by the facts of his birth and upbringing. His impatience seems all the more pathetic in hindsight, as Nan Kivell was already close to achieving his goal of recognition when he formulated these phoney credentials. In 1966, on receiving the second and final payment for his collection from Australia, he sent a second collection of Pacific material, less spectacular but still of enormous worth, out to Canberra as an outright gift to the National Library. For this grand gesture he was rewarded, at the age of 68, with his first genuine honour, a C.M.G. on the recommendation of the Australian Government. But by then it was too late for him to abandon the deception about the Danish honour, now widely reported by journalists, and he remained faithful to the deception until his death.

Nan Kivell’s autobiographical falsehoods cast doubt on all his claims, and undermine the credibility of the snippets of memoir he left behind among his papers. But some of his claims are born out by newspaper clippings, such as the incident he loved to retell about losing a car, a chauffeur and six paintings by Rouault under German bombardment while escaping from Paris during the evacuation of France, where he had been on a buying trip.¹ Many of the more fabulous details of his life, which one might expect to be spurious on the basis of his many lies, turn out on

---

¹ *Evening Standard* 22 June 1940.
further investigation to be verifiable. Nan Kivell could indeed be exasperatingly
difficult. He was frequently cranky, unpredictable, unscrupulous and cunning, as
many chronic collectors are. But he also had a sense of humour, and he loved to tease
fellow collectors, especially if they were in positions of influence. Throughout his
career as a collector and a dealer Nan Kivell had the ability to acquire, almost as if by
sleight of hand, objects with which he could mesmerize, tantalize and frustrate people
in power. He used this ability ruthlessly for his ultimate end, the acquisition of a
social status denied him at birth. In the end he was successful. When he was finally to
receive the long-awaited knighthood in 1976, awarded on the recommendation of the
Australian Government for ‘services to the arts’, he travelled to London from his
home in Tangier, Morocco. As he knelt before the Queen she remarked, ‘What a long
journey you have made’.¹ When he died the following year he left her a number of
choice items in his will.

¹ Address by Miss Audrey Russell, M.V.O., F.R.S.A. at the Memorial Service for Sir Rex Nan Kivell,
Wednesday 26 October 1977 in the Crypt Chapel of St Paul’s Cathedral, London.
Chapter Two
The Collector

Rex Nan Kivell first imagined his collection as a pictorial history of the Pacific on the voyage to England aboard the troop ship *Pakeha* in 1916. By his own account the collection began while Nan Kivell was convalescing in London after falling ill in France, with the acquisition of a badly gashed oil painting by Augustus Earle at the Caledonian Market in Islington, ‘a large green space with everything from Georgian silver to worn-out boots strewn on the cobbles’.¹ We can only guess at the order of acquisitions that followed the Earle painting from this point on, as there are no suggestions among Nan Kivell’s reminiscences of the shape of the collection in its early state, no recollection of a moment other than this one when the collection passed from being a hobby to a major endeavour. It seems likely that during the early phase of his collecting, acquiring pictures of the Pacific was essentially a nostalgic enterprise for Nan Kivell. Perhaps the activity helped him to overcome homesickness. London was the centre of the specialised market for such material, and the booksellers Francis Edwards and Maggs Brothers were the most well-informed and best-supplied dealers. With his already well-developed knowledge of the antiquarian book trade, Nan Kivell would not have taken long to find these eminent establishments in the West End: Francis Edwards at 83 High St, Marylebone, and Maggs Brothers in Conduit St, New Bond Street, not far from the Redfern Gallery’s first premises in 1923. Both booksellers advertised widely, regularly noting in their advertisements specific items of Pacific interest which would already have been familiar to the young collector.

From the earliest manifestations of his collecting mania Rex Nan Kivell attempted to cast himself in the role of the bibliophile and connoisseur. Of all the attributes he sought to complete this persona perhaps the most important was the appearance of learning. Nan Kivell’s education had been rudimentary, but he was at least literate, and aware of various branches of literature. This awareness was not acquired in England, but in Christchurch, New Zealand, before the First World War. Christchurch society was inherently snobbish, placing a high value on quality education. Although the male children of wealthy Cantabrians were likely to be

¹ RNK to Maie Casey, undated MS draft letter, [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
educated at the exclusive Christ’s College, or privately, the standard of education available to the children of the working population to which Nan Kivell belonged was by no means poor. Moreover the gap between classes was not as wide as it was in Britain, and social mobility was comparatively easier in the colony. In addition to his schoolwork, the young Reginald Nankivell had been allowed private piano lessons, which hardly suggests a home atmosphere of unadulterated proletarian sentiment. He showed his appreciation not only by gaining a fair mastery of the instrument, but by lavishing his newly-acquired bookbinding skills on his sheet music, several volumes of which, in neat black bindings, remain in the family. It appears that within the Nankivell family there existed a healthy respect for learning and literacy, if not the means to acquire a first-class education. Reginald’s early contact with the book trade gave him an alternative means of supplementing the basics which he had from home and from the New Brighton School.

There was (and still is) a sort of arcane cultishness about books and so-called ‘bookmen’ among book collectors, dealers, and the associated trades of printing and binding in provincial New Zealand.¹ As a trainee bookbinder Nan Kivell would have come into contact with this cult, which developed among people in the bookselling trade as a sort of alternative to academic distinction. Moreover, since many academics were as keen on the cult as members of the humbler book-related occupations, initiates were drawn together from a variety of social and educational backgrounds, and frequently met in an atmosphere of camaraderie united by a common interest. The arcana of rare and collectible literature, fine printing, illustration and binding could furnish a very real alternative to classical academic training for persons with a natural appetite for literature. Such exposure to the world of books provided, if not scholarship, at least something in the way of connoisseurship to those receptive enough to take advantage of the materials.

Rex Nan Kivell was especially drawn to illustrated books, and of these the accounts of maritime travels in the Pacific were the most appealing, with their beautiful engravings and aquatints full of the romance of exploration and discovery. His own seaside upbringing and awareness of the various odysseys of his forebears made Pacific voyages especially vivid in his imagination. Growing up in Bligh Street,

New Brighton, situated on a narrow sandspit, with the great tidal expanse of the Heathcote Estuary at one end of the street and the expanse of the Pacific Ocean at the other, his grandfather a fisherman and his brothers boatbuilders, Nan Kivell was steeped in maritime lore. He had an instant affinity with the literature of Pacific exploration, and indeed the narrative continued all around him. Perhaps too the theme of escape and wandering implicit in all travel literature had a special appeal to the potential expatriate in Nan Kivell.

Nan Kivell identified a legendary Christchurch bookseller called Smith as the crucial figure in his induction into this specialised world of book collecting. Although Smith remains a mysterious figure, his memory has been kept alive not only by the Christchurch antiquarian bookshop which still bears his name, but by historians of the book trade in New Zealand, and through the reminiscences of collectors, including Rex Nan Kivell. According to Pat Lawlor,

this ancient Smith goes so far back into the first growth of second-hand bookselling in this country that there may be nobody alive today to give the story, except maybe my brother Tom in Sydney. He would probably tell you that this ancient precursor of the Smith’s [bookshop] pre-dated Maui who, when he dropped his famous fish-hook brought to light with Smith’s assistance not only one of our Islands, but the original edition of the Ten Commandments. When Smith died some time before the First World War, his business was carried on by his daughter.¹

A.D. Smith (not Sidney Smith as in Nan Kivell’s recollection) was ‘an independent man who made his price and stuck to it. There was no haggling with him. Very impulsive, he went to his bank one morning and passing the New Zealand Shipping Company on his way home, made up his mind to go to England. He sailed the same night’, and was not seen again in Christchurch for six months.²

Grey, Hocken and Turnbull

Through Smith’s Bookshop Nan Kivell would have become aware early on in his career of three important figures in the collecting of books about New Zealand and the Pacific. The first of these is Sir George Grey, whose collections of books, pictures, Maori legends, animals and many other categories of things dominate the history of

¹ Lawlor, 1954, p. 229.
collecting in nineteenth-century New Zealand. The second figure in this constellation of New Zealand collectors is Thomas Moreland Hocken, whose collection forms the nucleus of the Hocken Library at the University of Otago in Dunedin. The third figure is Alexander Turnbull, who bequeathed his substantial collection of books and pictures to New Zealand on his death to form the Alexander Turnbull Library. While these three collectors did not confine themselves to New Zealand and Pacific material, they were early collectors in the field, and their collecting in this area in many ways forms the prototype for Nan Kivell’s own collecting.

McCormick has observed that Grey, Hocken and Turnbull represent three generations in the collecting of New Zealand material. Turnbull was the latest of the three and the first to be born in New Zealand. Nan Kivell’s position corresponds to the fourth generation in such a chronology, and his own collecting was influenced by the collections of these predecessors. He was born in the year that Grey died, and commenced his trade as a bookbinder while Turnbull was still actively collecting. All three of these earlier collectors were assiduous bibliographers and cataloguers of their collections, but only Hocken published a full bibliography based on his collection. This was his Bibliography of the Literature relating to New Zealand. We can be reasonably certain that Nan Kivell became familiar with this tome, published in 1909, almost as soon as he became involved with the antiquarian book trade in Christchurch, because it was the most comprehensive bibliographic reference tool for books on New Zealand available in published form at that date. It remained one of Nan Kivell’s two major bibliographic references during the building up of his own collection, the other being J.A. Ferguson’s Bibliography of Australia, 1941. The catalogues which Nan Kivell produced at intervals of his own collection are meticulously cross-referenced to Hocken’s and Ferguson’s numbering sequences. A special feature of Hocken’s Bibliography, which would have been of particular interest to Nan Kivell, was ‘the giving of a full list of the contents and illustrations of the rarer and least known works, such as Thevenot, de Brosses, Callander, Dalrymple, the early French voyagers, Webber, Angas, and others’. Hocken included this feature

---

2 For example, I have referred to a catalogue of the first 259 works consigned to Canberra, in the Auckland War Memorial Museum Library collection, which is a carbon copy duplicate of one sent to Canberra. Many such catalogues were made and updated by Nan Kivell as the collection was progressively transferred.
‘after much consideration’, with the idea that ‘the contents of these rare volumes being thus, as it were, focussed might prove of great assistance to the student engaged in a special line of research’. Another interesting feature of the Bibliography was the extent to which, by Hocken’s own admission, ‘the author has strayed from the ordinary track of a bibliography. He has introduced many little sidelights, biographical references, dates, and other special points, and an attempt has been made to run throughout a thread of historical interest’. This information, scattered liberally throughout the Bibliography, is the very model of the anecdotal, accidental discovery of Pacific history that characterises Rex Nan Kivell’s own excursions into the subject.

Poring over lists and catalogue entries is an activity fundamental to book collecting, and this is undoubtedly what Rex Nan Kivell learned to do at Smith’s Bookshop. It became a lifelong habit, and formed the essence of his professional and private world. Nan Kivell’s papers in Canberra are scattered through with sales catalogues listing books and pictures, sometimes annotated, but more often with the interesting items simply marked with crosses. His own efforts at cataloguing are painstaking but characteristically idiosyncratic and inconsistent, his frequent eccentricities revealing the lack of academic training which sets him apart from Grey and Hocken. Nan Kivell was all too aware of this shortcoming, which became something of a nightmare for him when he was required to compile a detailed list of the Pacific collection as part of its transfer to Canberra. If, as it seems, sentimental nostalgia rather than pure historiography was the prime motivating factor in Nan Kivell’s early collecting, what part did nostalgia play in the collecting habits of Grey, Hocken and Turnbull, and how closely did Nan Kivell echo their collecting in constructing his own collection, which so neatly complements theirs?

Nostalgia, in so far as it played a role in motivating Grey to collect, was chiefly nostalgia for the Europe he left behind. Grey saw himself as an agent of civilization, albeit styled along British, militaristic and imperial lines. He imported huge quantities of books into New Zealand, bought mainly sight unseen from catalogues produced by London dealers, especially Bernard Quaritch. Grey’s acquisitions included medieval manuscripts, incunabula, rare printed editions and ephemera, and represent an attempt to recreate, in a wholesale fashion, the literary

---

heritage of Europe in the new Pacific colony. He also collected pictures and many other collectible items for his private library, which he subsequently gifted to the city of Auckland. But there was a special nostalgia which applied to New Zealand in Grey's collecting. This was the collecting of material about the early administrative history of the colony, and above all the history of the Maori people whose memory he sought to preserve. This is not the place to go into an analysis of Grey’s complex and conflicting sentiments about Maori. But it is interesting for the purpose of this study to question the role that notions of identity played in Grey’s collecting of Maori material, as the question of identity was central to Rex Nan Kivell’s collecting bent. There are many similarities between the way each collector went about gathering materials with which a picture of colonial identity could be assembled. To McCormick, the ‘spectacular nature’ of ‘Grey’s weightier benefactions - the mediaeval rarities, the folios, the first editions’, should not blind us to the importance of his contributions to a native and indigenous scholarship: the books and pamphlets and newspapers; the documents he salvaged, perhaps improperly, from official files; the irreplaceable Polynesian manuscripts; the communications from a long line of local dignitaries...¹

The theme of generous public gifts is an important element in the stories of these early collectors. Grey was always generous with his collections, sending quantities of natural and ethnographic specimens back to London at various intervals throughout his long career as a colonial governor. In 1861, before leaving the governorship of the Cape Colony to return to New Zealand, Grey made a spectacular gift of his entire collection of books and manuscripts to the Cape Town Public Library. Included among the collection were 415 books and manuscripts in 78 African languages, 40 in West Australian Aboriginal dialects, 42 on Fiji, and 524 volumes of Maori manuscript and archive material.² In addition there were 114 mediaeval manuscripts. Almost a third of the latter had been bought between 1858 and 1859 from three of Quaritch’s catalogues.³ Grey began to collect again immediately, and in 1882 offered the books and pictures of this second collection to the people of Auckland as a donation. Besides the material which Grey had patiently gathered himself for the past twenty years, this gift included a large collection recently bequeathed to Grey by his friend and fellow-collector Sir Everard Home. Auckland

¹ McCormick, 1961, p. 18.
received, among many other things, the first Vulgate Bible of 1462, a Ximines Bible, numerous Polynesian manuscripts, the Book of Mormon in secret hieroglyphics, rare Coptic and Egyptian manuscripts, books on the Indian languages of America, the Protestant League’s secret treaty between England and the Low Countries, as well as many incunable books and 88 medieval manuscripts.1 Turning his attention temporarily from politics, Grey helped to campaign for a new building to house the Auckland Free Library which had received his magnificent donation. The actual transfer of the collection took some years, and by the end of 1886 some of the material at Grey’s residence at Kawai had still to be packed into cases for transport to Auckland.2 The new library was formally opened on 26 March 1887. Following in the footsteps of his extravagant former friend, patient and rival, the more modest but no less generous Dr Hocken gave his Library to the people of New Zealand on 31 March 1910. Turnbull’s bequest came to the nation in 1918.

An affectation of noblesse oblige similar to Grey’s, coupled with romantic nostalgia for times past, played a vital role in Alexander Turnbull’s collecting. Turnbull was a New Zealander by birth, but spent much of his youth in England before returning to the colony in 1892 to take over the role of managing the family mercantile business. Unlike the Nankivells of New Brighton, the Turnbull family, of Scottish heritage, occupied the upper echelon of Wellington society. By colonial standards the Turnbuls were extremely wealthy, and Alexander used this advantage to become a collector on a vast scale. Already a voracious collector of literary materials before he arrived back in Wellington, Turnbull began systematically to amass the beginnings of a national collection. The enterprise began to crystallise in his mind when he was twenty-five. He wrote to the dealer Dulan and Co. in 1893 that ‘anything whatever’ published in Europe ‘relating to this Colony, on its history, flora, fauna, geology & inhabitants, will be fish for my net, from as early a date as possible until now’. He also asked agents in New York to procure ‘any thing concerning New Zealand printed in America’.3

Like Grey, Turnbull was interested in the colonial and pre-colonial heritage of New Zealand, but he was much more exclusive in pursuing this interest than his

---

2 McCormick, 1961, p. 15.
illustrious predecessor. He was not completely given over to collecting the materials of his colony’s history however, and over the course of a lifetime built a virtually unrivalled collection of editions of Milton. Turnbull too was motivated by more than selfish intentions in his desire to possess. He was so conscious of Grey’s example that he considered having a copy made of the Governor’s Cape Town collection catalogue, ‘numbered harmoniously’ with the Governor’s system. He felt that such a catalogue would be useful for students of Maori folklore and mythology, as Grey’s collection contained much information on these subjects that was virtually inaccessible to New Zealanders.

Grey, Hocken and Turnbull shared a common altruism in their desire to make the materials of scholarly self-awareness available to the emerging nation. Hocken competed actively with Grey and later with Turnbull, but though a spirit of friendly (and sometimes not-so-friendly) rivalry prevailed between them, at the end of their collecting careers all three were firmly committed to the idea of donating their lifetime efforts to the New Zealand public. Though they could be possessive, acquisitive and covetous while actively collecting, the ultimate destination of their collections was public ownership, although the individual collections remained in different cities.

Taking Nan Kivell as the fourth generation in a succession of great New Zealand collectors, we can trace a major social transition in the activity of individual collecting by New Zealanders over a period of less than one hundred years. Grey’s collecting represents the classically-inspired activity of an imperial gentleman scholar. Manifest in the collecting of Hocken and Turnbull are the earnest bibliographic exercises of well-educated middle-class amateurs. Nan Kivell’s collecting on the other hand represents an odd mixture of affectation and self-acquired taste. Nan Kivell was not a gentleman by birth, but he aspired to become one, and his collection was an important marker of status in realising that aspiration. Another significant factor that sets Nan Kivell apart from Grey, Hocken, and Turnbull is that as a professional art dealer, the saleroom was as much the source of his income as it was of his private entertainment.

Evidence that Nan Kivell was consciously styling his collection to complement those of his predecessors can be seen in his acquisition of early Maori

\[^1\] Ibid.
printed material in the 1940s. Grey’s collections held at Auckland and Cape Town are strong in Maori manuscript and printed material dating from the early colonial period, and Alexander Turnbull also collected in this field. After 1945, when the Pacific collection was mature enough for him to begin to consider its disposal, Nan Kivell began to acquire Maori printed ephemera and it is probable that he was at this time deliberately comparing his own collection to Grey’s and Turnbull’s, and attempting to strengthen his holdings of New Zealand material in areas where he perceived a weakness. He had been told about a dealer, W.H. Hill, of Taupo, by the collector Ken Webster in 1948, and wrote immediately inquiring about interesting items. ‘I would be interested also to hear about the photos of Maori chiefs etc. My particular interest, however, is early books printed in Maori or English’.¹ Hill forwarded catalogues, and Nan Kivell immediately began to purchase:

From your new list could I please have the list given overleaf, they all sound delightful items. Did I tell you I have morocca and half-morocca cases made for all my rare and the delicate items, and when I eventually have them all back in New Zealand you must come and see them. I am sure you will appreciate how I treasure them...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Report present State of Islands o’ N.Z. 1838</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pukapuka Waki 1840</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Te Tokomakatanga</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wakapapa Ara 1847</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>He Pukapuka Wakaako Mangunga 1838</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ratari. lessons 1-12 (11 not known?)</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Letter of Lord Goderich and Address. to Chiefs of N.Z. Sydney 1833.</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southern Cross Ack. 1847</td>
<td>1.17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“ “ “ 1848</td>
<td>1.17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>N.Z. Spectator 1850</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ko te Whakapono</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ekoruha Paihia 1840</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

£58.1.6

Balance owing on last cheque
11.5.9

£69.7.3

¹ RNK to W.H. Hill, October 13 1948. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
P.S. ....You will never weary me of reading your letters giving the details of early publications in your collection. The very titles set one in an excitement.¹

The following year, while ordering a set of 17 complete copies of the *Maori Messenger* and a number of single sheets for £30, he remarked to Hill that ‘when I see my collection growing and each item enclosed in its individual case in the bookcase, I am more pleased than any child could be with a new toy, they are a real joy’.²

**The Nan Kivell Collection**

Although Nan Kivell’s collecting began with an interest in books and ephemera, he quickly developed a special interest in paintings of colonial subjects. In this too the earlier triumvirate of New Zealand collectors preceded him. Grey, Hocken and Turnbull all collected paintings. Of the three Grey was by far the most interested in the aesthetics of painting, and collected European Old Masters which complemented his other collections of European culture. Hocken and Turnbull on the other hand tended to collect the sort of images which had interest as documentary evidence of the process of colonisation in New Zealand, but would not have been considered fine art by the aesthetic standards of the day. Such images included watercolour, pencil and ink sketches of landscape, flora, fauna and native inhabitants made by colonial soldiers, sailors, surveyors and other practical draughtsmen, as well as the more refined production of the many middle-class amateurs, men and women, who practised drawing in the colonies for amusement and social accomplishment. This area of interest was still comparatively neglected when Nan Kivell began to collect, and it became his forte. But his collecting was never completely confined to illustrative material, and he continued to collect books and ephemera as avidly as paintings and prints. He was consciously attempting to form a comprehensive study resource of early Pacific material, which would represent the early history of the region in as many pictorial and printed media as he could find to supply it.

The practical aspects of Nan Kivell’s collecting habits make their first appearance in his binding of the volumes of sheet music he learned as a young piano pupil in New Brighton. These he bound meticulously in soft black covers, using the skills he acquired at his job at A.C. Andrews Ltd. Bookbinding was the early

---

¹ RNK to W.H. Hill, December 17 1948. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² RNK to W.H. Hill, June 12 1949. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
expression of the physical orderliness, indeed, fastidiousness, with which he was to marshal his numerous acquisitions. The activity lead naturally into the related skills of framing and mounting which he later acquired as a picture dealer in London, and which continued to delight him for the rest of his life. It was at this practical junction between the material and the imaginary that Nan Kivell found his most profound satisfaction. His curatorial impulse, if it can be so described, was more physical than intellectual. Having discovered an image or book that appealed to his imagination, his first inclination was to covet and cosset it lovingly in bindings, rather than to delve into the intellectual activities of identifying, classifying, cataloguing and systematising the specimen. ‘Pamphlets are my love’ he confessed.\(^1\)

these fragile, self-effacing, often badly printed documentations or protestations; statistical; often most informative humanly; achievements made exciting, but all so wanting protective covering. I very happily make strong linen envelope cases, or drop-over boxes and so now their chances of survival equal the best of calf-bound volumes.

Perhaps there is something in the phrase ‘waning protective covering’ that betrays Nan Kivell’s own need for legitimacy. His love of fine morocco bindings never left him, and this association partly explains his decision to move to Tangier on his retirement from managing the Redfern Gallery. He took great pleasure in his bookshelves with their heavy volumes of prints and rare books, immaculately bound in calf and morocco, and had a number of portraits of himself taken in front of them. In this respect his collecting reflected the renaissance tracitio of the gentleman’s library and cabinet, satisfying his innately snobbish desire to emulate the leisureed classes whose acceptance he craved. But in the scale and perspicacity of his collecting Nan Kivell surpassed his own social aspirations. In the late 1930s and 1940s, having amassed a reasonable fortune and a formidable knowledge of and insight into art media through his trade in fine art, he began to collect not so much like a gentleman amateur as a fully fledged institutional library.

While he claimed to have thought of the idea of a Pacific historical collection as early as 1916, Nan Kivell may have become aware of a significant model for his own collection in 1925. This was the collection of A.G.H. Macpherson, the son of a well-known Indian judge and for many years a steward of the Royal Calcutta Yacht Club. The Macpherson collection consisted mainly of maritime prints, and represented, according to The Studio writer Herbert B. Grimsditch, ‘the only attempt

\(^1\) RNK to Maie Casey, undated MS draft letter [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
that has been made to form a complete pictorial record of the sea history of the Anglo-
Saxon race’. The total number of prints exceeded 9,000, of which 2,300 recorded
naval actions. This was ‘more than three times the number in the well-known Cust
Collection’. Also included in the Macpherson collection were early atlases and sea-
charts. The writer noted the paucity of maritime material in British national
collections, and felt that the proper place for the Macpherson Collection was in a
national museum. The collection was ‘not only unique, but of immense importance’
because it could never be duplicated ‘owing to the increased demand for sea prints’.
As the Studio article was published in the year that Nan Kivell commenced his
activities as an art dealer, it is quite possible that he read this article, and consciously
modeled his own collection on Macpherson’s.

The sequence of Nan Kivell correspondence held at Canberra begins at a high
point in his collecting career, with references to his acquisition in 1938 of a superb
collection of watercolour drawings by Augustus Earle. These drawing were made on
Earle’s voyage around the world in 1826/27. As Jocelyn Hackforth-Jones has pointed
out, Earle was ‘probably the first professionally trained freelance travel artist to tour
the world.’ The drawings were made as part of a documentary travelogue Earle
compiled to record his adventures on the tour, which also included written journals.
Material recorded on the spot at many locations he later published as illustrated
books, which, by the time Nan Kivell began to collect, were well known to dealers
and bibliographers. Earle’s raw material was as close as one could hope to get to the
expression of early European reactions to the Pacific. Earle’s keen eye for the detail of
social interaction and his enthusiasm for the romantic aspects of seafaring and exotica
were channelled by the artist into making images that would capture and relay these
aspects of his material to the book-buying public in London. But the original drawings
made for publication include vastly more in range, detail, accuracy and immediacy
than the prints that were made from them. In a sense then the Earle album represents a
sort of lodestone in travel art collecting. The acquisition was a major coup for the
collector. The album of Earle drawings had changed hands at Sotheby’s for £1800 in
1926, attracting considerable interest. Nan Kivell’s acquisition of the Earle album

---

from the dealer Walter Spencer, 'at an enhanced price', signalled his coming of age as a major collector of Pacific travel art.¹

The Earle album was a most exceptional acquisition by any standards. Earle was an unusual artist for his time in that his career was essentially self-directed, and his choices as to where and how he worked were comparatively unconstrained by social convention. Augustus Earl was the son of an American portraitist, James Earl, who had fled to England to join other refugee Tories, but who died while on business in America when the boy was three. Augustus was a precocious student of painting and exhibited at the Royal Academy from the age of thirteen. He later added an 'e' to his surname. As he grew older he developed into a compulsive traveller, and his energetic, gregarious nature, combined with his accomplishment in both illustration and portraiture, helped him to pick up artistic commissions wherever he stopped on his travels. He tended to stay in one place long enough to make a mark in the polite social life of the communities that hosted him, but moved restlessly on to fresh adventures when the impulse to roam overtook him. This roaming impulse took him first to the Mediterranean on a gunboat commanded by his half-brother Captain Smyth, then to the United States and South America. Earle then spent several years in Rio de Janeiro where he produced a number of detailed watercolours depicting the local scenery and social life. These works reveal his developing ability to construct complex narrative depictions of interactions between different social classes, which elevate his sketches far above the norm for social documentary in colonial watercolour painting of the era. Examples of such exercises in social commentary include *Negro Fandango Scene, Campo St. Ana nr. Rio* (1821-4) (NK12/98) [Figure 6], *Games at Rio de Janeiro, during the Carnival* (1821-4) (NK12/99), and *Punishing Negroes at Catubouco [Calobouco], Rio de Janeiro* (1821-4) (NK12/100).

On the way to Cape Town in 1824, Earle was accidently marooned at Tristan da Cunha for 9 months. His images of the lonely existence he shared here with six others at the tiny British outpost on the island are among the most memorable in his album. In these works Earle captures an essential element of the Romantic

¹ A full provenance for the 161 works on paper by Augustus Earle is given in G.H. Chandler, 'Preface' in J. Hackforth-Jones, *Augustus Earle Travel Artist*, London: Scolar Press, 1980, p. v. The works were originally in the possession of Admiral William Henry Smyth, the artist's half-brother. They passed to the admiral's grandson Herbert Warrington Smyth on whose behalf they were auctioned at Sotheby and Co in London in May 1926, 'mounted in an old folio scrapbook 19in by 13in', to the dealer Walter Spencer. Nan Kivell acquired the works from Spencer in 1938.
imaginative response to nature, made more poignant by the artist’s realisation that pursuit of the sublime and exotic brought with it an awful price of extreme loneliness and isolation. This realisation is most apparent in watercolours such as the well-known Solitude, - Tristan D’Acunha, - Watching the horizon (1824) (NK12/3). He was eventually rescued by a vessel heading for Australia, and landed at Hobart in January 1825. In May of that year he established himself as an artist in Sydney, earning commissions to paint society portraits. While resident in Sydney he undertook many expeditions into the interior, recording his impressions in watercolours which are included among the works in the album acquired by Nan Kivell. Some of these were later worked up into finished oil paintings, for example the *A bivouac of travellers in Australia in a cabbage-tree forest, day break* (c. 1838) (NK14) [Figure 7], separately acquired by Nan Kivell. He also made many watercolour portraits of Aboriginal people, which are generally less stilted and more analytical in a documentary sense than his portraits of New South Wales dignitaries. Some of these are discussed in Chapter 9 of this study. Images such as *Desmond, a New South Wales Chief* (c.1825-7) (NK12/61) [Figure 50] are unusual in that they are relatively free of Eurocentric prejudice, and reveal the interest and compassion with which Earle regarded indigenous peoples. This theme is further developed in Earle’s watercolours of the extended visit he made to the Bay of Islands in New Zealand in the summer of 1826/27. His intimate record of Maori life and customs reveals the close quarters from which he was able to observe them. The welcome he received from local Maori groups was matched by the antagonism which he experienced from the resident missionaries, who objected to his cohabitation with a Maori woman, and his frequent recourse to liquor. Earle’s willingness to move outside the comfort of European convention in order to make a careful record of personal observations, both of fledgling European colonies and of the indigenous societies that hosted them, makes his work particularly engaging to the modern viewer.

Following his return from the Bay of Islands Earle departed again in October 1828 intending to sail to India, and becoming ‘the first freelance artist to paint in the South Pacific’. On the way he recorded scenes in the Caroline Islands, Guam, Manilla, Singapore, the Straits of Malacca, ending his journey at Madras where he remained for a short time until ill health forced him to return to England. *En route* he

---

1 Hackforth-Jones, 1980, p. 11.
stopped at Mauritius and St. Helena, where he made a watercolour image of Napoleon’s Tomb in the Island of St. Helena (1829) (NK12/142). On his return to England he began to publish his work in a series of illustrated volumes. In 1832 Earle took a position as an illustrator on the expedition of the Beagle, captained by Captain FitzRoy, to the South Pacific. On this voyage he became friendly with Charles Darwin. Earle and Darwin shared accommodation on board the Beagle and for an extended period ashore at Rio de Janeiro, until ill health forced Earle to relinquish his position on the voyage of the Beagle, and Conrad Martens took his place. He returned again to England where he died alone in London in 1838, of ‘asthma and debility’.2

The album acquired by Nan Kivell, 100 years after Earle’s death, contains the bulk of the artist’s surviving watercolours made between 1821 and 1832. It is unique record of locations and societies in the remote Pacific, at a time when no really comparable recording of personal impressions, both pictorial and journalistic, was being undertaken. Earle’s contribution to Pacific historiography lay in its very personal nature. The extent to which he subjected his own impressions to analysis and attempted to make a record wholly based on the responses of an individual psyche to exotic locations and peoples is unusual for its time. His insistence on maintaining his personal freedom lay at the core of his relationship to the societies in which he stayed, however briefly, and inevitably set him apart. From this detached, somewhat ambiguous position he was able to observe and record his impressions with a wryly critical eye, covering an extraordinary range of locations across the globe. From a historical perspective these elements help to place Earle within the context of the Romantic movement, with its expression of individual consciousness in relation to dramatic changes in society. What is especially interesting for historians of travel art is that the personal drama so eloquently played out in Earle’s writings and paintings took place at such a great distance from the centres of the Romantic current in European thinking. Also of interest is the way in which Earle was able to apply valuable lessons in the composition of grand historical paintings in the European tradition, which he had learned at first hand from masters like Benjamin West, to subject matter collected as it were in the field. The importance of this training lay not

---

1 Augustus Earle, Views in New South Wales, and Van Diemen’s Land: Australian Scrapbook, 1830, London, 1830; A Narrative of a Nine Months’ Residence in New Zealand in 1827; Together With a Journal of a Residence in Tristan D’Acunha, an Island Situated Between South America and the Cape of Good Hope, London, 1832.
so much in the often observed fact that it imposed a Europeanised set of pictorial standards on non-European subjects for illustration, but that it gave the artist a sophisticated vehicle with which to explore the pictorial potential inherent in his chosen subjects. Without the benefit of classical training in pictorial composition the observations recorded in the Earle's watercolours would be the lesser for want of technique. That so much of this achievement was concentrated into a single album of original drawings was particularly exciting to the collector in Nan Kivell, and it presented him with an opportunity to exercise the activity which he most enjoyed, the pleasure of rediscovering the artist's work for the interested public.

References to Nan Kivell's acquisitions of works by William Strutt and Conrad Martens in 1938 are another indication of the growing strength of his collection of fine oil paintings of colonial subjects by professional artists, as opposed to the more ephemeral works by amateurs, and prints, which formed the greater part of the collection. Writing to Major John Pye in New South Wales, Nan Kivell announced 'You will be pleased to hear that I have secured some very important Augustus Earle paintings, and also, some William Strutt paintings, in addition to some more of Marten's [sic]. I have become almost of a one-track mind now in collecting these Australian prints and pictures, and have almost forgotten that contemporary English paintings are being painted'.

1 Of the three oil paintings by or attributed to Martens in the Nan Kivell Collection only one, View of Fort Street and the North Shore, from Flagstaff Hill [Figure 8], is likely to have been acquired before the Second World War. This painting has the item number 19 in Nan Kivell's sequence, which suggests that it was acquired considerably earlier than 4484, View of Sydney Harbour, and 4485, View of Sydney Harbour showing Sydney Cove. NK19 has the distinction of being signed by Martens, while the later acquisitions are unsigned. An early type-written consignment list and catalogue produced by Nan Kivell for the transfer of the first part of his collection to Canberra in 1948 lists several more oil paintings attributed to Martens, but these attributions have since been discounted by National Library staff. In addition a number of watercolours attributed to Martens are also scattered through this catalogue. Some discrepancies in Nan Kivell's cataloguing further compound the problem of identifying which works Nan Kivell believed to be by Martens, but it is clear that this artist was one whose work Nan Kivell was anxious

---

1 RNK to Major John Pye 28 December 1938. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
to add to his collection. The works by Strutt alluded to in Nan Kivell’s letter to Major Pye are also difficult to identify, but may have included a watercolour of a kangaroo in a landscape which was itemised in his catalogue as number 860. Thus Nan Kivell seems to be suggesting to Pye that he had managed to collect more of these artists’ work than he actually had at the time of writing. More substantial acquisitions of works by Martens and Strutt were still to come.

**Wartime acquisitions**

Sales records among his personal papers, rather than letters, confirm that the war was a time of energetic collecting for Nan Kivell. Rich pickings of Australiana were turning up around the London dealers. Evidence in the form of receipts for items purchased is meagre, but there is a sprinkling of such documents among his papers, and if they fall short of a chronology of collecting they do at least provide a cross-section of his acquisitions during the war years.¹

In December 1939, from the antiquarian bookseller Francis Edwards Ltd, he acquired a coloured engraving, ‘View of Panshanger, Tasmania’, 1835, and an Ortelius ‘Map of the Pacific’, 1589. From the same dealer in May 1940 he received an account for £80 10.0 for five items, four Australian and one Pacific, including an oil by Conrad Martens, ‘View of Lord St on the Shore of Sydney’, c.1843. At the Parker Gallery in August 1940 he bought, for £32 to be paid in three installments, ‘Valparaiso Bay the Principal Seaport of Chile’, an original watercolour drawing by Martens. On 8 October 1940 Nan Kivell bought from Maggs Bros, for a ‘special nett price’ of £26,10 items, mostly maps, including Ortelius ‘Indiae Orientalis’, 1584, and ‘Potatow Chef de Tahiti, crayon portrait, framed c1775, (after Cook’s second voyage vol. 1. p. 159) £3.0.0’. On 25 November, from The Parker Gallery, for a ‘special price’ of £35, he bought a ‘Wreck of the East Indianan “Cabalva”’, oil painting on canvas signed T. Whitcombe 1820, exhibited Royal Academy 1820 - to be sent to Sundial House, Corton, Warminster, Wiltshire – Nan Kivell’s Elizabethan country house.

1941 does not feature much in his papers, but sales accounts and receipts show that 1942 was an active year for Nan Kivell’s collecting. On 19 February 1942 he

¹ MS4000, National Library of Australia.

On 23 October 1942 at the Parker Gallery he bought for £35, ‘Clipper Ship “James Baines”, Black Ball Line of Australian Packets’, a coloured lithograph by T. Picken after S. Walters, published in 1854. This was a high price for a coloured lithograph, suggesting that the rise in prices for Australiana, which was much noted by Australian collectors after the war, in fact began to occur during the war years. On 21 December 1942 he bought a facsimilie ‘Tasman’s Journal,’ folio vellum, Amsterdam 1898, from Maggs Bros for £10.0.0, and on 27 January 1943 received a reminder from Paul Larsen of Old Masters, 43 Duke St, St. James, to say that ‘I am still keeping reserved for you the Portrait of Sir William Fraser 1st Bart by George Romney (with the map of Papua and New Guinea). Perhaps you would like to see the picture again before deciding’.

On 10 February 1943 from Maggs Bros for £34.7.8 less 10%, he acquired: ‘Cleverley Set 4 Capt Cook plates 1787-8’; ‘Mara Resolutions Voyage 8vo calf 1775’; ‘Taylor Te Ika a Maui 8vo 1870’; ‘Polack’s New Zealand 2 vols 8vo calf 1838’. On 26 May 1943 he made another large purchase at the Museum Book Store Ltd, spending £288.11.6 for ‘Books & Prints, Bundle of legal documents, Colonial Church Legislation 1852, Convicts NSW 1830, Emigration 1833, and Ellis drawings’, the latter making up the bulk of the expenditure at £250. On 28 June 1943, from John Gardiner, Print Seller and Dealer in Rare Books, he acquired a set of ‘four aquatints in colour, The Cook Voyage after Cleverley’ for £20, and a ‘Map of the World’ by John Speed 1627, for £6.10.

A series of notes and receipts which passed between Nan Kivell and Bernard Halliday, of Bernard Halliday Old and Rare Books, in mid-1943, is interesting for its sidelight on Nan Kivell’s competition in the field at this time. Nan Kivell’s main competition came from large Australian institutions like the Mitchell Library rather than from private collectors. This competition was severely limited by the additional distance the war placed between Australia and London, and Nan Kivell was able to pick up primary historical documents at reasonable prices from the booksellers. But
competition with the Mitchell Library in particular was alive and well, and encouraged by certain dealers. For example on 26 July 1943 Bernard Halliday wrote to Nan Kivell offering for sale a portrait of Cook in Halliday’s possession, and a watch which had been owned by Captain Easty, a British marine who had made a voyage to Norfolk Island on the *Atlantic* in 1792. Two days later Nan Kivell acquired from Halliday not the Cook portrait, nor the watch, but an MS letter to the Earl of Sandwich from Forster for £18, and ‘The Telegraph’, by Muir, for £1.10.0. Nan Kivell was evidently back in Halliday’s shop another two days later, this time acquiring ‘38 Thierry ALS’ for £4.10.0. A month later, ['23 August 1943], Halliday again offered the watch, adding in his letter (perhaps as a goad) that he had sold Easty’s diary to the Mitchell Library in Sydney for £200. Nan Kivell did not buy the watch, but almost certainly would have bought the diary if he had had the chance, as it contains a vivid description of the miseries suffered by convicts during the early years of the Norfolk island penal colony which would have particularly appealed to Nan Kivell’s keen sense of colonial injustice.

On 13 April 1944 he acquired from Maggs Bros an oil painting by I. Spencer, ‘John Williams in the Tonga Islands’ 1848 ‘damaged by bomb blast’, for £12.0.0. Rather more documents and books were collected at this time, suggesting a scarcity of pictures, particularly oils. In June 1944 he acquired for £100 an exceptionally fine black and white portrait by Charles Meryon of ‘Toma Kiki’ from a dealer, Percy M. Turner, at Gerards Cross, Buckinghamshire.

This sample of receipts demonstrates the random nature of Nan Kivell’s collecting within his chosen theme, as well as his characteristic inclination to acquire ephemera, and items of slight or derivative interest, along with works of major significance. Nan Kivell’s imaginative response to visual imagery was clearly strong and intuitive, and his will to possess powerful. But his ability to inquire into the precise nature of each object as he acquired it was limited. As a collector he was a man of action, rather than scholarship, and he was content to leave the precise authentication of identity to others - in fact, he encouraged this, seeing his collecting as a service to scholarship rather than as a scholarly end in itself. His lack of precision over the identification of many of his acquisitions inevitably led to doubts about the authenticity of some of them. In general it can be said that, in the state they were in as he disposed of them, the objects in each collection Nan Kivell made were in good
condition, well housed and presented, but not terribly well documented. The collections represent very good ranges of broad categories of subject matter: Bronze Age coins and jewellery; images and literature of the Pacific; British printmaking; British book illustration. But within each collection no great attempt had been made by the collector to order the collections into sub-categories, nor to ascertain in a scholarly way the accurate identification of the objects which he accumulated under his broad headings.

Nan Kivell was well aware of his defects as a cataloguer, admitting to them in a number of instances in his letters. He agonised over the catalogue he was obliged to compile of the Pacific collection as part of the process of transferring it to Canberra, and this difficulty helped to protract the acquisition process over many years. During the mid-1950s, while licking his wounds over his failure to swap the Pacific collection for an Australian knighthood, Nan Kivell wrote to Justice John Ferguson, the energetic cataloguer of Australiana whose work he greatly admired. ‘My first letter’, he wrote, ‘must be...to congratulate you on your magnificent job, for which you should have all the literary honours in the world showered upon you. Also the Australian Government should open their Pandora’s Box of honours and let you pick your choice.’

The Blitz was responsible for some of the most interesting additions to the Nan Kivell collection, but it also removed most of the history of its growth. Bomb damage apparently destroyed many of the Redfern Gallery’s records prior to 1941, and with them Nan Kivell’s letters and notes about his collecting activities. Because there are no letters recording the growth of the Pacific collection at its most interesting phase of development, one is forced to reconstruct the main events from the less than reliable accounts provided by Nan Kivell himself. At various times he gave interviews or wrote notes for journalists about his collecting adventures, and towards the end of his life he wrote a number of scraps of reminiscence which look as though they were intended for a longer memoir that was never written. These anecdotal fragments give us a colourful but rather repetitious idea of the circumstances surrounding some of the more interesting additions to the Pacific collection. Although it is difficult to reconstruct the order in which the collection was acquired, it is perhaps not really necessary either, since collecting is by its very nature

---

1 RNK to Justice John Ferguson 23 July 1955. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
a random process, the collector relying as much on chance to throw up opportunities to collect, as on his determination to seek and to possess. A more fruitful activity is to attempt to shed light on the collector’s motives, by analyzing the collection itself, and exploring the common themes that bind it together as a whole.

Nan Kivell’s correspondence in Canberra provides only a scanty record of his activities during the war years between 1939 and 1945. The occasional incident is recorded, but unfortunately the active role the gallery played in maintaining British artistic life during the Blitz and its aftermath is not reflected in his archived letters. Several writers have attested to the contribution to the morale of the embattled British art scene made by the Redfern Gallery, which was one of the few galleries to remain open. *The Studio* magazine, which also soldiered on despite the Blitz, carries a regular commentary on the Redfern’s activities during this period, so that it is possible to reconstruct the gallery’s activities in the war years. But little is present in Nan Kivell’s correspondence to provide a first-hand account of one of the most interesting periods of his career. This was a period in which, through sheer perseverance, he consolidated his position as one of Britain’s foremost contemporary art dealers. He also did some of his best collecting, taking advantage of the panic caused by the Blitz to acquire items jettisoned by anxious owners at bargain prices. Among these acquisitions is the large painting of the *Death of Captain Cook* by George Carter [**Figure 9**].

Nan Kivell had several anecdotes relating to this period which he repeated verbally many times and committed to paper more than once. These should be taken with a grain or two of salt, but nevertheless provide a vivid picture of Nan Kivell’s modus operandi. His favourite collecting story was the one about the cartoon by Meryon, *Death of Marion du Fresne* [**Figure 10**].

I had previously bought this chalk and conté drawing in Paris, but it was still there when the last war started. When the “Battle of the Bulge” became menacing I got a special permit to go to Paris & whilst there collected the rolled-up large drawing and also a number of my paintings by Georges Rouault. I got to the railway-station but there was panic & the order was given, “no baggage allowed on the train”. I went back to the gallery where I had bought the Rouaults and arranged to have them taken to Calais by a chauffeur who was taking some people there in a car. I went back to the station & clutching the Meryon under my overcoat, after hours of waiting I eventually got on a train & after many stops - hours long - got to Calais. Alas no news of my Rouaults & the only thing I ever heard was that there had been heavy bombing by the Germans at Saint Omer, the town where the chauffeur said he would be staying the night. I still hope I & my Rouaults had no bearing on the disappearance of the
chauffeur and his party. I got onto a boat for England & what a melange of fleeing persons, everything was being abandoned on the quay - because my hand-baggage was allowed - motor cars, packing-cases, prams, bicycles and even portable suit-cases, but the Meryon was safe. Then we were all batten down in the hold - it literally was a hold, all the cabins & bunks & baths had been removed & only wood seats inserted for soldier transport - and of course a frightening air-raid descended on Calais, we all felt as rats must feel when caught in a trap. Eventually we got to Dover and blow me down we had another air-raid there, but this one helped because at the time I was having a difficult passage with the Customs explaining why I hadn't got an export licence for the Meryon - isn't that just England! - anyhow on the siren sounding everyone, including the Customs Officers, fled, & I rolled up the Meryon again & ran for the shelter of the train.¹

Another such anecdote relates to the acquisition of an oil painting of The Canterbury Plains from the Port Hills by Swainson, of which Nan Kivell already had a watercolour version:

I had heard of this painting for some time, but had great difficulty in tracing it, but I eventually tracked it down as hanging in the home of a Bishop’s widow, in Edinburgh. The first letter was obviously tactful ‘May I be allowed to see the picture & if possible photograph it.’ This brought a charming acquiescing reply which prompted my replying and quietly asking if possibly the painting might be for sale. This brought a distinct ‘No’ but not for the reason of the beauty or associations of the picture, but because ‘If the picture was removed a nasty place would show on the wall, and she being old couldn’t bother to have the room redecorated! Well of course what could I do but promptly reply that besides buying the painting I would pay the cost of the redecoration of her room. She was amused and said I deserved to have the painting & so it is now in the Collection.²

The occasional contemporary letter describing Nan Kivell’s collecting excursions has survived. This one, from May Cotton-Stapleton, Crichel, Wimborne, Dorset, dated 15 October 1940, carries a suggestion of the prevailing atmosphere of wartime upheaval among English country houses, which helped to flush interesting items onto the market. Crichel was the family seat of the Sturt family. The household was thrown into confusion when Nan Kivell’s business partner, Napier Sturt (Lord Alington), died during the war. At this time Nan Kivell was contemplating the production of a book on South Pacific exploration, and the death of his partner did not inhibit him from coming to the house in search of material on Napier’s relative Captain Sturt, who had been an early explorer in Australia:

Dear Rex,

¹ RNK to Maie Casey, undated MS draft letter [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² RNK to Maie Casey, undated MS draft letter [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
I spoke to Sir Alexander Hardinge on Sunday about your being able to come here to peruse the books concerned with Captain Sturt's explorations into the interior of Australia and, I am glad to say that Sir Alexander says that there will be no objection to your having use of the data you want in this way for completing your own book... we can then trot up to the Golf House for a snack of lunch as I know that it will not do for us to make free and easy use of this house, at one time so hospitable, in view of the circumstances. I.e. it just belongs to no one until all these horrible legal arrangements are settled. I have never entertained any personal friend here all the time I have been here and, although you are too a personal friend of Napier's I feel that we will be well advised to eat at the Club House. In the event of your having to take the book away, I will ask you to sign a receipt for same so as to avoid any possible difficulties when the time comes for Probate to be taken.1

The subject of the book Nan Kivell wanted to write about Pacific travels begins to crop up more frequently in letters during the 1940s. Obtaining photographs of images ostensibly for later publication was a major pastime. In August 1942 he corresponded with Dame Alice Godman and the British Museum concerning access to a book of drawings by George Raper, held by the British Museum on behalf of Godman. He wished to have photographs made of the drawings for possible publication in his book on Pacific explorations. On 10 December 1942, Nan Kivell received a friendly note from from Noel Blakiston, Clandon Park, Guildford, suggesting that he write to Lord Onslow asking if he had any New Zealand material which might be useful for his book. The letter gives us a vivid picture of the rich detritus of colonial activity which was scattered about the countryside within easy reach of London:

His father, as you will know, was governor and his younger brother, Huia, was made a member of a Maori tribe or its chief or something. There are certain framed docts relating to Huia and a good many old photographs also watercolours of NZ, and Maori shawls and clothes and a Maori hut in the garden and trees which look as though they may have come from N.Z. Also lots of books about N.Z. You could see all that is obviously visible here by coming to see me, but I would suggest your writing to the Earl of Onslow, Dippenhall, Meads, Farnham, Surrey, saying that you are a friend of mine and would he mind letting you see N.Z. relics here and whether he had anything else he would let you see. I believe he would be interested in your book and it would be as well for you to make a contact with him as you could hardly use anything you might see of interest here without his permission. He doesn't

---

1 May Cotton-Stapleton to RNK, 15 October 1940. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
live here at all and hardly ever appears here. Then propose yourself for lunch any Tues Fri Sat or Sun.¹

Other interesting items came through responses to his advertisements in the Clique magazine, which read:

WANTED
AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND
Paintings Drawings Prints
Manuscripts. Not later than 1880
(All expenses paid on approval items)
R. NAN KIVELL 20 CORK ST LONDON W1.

On 7 October 1940 Nan Kivell acquired from Francis Edwards, for £44, a fine coloured engraving of Fowkes’ ‘Plan of Sydney’, 1789. The plan was of special interest because it dated from earliest period of convict settlement in Australia. He had arranged to pay it off in installments, but on 15 October received a letter from Francis Edwards asking for the plan back, as Sir William Dixon in Sydney had now ordered it.² Nan Kivell’s response was a typical mixture of guile and ingenuousness. He claimed to have already dispatched the Fowkes to his ‘home’ in Christchurch, New Zealand, for safekeeping, but offered to present the engraving to Dixson for his library: ‘there is no reason for any of the three of us, yourselves, Sir William Dixon, or myself, to be unhappy’ he writes to Edwards, ‘as I had definitely decided that it should go nowhere else but to the Dixson Library’. He would have great need of Dixson’s help in obtaining access to the library and introductions to owners of private collections when in Sydney and Melbourne getting references for his book on the early paintings and engravings of Australia. He should be only too pleased to have an opportunity to show his gratitude by giving the Fowkes engraving to Sir William for presentation to his library. Having listed some of the highlights of his own collection (works by Earle, Martens, Glover, Liardet, Strutt, Gill etc.) he promises to visit Sir William next January or February, when he is planning to go to New Zealand. However, he writes,

... in the meantime I am enclosing a copy of this letter for you to send to him. I feel that will be the best solution of the problem. I will also add that having completed all the necessary references for my book, and as I shall not be living permanently again in New Zealand or

² Francis Edwards to RNK 15 October 1940. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Australia, I shall discuss first with Sir William Dixson about the disposal of my collection. No one else will be given a first offer to acquire it. I promise this as I feel the only place for all these pictures and prints should be Australia.¹

Many of the elements which become tiresomely repetitive during the later negotiations with the Australian Commonwealth are present in this letter, the first among the letters at Canberra to mention the disposal of the collection. Half teasing, half ingratiating, it is characteristic of the tactics which would by turns tantalise and exasperate later negotiators. Dixson's knighthood clearly impressed Nan Kivell, who was keen to acquire his own, but his collection also brought out the competitive instincts of the rival collector. Despite the fatuousness of the promised donation, his declaration of Australia as 'the only place' for the disposal of his collection is significant in the context. He claims in the letter that the great majority of his collection is already in Christchurch, but as this is a lie it seems that he is only mentioning New Zealand for tactical reasons, and that he was not seriously considering New Zealand as a final resting place for his collection at this stage. The ruse of promising a visit to Australia and New Zealand also appears for the first time here. This empty promise, the revenge of the expatriate colonial, appears again and again over the years of correspondence with the Australian Commonwealth, as officials tried in vain to entice the reluctant collector out to the source of his precious images.

Nan Kivell and other collectors

After 1945 Nan Kivell continued his energetic acquisition of Pacific material. In April 1946, for example, he spent £536 at Francis Edwards for various items, mostly books and MSS, including a Catalogue of the Different Specimens of Cloth Collected during Cook's Voyages, £120, and a Banks autograph MS, 3 pages. Although Australia kept close watch on Nan Kivell's buying activities through the Commonwealth National Library's Liaison Officer in London, there was little competition from New Zealand. Ken Webster was one of the few collectors who were actively seeking New Zealand material in London, and despite initial warmth between them, the relationship eventually soured irreconcilably. Nan Kivell loved to tease Webster, who collected in London and in New Zealand for the Alexander Turnbull Library and the Dominion Museum at various times. Nan Kivell, who also collected by

¹ RNK to Francis Edwards 16 October 1940. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
correspondence in New Zealand, kept among his papers a telegram from the Auckland dealer
Strang:
REFERENCE BETHUNES VIEW PROBABLE COMPETITION WEBSTER PER
TURNBULL ANY LIMITS RARER ITEMS.

Written in blue ballpoint on this is Nan Kivell’s draft reply:
PLEASE SECURE ALL ITEMS INTERESTING TO ANNOY WEBSTER
NANKIVELL.¹

Much later he regretted his treatment of Webster. Writing to Webster’s widow
in 1967, he reflected that ‘I always deeply regretted that the rift in my friendship with
Ken had deprived me of those most enjoyable visits to your home. To this day neither
Terry Barrow² nor I understood [sic] what was the reason Ken withdrew his
friendship from us’.³

On the other hand he enjoyed long friendships with other collectors, unmarrred
by competitive jealousy. One of the most charming of his correspondences was
carried on with the Norwegian collector Kroepelian, whom he first contacted in
1948.⁴ In reply, Kroepelian wrote, ‘I hope that you will not consider me too
inquisitive, but you know that book collectors are rather quaint people and they like to
“find out” if certain collections are running parallel with their own, so that they might
assist each other’.⁵ The two collectors had much in common. ‘From your letter... I see
that you are suffering from Arthritis’, wrote Kroepelian, ‘and so am I’.

I have been badly suffering from Arthritis since I was about 24 years old, and dare say that I
have tried every damned remedy which has been proposed to me, without any success... It is
rather curious to make the acquaintance of a fellow sufferer of two so very different forms of
disease as Oceania and Arthritis.’⁶

‘I think you have done right in buying a house in Morocco’, Kroepelian wrote to Nan Kivell
in 1965.

I have with the greatest interest read what you write about your collection. You are mostly
buying in London where you probably sometimes find items of interest, but I almost never
find anything but rubbish. If I find ten books a year worth having I consider myself very
lucky. I think I do have a nice collection of books concerning Tahiti. It amounts to about 4500

¹ Undated telegram message. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² Dr Terence Barrow (1923-2001) was a New Zealand-born ethnologist who held curatorial positions at
the Dominion Museum, Wellington, and the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, and subsequently became
licensed to authenticate artefacts for sale on the United States market. See Jerome A. Feldman,
³ RNK to Leila Webster 13 October 1967. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁴ RNK to Bjarne Kroepelian 3 November 1948. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁵ Bjarne Kroepelian to RNK 22 March 1953. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁶ Bjarne Kroepelian to RNK 11 July 1953. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
items in about 8000 vols. I have lately several times been approached by people and librarians who wish to buy it, but I do not want to separate with it as long as I live. (In any case I consider them enormous sums which I have been offered).\footnote{1}

The tendency to collect duplicates and ephemeral items, often remarked on by commentators on the Nan Kivell collection, can be attributed to the collector’s inability to resist a collecting opportunity rather than to a lack of discrimination. It also provided him with many opportunities to trade, exchange, and offer as gifts, items which he could afford to part with. Inherent in this catholic attitude to acquisitions was his characteristic tendency to treat different artistic media with equal respect. He did not subscribe to a hierarchy of art media or genres of the sort that had been traditional in previous centuries, in which, for example, landscape occupied a lower position in the scale of values than portraiture, or prints a less privileged place in a collection than oil paintings. All were absorbed with equal enthusiasm into the Nan Kivell collection. In part this welcoming attitude to the less ambitious efforts of illustrators and printmakers derived from his introduction to the world of fine art through illustrated books, and from his early introduction to his trade via bookselling and bookbinding. But his delight in printmaking was a largely unschooled component of Nan Kivell’s aesthetic sensibility, and played a special role in his personal contribution to the world of twentieth-century art. For he extended the same benevolence towards printmaking in his contemporary art dealing that he did in his private collecting of historical material. In doing so he did a great deal to elevate the status of the modern art print from the rather lowly position it held at the beginning of the century, to its recognition as an art form worthy of respect in its own right, and not simply as a derivative of painting.

However the conclusion is unavoidable that in his acquisition of Pacific material Nan Kivell collected thematically. Many sales catalogues of travel art and literature are scattered through his papers, in which items of Pacific interest are marked with crosses, while those of Atlantic, African, American, Asian and Indian interest are unmarked. Nor are Central or South America represented in any depth in the collection, except rather sporadically in such cases as the folios of Augustus Earle, where in his zeal to collect works by a particular artist Nan Kivell acquired groups of subjects which included other parts of the world. The Pacific and especially the South

\footnote{1 Bjarne Kroepelian to RNK 12 January 1965. MS4000, National Library of Australia.}
Pacific was his theme. He collected to document social history rather than art history. Before 1950 the category of travel art had yet to be defined in any comprehensive art historical sense, and it was due in a large part to the efforts of collectors like Nan Kivell that travel art as a genre *per se* came to be analysed in depth by Bernard Smith,¹ and subsequent commentators like Barbara Stafford.² But it seems clear enough that had the aesthetic category of travel illustration, and the tradition of grand exotic landscape painting that grew out of it, been Nan Kivell’s primary concern, he would have collected South American volcanoes by Church, or watercolours by Humboldt, regardless of whether they were painted on one side of the Pacific or the other, or for that matter in Timbuktu. He certainly had the opportunities and the means to make such purchases. He largely ignored America, Asia, Africa and Europe in his collecting of travel art, although he made exceptions for particularly interesting artists like Edward Lear.

Nan Kivell was highly eclectic, and it is therefore not terribly profitable to attempt to find much in the way of stylistic consistency in the works he collected. He recognised this himself, and one of his principal wishes in getting the collection to Canberra was that it be made available to scholars like Bernard Smith, who could make better use of it from an academic point of view than he could himself. His collecting was comprehensive, notwithstanding the qualifications mentioned above. Nor did artistic merit necessarily determine his acquisitions. In J.C. Beaglehole’s words, he saw ‘the point of the horror as well as the masterpiece’.³

Three-dimensional objects were not high among Nan Kivell’s collecting priorities. There were some notable exceptions to this general rule:

Although the collection is in general a Pictorial record of the times & development of the Australasian & Pacific part of the World, together with its written & incidental material, a few objective items have crept in, just for the company it seems. I have definitely not considered adding artifacts & their associates, if I had done so I would have ended up with Maori war-canoes under my bed, & had to rent a dozen warehouses & everything would have become just a museum. As it is, speaking of beds, I did buy a Sheraton [sic] bed with ivory narwhal

posts which belonged to Captain Weddell. Also the sea-chest of drawers which Charles Darwin used on the Beagle Voyage. Coins & medals associated with Cook, the Missionaries [and] Explorers of course fell naturally into the Collection. The carved & silver mounted emu eggs were included because of their intrinsic interest as being the first development of the silversmith’s art in Australia. You will find also the brass badges of prestige which hung on chains around the necks of “Tallboy, King of Marabie” and “Mr. Ross, King of Kuklyne and Mopool”.2

Although he generally avoided collecting artefacts, Nan Kivell was instrumental in obtaining important objects for artefact collectors, especially Ken Webster. He claimed to have sourced some of the most important artefacts in the Webster collection. His accurate recollection of these items, detailed in a letter to Terry Barrow in 1971 suggests that the claim was substantially true. According to this letter, Nan Kivell and Webster developed a collaborative understanding early on in their collecting work in London, whereby, in relation to New Zealand material, Webster would acquire any artefacts that became available, leaving manuscripts and pictures for Nan Kivell to acquire. Apparently Webster later regretted this arrangement and began to acquire books and manuscript items in direct competition with Nan Kivell. As Nan Kivell was vastly more successful than Webster, this competition resulted in frustration for Webster: which eventually dissolved the friendship.3

The most ambitious artefact acquisition that Nan Kivell attempted was that of the entire frontage of Joseph Banks’ London townhouse in Soho Square, a fine

---

1 'One Antique Hepplewhite Mahogany four-poster bed with narwhal bottom posts, complete with box spring mattress and top hair mattress, £85 0.0.' Purchased 23 May 1956 from Charles Angel. Nan Kivell made a present of this extraordinary bed to his friend Harry Tutlock Miller. MS4000, National Library of Australia.

2 RNK to Maie Casey, undated MS draft letter, [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.

3 RNK to Terence Barrow 28 September 1971. MS4000, National Library of Australia. For the student of New Zealand collectors this is an especially interesting letter. Not only does it describe the relationship between Webster and Nan Kivell, but it also offers a very revealing personal insight into Webster’s own peculiar psychology, from one of his peers. ‘Now about Ken... what astonished me was the energy and enterprise, that apart from what he would call his life’s interest in early New Zealand and Pacific artifacts, he put into the creation of extraneous constructions. Do you remember that interminable waterfall and watercourse, that never after years of work on it by Ken ever did work...? Then there was the cavernous excavation under the house, he never seemed to realise that he was undermining the foundations...I was very unhappy when Ken erected a barrier between us when he realised that he had parted with a lot of pictorial items of early New Zealand and Pacific interest. This was before he began to collect books and prints, etc. for his own collection. I had told him I was not collecting artifacts and I had always passed them on to him when I found them. I let him have some remarkable pieces that became corner-stones of his collection. The early feather-boxes, the Maori capes, that early dogs-hair one, the tattooing cup, the splendid tikis and fishhooks, the greenstone meres and whalebone ones. I never regretted parting with these and was only too pleased that Ken Webster should have them.’ As a further point of interest I note that the ‘tattooing cup’ mentioned here was acquired by Auckland Museum in 2002, via Dunbar Sloane’s auction, for $26,000.
Georgian structure of at least two stories, complete with fan-lights. The writer John Summerson drew attention to the plight of this building in 1938 in an article lamenting the increasing demolition of old London to make way for new building projects.

Next in importance [after Wren churches] I would mention a very different building, the house at no. 32 Soho Square, which once belonged to Sir Joseph Banks, the naturalist. Here is a building, by an unknown architect of the Adam school, showing a highly original handling of the street-front problem. The much-lamented Adelphi contained nothing as original as this. Instead of the usual separate pairs of plain openings, the first and second-floor windows are combined in a delightful recessed composition; the windows themselves are grouped in triplets and separated by miniature columns, while the front door below is covered by a generous elliptical arch. The interior, which includes the noble saloon built by Banks for his scientific meetings, has by now been gutted of everything saleable, including the door-frames, chimney pieces, and, I believe, some of the ceilings. Demolition is imminent, and Londoners who wish to lodge this really exceptional piece of Georgian architecture must do so with all haste.¹

Nan Kivell did manage to rescue this piece of architecture from demolition, and attempted to have it preserved with the idea of presenting it to the city of Christchurch. He wanted it to be erected at the Canterbury Museum as a memorial to Banks, whose name Cook gave to the volcanic peninsula adjacent to the city. Two things conspired to thwart this plan. Firstly the director of the Canterbury Museum, Roger Duff, was unable to raise the necessary interest and finance in Canterbury to effect the transfer. Secondly, Nan Kivell himself was struck down by a particularly acute episode of arthritis, requiring an expensive operation, and could not foot the bill himself.² A dispute with the firm who were to complete the wood preservation ensued, and what became of the house frontage thereafter is unclear. However the collector Bruce Godward made a drawing of the house at the time, so we do have a good idea of what it looked like [Figure 11].³

It seems probable that Nan Kivell’s desire to secure Bank’s house-front piece was reinforced, if not originally stimulated, by reading Summerson’s call to action. This raises the interesting possibility that his collecting was at least partially governed by the advice of others. The suggestion gains substance in the context of the national

³ Bruce Godward, unpublished memoir, Hocken Library.
significance which writers like Grimsditch and Summerson claimed for the items they described in their articles. It is possible that it was the thought of national attention as a benefactor that excited Nan Kivell’s collecting impulse at a basic level, and possible too, that this idea was at least subconsciously the primary motivating factor in his assembling of collections. As the youngest child in a large family, Nan Kivell would have received many hand-me-downs, and it is likely that at a primitive level he wished to reverse this order, deriving satisfaction from passing his old playthings on to another, less privileged than himself. In this hypothesis the final consummating act would be the transfer of ownership of the collection to a grateful recipient, who would then look upon him as a noble benefactor. Whether this action was by sale or gift is less important than the potential value of the collection in terms of its intrinsic worth to society. In this sense Nan Kivell was always on the lookout for items which he could acquire for less than their potential value. Having acquired them he could then realize their value by drawing public attention to their potential, but he needed the support of other, more credible authorities to back up his own instinctive hunches. He may also have depended to a much greater extent on the writings of contemporary critics in highlighting areas for collecting than has been previously realized. At any rate, once he had identified a potential prize, he was prepared to go to great lengths to get it:

Over the years hundreds of the items in the Collection have stories to tell: Found in the Portobello Road junk dealer’s stall. Found in Paris in an obscure book-shop. Went to Rome to buy. Went to Spain having heard or overheard a conversation. Went to Algiers to secure a superb collection of voyages. To Morocco, to Turkey, to Greece, often & often to Paris & Italy, where I had good friends always on the look-out for items for me. I asked for and had sent to me catalogues of all the booksellers & auctioneers of the world & many delicious rare items came to me this way.¹

¹ RNK to Maie Carey, undated MS draft letter [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Chapter Three
The Collection

Rex Nan Kivell's competition with Australian institutional collectors increased during the war years, but the stakes were raised dramatically after 1945. In 1945 the Commonwealth National Library had not yet become the expansive organisation it is today, charged with the responsibility of receiving and preserving the printed and pictorial heritage of a nation. Its scope was more limited - its main function was that of Parliamentary Library, its activities for the most part centred around those of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia. Administratively it was a Government department, with its collection and offices in the graceful art deco Parliament Buildings in the Canberra suburb of Parkes. But among its ambitions as an institution was the desire to spread its wings beyond the confines of its Parliamentary nest, to collect the materials of nationhood, and to build itself a new home. Like Canberra itself, newly arrived among Australian cities, the Commonwealth National Library was something of a Johnny-come-lately in the race to secure a substantial footing. Its greatest rival was the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney, and it had a long way to go before its collections could match the combined wealth of the Mitchell and Dixson collections which made that institution truly national in scope.¹

To live up to its name the Commonwealth National Library had to have collections of national significance, and it was determined to acquire them. There had been some recent successes, including the acquisition of the Roosevelt memorial library of American research material. In the new dawn of boundless optimism that followed on the end of the war, the staff of the Library began planning a bold new edifice to house the expanding activities and collections. The Commonwealth National Librarian, Kenneth Binns, wasted no time in contacting Nan Kivell through L. Courtney Key, the Liaison Officer the Library maintained in London at Australia House.

Initial negotiations

The possibility of the National Library acting as a repository for the Nan Kivell collection arose out of discussions which took place in 1946 between Nan Kivell and Key. On 3 August 1946, following a telephone call, Nan Kivell wrote to Key, ‘I was glad to get in touch with you and I shall appreciate your assistance in helping me to get the early paintings of Australia and New Zealand housed somewhere in Australia where they can be seen and if wanted for any publications used by whoever would care to’. ¹ He invited Key to come to the Redfern Gallery and see the large oil by Webber, *A Chief of the Sandwich Islands* [Figure 12], which he had recently acquired, and photographs of other works in the collection, most of which was stored in his country house in Wiltshire. He also proposed to arrange at the same time to send to Canberra a ‘large collection of mounted but unframed early watercolours and rare prints, and also perhaps the important books and manuscripts’. In typical fashion, for Nan Kivell was always generous in supplying tantalising copies, his letter enclosed a photograph of another startling purchase he had recently made, a watercolour portrait of Elizabeth Broughton, a small girl who had survived the horrific Boyd massacre in New Zealand.

L. Courtney Key was received at the Redfern Gallery on August 7 1946, and shown a variety of titbits from the collection by the genial Nan Kivell. The next day he wrote rather breathlessly to Binns describing what he had seen.² Key described Nan Kivell as a New Zealander, born in Christchurch, who had been in business as an art dealer in London for twenty-five years. Nan Kivell aspired to write a pictorial history of Australia and New Zealand when he retired from active business. He had been collecting relevant material ever since he came to England and now owned ‘about 200 pictures, several volumes of sketches and drawings, something under a thousand volumes, and a number of manuscripts’. He wanted to write his book in Australia but probably would not be able to start for ten years. In the meantime he thought it a pity that his material should be stored away in England, and wanted to send it to Australia so that it would be available to anyone who wanted to make use of it. He was not proposing at this stage to part with any of it, Key reported, and said that

¹ RNK to L.C. Key 3 August 1946. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
he would only sell it if unforeseen circumstances made it necessary for him to realise on it, a contingency he did not think likely to occur. He had considered shipping it to Australia and storing it, but would prefer that it went to a responsible public body where it could not only be safely and properly housed, but, if desirable, could be displayed, and where research workers could have access to it. Key felt that Nan Kivell’s attitude was most generous and entirely without reservation. He would not expect the institution receiving it to pay the freight charges, which he was willing to meet himself. With these points in mind Nan Kivell was wondering whether the Commonwealth, because of the nature and historical value of this collection, would be prepared to act as its Custodian. He told Key that he knew the Mitchell Library well, but thought that the Commonwealth would be a more appropriate agency to house and care for it until the collection was otherwise disposed of. If the National Library would be prepared to take it for a number of years, Nan Kivell would be very happy that it should do so. Key added his strong recommendation to the proposal.

Key went on to describe some highlights of the collection: the Webber Chief, the Augustus Earle, Night Bivouac in New South Wales, a number of Webber’s sketches from the Resolution voyage, the Earle watercolours, the large Meryon drawing of the Death of Marion Du Fresne, a complete French edition of the voyage of the Astrolabe with prints in their first state, Dutch maps, manuscripts including Banks papers, convict records from the Old Bailey dated in the 1790s, several Cook letters, and ‘a letter from the Headmaster of Eton about Banks in which he doubts whether Banks will ever do any good at anything because he is not interested in the usual lessons’.

Noting that Nan Kivell’s estimate of the value of the collection was more than £30,000, Key finished his account with a recommendation ‘that the National Library should make every effort to meet Mr Nan Kivell’s suggestion that it should receive and care for his collection until he himself comes to Australia since I think that by so doing there is a possibility that some at least of the collection would pass permanently into the possession of the Library’. Finally Key mentioned that Nan Kivell had ‘almost diffidently’ pointed out that he would like it understood that material of exclusively New Zealand interest should ultimately go to that country - thus introducing one of the key elements in the negotiations that took place over the next ten years.
On 22 October Binns wrote to Nan Kivell asking to 'hear more fully' of his plan to send sections of the collection for storage in Australia. Binns assured the collector that he could provide suitable and safe storage in accommodation which the Library had just obtained from the Munitions Department. This would allow Nan Kivell to go on with his work of cataloguing and preparing the paintings as a possible first consignment. The question of display for the collection was a more difficult and perhaps more urgent matter. Binns was at present engaged on the replanning of the National Library building to provide for a number of new activities, which included archives, films, and the Roosevelt memorial library of American research material. If the collection and particularly the pictures should come to the National Library, this would be occasion to make definite provision for suitable gallery accommodation. Books and MSS would be adequately provided for, but an historical collection of pictures such Nan Kivell's, together with what the Library already had, would require a large and specially planned section of the building. While not wishing to press Nan Kivell on such an important matter as the ultimate disposal of the collection 'which must mean so much to you', Binns sought an indication, 'even in some general offer which I could submit to my Committee', of Nan Kivell's intentions. On this Binns felt he could justify enlarged gallery provisions in the plans now being prepared.

Binns now sent Key detailed instructions on how to proceed:

You might indicate to him how comprehensive our collection is and that it includes such items as the Cook portrait, the Endeavour painting, the 29 Hodges and the one or two small Webber studies, to mention only a few. It has always been of concern to me that we have never been able to give time and expert attention to this section of our Library, which it so urgently justifies. I think you should stress our present difficulties with regard to even storage accommodation, but say that I have secured safe storage for all his collection, if cases, in either Sydney or Melbourne, if not in Canberra, until the extensions to the National Library building are ready. I mention Sydney and Melbourne because we have just acquired in connection with storage of war archives excellent fire-proof accommodation on the outskirts of both these cities, that in Sydney consisting of a series of buildings formerly used for the manufacture and housing of war explosives.

Under separate cover Binns sent Key a series of the reproduced plans of the proposed new National Library building. He asked Key to explain to Nan Kivell that as a result of his investigations and contacts with leading library architects in the

---

1 K. Binns to RNK 22 October 1946. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
United States, Binns and his staff would extensively revise these plans. If they had any reasonable expectation of receiving the Nan Kivell collection he would make general provision for it in just the same way as he had undertaken to do for the collections of Mr Justice Ferguson.

Courting the collector

So began a cautious deliberation over the practicalities of making a long-term loan of the Nan Kivell collection to the Commonwealth Library. The deciding factor in Binns' mind, as far as actively pursuing Nan Kivell’s proposal went, was the collector’s success in obtaining, at auction in November 1946, the journal of Richard Atkins, a merchant seaman who had made a voyage to Sydney in the first years of the convict settlement. There was considerable interest in these items in Australia, from both Binns himself, and from Phyllis Mander Jones, the Mitchell Librarian.¹

Nan Kivell was consistently in a position to outbid these competitors, and had much better contacts in the market. When Key reported to Binns Nan Kivell’s purchase of the Atkins journal and a group of Bligh letters, the Commonwealth National Librarian expressed concern at the ‘phenomenal advance in the prices of Australiana’, saying that while he was aware of the trend, he was not aware that it had reached quite this level of competitiveness.² Nan Kivell was almost single-handedly driving the market up in his determination to possess such items. The Library was at a distinct disadvantage bidding for interesting material in this increasingly competitive market and it was anxious to have Nan Kivell, a major player, on its side. Clearly the time had come to act.

Binns had a nagging anxiety at this stage that despite his generous overtures and promises to pay the costs of transporting the collection to Australia, Nan Kivell might be intending to use the Library as a way station before breaking the collection up and placing it on the Australian market, where it might attract enormous interest and higher prices.³ Key was quick to counter this suggestion. He guessed that Nan

¹ Phyllis Mander Jones (Mitchell Librarian) to Walter T. Spencer (Bookseller, London) 18 April 1947. Mander Jones was inquiring about the journal of Richard Atkins and the identity of the present owner. Nan Kivell had bought the journal at Sotheby’s on 11 November 1946 (Lot 1) together with a group of Bligh manuscript letters.
Kivell’s own anxiety about the collection related to its possible fate should it remain in private hands. Nan Kivell, he thought, would prefer to see the collection remain intact, and believed that its rightful place was in Australia where its historical significance would be fully appreciated and respected. He seemed to fear the increasing nationalisation of business in Britain following the war, and wanted to protect the collection from the depredations of government and taxes. Key also thought that if Nan Kivell wanted to sell, there would be no advantage in selling the collection in Australia, as prices for ‘Australiana’ were much better in London and America than they were in Australia. That Nan Kivell was prepared to pay top prices for Pacific material in the face of active competition had been demonstrated by the Atkins and Bligh purchases. He was unlikely to receive anything like the prices he had paid for such items in Australia. But the implied threat to sell to American interests was never far from the negotiations, and the Australians were acutely conscious of it throughout. American acquisition of the collection was a much more persuasive anxiety that the prospect of New Zealand gaining some part it. At the same time prices for Australian historical material were going up in London.

Nan Kivell’s personal appearance left a strong impression on Key during a visit to the Redfern at this time, which he described to Binns:

Unfortunately Mr Nan Kivell’s illness continues. It seems to be of a puzzling nature. I gather it is probably a failure in the circulation system since the blood appears to come to the surface of the body and get congested there instead of passing the capillaries and on into the veins. He tells me he is under specialists but so far they have been unable to tell him much about it. I should judge his age to be between fifty and fifty-five.¹

Nan Kivell was in fact not yet 49. His illness, though genuine, was not chief among his motives for wanting to get his collection out of England. The damage caused by the war to collections in Europe was fresh in people’s minds at this time. The potential threat of atomic warfare stimulated the proposal of at least one scheme to lend European old master paintings from British collections to museums in the Antipodes on a rotational basis to lessen the risk of their destruction in the event of atomic war.² Nan Kivell may have been thinking along similar lines, though his

² Cf. New York Times 15 June 1955, ‘Art on loan proposed – New Zealanders seek British masterpieces for showing’, ‘Art authorities in New Zealand have started a campaign to obtain on loan some of the reserve collections of Britain’s stored art, the Canadian Press says. Sponsors believe that such masterpieces should be lent to art galleries in the British Commonwealth of Nations to stimulate an interest in art and safeguard it from destruction in an atomic war. Mr Eric Westbrook, Director of the
instincts were as much commercial as curatorial and he knew the collection was worth much more as a whole than split up.

Following Nan Kivell's offer to send copies of the Atkins journal and Bligh letters, Binns sent him a copy of Volume II of J.A. Ferguson's *Bibliography of Australia*, which the collector had enquired about in a recent letter. Binns reported that the Library was substantially revising its plans for the new building 'especially in view of the Ferguson collection', hoping to excite Nan Kivell's competitiveness by suggesting the august company his collection might have in the new National Library at Canberra. As Key was returning to Australia, he hoped that Nan Kivell might allow the liaison officer to carry the matter of the transfer of Nan Kivell's collection to finality.

With discussions about the transfer now open, there followed some months of quiet which were typical of relations between Nan Kivell and the Library in the years to come. There would be an exchange of letters, some minor point would be resolved, then one or other party would become absorbed in more pressing matters and the Nan Kivell question would rest for a time. Because they were on opposite sides of the globe, holiday periods never coincided. The first quarter of each year would be quiet while the Australians took their summer holidays. From July to September Nan Kivell would be in the south of France, Spain or North Africa, soaking up the sun he found essential for his severe chronic arthritis, the legacy of his wartime influenza. This state of affairs persisted throughout the thirteen-year period of the negotiations over disposal of the Nan Kivell collection. At times the correspondence has a curiously unreal flavour, as though the two sides occupy not merely different sides of the planet, but entirely different dimensions, in which the material fact of the Nan Kivell collection, in all its multiplicity of media from expensively bound volumes to dashingly framed oil paintings, has no importance other than as a marker of the notional displacement of antipodean identity.

In October 1947 however Nan Kivell was back in London after a trip abroad, and Key, to his own surprise, was still in London. Looking up Nan Kivell with C.A. Burmester, who was to succeed him as Liaison Officer to the Commonwealth

---

Auckland Art Gallery and president of the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand, is the prime mover in this plan. He has urged a conference on the subject by Britain with other Commonwealth countries.¹

¹ K. Binns to RNK 21 January 1947. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
National Library, he found the collector busily cataloguing the Pacific collection with the idea of making shipping lists for consignment. Once again Key was struck by the uniqueness of the pictorial material. Nan Kivell described to his visitors the recent acquisition of half a dozen watercolours by Lewin which had never been engraved, although he did not show them. He also agreed to allow Key to have a microfilm of the Atkins journal, which was at the British Museum being transcribed at the time, made for presentation to the Mitchell Library at the request of Phyllis Mander Jones. All three agreed that whatever the eventual fate of the Nan Kivell collection, an early start should be made on transferring it to Australia and to the custody of the National Library.¹ Key suggested that Nan Kivell’s proposal to ship the collection to Canberra be put before the Library Committee as a matter of urgency.

Earlier in the month Nan Kivell had written to Binns to say he was beginning to catalogue the collection as a first step towards shipping.² He was tackling the paintings first, as they were the easiest to catalogue. While he was used to producing lists of works for sales of stock, Nan Kivell often gave the work of producing exhibition catalogues for publication to someone better qualified, for example Eric Newton in the case of the 1938 catalogue of the Redfern’s highly successful Christopher Wood exhibition. When it came to his own collection he was at a bit of a loss, because his first impulse when presented with an object of great interest was to acquire it, rather than to describe it. However he set himself to the task with great dedication, even though he found the work taxing and time consuming. The typescript catalogues of the Pacific collection he produced over the years make interesting reading, despite their inconsistencies of terminology, classification and numbering systems. They show Nan Kivell actively coming to terms with the shape of the collection, which like all great collections had grown haphazardly according to opportunity and means, and with his own increasing sense of what it represented in terms of a distinct category of ‘Australasian’ material.³

Meanwhile, however, arrangements for the transfer hit an unexpected snag. In his initial discussions with Key Nan Kivell had offered to pay the costs of transporting the collection to Canberra himself. But in response to a request from Binns to set his

² RNK to K. Binns 9 October 1947. MS4060, National Library of Australia.
³ I have referred to the typescript (carbon copy) catalogue of items 1-1259, in the Auckland Museum Library, in this work.
proposal out formally Nan Kivell made no mention of these costs. Binns feared Nan Kivell was trying to wriggle out of the promise. More disturbing still was Nan Kivell’s statement in the same letter that ‘should there be the necessity of disposing of [the collection], I would give your department the first offer of purchase’.\(^1\) To Binns’s great chagrin, when he made his representation to the Library Committee he was unable to state definitely that Nan Kivell would pay freight and insurance costs, or that he had any long-term commitment to gifting the collection to the library. As a direct result of this lack of clarity the Committee refused to endorse the proposal, citing the possibility of ‘considerable expense in the transfer and insurance of the collection without any reasonable assurance that Mr Nan Kivell would ultimately decide to give the collection to the Library’.\(^2\) Binns was asked to make further inquiries and report again. Reporting this setback to Key, Binns asked him to put the question of insurance and transport to Nan Kivell. But he was worried that if Key put pressure on Nan Kivell to make a definite commitment to cover the transit costs it would ‘divert his attention from us to the Mitchell Library’. He was also worried that if he was unsuccessful in getting the Nan Kivell collection to Canberra he would lose his campaign to have an exhibition gallery incorporated in the plans for the new library building. As it happened, Binns retired at the end of 1947 without realising his hopes of carrying the Nan Kivell transfer to finality. He was replaced by Harold White, a tough and determined Librarian whose negotiating skills and appetite for the chase were eventually to prove a match for Nan Kivell [Figure 13]. It is not clear, therefore, who had the unpleasant task of relaying to the irascible collector the news that the Library Committee had rejected his proposal to send the collection to Australia. The news would not have been welcome.

In Canberra, Harold White was anxious to resolve the matter quickly, rather than ‘let the matter lie in abeyance for some considerable time’ to avoid irritating Nan Kivell further, as Binns had counselled Key and Burmester, before he retired.\(^3\) Binns was anxious to get Nan Kivell to agree in writing to undertake the costs of transport and insurance. He worried that the collector’s attention might be diverted to the Mitchell Library, and thought that a satisfactory way of overcoming the difficulty

---

\(^1\) RNK to K. Binns 6 November 1947. MS4000, National Library of Australia.


would be for Nan Kivell to make ‘some more definite offer, perhaps along the lines of the [sic] Petherick or Mathews, which I suggested in a previous letter’. Accordingly, Harold White approached the Speaker of the House of Representatives, J.S. Rosevear, who was also Chairman of the Library Committee, and asked for the matter to be reconsidered. Key, now Deputy Librarian, wrote reassuringly to Nan Kivell to say that transfer of the Nan Kivell collection was an important part of the library’s efforts to realise its plans for a bold new building in Canberra, which would include ‘sufficient space in the right part of the building for the public exhibition of material of outstanding interest and beauty, such as many of the pictures that you possess’.

In explanation of the Library’s governance and procedures, Key revealed to Nan Kivell the heavyweight political makeup of the Library Committee:

our Library is governed by a Joint Committee of members of both Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament, the Speaker of the House of Representatives being Chairman of the Committee and the President of the Senate being Vice-Chairman. The House of Representatives met a week after I returned to Canberra and has just risen for a three weeks’ break over Easter, but the Senate has not yet met during 1948 and will not assemble until early in April. The result is that the Senators have not been in Canberra and it has not been possible to arrange a meeting of the Library Committee. We have discussed your letter fully with the Speaker but he feels, as Chairman of the Committee, that a matter of this importance should not be decided without the Committee being able to consider it. The Speaker is, himself, strongly in favour and I can see no reason whatever why your proposal should not be accepted. In the meantime you will appreciate from what I have said that Mr. White is unable to give you a definite reply. 1

‘The Government has given a high priority to the building’, Key wrote. ‘Not only has the normal growth of the Library to be considered but the needs of special collections like your own, of which it seems certain that we acquire [sic] an increasing number. The latest of these is a collection of Mr. J.A. Ferguson, whose “Bibliography of Australia” is, no doubt, already familiar to you’. Carried away by a momentary burst of lyricism, Key added, ‘You would be delighted with our present weather. Warm, clear days and nights to dream of’. Perhaps he was already hoping to entice Nan Kivell out to Canberra. 2

---

1 L.C. Key to RNK 23 March 1948. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
2 Ibid.
Conditions of transfer

Whatever his personal feelings of outrage at the Library Committee’s unwillingness to receive the collection with open arms, Nan Kivell would have been hugely impressed with the calibre of its members, and responded with a businesslike set of ‘conditions of transfer of the Rex Nan Kivell collection of Australian historical books, manuscripts and pictures to the Commonwealth National Library, Canberra, for custody, display and use’. In this document he stated:

1. The collection consists of many pictures, prints and drawings relating to Australian history, chiefly before 1850. It is the result of nearly 30 years’ collecting and contains a great deal of material of the first importance. I have gathered it together as the basis of a work I propose to write on the early history of Australia as represented by illustrations of every kind. Because of the nature of its contents it is unlikely that a similar collection will again be assembled in private hands.

2. It will probably be some years before I am able to write my book and in the meantime I am concerned for the safety of my collection. I also feel that it is a collection that really belongs to Australia and I should be greatly disappointed if it became necessary to disperse it.

For these reasons I have suggested its transfer to Australia and to the custody of the Commonwealth National Library at Canberra. While I am not able at this stage to make a definite undertaking regarding its final disposal I suggest that it should be sent to Australia on the following conditions:

(a) The Commonwealth National Library should accept its custody and be responsible for its preservation under proper conditions. During such time the National Library should be free to display all or any of the collection and to allow its use by research workers who wish to avail themselves of it.

(b) That the collection should be held until such time as I am able to come to Australia and use it for the work that I have in mind. When this is finished we can go into the question of its future.

1 Rex Nan Kivell, ‘Conditions of transfer of the Rex Nan Kivell collection of Australian Historical books, manuscripts and pictures to the Commonwealth National Library, Canberra, for custody, display and use’, no date, National Library of Australia file.
(c) As I have already indicated to Mr. Key, I am prepared to meet the cost of transfer to Australia.

White wrote to Nan Kivell on 5 April promising a meeting of the committee in late April, but as it happened things moved more swiftly and four days later Courtney Key sent an urgent telegram to Burmester in London via the Department of External Affairs:

IMMEDIATE. FOR BURMESTER FROM WHITE.
PLEASE INFORM NAN KIVELL THAT LIBRARY COMMITTEE
THIS MORNING AGREED UNANIMOUSLY THAT THIS LIBRARY
ACCEPT CUSTODY OF HIS COLLECTION. AIR MAIL
FOLLOWING.

This should have removed the final obstacle to the transfer of the Nan Kivell collection to Canberra, but it did not. There was a further problem to be resolved: export permission from the British Board of Trade. When he received the positive telegram from Canberra Nan Kivell immediately sent off a number of the larger paintings to the art packers James Bourlet and Sons Ltd. With the permission of the Australian High Commissioner, Burmester undertook to approach the Board of Trade for an Export Licence. The Board of Trade asked for a list supplying full details of author, title, date and value of each item concerned. This sent Nan Kivell into a fit of exasperation. Following a visit from Burmester in May he wrote the liaison officer a note which summed up his frustration:

I am sorry if I appeared exasperated, but in truth I was, as when one is presented with these formidable documents the frustrations of it all makes one wonder if it is all worth while. I feel sometimes when one is up against these officious documents that it would be better to put the whole collection on the market, and just take up gardening, which I love, and where one can’t be intruded upon. ¹

He steadfastly refused to supply the detailed list. He claimed that ‘owing to the dispersion of his collection and the fact that it was not catalogued he could not supply this without a great deal of difficulty’. ² No doubt this was substantially true, but Burmester told Key that,

Mr. Nan Kivell’s attitude is not helpful...He avoids my references to his card list and to his catalogue of about a hundred of his pictures which both you and I know he has. I do not think he is likely to give anybody a list of his collection until he sees it going to Australia without

¹ RNK to C. Burmester 28 May 1948. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
complications at the Board of Trade. In the meantime his ultra-cautious attitude makes the achievement of that end doubly difficult. Our terms are cordial and though he assumes an attitude of impatience and surprise at the red-tape involved he seems fairly satisfied with the progress being made, slow though it is.

The Board of Trade was fairly accommodating. It said that if the British Museum, and other institutions to which a list of collection items would normally be referred in such circumstances, agreed to accept a general description of the collection instead of an itemised catalogue, that would be acceptable to the Board of Trade as well. The Keepers of the British Museum were also sympathetic to the idea of a general description, but had concerns of their own. They had fought for some time for the right to have lists of antiquities proposed for export referred to them by the Board of Trade. As it happened they were at that moment negotiating with the Board of Trade for continuation of that arrangement, and were worried that their case would be jeopardised if they were to issue anything "in the nature of a blank cheque" to Nan Kivell. In the end the collector gave in and accepted the necessity of compiling a detailed list of each consignment. These lists constituted in effect the first systematic account of the collection and it is interesting that they were produced by Nan Kivell himself as they provide the reader with an account of the collector’s own investigation into the collecting activity of almost three decades. In creating the lists he was forced to come to terms with the variety and breadth of the collection, and as he got over the initial frustration of having to catalogue, his pleasure in the activity of describing his possessions grew, entailing as it did a sort of rediscovery which he came greatly to enjoy.

The first of these lists referred to an initial consignment which he had sent to Bourlet’s, the packers, who were complaining that it was jamming up their packing room. This first consignment included A Chief of the Sandwich Islands by Webber, The Death of Cook by Carter, and the Portrait of Abel Tasman attributed to Cuyp. On 9 July Bourlet’s wrote to Nan Kivell to say that they had now received the requisite Export Licence, and would he please be good enough to let them have the value for shipping purposes. On the back of Bourlet’s note Nan Kivell scrawled an excited note to an assistant:

---

1 Ibid.
2 Bourlet to RNK 9 July 1948. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Peter can you cope with this. Ring up or go and see Voigt at Bourlets & find out if the freightage is charged on value or bulk & weight. If on value then I am only naturally going to declare at nominal values in a few hundreds. The Earles portfolios at say £500 and the pictures a nominal £50 each. This will mean they then charge on bulk. As to insurance you remember that complicated talk I had with [Gordiats] about it. A most confused issue I found it. If I insured for full value & all was lost, I only got a proportion of the ship's value & might even have to pay more, do you remember? I am sure it was all hooey .... I can't decide about insurance, what do you feel? It is costing such a lot already so why pile on the agony. Do what you feel if it is urgent to get them away. Rex.

Insurance was certainly a vexing problem. Among Nan Kivell's papers there are only a very few letters or notes which reveal his naked feelings, undisguised by the guile, ingenuousness and formality which characterise his regular correspondence. The note quoted above is exemplary, in that it catches the collector in a mood of irritation at the red tape of officialdom, excitement at being on the brink of a new relationship with Canberra, and anxiety at the cost of his involvement. Until this point his scheme to relocate the collection had been largely a matter of correspondence. Now it was on the point of being realised, the hard costs were beginning to bite. It is here that his generosity towards Australia is most apparent. Freight and packing costs for works of art have always been high, often forming the bulk of the expense involved in bring out large exhibitions to Australia and New Zealand from the Northern Hemisphere. Even by today's fastidious standards in the conservation and preparation of objects of cultural heritage for transport Nan Kivell's collection was well looked after. One of the comments most frequently made when the collection was finally opened in Australia was the exceptionally fine condition of the individual items. Because he was a professional dealer Nan Kivell's stock-in-trade was as much in cleaning, mounting and framing works of art as it was in sourcing and selling them. He had 'decided opinions on framing', according to one writer.¹ Throughout his dealing and collecting career he employed the services of several professional restorers and conservators, including experts at the British Museum, and was extremely particular about his methods of preserving and presenting his collection. This activity represented a high cost to the collector over and above the purchase price of the items themselves.

Although White and other government officials had some misgivings about their reponsibilities towards providing 'proper conditions' for the Nan Kivell

collection under their agreement with the collector, they could at least be assured that Nan Kivell had done everything he could to protect the collection while it was in transit, and to ensure that a minimum of work would be necessary to prepare the works for display once they were unpacked. Unlike many amateur collectors, whose collections involve a receiving public institution in a tremendous amount of expensive conservation work on their transfer, Nan Kivell was probably better resourced in terms of available expertise and materials for essential preparation work than the Commonwealth National Library. To their credit, the National Library, and the Australian politicians who became involved in the transfer of the collection, never lost sight of the high standard of collection management Nan Kivell had set, and undertook to maintain it. In the words of the Australian Crown Solicitor, H.F.E. Whitlam, the arrangement entered into with Nan Kivell in May 1948, which consisted of the conditions drafted by Nan Kivell (set out above), constituted a ‘bailment…of a somewhat unusual kind’. The arrangement imposed a ‘fairly high obligation of care on the part of the Commonwealth in respect of the collection so that every care should be taken to ensure that the collection is not damaged or lost’.1

With the physical transfer of the collection to Canberra now in action, the Library needed to formulate a press statement which addressed the ownership issues without compromising either Nan Kivell’s position or the Library’s. White began to field press inquiries in April 1949, and by the middle of the month was asking Burmester to obtain from Nan Kivell a draft statement on his long-term plans for the collection. Nan Kivell was unwilling to be drawn. Burmester reported to White that ‘progress towards a more satisfactory understanding in regard to the future of the collection is slow’, and that it was unlikely that the collector would commit himself any further for ‘two or three years at least’.2 He kept referring to increased nationalization of the professions in England, claiming that this was ‘robbing his business of customers’ and having an adverse effect on the sale and price of modern pictures, which could damage his livelihood and ability to provide for his future. For press purposes, White adopted Burmester’s recommended line, that Nan Kivell had built up during his lifetime a remarkable collection which he hoped eventually to present to the Commonwealth National Library. In the meantime he had sent it to the

---

library so that it would be safe and at the same time available there for students working on early Australian subjects. He would continue to collect further items adding to its completeness and, when the opportunity occurred, intended to go to Australia himself to work on the collection in the National Library.

Meanwhile there was another embarrassment when the first consignment arrived in Australia early in 1949. The Library Committee had only agreed to accept custody of the collection when they were satisfied that Nan Kivell would pack and ship it at his own risk and cost, which he had done using his agents Bourlet's. This evidently meant that Australian Customs treated the consignment as a private export when it arrived in Australia, prompting White to suggest to Burmester that for future consignments Australia House, rather than the owner's agents, should handle the transactions.¹ Nan Kivell continued to be vague when White pressed him again in June 1949 for a statement on his long-term plans for the collection.² He hoped that within the coming twelve months there might be some clarification in England as to the possible trends of the political situation. This would naturally influence any decision he was hoping to make. 'In the meantime I shall keep on sending out to you selections', he wrote.

Unknown to White, Nan Kivell was also making vague offers to New Zealanders concerning the eventual disposal of some of the items in the collection, especially to Roger Duff, Director of the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, with whom he carried on a sporadic correspondence for many years. 'Eventually what you must have for the Museum and which is now at Canberra', he wrote to Duff, 'is the silver bed-side kettle and lamp etc which was given to Sir Joseph Banks by Queen Caroline [sic] in memory of a visit she paid him when he was ill in bed. It surely belongs to Banks Peninsula don't you think?'³

Exhibitions

Another whole year went by before the Commonwealth National Library staff were able to open and view the whole of what Nan Kivell had so far sent them. On 1 December 1950, L.C. Key, who was Acting Librarian at the time, reported to Nan ¹ C. Burmester to H. White 28 April 1949. National Library of Australia file. ² RNK to H. White 8 June 1949. MS4000, National Library of Australia. ³ RNK to R. Duff 29 December 1949. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Kivell, and separately to White, that he had managed to take the Australian Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, to the store where the collection was still housed in packing cases.¹ Menzies ‘spent an intensely concentrated hour’ among the works. To Nan Kivell, Key reported that the Prime Minister was delighted with what he saw, and left remarking ‘we must think about a proper building for these’. To White, Key noted that Menzies had taken him to task for having the collection in a timber building subject to fire risk and with what he considered unsafe doors and windows. ‘It was a heaven sent opportunity’ wrote Key, ‘which I think was put to some advantage’. Key also reported to Nan Kivell that the Commonwealth would be celebrating its Jubilee in 1951, and an exhibition of historical paintings was being organized through the offices of the National Gallery of Victoria. A very pressing request had been made to include about five or six oil paintings and rather more watercolours from the Nan Kivell collection.

Four months later in March 1951 the first major Australian exhibition featuring important works from the Nan Kivell collection opened in the National Gallery in Melbourne, attracting favourable comment from the Melbourne Herald;² and mention of Nan Kivell as the source of some of the works.

It was not long before New Zealand began to be seriously interested in the collection. In August A.D. McIntosh, the Permanent Head of the Prime Minister’s Office in New Zealand, wrote to White asking whether it would be convenient for the New Zealand Government to borrow the New Zealand part of the collection.³ McIntosh had had some contact with Nan Kivell in London the previous January. He had visited the Redfern and been shown a photographic catalogue of the collection. Significantly, Nan Kivell had not told him that the collection had been sent out to Canberra, but had offered to lend material to New Zealand for an exhibition. McIntosh now wrote to Nan Kivell to report that tentative plans had been laid for a New Zealand exhibition, and a working group had been set up in Wellington comprising ‘representatives of the National Art Gallery, the Turnbull Library, John Beaglehole and one or two others’.⁴ ‘I am taking you at your word’, said McIntosh,

² Alan McCulloch, ‘Prints Display is Fascinating’ by the Herald Art Critic, Melbourne Herald 20 March 1951.
⁴ A.D. McIntosh to RNK 23 August 1951. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
‘and will do everything possible to see that the staff is prised out of Harold White at Canberra and brought over here for a show’. The group was assuming that the Government’s consent would be forthcoming for financial help.

In due course a formal request to borrow items from the Nan Kivell collection was made by the New Zealand Government. The Library Committee considered the request on 23 May 1952. The background report prepared for this meeting, which summarised events so far, noted that the major part of the collection had been transferred to Canberra where it had been given the best accommodation possible under present circumstances. A selection of the prints was displayed in the library’s Reading Room, and a number of paintings had been hung in the House of Representatives Committee Room. This latter arrangement was hugely advantageous to the library (and to Nan Kivell) because it meant that the most important ministers could see the best works in the collection almost daily. It was a fantastic position to campaign from. The remainder of the collection had been given temporary storage in the basement of the Health Department offices in the suburb of Barton. Works from the collection had already been lent for various exhibitions, and further items were being reproduced in colour as illustrations to an Australian encyclopaedia. There had also been requests from regional museums and galleries in New Zealand, including Canterbury Museum, Hawkes Bay and East Coast Art Society, Auckland Institute and Museum, and the City Library in Wellington. The report proposed that in considering the request of the New Zealand Government, the Committee ‘might like to consider whether this might not be an appropriate time to invite Nan Kivell to visit Australia’. It also proposed that the items lent to New Zealand be exhibited around Australia on their return.

The exhibition went ahead as planned, creating enormous interest in the collection in New Zealand. The implication of this turn of events was that Nan Kivell was now ideally placed to begin to play off the interest of the Australian Government in the collection against the interest of the New Zealand Government. He began actively to consider a division of material between Australia and New Zealand. He was now dealing almost exclusively with officials at the highest levels of administration and government in both countries. It is interesting to note at this point that nationalistic exhibitions of the type that were now being created featuring the Nan

---

Kivell collection could just as easily have been created without it, using collections already available in public collections throughout Australia and New Zealand. The excitement factor seems to have been provided by Nan Kivell’s adroit manipulation of the interested parties, and his sheer talent for promoting the value of the material, which was only just beginning to be recognized by scholars like Bernard Smith and Ursula Hoff. Because acquisition of the collection was an important part of the Commonwealth National Library’s strategy to acquire a brand new building, the Library staff promoted it energetically to government ministers, with whom they had close relations arising from the Library’s Parliamentary responsibilities. Learning of discussions between Nan Kivell and New Zealand government officials concerning the disposal of the collection, White lost no time in lobbying the Commonwealth to invite Nan Kivell to Australia on an all-expenses-paid formal visit, and to have him put on the invitation list for State functions.

Before submitting his report to the Library Committee, White advised Bernie, the Library’s new Liaison Officer in London, of his intention, with the agreement of the Speaker of the House (who was also the Chairman of the Library Committee), to submit a copy of the report to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had just left for London and White hoped that he would take advantage of the visit to ‘further the matter’ in association with the High Commissioner. Presumably he was hoping that the Prime Minister would visit Nan Kivell at the Redfern. Five days after the Committee met White telegraphed Bernie to say that his proposals had been approved. However there is nothing in the library’s files to suggest that any meeting between the Prime Minister and Nan Kivell ever actually took place. Nothing further happened until 25 September, when White wrote again to Bernie to advise him that the Prime Minister had approved an invitation to Nan Kivell to come to Canberra with all expenses paid, although this was not usual practice for Government guests. The invitation would recognize the Government’s appreciation of Nan Kivell’s work, and provide an opportunity to discuss with him formally proposals for the ultimate disposal of the collection. To the Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department, White wrote that the purpose of the visit would be for Government and Library Committee to indicate personal appreciation and interest in the collection and invite his co-

1 H. White to K. Bernie 19 May 1952. NLA file.
operation in detailed planning of exhibition areas for the National Library building recommended to Parliament by the Public Works Committee.

However the visit was not to be. Nan Kivell declined the invitation, citing the many commitments he had for the Coronation year as his reason. Bernie, in constant contact with Nan Kivell, reported to White from London that the dealer had told him that the New Zealand Government was interested in acquiring the collection and was ‘now going after it in a big way’.¹ Nan Kivell intimated that he had ‘practically been asked to name his conditions for parting with it - whether it is a question of price, honours etc.’ He was disparaging about New Zealand’s general appreciation of cultural heritage however, citing many examples of official failure to act on opportunities to acquire important material for the nation. Bernie reported that his present attitude to New Zealand was to ‘let them wait’. In fact Nan Kivell was particularly annoyed at the time by the attitude of R.A. Falla, the Director of the Dominion Museum in Wellington, for failing to act on an opportunity he had facilitated with the help of Roger Duff of the Canterbury Museum, to acquire original paintings by J.G. Keulemans made for *Buller’s Birds*. Falla, an ornithologist, considered the works inaccurate and thus valueless to science despite their historical interest.² In the meantime Bernie suggested that perhaps Australia should apologise to Nan Kivell for asking him to visit during Coronation year, and repeat the invitation for a later time³.

Nan Kivell does not seem ever to have had any real intention of accepting the invitation. ‘This would have given me the greatest joy’, he wrote to White,⁴ ‘but alas, I have so many commitments for this coming year, that I simply cannot leave England, even on a flying visit’. Nan Kivell’s tricky nature was now becoming increasingly clear to the Australians. However they were determined to be patient, and on White’s advice Prime Minister Menzies agreed that the invitation should be allowed to stand.⁵

Meanwhile, New Zealand interest in the collection was growing. In November A.D. MacIntosh reported to Nan Kivell that he had arranged for C.H. Taylor of the Turnbull Library to go over to Canberra to organise the selection, packing and

---

¹ K. Bernie to H. White 21 October 1952. NLA file.
² Roger Duff to RNK 2 July 1952. MS 4000, National Library of Australia.
⁴ RNK to H. White 13 October 1952. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
freighting of items in the collection for exhibition in New Zealand. 'We struck a lot of
difficulty with White' wrote McIntosh, 'not, I think, in any bad sense but he sheltered
behind his committee and naturally was reluctant to see these treasures slip outside his
grasp'.

1 A.D. McIntosh to RNK 7 November 1952. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Chapter Four
The Exasperating Cross-trumper

In December 1952 Nan Kivell decided to raise the stakes for his collection dramatically. Spurred on by the proposal of an exhibition of items from the collection to be held in New Zealand, and increasingly desirous of an honour to coincide with the Coronation, Nan Kivell played up the idea of New Zealand's offer of a knighthood. The offer was almost certainly spurious. On 9 December K. Bernie wrote a long memorandum to the Australian Prime Minister, advising that the New Zealand Prime Minister would be meeting with Nan Kivell at 10.30 on Friday 12 December, to place a proposition for acquiring the collection before him.¹ The exact nature of the proposal was not known but it was likely to be an assurance of a knighthood in return for the presentation of the collection to New Zealand. Bernie's recommendations were that the Australian Prime Minister discuss the matter with the New Zealand Prime Minister 'at the earliest possible moment'; that if New Zealand persisted in seeking the whole of the collection then its disposal be discussed on the highest level with Nan Kivell immediately. If it were necessary to secure the Australian, Pacific and South Seas material for Australia, Nan Kivell should be offered, in addition to the proposed trip to Australia, an annuity appropriate to the value of the collection, to commence at the age of 60, or some other reward acceptable to him.

The idea of an annuity in exchange for the collection had been in Nan Kivell's mind for some time. He knew of the acquisition of the Petherick collection by the Commonwealth in 1911. This had been achieved by offering the book dealer and collector E.A. Petherick an annuity. The advantage of such an arrangement for Nan Kivell would be that it would provide him with an income relative to the value of the investment he had made in the collection, and thus with the means to continue collecting. The idea was useful to Nan Kivell not only because there was a good precedent for it in the Petherick arrangement, but also because it was a valuable bargaining tool which related to the capital value of the collection. Nan Kivell estimated this value in December 1952 at £100,000. No official with whom Nan Kivell was in correspondence during these negotiations saw fit to challenge this

valuation. Curiously, Nan Kivell never once mentioned the purchase in 1948 by the New Zealand Government of the magnificent Oldman collection of Pacific artefacts from the London dealer W.O. Oldman. The latter purchase, facilitated by Walter Nash, was a much more substantial and more recent precedent for the sort of arrangement Nan Kivell had in mind, and his silence on the subject is puzzling. Perhaps he felt that ethnographic artefacts were considered more valuable by the Dominion authorities than the pictorial and manuscript material he was collecting, and that his collection would suffer by comparison.

Knighthood

In the event, Nan Kivell did not receive a visit from Prime Minister Holland of New Zealand. Instead the Secretary of Internal Affairs A.G. Harper visited Nan Kivell. What took place during that conversation is difficult to ascertain. However Nan Kivell represented the visit as the occasion of ‘an off-the-record, semi-official’ suggestion to him that the New Zealand Government might offer him a Coronation knighthood. Nan Kivell was careful not to make this sound like an outright proposition of an exchange of honours for the collection. He wrote three letters on 15 December 1952 following Harper’s visit.¹ To White in Canberra he said that he felt that as a New Zealander he would prefer the recommendation for the honour to come to New Zealand. He told White that Harper had convinced him that there was more to the suggested knighthood than its ‘snob-value’, and that it would be recognition of 30 years’ work by a New Zealander in London. Nan Kivell was quite clear in this letter that while he saw the division of items in the collection between Australia and New Zealand as a potential ‘snag’, ‘obviously all relevant Australian matter should go to Australia’, and the New Zealand material to New Zealand. He did not think New Zealand would be difficult over the ‘extraneous Pacific material’ being held by Australia, and suggested that where there were items relevant to both nations arbitration could be undertaken by Harold White and C.H. Taylor, the Turnbull Librarian.

¹ R NK to White, R NK to A.D. McIntosh; R NK to C.H. Taylor 15 December 1952. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
To A.D. McIntosh Nan Kivell wrote a very similar letter, which nevertheless contained some significant differences in approach. After announcing the same ‘off the record, but semi-official’ suggestions of a Coronation Knighthood allegedly made by A.G. Harper, Nan Kivell raised the issue of the disposal of his collection. This time he implied that anxiety about taxation and possible death duties was the main reason for his wanting to resolve the issue. ‘I feel it is too airy to leave it as it is at present, a prey to my executors’ decisions, and the greater amount of cash realized on it handed over to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Affecting a chatty style, Nan Kivell told Macintosh that he was using his summer holidays to get the catalogue of the next consignment ready for shipping out. Attempting to tantalise, he mentioned early Maori manuscript material from the South Island, watercolours of the Maori Wars, and a series of early Otago diaries. He also brought up the subject of the portico from Sir Joseph Banks’ former townhouse in Soho Square, which he had salvaged and was having ‘pickled’. He intended to ship this out to Christchurch as a memorial to Banks, together with the silver kettle and spirit lamp given to Banks by Queen Charlotte.

To C.H. Taylor Nan Kivell expressed pleasure at the success of the exhibition of items from his collection which Taylor had earlier reported to him. He mentioned that A.G. Harper had visited him on the way to the Palace to make arrangements for the Royal Visit in 1954. He recited the same story about the knighthood and its more than ‘snob-value interest’, reiterating his own valuation of the collection at £100,000 in the next sentence. Again he proposed a division of material between New Zealand and Australia, suggesting that items relevant to both countries could be arbitrated for between Taylor and White. ‘I would feel like a Solomon if I were asked to decide’ declared Nan Kivell, ‘but again being a New Zealander, and should the New Zealand Government wish to bestow the honour then I think that New Zealand should have the stronger claim on any decisions’ [Figure 14].

Three days after these letters were sent, Bernie backed up Nan Kivell’s position to White in Australia with a letter of his own.1 Bernie, at least, was apparently falling for Nan Kivell’s tricky manoeuvres and had swallowed bait, hook, line and sinker. He seemed quite convinced by Nan Kivell’s reports of the knighthood offer by New Zealand. ‘I gather the New Zealand Government clinched their argument...on the grounds that up to now too few New Zealanders have received

adequate recognition for their cultural activities either at home or abroad’, he reported. Nan Kivell had recently told him that the Dutch Government had offered him £10,000 for the attributed portrait of Tasman by Cuyp in the collection, and that he was receiving regular and persistent offers from the Honolulu Art Gallery.

Just after Christmas, while waiting for a response to his letters of 15 December, Nan Kivell packed up over a thousand contemporary fine art prints from the Redfern’s stock, and sent them out to the four municipal art galleries in New Zealand as gifts, evidently hoping that this fresh display of beneficence would bring him further public recognition in his home country, and assist him in his bid for an honour. These important gifts are discussed in detail in a later chapter.

Harold White also appears to have taken Nan Kivell’s claims at face value. In January White returned to the problem with renewed enthusiasm. In a letter to the Speaker of the House, A.G. Cameron, White enclosed a copy of Nan Kivell’s letter of 15 December.¹ Nan Kivell’s letter, White told the Speaker, ‘suggests that we are likely to get the major part of his great collection, not only earlier than we had expected, but as a gift. White also reported that he had learnt from Prime Minister Menzies’ staff that during his stay in London Menzies was informed of the New Zealand Government’s negotiations by both the Library’s Liaison Office and the Australian High Commissioner. Menzies had however taken no action. White asked Cameron to remind the Prime Minister of the matter as soon as he returned to Australia. White had an ulterior motive in this: the new building proposed for the National Library. ‘The bearing of Nan Kivell’s projected gift on the erection of our building, the Cabinet approval for which is now most urgent, suggests that both matters should be brought to [Menzies’] attention during the series of Cabinet meetings about to begin’.

In a postscript to this letter, White remarked how appropriate it would be if the Commonwealth recommended a Coronation Knighthood for Mr Justice Ferguson to coincide with New Zealand’s recognition of Nan Kivell. The library’s copy of this letter is annotated, in White’s handwriting, with the date 19 January 1953, to the effect that the Prime Minister had again made no recommendation for action ‘though he reproduced a delightful imaginary conversation between Nan Kivell and Mr Holland’. Menzies, for one, was taking the whole thing with a grain of salt. He had

probably guessed that Holland would be unlikely to accede to Nan Kivell’s demands, let alone visit him at the Redfern Gallery. This note reveals a tone of mockery, perhaps directed at Nan Kivell’s homosexuality, which contributed to the collector’s anxiety complex about returning to the antipodes. In London he could get away with his faintly bizarre persona, even become successful by it. But in the colonies he would still be an object of ridicule, perhaps worse. Safe in London, in possession of valuable cultural property important to the maintenance of colonial pride, Nan Kivell could afford to ‘let them wait’ and meet his terms. Yet Menzies’ continued tolerant indulgence of Nan Kivell’s many audacities was a major factor in Australia’s eventual success.

On the same day that he wrote to Cameron alerting him to New Zealand’s supposed offer of an honour, White expressed to Bernie that the only real doubt now in his mind was whether Nan Kivell expected or hoped for any monetary return. He reminded Bernie that earlier in the negotiations between Nan Kivell and the Library the option of an annuity had been suggested, and that Bernie had himself reiterated this option in his recent submission to the Prime Minister. White also asked the Liaison Officer to give him any information about the gift duty position as it would affect Nan Kivell. From this point on the proceedings became increasingly technical.

Bernie responded in due course with a review of the subject of the annuity as it had come up in negotiations with Nan Kivell. As far as Bernie could recollect, in discussions between himself and Nan Kivell before his interview with New Zealand officials the previous December, the conversation turned briefly to the nature of the proposals that the Australian Government might put forward if ever it came to a question of straight out bargaining for the whole collection. The only mention of an annuity took the form of a rhetorical question posed by Nan Kivell along the lines of: ‘What could they offer? A higher honour? An annuity? A nominal price?’

At this stage of the negotiations, Bernie felt, the New Zealand proposal seemed to obviate the necessity for any bargaining. He did not think Nan Kivell expected any reward while he retained ownership of the collection and it was merely in the custody of the Commonwealth National Library. However if the collection or a large part of it were permanently transferred to the Commonwealth, Bernie felt that

---

Nan Kivell would have hopes and expectations of a reward, ‘perhaps fairly substantial’. The collector seemed to have in mind something that would ensure him a comfortable living should his other sources of income fail or his assets deteriorate in value. Bernie doubted however that Nan Kivell had worked out in detail what his minimum requirements might be.

Regarding gift duty, Bernie reported that under British law there was no tax payable on transfers made during the life of the donor. However gifts made by a deceased person during his life for public and charitable purposes were liable for Estate duty unless made more than 12 months before death. Other gifts were liable for duty unless made more than five years before death. Should the question ever arise it would seem likely that the transfer of the Nan Kivell collection to the Commonwealth would be regarded as a ‘public or charitable purpose’, although it was Bernie’s understanding that each case was decided on its merits. The rate of duty on an estate of £100,000 would be about 45%. Should a transfer of the collection take place there might be stamp duty to pay on the Deed of Settlement, depending on the terms and conditions of the transfer. On a property of £100,000 this could amount to nearly £2000.¹

Meanwhile Harold White had ‘taken the precaution’ of asking Nan Kivell’s permission to consult directly with the New Zealand authorities.² On Nan Kivell’s reply authorising this White made a note that he had discussed the matter with Hutchens, the New Zealand Official Secretary in Canberra, who had confirmed his feeling that McIntosh had only addressed Nan Kivell unofficially at this stage. By now White was reasonably certain that no official proposal had been made to Nan Kivell by New Zealand.³ Next, White reported to Bernie that he had discussed the matter personally with Prime Minister Menzies and confirmed that Australia would take no action to compete with New Zealand in the offering of an honour to Nan Kivell.⁴ He enclosed a copy of his letter to McIntosh, marked ‘Personal and Confidential’.⁵ In this letter White told McIntosh that he had informed Nan Kivell of the certain agreement of his Government and Committee with the proposed arrangements, and that ‘in all the circumstances’, Australia would raise no objection

to the transfer of the New Zealand items. White reported to McIntosh the feeling that Nan Kivell was ‘clearly anxious’ that the matter proceed smoothly and promptly. He asked McIntosh to suggest how more formal negotiations between Australia and New Zealand could best be put in train. As his Committee was meeting on 23 February, White was hoping for a response before that date.

A.D. McIntosh’s reply to White was revealing. ‘As I understand the story’, he wrote, ‘Mr Menzies - possibly at your instigation - saw Nan Kivell in London and tempted him with a title in exchange for the Australian collection’. This was clearly a different picture from the one Nan Kivell had painted to White and Bernie, who had been led to believe that the New Zealand Prime Minister had visited Nan Kivell and suggested the knighthood. McIntosh went on to correct this part of the story from the official New Zealand perspective. He himself had been led to believe that the knighthood idea had come from Menzies, but that Nan Kivell, being a New Zealander, thought that his own country might feel similarly inclined. He accordingly discussed the matter with A.G. Harper, New Zealand’s Head of Internal Affairs, who happened to be in London at the same time as Menzies. Harper, ‘imbued with feelings both you and I can share and understand’, felt it would be a grand thing if New Zealand could either do something on its own or support Australia in collaboration in the matter of an honour, if this would secure the collection. The matter was then put onto McIntosh’s plate. He felt that even if New Zealand could not offer the honour which Menzies was alleged to have discussed with Nan Kivell, at least some alternative could be discussed. Perhaps the two countries could ‘go halves’ and ask for an extra title on behalf of both governments.

Unfortunately, reported McIntosh, New Zealand’s share in the Coronation list was not really any bigger in numbers than usual. When the selections had finally been made the previous week the Nan Kivell proposal was crowded out. McIntosh feared therefore that it was too late to ask for an additional honour on behalf of the two governments. One disadvantage that McIntosh regretted was that the exhibition he had organised of material from the collection, which was currently touring New Zealand, had not yet reached Wellington, where Prime Minister Holland could see it. ‘Our Prime Minister is not as aware as Mr Menzies on this particular range of material and its national value’. In conclusion McIntosh said that he believed that the gift and

---

division of the material were contingent on the honour. 'Until we knew in New Zealand', he said, 'that we could either make the offer or share in the offer there seemed no point in any premature discussion as to the division. Having failed at this end, is there any hope of doing any thing in collaboration?'

Advantage Australia

Nan Kivell himself appears to have found out by the end of March that he had missed the New Zealand honours list. His reaction was swift. On 2 April he wrote to White:

It is with a sadness that I have to face the fact that my homeland - New Zealand - is not very alert concerning the acquisition of its early documentary items. I, having a collector's enthusiasm am perhaps biased as to the importance of such matters, but I do feel you and your associates at Canberra also have the same feeling concerning the necessity of preserving all early relevant items before they become destroyed.

What Nan Kivell now proposed was that the entire collection should go to Australia. The question of an honour was still very much on the agenda. Nan Kivell's strategy was to invoke another, much earlier, conversation with a high official of the Australian Government in which he alleged the possibility of an honour was mentioned. This time he claimed that the idea came originally from Australian Premier, Ben Chifley, in 1949. To Bernie in London Nan Kivell explained that his new decision arose from the unwillingness of the New Zealand Government to foot the bill for the final costs involved in the purchase, restoration and shipping to Christchurch of the facade of Sir Joseph Bank's house in Soho Square. These costs amounted to about £1000. Nan Kivell could not presently afford to pay for the whole of this work himself, although he had already contributed a substantial sum to the operation. The reason was that he was receiving hospital treatment three times a week and might have heavy medical expenses for the next twelve months. He told Bernie that he had suggested that the New Zealand Government pick up the final costs for the facade, but that its officials had declined to do so, and this was the reason for his decision to dispose of the whole collection to Australia. It seems much more likely that this reason was a way of saving face for Nan Kivell in the aftermath of his failed bid to get into the Coronation honours list.¹ From his end, White reported to Bernie

that Nan Kivell had missed out on the New Zealand honours list, and that he had suggested to the Speaker, A.G. Cameron, that he felt the best course for Nan Kivell would be to make an outright gift of the New Zealand material to New Zealand and the Australian material to Australia, and hope for the best. White had also discovered that it was most unusual for the Australian Government to recommend honours for nationals other than its own.

For the time being there was not much more to be done, but White did his best to keep the possibility of meeting Nan Kivell’s demands on the Library Committee’s agenda. Privately Nan Kivell licked his wounds, but as 1953 was a fantastically successful year for the Redfern Gallery, he had plenty of other business to take his mind off the issue. Harold White arranged for A.G. Cameron to visit Nan Kivell in June while he was in London, to advise the dealer personally of the Australian position in respect of the collection. The approach of sending such dignitaries on personal visits to Nan Kivell was a very effective one, for it was greatly flattering to his snobbery and sense of self-worth. Following this visit Bernie reported that ‘both Mr Speaker and Mr Nan Kivell have been very recient about their recent interview’.1 Bernie thought that Nan Kivell did not altogether appreciate the difficulty involved in obtaining an honour from Australia for a foreign national. Nan Kivell was now apparently seriously considering an offer from an American friend to go to Santa Barbara to live, which might involve the removal of his pictures to the United States. In the meantime the collector was about to go off on holiday to the Mediterranean for a couple of months.

Before he left, however, Nan Kivell wrote a breezy letter to White which reiterated the implied threat to remove all to Santa Barbara. He began by announcing two major new acquisitions for the collection. The first of these was a collection of a hundred original watercolours by Vice-Admiral John Hunter, of flowers, birds, fishes and natives etc. of New South Wales, Norfolk Island and Lord Howe’s Island, 1788-1790. ‘This item is certainly a coronet if not a crown to any collection, and I am most excited having secured it’, he declared.2 He mentioned the visit of ‘Mr Speaker’ and noted his disappointment at having received no other official visits, especially from New Zealand. ‘Personally I suppose one should rise above the acclaims’, he said, ‘or

---
1 K. Bernie to H. White 2 July 1953. NLA file P21/5/30/1.
2 RNK to H. White 27 June 1953. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
relative neglect of one’s efforts, I am human enough to be saddened by the lack of interest by those in authority in very alive young countries like New Zealand and Australia.

Again he mentioned Mr Chifley. His use of Chifley’s name was to become a source of considerable annoyance to the Australians in subsequent negotiations. Now he said that ‘having made my gesture at the suggestion of a former Premier, and that the present Government do not seem to be so interested I do not feel inclined to make any further gesture’. Now he announced the possibility of his going to Santa Barbara, and reassembling his collection there, and continuing to collect. He felt no need to maintain a personal presence in London as his executor, the dealer Frank Maggs, would always act on his behalf. In this way Nan Kivell not only implied a threat to remove himself and his collection to America, but also to continue to use his influence on the London market to secure material of interest to Australia for himself.

On his return from the Mediterranean, Nan Kivell immediately resumed collecting. In August he announced to Roger Duff that he had secured Horatio Robley’s personal collection of watercolours from New Zealand.1 He also raised again the problem of the Banks facade, hoping that Duff could still find a source of funding for the project in New Zealand. He related the sorry saga of his disappointment at the hands of the New Zealand authorities. ‘I do not feel very enthusiastic concerning making any further gestures to my native land’, he said.

In October Phyllis Mander Jones, the Mitchell Librarian at the State Library of New South Wales, sent Nan Kivell a present of a copy of The Mitchell Library: historical and descriptive notes. In a revealing insight into the competition between collectors of Australiana that forms the backdrop to the Nan Kivell story, Jones admitted her institution’s interest in the Hunter illustrations that Nan Kivell had recently acquired at auction.2 ‘I am afraid that we bid against you for the Hunter items’, wrote Jones, ‘thus greatly increasing the cost to a collector whom we know as one who has already given us generous co-operation. We, of course, did not know you would be bidding, and, as we are not only interested in Australiana, but also bound to give preference to it by the wills of both Mitchell and Dixson, we naturally go after what is offering’.

1 RNK to Roger Duff 31 August 1953. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
2 Phyllis Mander Jones to RNK 1 October 1953. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Harold White did not write to Nan Kivell again until November 1953. But he did make further inquiries as to what could be done to smooth the collector’s ruffled feathers. In July he wrote to Peter Heydon, the Australian High Commissioner in New Zealand, to see if he could help the matter along in Wellington. Heydon responded that he had raised it with A.D. McIntosh. McIntosh, reported Heydon, ‘feels the greatest possible annoyance that such valuable material should be the property of so exasperating a cross-trumper’, but, ‘fully shares your views as to the need to do almost anything humanly possible to secure this collection for the countries that clearly should have it, but he sees no easy way to do it’.\(^1\) White in turn informed Heydon that it was most unlikely that the Australian Government would recognise Nan Kivell other than to extend the invitation for him to visit. ‘If, in the meantime, New Zealand can be encouraged, either as things stand, or through an outright gift of the New Zealand material to them, to recognize him in the New Year’s honours list or during the Royal Visit, that would be fine’.\(^2\)

Finally White broke his long silence, for which he apologised to Nan Kivell.\(^3\) He stated that he had given long and earnest thought to the difficult decisions with which Nan Kivell was faced, and that he had deferred writing until he was satisfied that the conclusions he had reached were sound, however they might appear to Nan Kivell. He stated the conclusions here with all the frankness which Nan Kivell had shown and which he had encouraged White to show. White was satisfied, he said, that there was a growing knowledge and appreciation of Nan Kivell’s collection and generous actions in Australia and New Zealand. Any action that would remove it to any other country would therefore be a deep disappointment to many. To those who had worked with the collection and knew it well, its removal would be an ‘irretrievable tragedy’. White did not doubt that Nan Kivell’s ‘great public service’ in the ‘assembling and transfer of the collection to its natural home’ would be adequately recognised in due course. This would be hastened by a prompt decision on Nan Kivell’s part to gift the collection to the Australian Commonwealth and New Zealand Governments, on the basis agreed to earlier, i.e. the New Zealand material to be gifted to New Zealand, and the Australian and Pacific material to Australia. The gift could be made in February 1954 to coincide with the Royal Visit. For the Library’s part,

---

\(^3\) H. White to RNK 23 November 1953. National Library of Australia file P21/5/30/1.
White expected to have as much of the collection on display in Parliament House and Government House from January onwards, so that it could be visible not only for the Royal Visit, but also while the Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science was convened. This event was to be attended by more than 2000 scholars.

White’s further advice was that Nan Kivell should take up the Prime Minister’s invitation to visit Australia in March and April of 1954, so that he would be in Canberra during the expected three weeks’ sitting of Parliament following the Royal Visit. This last suggestion was curious in that it made it possible for Nan Kivell to infer that his visit was not wanted during the Royal Visit, but his collection was. He could have read White’s advice as a suggestion that his visit would be welcome only when the Queen was safely out of the way. At any rate, he chose not to take this inference. Instead, when he replied to White to decline the invitation, he cited his arthritis and sciatica as the reason for his not being able to accept ‘the very kind invitation of the Government to visit Australia during the Royal Visit’.¹ He had definitely decided not to divide the collection. Again he brought up the alleged suggestion of Mr Chifley, whose name he persisted in spelling incorrectly, to the annoyance of the Australians. ‘As you know’, he said, ‘I am perfectly prepared to hand the collection over to the National Library and so now it is up to the Government to see if it is interested enough to follow up Mr Chiffley’s [sic] first idea’.

**Slow progress**

Nothing much happened on the Australian front for six months. The Royal Visit came and went, and Nan Kivell did not go to Canberra. In New Zealand however the exhibition assembled by C.H. Taylor from the Nan Kivell collection opened in Wellington in December 1953 at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Art’s gallery in the Dominion Museum building in Buckle Street. ‘The grand hour has come and gone’, wrote Taylor, ‘the exhibition was opened on Friday evening as planned, and though it was a little wet, the “Academy” hall was filled. Even the Minister’s supper guests numbered about 140, and we reckon the total must have been about

¹ RNK to H. White 7 December 1953. M$4000, National Library of Australia.
500. The exhibition would remain in Wellington until after the Royal Tour, after which it would go to other centres.

Tiring of the resounding silence from Canberra Nan Kivell wrote to White in June 1954, announcing that he was ‘off to Greece...on an interesting hunt’. He had heard of some papers of Sir George Grey’s that were there. Clearly Nan Kivell was able to travel when it suited him, and this did not escape White’s notice. Nan Kivell went on to reiterate his current line, developed in 1953, of an imminent departure for California, where he would reassemble the collection. To reinforce the threat Nan Kivell asked White not to approve any requests for loans from the collection ‘say after December 1955’. ‘I am writing to let you know this because I am supposing your Government is not particularly interested in the collection staying with you as they have not troubled to carry on the enthusiasm with which Mr Chifley [sic] viewed the securing of the collection for Australia’, lamented Nan Kivell.

At this point Bernard Smith entered the correspondence with an enthusiastic letter to Nan Kivell explaining how useful he was finding the collection to his research. Smith had just taken up a teaching position at Melbourne University, but had leave of absence to complete his PhD in art history at the Australian National University. This research was an extension of the work Smith had begun earlier at the Warburg Institute in London, and which developed into the pioneering study *European Vision and the South Pacific*. It is possible that Harold White had put Smith up to this letter, as a way of flattering the collector. Nevertheless Smith was quite sincere in his admiration, and already knew Nan Kivell and his partner Harry Tatlock Miller well. He pointed out to Nan Kivell that research in the arts was still in its infancy in Australia, but with access to such important material as the Nan Kivell collection provided, there was every prospect of a bright future. Smith made certain suggestions in this letter about future development of the Nan Kivell collection which would have been very interesting had they been followed. As Smith’s interest was

---

1 C.H. Taylor to RNK 17 December 1953. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
2 RNK to H. White 19 June 1954. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
3 B. Smith to RNK 10 July 1954. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
4 Smith described his first meeting with Nan Kivell in 1948 to John Thompson in an undated letter, B. Smith to J. Thompson: ‘Rex Nan Kivell took me to his London flat “and showed me what he had there”. The vertical shelves were separated by narrow passages. In his desire to show me what he had our bodies often came into close physical contact. Rex seemed not at all averse to letting me know that he was homosexual. He did not know that I was married with two young children. He told me that he was looking for an assistant to manage the Redfern Galleries.’ I am grateful to John Thompson for supplying me with a copy of this letter.
very much focussed on the visual grammar and technique of image making in the colonies, he thought that it would be good if Nan Kivell could acquire books on painting technique relevant to the practice of such artists as Samuel Prout. Prout himself had written books on the subject, and Smith also mentioned Cox’s *Treatise on landscape painting*. He included a list of such works for Nan Kivell’s interest, hoping that the collector might be able to acquire them. Smith was certain that if the Nan Kivell collection could be united with a first class art library specialising in the nineteenth century it would become one of the centres of Australasian art research, if not the centre. Of course he would agree without question that the acquiring of original works of art and of illustrated books relating to Australia should remain a first priority. Smith ended by reiterating the increasing interest of the universities in Pacific history, and rounded the letter off with an expression of sincere thanks for the ‘great piece of work’ Nan Kivell had done.

Harold White made special mention of Smith and his ‘intensive studies’ in his next letter to Nan Kivell.¹ White expressed ‘further disappointment’ on learning of Nan Kivell’s likely visit to California in advance of accepting the Australian Government’s invitation to visit Canberra, and added that he ‘hated to think’ of the effect that the removal of the collection would have on workers such as Bernard Smith and on public opinion generally. Smith urgently wanted photographs of items on the attached sheets. This strategy of seeking copies of interesting items from Nan Kivell was a good one, because while he was possessive about ownership, the collector was ever eager to please by supplying copies, and White was perceptive enough to realise that this sort of exchange kept the relationship between Nan Kivell and the Library alive in a very positive manner.

Still valiantly campaigning behind the scenes on Nan Kivell’s behalf, in the hope of securing a final resolution of the collection and its fate, White kept up the pressure on government ministers. In January 1955 he succeeded in setting up a meeting in London between the Speaker, A.G. Cameron, and Nan Kivell.² In briefing his new Liaison Officer Lynrivyn, who was to facilitate the meeting between Nan Kivell and Cameron, White suggested that it would be diplomatic if Mr Chifley’s name were not mentioned. ‘For our part’, said White, ‘we have never been able to

¹ H. White to RNK 23 July 1954. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
reconcile Nan Kivell’s recollection with what we believe could have taken place’. Cameron reported the outcome of the meeting to Prime Minister Menzies in due course. Cameron hoped that Menzies would take advantage of his forthcoming trip to London to meet Nan Kivell and personally persuade him to take up the invitation to visit Australia.

You will realise how important it is to the Library Committee, in planning for the future, to know how far it may count on the great collection of Nan Kivell material which it has in custody. It is incomparably the best collection still in private hands, consisting of thousands of original pictures, prints and manuscripts worth more than £100,000 and incapable of being assembled again.

Cameron mentioned the possibility of the collection and its owner moving to California, and reminded the Premier of the discussions surrounding a Coronation Honour. He thought that Menzies might be able to discover Nan Kivell’s present attitude, ‘which might well be modified by personal recognition by yourself’.

Nan Kivell wrote two letters to White in early February 1955. In the first he told White about his plans for a book of Pacific portraits, and his hopes of a California trip. He could not make any plans to visit Australia at this stage. In the second he announced his recent acquisition in Paris of a large collection of original paintings by Elizabeth Gould for the book *Birds of Australia*. These works were all the more interesting because attached to them were the ornithological notes concerning their intended publication as illustrations for the volume. He had also managed to obtain a rare book on Cook published in Estonia in 1780. The implied threat contained in these letters was two-fold: firstly that Nan Kivell would take the collection away if his conditions were not met, and secondly, and perhaps just as compellingly for the National Library, that he would continue to use his cash and unrivalled network of dealer contacts to prevent the library from making significant purchases of its own in the field. Nan Kivell certainly had money to burn, as the Redfern Gallery was profiting greatly from the enormous leap in prices for the Modernist paintings in which he had invested heavily before the war. Redfern Gallery accounts scattered among his correspondence for the period confirm regular sales of works by artists

---

2 RNK to H. White 2 February 1955. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
3 RNK to White 8 February 1955. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
including Christopher Wood, Maurice Vlaminck, Lucien Pissarro, Graham Sutherland, and Alphonse Quizet.

Prime Minister Menzies met with Nan Kivell in London in early March. Around the same time White had a meeting with A.D. McIntosh during which ‘Library and cultural problems in New Zealand generally’ were discussed, and the Nan Kivell case in more detail.\(^1\) McIntosh reported to White that there was ‘no Government interest awakened through the exhibition in New Zealand’. McIntosh still felt a joint approach from Australia and New Zealand for an honour might be successful. This would depend on the outcome of the Prime Minister’s meeting with Nan Kivell. But nothing much seems to have come of the meeting, other than an exchange of pleasantries, and the tone of the correspondence carried on much the same as before.\(^2\) In August a letter to White from Government House, Canberra, confirmed that there had in fact been a number of instances in which the Australian Government had awarded honours to foreign nationals. The normal practice in such cases was to seek the permission of the other Government before proceeding.\(^3\)

During 1955 White adopted the tactic of keeping himself and other library officials and scholars in touch with Nan Kivell through various enquiries about specific works, and requests for copies of material still in London. The question of disposal did not arise again between the correspondents until the following year, which is symptomatic of the gradual slowing of the pace of negotiations which occurred after 1953. While the pace slowed, the terms and conditions discussed began to firm, from 1955 onwards, into a deal. During this time the fame of the collection continued to spread as more and more works were lent from it to touring exhibitions. Many magazines featured articles about the collections and colour reproductions of paintings from it during the 1950s, and individual items were used to illustrate publications on Australian and New Zealand history.

It was not until January 1956 that Nan Kivell issued a new threat. ‘What is your Government’s attitude towards the collection whenever it may have been discussed by those interested?’ he demanded to know of White.\(^4\) ‘I am off to Haytii [sic] in July to look at a property’, he warned, citing the need to spend a period every

---

\(^2\) H. White to RNK 24 March 1955. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
\(^4\) RNK to H. White 7 January 1956. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
year in a hot climate, because of his arthritis, as his reason. He had decided not to go
to California because he would have quickly become involved in a social life, 'the
very kind I want to escape from'. Now the stakes were raised again, this time to
£200,000. According to Nan Kivell 'responsible assessors in the art and book world'
had estimated this figure. There may have been considerable substance to this claim,
as prices for historical Pacific material had certainly climbed rapidly since the end of
the war, due in no small part to the efforts of collectors like Nan Kivell himself. Nan
Kivell also claimed he had a standing offer of £200,000 for the collection from an
'American Foundation'. 'They are persistently importuning me to start negotiations
with them', he wrote. 'You can imagine that sometimes temptation beats often at my
brain, and then I get cold-feet [sic] at the thought that I had at one time offered it to
the Australian Government. However they cannot be very worried or they would
surely have tried to put some strings around me'.

As a result of this last letter, White reported to the Prime Minister, requesting
that Menzies again meet Nan Kivell in London.¹ This might be the last opportunity to
acquire the collection for Australia, White felt. The most significant development in
the discussions between the Library and Nan Kivell was that the collector's latest
attitude seemed to indicate that he was prepared to negotiate on a financial basis. Nan
Kivell was serious about maintaining another headquarters in a foreign country for six
months of the year to avoid the London winter, and this would substantially increase
his living costs. His income would also be affected by the need to hand over his
business to others for part of the year. Mentioning the sum of £200,000 that Nan
Kivell had suggested was now the value of the collection, and estimating himself that
it would have cost £100,000 to assemble, White now put before the Prime Minister
four possible bases for negotiation:

1. An outright offer for the collection;

2. The offer of an annuity;

3. An offer similar in principle to that by which the Library acquired the collection of
   E.A. Petherick under the Petherick Collection Act of 1911 which required Petherick
to perform prescribed duties associated with the collection so long as he was

physically and mentally capable, in return for an annuity of £500 per annum. In the present case Nan Kivell might be offered an annuity and the opportunity, without the obligation, to work on the collection. He is already engaged on the preparation of a book of *Early Pacific Portraits* and has plans for a more extensive work on the pictorial history of Australia and the South Seas.

4. An offer to extend, for an indefinite period, the invitation issued to him in 1952 to visit Australia as the guest of the Government for a short period. This would provide the opportunity for further negotiation on the spot with the advantage for him of first-hand experience of climatic and other conditions here. It would also be welcomed by the Directors of the State Art Galleries who would benefit from his knowledge and are most anxious to assist in ensuring that the collection remains in Australia.

White noted that in any negotiations Nan Kivell would have in mind taxation which the United Kingdom might impose. The collection would have been valued on some basis for the Board of Trade, whose permission was required for its export. This valuation, and any terms of sale or disposal, would be relevant.

Menzies’ meeting with Nan Kivell was scheduled to take place between 20 June and 16 July 1956 when the Premier would be attending the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers.¹ Nan Kivell was clearly pleased to have met Menzies for the second time but his attitude remained firm.² While he continued to compile lists (his latest catalogue described item numbers 4233-5057) and send material out to Canberra, he reiterated his indecision as to whether to sell the collection. Instead of announcing his acceptance of the invitation to Canberra, as usual Nan Kivell reported some other destination to which he was drawn through an impulse to collect. This week he was off to Paris as he had heard of a collection of early Italian pamphlet printings of Cook items. After this he thought he might go to Madrid in search of prints of early Spanish voyages.

¹ H. White to RNK 24 May 1956. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² RNK to H. White 10 October 1956. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Chapter Five
The Deal

Late in 1956 Sir Alister McMullin, in his capacity as Chairman of the Library Committee, reminded Menzies of his visit to Nan Kivell earlier in the year. McMullin had himself met Nan Kivell in London on at least one occasion. In reply Menzies said that it was true that he had not opened negotiations with Nan Kivell when he saw him. He had however made a suggestion that Nan Kivell might come to Australia. Menzies thought it would now be in order for McMullin to get in touch with Nan Kivell and renew the invitation. McMullin did this, but not until well into the new year. He may have acted a little too late. By the time Nan Kivell received the renewed invitation, he had already written a letter to White which took the discussions to a new level of urgency. On 1 March 1958 White received a long letter from the collector. It began in the usual way, introducing, in rather more detail than usual, interesting highlights from an enclosed list of Nan Kivell's latest cataloguing efforts, items 5644 to 6297. These included:

5834 Queen Pomare's M.S. letter asking for protection from the French, 5836 Philip Gidley King's 3 M.S.S letters, 5837 Mungo Park's M.S. letter to Sir Joseph Banks, 5838 Richard Dore's M.S. letter, 5844 an unrecorded edition of 'The Telegraph', 5929 The original oil painting by John Webber 'View in Ulietea', 5973 M.S. receipt of John Adams, Pitcairn Island, 5974 Series of Sir T. Mitchell's letters concerning his maps, 5827 William Hodges' oil painting of a Dodo and Red Parakeet, 5651 the William Strutt painting in oil of Hare Pomare and his wife, 5978-80 Early Australian Mormon items, 5981 Macquarie's Rules and Regulations, 5991 W. Romaine Govett's album, 6063 Six of the original watercolours during Breccin's Voyage, 6125 A long series of the Early Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, Published in Paris. Several early American publications, and two very interesting large Missionary paintings at the commencement of the Poominde Institution in 1853. There is also a series of the rare Dalrymple Maps, and I am hoping to get another larger collection soon...

What Nan Kivell wanted to do now was to arrange for all the collection so far catalogued to be 'brought together'. He was having all the paintings framed, the watercolours, drawings and prints all mounted to correspond with those already at Canberra. 'The books are repaired, morocco cases made for the rare books, linen drop-over boxes and envelopes and slip-in cases for others, albums made and all

---

3 RNK to H. White 1 March 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
catalogued - these thousands of items should be ready for despatch some time this year'. He was doing this, he said, because of the vulnerability of so many of the items to loss, damage, theft and dampness. For example the album of John Hunter's original watercolours and drawings done in Sydney 1788-1790 should be kept in an air-conditioned place of safety. Having it with him in England meant that Nan Kivell was having to show it continually to every Museum and Library director from America and the Continent who had heard of it.

Nan Kivell would be happy to be relieved of the responsibility of the collection, which had long since 'passed out of the orbit of a “personal collection” to be housed in one’ home'. ‘With politicians and scientists playing “ball” at such an alarming speed’, thought Nan Kivell, ‘I feel the possibility that one might ricochet “slightly accidentally”, then it is anyone’s guess!’ Now came the bombshell: Nan Kivell supposed he would go on collecting until his end,

but I happen to like getting my strings nicely tied up and so as there were no further
Governmental reactions to Mr. Chiffley’s [sic] original suggestion concerning the collection, I
have decided to sell the collection as a whole. My promise to Mr. Menzies and you Mr. White
that if I did make this decision I would give the Commonwealth National Library the first
offer, naturally stands. You would like presumably to talk this over with your Committee.¹

He asked if this could be kept out of the press at least until they had discussed
the matter. He had a ‘slight guilt complex’ concerning his homeland, despite his
‘personal distress’ at the lack of governmental interest in his work. Then there was the
American Institution which had wanted to buy the collection for years, and which he
had always parried by saying he had no intentions of selling. Also now there was a
‘new multi-millionaire from Texas’ who had come into the field and wanted to buy
the collection. Nan Kivell had not met this man yet but he had suggested that the
collector meet his architect to help plan a ‘Library and Museum’. The Texan could get
an exemption on tax if he did something cultural, and he seemed for some reason to
be ‘fixed on the “Pacific”’.²

Another factor in Nan Kivell’s decision was the enormous cost he was
involving himself with in the production of his book of ‘Portraits’. Nan Kivell
apologised for the length of the letter, which he said he was writing while in bed with
a chill. Perhaps as a way of sweetening the bitter pill he was proffering, Nan Kivell

¹ RNK to H. White 1 March 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² Ibid.
reiterated his promise of first offer, and said that he would go on collecting after he had sold. If he died before he sold he would probably arrange to have the second collection bequeathed to the National Library, 'because as I said before, I like to have the ends of my strings neatly tied'. Hoping that White was well and had enjoyed his recent trip to Japan, Nan Kivell lamented, 'I still do not know where to go in the world to live!!' Wherever that might be, it clearly was not likely to be Australia.¹

Three weeks later Nan Kivell wrote to McMullin to decline the renewed invitation. He said that he had just returned from a business trip on the Continent, and that on his return he had found McMullin's letter had been waiting for a reply for more than three weeks. The reply was even more prolix than his recent letter to White:

Your, and Mr. Menzies' very warm understanding and generous offer I appreciate immensely, and I ask myself why not cut all the strings that tie me to my work and pleasure here, and just say to Hell I am off to Australia! As I think this I see lined up on my desk and in my secretary's notebook appointments one after another, and commitments to arrange and organise Exhibitions all over England, America and on the Continent for the next three years! 3 Years!! I must be mad to have allowed myself to get trapped in this way, and I was born practically on the beach in Pegasus' Bay [sic] in New Zealand, and not in a London dwelling where I spend at least a third of my life in an office downstairs with perpetual electric light. What fools humans can be! As I re-read your letter I can feel the Australian sun and see the heat-haze again, and even for this I appreciate your invitation. One day I must break away from all this and renew my acquaintance with you all. I would love it.²

As there is no evidence that Nan Kivell had ever felt the Australian sun or seen the heat-haze in that country it is hard to read him as much more than a confidence trickster in this instance. That the Australian politicians continued to negotiate with him from this point on is a tribute to both their forbearance and sophistication. Because they recognised the worth of the material Nan Kivell was holding, they were prepared to tolerate his exasperating carry-on. The New Zealand officials had no time for him, partly through prejudice, which was not helped by his audacity in seeking to bargain for a knighthood, and partly through ignorance of the significance of the collection.

Nan Kivell went on to reiterate his current estimate of the worth of the collection, £200,000, but his line with McMullin was rather softer than the hard-sell

¹ Ibid.
² RNK to A.M. McMullin 21 March 1957. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
stance he had taken with White at the beginning of the month. Clearly the idea of an honour was still greatly appealing, and he seems to have had some remaining hopes in this direction. He said that as he was placed he had no need of the capital involved in the collection, tempting as the American offers were. But if he sold, he could use the capital to ‘start collecting all over again, because obviously I shall never, as long as I am able financially, be able to stop’. He maintained that there were still moves afoot in New Zealand to recognise him with an honour, but his preference, if an honour were available on Australia’s recommendation, was to ‘make the gift to the Commonwealth National Library, because of the interest Mr White and successive Liaison Officers here in London have always taken in my efforts’. Then he mentioned the portraits book, which was costing him money and which he would like assistance with if he were to make a gift of the collection. From this point on the portraits book became a significant item in the negotiations.

In Canberra, Harold White took the matter to the Library Committee. White summarised the present situation regarding the Nan Kivell collection in a long report. ‘Now for the first time he has given a clear indication of his intention to bring the whole collection together and to offer it for sale. In accordance with his earlier undertaking he has given the National Library the first offer’. While no firm price had been mentioned by the collector, White reported that Nan Kivell had given Library officers the impression that the collection had cost in the vicinity of £100,000 to assemble, over many years, and that he had been offered £200,000 for it by an ‘American Foundation’. White then tabled again the four bases for negotiation which he had proposed to the Prime Minister the previous year, adding that as the opportunity for discussion the first three options had not arisen when Menzies met Nan Kivell in London, the Prime Minister had subsequently authorised further negotiation on the basis of option four, the proposed visit to Australia. White now proposed two more possible points for negotiation with Nan Kivell:

I. that he might act for us as a buyer in London of pictorial material

II. that we might assist financially with the publication of his book of South Seas portraits which he expects to cost about £10,000

---

1 Ibid.
Sale negotiations

Negotiations for the acquisition of the collection by the Australian Commonwealth now began in earnest. At the end of March White reported back to Nan Kivell. Opening with suitably flattering remarks about the collector’s latest list, White moved quickly to business, with all the diplomacy which characterises his handling of the affair:

I can well understand your growing sense of responsibility for such a collection and your concern both for its safety and for the financial burdens arising from it and its development. Therefore I think you are wise to decide that the time has come for it to pass to an institution and you know how earnestly I hope that it will be our own. Though I have the greatest admiration and affection for many things American I could personally regard its transfer there only as a national calamity for Australia. I appreciate that the National Library has been given the first opportunity to acquire it and you may be assured that the Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies, and the Chairman of the Library Committee, Sir Alister McMullin who recall their meeting with you with such pleasure will give the matter their closest attention.¹

In April, following the Easter recess of Parliament, White reported again to the Prime Minister.² The Library Committee had considered the position and reaffirmed that Australia could not afford to lose a collection which was incomparably the best pictorial collection relating to Australia and the South Seas still in private hands and which could never again be assembled. The Committee felt that negotiations for its acquisition should be begun as soon as appropriate arrangements could be made and a suitable basis agreed on with the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. The Committee thought that it might not be necessary to make an outright offer for the collection because it thought that Nan Kivell might well wish to continue his association with the Library.

On these bases White’s advice to the Prime Minister was that the Library should agree to assist Nan Kivell with the portraits book, and offer him an annuity ‘no less generous than the present day equivalent of the £500 per annum paid to Petherick in 1911’. Nan Kivell should be appointed the Library’s buyer in London of pictorial material relating to Australia and the South Seas. In addition the invitation to visit Australia should be renewed, and he should be given the opportunity, without obligation, to work on the collection, with honorary status equivalent to the position

¹ H. White to RNK 31 March 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
of Fellows and Consultants in the Library of Congress. White noted that these proposals might involve the Commonwealth in a smaller expenditure than an outright purchase. However either alternative would have its taxation aspect, and the Commonwealth taxation officials were unable to assess what the implications would be at present. Much depended on whether the United Kingdom taxation officials chose to regard the collection as one assembled in the ordinary course of business as an art dealer, or for some other purpose. A meeting was arranged for 22 April between White, the Prime Minister and the other Presiding Officers of the Library Committee, the President of the Senate and the Speaker, to discuss the matter.

An initial tax assessment was prepared for the Treasurer, A.W. Fadden, to assist the Committee with its deliberations.\(^1\) This document stated that Harold White had mentioned £5000 as the appropriate level of the annuity to be suggested to Nan Kivell in consideration of his transferring ownership to the Commonwealth Government. For taxation purposes such an arrangement could be regarded as consisting of two stages: a) Nan Kivell ‘sells’ his collection to the Commonwealth Government for £X; b) Nan Kivell buys an annuity from the Commonwealth Government the present value of which is £X. The present value of a life annuity of £E5,000 for a man of 60 assuming a rate of interest at 4.5% was £A62,000.\(^2\) An annuity of £E5000 for 15 years certain and life thereafter had a present value of £A76,000.

The tax implications, briefly summarised, were as follows: the annuity would not be income taxable in Australia, assuming Nan Kivell remained domiciled in the United Kingdom and his income was taxed there. If the United Kingdom authorities agreed that Nan Kivell’s collection was outside his ordinary business, then the annuity would be taxed in the United Kingdom on a special basis, lower than ordinary income tax. If however the collection were regarded by the United Kingdom as stock in trade of his business then the taxation would hinge on the profitability of the transaction for Nan Kivell’s business. If the price paid to Nan Kivell by the Commonwealth was high enough to produce a profit for United Kingdom tax purposes in Nan Kivell’s business accounts, then the United Kingdom would either tax the business profits including the annuity, or, if the whole proceeds of the sale were used to buy the annuity, tax the


\(^2\) '£E5,000' is the form used in the original document – I have retained it.
annuity. If the price paid by the Commonwealth were such that no profits for United Kingdom tax purposes emerged for Nan Kivell, then the special lower rate of income tax would apply to the annuity.

The tax assessment document further estimated that, assuming Nan Kivell’s estimate of the value of the collection at £E200,000 was correct, payment of an annuity worth £A76,000 would be less than the value of the collection, so the question of whether the collection was stock in trade or not for United Kingdom tax purposes would not arise. Finally the report noted that there was a United Kingdom tax position on ‘gifts inter vivos’ which might have some bearing on the proposal, which should be looked into further by a representative in London, if it were decided to pursue the proposal.

In transmitting the report on taxation to the Prime Minister, the Treasurer appears to have accepted the market value of the Nan Kivell collection as £200,000.1 Fadden declared that he had no objection to an offer being made to Nan Kivell in the terms proposed.

White now referred the matter to the Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Department in Canberra, asking for assistance in London to ascertain the precise implications for the annuity proposal under U.K. tax law.2 ‘Since it is in Australia’s interest that the offer to Mr Nan Kivell appear as attractive as possible it is important that he get the most favourable treatment from the United Kingdom taxation authorities’ noted White, asking for clarification of whether or not the annuity proposed would be taxed in the U.K. Any other aspects of U.K. taxation which might apply, including estate duty in respect of the transfer and stamp duty on any deed of settlement, should also be examined. The proposal should also be discussed with the Crown Solicitor’s Agents in London, Messrs Coward, Chance & Co., as they would be able to offer assistance with negotiations and prepare any Deed of Settlement that might eventuate. The proposal should then be made to Nan Kivell, ‘at an appropriate level in an endeavour to secure acceptance to the offer in principle and to negotiate the proposed terms of sale’. All of this, realised White, might ‘present some difficulty and require delicate handling’.

---

2 H. White to the Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department 18 June 1958. National Library of Australia file.
An important point arising here was the provision of an acceptable definition of the collection itself. A complete list did not yet exist, as Nan Kivell was still working on it. His listing followed a numerical order. To date items nos. 1 to 1927 inclusive had been shipped to Canberra. Lists only had been received for items 1928 to 6414, although White believed that Nan Kivell intended shortly to resume shipments. There remained still items uncatalogued, of which the Library could claim no exact knowledge, and there were items the collector was still adding. To the latter category White felt the Commonwealth could make no claim. The desire of the Library Committee was to secure the whole of Nan Kivell’s collection. White therefore suggested that the collection be described in any correspondence at this stage as:

the whole of your collection of pictures, prints, engravings, drawings, photographs, maps, manuscripts, books, pamphlets and other material relating to the discovery, exploration and history of Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific and the South Seas, including those items listed in the catalogues already sent to the Commonwealth National Library at Canberra, and those still awaiting cataloguing.

The offer was not at this stage to include assistance with the portraits book, ‘unless it appears necessary in order to clinch the deal’. However it was proposed that, in addition to any annuity, Nan Kivell be offered honorary status as the National Library’s Consultant on Graphic Records. The invitation to visit Australia should be reiterated, especially if it appeared during the negotiations that there were still some chance of his accepting, so that a formal recognition of the transfer could be made. Finally White repeated that if the collection were to be offered as a gift, Nan Kivell had stated his preference was for it to be made to the Commonwealth National Library. Clearly White foresaw the advantage of having title to the collection vested in the Library rather than the Commonwealth. The disadvantage of the latter position would become very evident to Library staff much later on, when a national art gallery for Australia came into being.

In a second memorandum, marked ‘private and confidential’, despatched to the Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Department on the same day as the one discussed above, White expanded on the issue of the honour.¹ This memorandum is revealing of the true position of Australia and New Zealand in respect of an honour

¹ H. White to the Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department 18 June 1958 ‘Private and Confidential’, National Library of Australia file.
for Nan Kivell, as at 18 June 1958. Warning the Secretary that the question of an
honour should not be raised with Nan Kivell, but that he might very well bring it up
himself, White presented a quick summary of the background to this aspect of the
negotiations. It was clear that Nan Kivell had for some time thought an honour would
be an appropriate recognition for the gift of his collection, and that the honour might
come either from Australia or New Zealand. Repeated mention had been made in
letters from Nan Kivell of a suggestion, for which no evidence could be found, by Mr
Chifley that Nan Kivell accept such recognition from the Commonwealth in return for
the collection. Mentioning Nan Kivell’s claims in 1952 of ‘off the record, semi-
official suggestions’ from New Zealand to make him a Coronation Knight, White
noted that A.D. McIntosh had unsuccessfully recommended this in a bid to secure the
New Zealand portion of the collection, and that no further action from New Zealand
was likely along these lines. He confirmed that the possibility of conferring an
Australian honour had since been considered and rejected.

Events now began to move very quickly. The transaction which unfolded went
through a number of permutations in consideration by the various parties involved,
with a considerable degree of complexity. The main problem to be overcome in
reaching a successful settlement was how to avoid income tax, estate duty and stamp
duties which might be payable in both the United Kingdom and Australia. An
enormous amount of energy was devoted to finding a way through this international
tax law minefield by the Australian officers involved, as the deal drew closer to
conclusion. Nan Kivell proved himself as astute as the other side in manoeuvring
through the legal and taxation issues, and his business acumen and professionalism
are nowhere more apparent than in his handling of his side of the transaction. In this
section of the correspondence Nan Kivell drops the affectation of ingratiating naiveté
he had adopted throughout the long courtship. Instead, a different voice emerges,
assured, fluent, fully conversant with every aspect of the negotiations - indeed, almost
suave.

Nan Kivell was ably assisted by his accountant Norman Alexander throughout
the deal. On several occasions Nan Kivell and Alexander appear to be ahead of the
game, passing correspondence between them dealing confidently with aspects of the
taxation situation, which the Australian side was having to brush up on urgently. Sir
Edwin McCarthy, the Deputy High Commissioner in London, assisted by the
Library’s new Liaison officer, Larry Lake, skillfully represented the Australian interest. McCarthy’s diplomacy in negotiating terms with Nan Kivell ensured a smooth and speedy resolution of the issues at stake. McCarthy was sometimes negotiating ahead of confirmation of the legal detail which still needed to be confirmed by the experts, displaying insight and aptitude which were up to the mark as far as meeting Nan Kivell’s own acute facility in the marketplace, and which the dealer clearly appreciated. Although brief, McCarthy’s contribution to the eventual acquisition was a major one, and deserves to be recognised as such.

**Tax avoidance**

The first task for the Australians was to establish what liability for income tax the proposed annuity might attract. It turned out that the annuity could only avoid income tax under certain conditions, which were however avoidable if it could be shown that no profit accrued to Nan Kivell as a result. A more serious problem was posed by estate duty, and certain aspects of the United Kingdom law relevant here suggested that a cash payment to Nan Kivell might be safer in the long run for the Commonwealth to pursue. Another option was to suggest the creation of a trust fund, with Nan Kivell as the trustee, the proceeds of which were to be used to make further purchases for the collection. It was clear from the initial reports of the taxation experts that no further progress could be made in establishing the precise nature of the taxation liability until negotiations regarding the transfer could be advanced a step further by the parties.¹

Accordingly, Sir Edwin McCarthy was despatched to the Redfern Gallery from Australia House with a proposal to be ‘laid before’ Nan Kivell, offering the annuity of £5000 per annum approved by the Prime Minister and Treasurer.² This was done, and Nan Kivell was quick to respond. In his letter to Sir Edwin acknowledging the visit and offer, the collector showed just how sure his grasp of the situation was. Asking for a little time to consider the offer, he pointed out the taxation issues as he saw them, offering some alternative solutions which had not been considered by the Australian advisers, but nevertheless were sound:

² H. White to RNK 5 June 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
I am favourably disposed towards it but the fact that it does not give me any substantial capital to work with to help add to the collection, is rather a draw-back. This however may possibly be overcome by an arrangement with an Insurance Company to advance a sum equivalent to say five years' Annuity and this sum treated as a Capital Appreciation and not an Annuity on which I should have to pay Income-Tax and Sur-Tax.

I shall need the assistance of an International Tax lawyer besides the advice of my Bank Manager and this will take a little time, but as soon as I return to England on August the 4th, I will have these meetings arranged and then let you have a letter with my decision and their remarks.

There may be another way to avoid these extra crippling taxes, which with my present income, would be crippling, and so prohibit what I want fundamentally to do, namely to keep on adding to the collection and not to let anything go by that is of importance, to have the Annuity paid to me or my nominee in Switzerland. I may decide to live, at least some part of the year in a clinic for arthritis in Switzerland.

My chief interest being the Collection, I want to devote everything I can to it.¹

As if to underscore the ever-increasing value of items in the collection, and items still on the open market, Nan Kivell went on to report a great disappointment he had had on the auction floor at Sotheby's that week.² He had instructed his agent to go up to £7,500 for a 1525 French account of Magellan's Voyages from the Duke of Devonshire's sale, and felt certain of getting it at this figure, but 'sad to say' it went to £9,500 and was bought by Mr John Fleming of New York. Nan Kivell concluded by expressing his interest in the proposal. He would listen to what his advisors said and let Sir Edwin know when the Deputy High Commissioner had returned from a visit to Australia.

Now Nan Kivell wrote to White with news of Sir Edwin's visit, enclosing a new list of items, 6145-6643.³ He also repeated his disappointment with the 1525 account of Magellan. His next move was to consult in detail with his accountant. Norman Alexander was well connected. In pursuing Nan Kivell's queries, he first consulted a friend, Mr Todd Hilton, who was manager of the National Mutual Life Assurance Company of Australasia in London, who told him that 'this was something his company did not tackle'.⁴ This connection then referred Alexander to the Law Revisionary Society, who also said that 'this was not a proposition that interested them'. Then Mr Hilton phoned back to say that he had consulted with an Australian

---
¹ RNK to Sir Edwin McCarthy 2 July 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² RNK to H. White 2 July 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
³ RNK to H. White 2 July 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁴ N. Alexander to RNK 29 July 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
bank, which had advised that it would be prepared to purchase five year's annuity from the Australian Government in return for a discount, but was rather uncertain of the income tax position. Alexander then tried another approach. He contacted another friend of his who was 'an Inspector of Taxes I use for delicate enquiries', and asked his opinion on a new proposition. This was that instead of the Australian Government purchasing the collection for an annuity, they agree to purchase the collection for a capital sum by deferred payment of £5000 a year. 'In other words', wrote Alexander, 'they would not be paying you an annuity which would be taxable income, but a deferred payment which would be a capital sum'. Alexander felt that Nan Kivell should try to get the negotiators to agree to this form. If Australia would agree to this arrangement, the 'nature of the deal is purely one of capital'. Nan Kivell could then go to a bank and get them to discount a debt due to him in five years' time.

In Canberra Harold White reported to the Library Committee in late August that Nan Kivell had expressed interest in the offer put before him by Sir Edwin McCarthy, but that he was concerned about taxation issues and wanted to discuss the proposal in detail with his advisors. Meanwhile Treasury officials had provided more advice on the complexities of the tax situation, in order to work out an alternative offer to Nan Kivell should this prove necessary. The new proposal, now awaiting the approval of the Treasurer, took account of Nan Kivell's expressed desire to use the proceeds of the annuity to make additions to the collection. The main provisions of the new proposal were that:

1. Mr Nan Kivell makes a gift of his present collection to the Commonwealth. If he survives a further five years the gift would not be liable for U.K. Estate Duty. Should he not survive so long, the Commonwealth would take responsibility for any Estate Duty payable by his estate.

2. On transfer of the collection, the Commonwealth would establish a Trust Fund with Mr Nan Kivell, the Commonwealth Librarian, and one other (who might be someone nominated by Mr Nan Kivell) as trustees. The Trust would be for the purpose of adding to the collection and Mr Nan Kivell would be authorised to draw on it to any amount up to, say, £25,000 within the first five years, and a further £50,000, making a total of £75,000, spread over fifteen years. (Monies would probably not be paid into the Trust, but the amounts drawn, up to the authorised limits, would be appropriated
as required.) No Australian or United Kingdom tax would be incurred by this arrangement.¹

Other provisions including appointing Nan Kivell as consultant to the Trust, with the Trust covering his expenses incurred in carrying out its objects, including fares and allowances. Should he fall on hard times financially Nan Kivell could be paid up to £2000 per annum for his services as consultant to the Trust, or some other arrangement could be made to meet his circumstances. The trust would cease on Nan Kivell’s death.

On the same day that White tabled this report to the Committee, The Treasurer transmitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, outlining the essential elements of the new proposal, and stating that he had no objection to Sir Edwin McCarthy being authorised to make an offer to Nan Kivell on this basis.² The next day authorisation to negotiate was cabled to McCarthy in London.³

In due course Nan Kivell was ‘entertained at lunch’ in the High Commissioner’s suite at Australia House on 8 October. Sir Edwin McCarthy was present, as well as Larry Lake and the Australian Taxation Representative Mr Roberts.⁴ They discussed the new proposal of the Australian Government to form a Trust with the collector. This option was immediately unpalatable to the collector. Writing to Sir Edwin in October, Nan Kivell said that his lawyer had pointed out ‘without any prompting from myself’, the delays that might eventuate in administering the trust when three people were appointed to manage it.⁵ This would be disadvantageous ‘when perhaps urgent decisions were necessary’. This was certainly a very valid point where collecting was concerned, because Nan Kivell did not want decisions required to be made in the moment on the auction floor, to secure important items, to be compromised by the bureaucratic process of a trust. However he had another idea up his sleeve. During discussions with his lawyer,


⁵ RNK to E. McCarthy 10 October 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
year (free of income tax) also to be credited to this same account. I would then create a family
trust and any payment I wanted could then be withdrawn as required.

Sir Edwin telephoned Nan Kivell back with a new suggestion. Nan Kivell
summarised his understanding of Sir Edwin’s new offer in a written response on 23
October, which shows that by this time the terms of negotiation had altered quite
dramatically into one of essentially two lump sum payments of capital. The
brinkmanship exhibited by both key players at this stage of the game is evident in the
exchange of letters which ensued at this point.

'[Y]our new suggestion for a solution sounds excellent to me’ wrote Nan
Kivell.

I understand, considering we get the formalities finished this year, that it works out like this:-

1959 January 1st. First payment of £E 30,000
(As capital return, free of Income-tax)

1965 January 1st. Second payment of £E 30,000
(As capital return, free of Income-tax)

1971 January 1st. Payment of £E 5,000 annuity, free of
Income-tax on each succeeding January 1st.

On this annuity, if ever it came to pass I would accept any rulings in the payment of Income-
tax. I may even be living in Australia by then with any luck!!

As I shall be collecting material all the time, and as the Commonwealth National
Library will be the benefactors [sic], I think we must envisage all eventualities, for instance
in 1971 there will undoubtedly be a completely new staff in the Library and in Parliament.

I do think that here and there in our letters mention should be made of the exceptional
financial benefit that is accruing to the Commonwealth National Library, insomuch as the
collection is valued at auction prices at £200,000, and I could sell it at this sum to an
American collector.

However if I did this I should have excessive complications over future Income-tax,
and obligations would come toppling in by every post. Also this would defeat the purpose in
forming the collection, a purely Australasian one, and intended eventually only for Australia
or New Zealand. So again my many thanks for your most valued assistance.¹

However Nan Kivell was wrong, either inadvertently or deliberately, in his
understanding on the matter of the annuity. Sir Edwin had not in fact offered an

¹ RNK to E. McCarthy 23 October 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
annuity in addition to the two lump-sum capital payments. The payments were offered instead of an annuity, as a way of avoiding tax issues raised by the annuity proposal. Sir Edwin wrote back the next day, after taking urgent counsel with a British Inland Revenue officer and an Australian taxation officer.¹ It was now evident, thought Sir Edwin, that there would be no difficulty in their coming to an arrangement if they could solve the taxation problem. It was clear Nan Kivell’s wish was that the collection enter into the possession of the Australian Commonwealth Government. Regarding financial arrangements, something of the order they had discussed between them would, subject to details, be acceptable to the collector. Mindful of Nan Kivell’s reference to the high value of the collection, Sir Edwin added that the Prime Minister, and indeed all those interested in the collection, was aware that its marketable value had been assessed ‘at a figure much greater than those we have discussed’. Inland Revenue representatives had said that they could not regard annual payments as capital and if they commenced even some years after a substantial sum of a capital nature were paid, the whole transaction would be subject to tax. The tax representative had insisted that this was unavoidable, even if it were intended that the annuity would be used to add to the collection. After Sir Edwin telephoned Nan Kivell he then enquired of the tax officials as to whether two sums six years apart would be considered as capital, and their answer was that they would be able to accept this view. In respect of the annuity, however, Australia’s own Taxation Officer had informed Sir Edwin that, from his detailed discussions with the Inland Revenue officers, he was satisfied that an undertaking to pay an annuity in twelve year’s time would make not only the annuity but the other two payments subject to tax.

Now Sir Edwin showed his own mettle, by tactfully putting to rest the confusion about the annuity. At the same time, in a brilliant gesture of gracious diplomacy, he acceded to Nan Kivell’s implied suggestion that the proposed settlement was too small in relation to his assessment of the value of the collection:

When I suggested two payments - six years apart - of £30,000 each, I had in mind, because of the taxation aspect, and only because of it, that we would have to drop the idea of an annuity. I regret that I apparently conveyed to you that my suggestion included the introduction of an annuity after twelve years. Though I did not work it out, it seemed that roughly the two payments of £30,000 with the interest that would accrue by substituting the second lump sum for an annuity up to fifteen years was in line with our proposal of £30,000 plus £3,000 a year

¹ E. McCarthy to RNK 24 October 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
for fifteen years. Perhaps on this basis, however, it is somewhat less than it should be, and I
would be prepared to suggest to our Government that the two payments of £30,000 each be
raised to £35,000.¹

Sir Edwin noted Nan Kivell’s reservations about the establishment of a trust, and said that if they could agree on the other aspects he could recommend to the Australian Government that this idea be dropped. In the light of what he had stated, the Deputy High Commissioner continued,

I wonder how the following appeals to you, namely that a payment of £E35,000 be made to
you on January 1st, 1959, and a further payment of £E35,000 on January 1st, 1965. These
figures are based on the assumption that no tax would be payable. There would be no proposal
that the sums so received should be used by you for making additional purchases for the
collection, but if you decided to make any such purchases they would be subject to your own
discretion and judgment. If this were acceptable to you, I should be glad to put it forward.

Sir Edwin was going to Geneva in a few days for about two weeks. He thought
perhaps they could ‘have a further look at the subject’ on his return. This state of
affairs brought about a surprisingly swift resolution to the matter. Nan Kivell’s reply
was speedy and to the point:

Dear Sir Edwin,

Thank you very much for your most comprehending and detailed letter, and I do
appreciate very much all the intricate excursions [sic] you have had, to take up your valuable
time before an agreeable conclusion could be made concerning my collection.

I think then that under the circumstances necessary to avoid excessive tax which
would cripple any of my future collecting, you have now made it possible for me to accept
your suggestion as detailed in your letter of the 24th October 1958, namely, two payments, the
first £E35,000 on January 1st, 1959, and the second £E 35,000 on January 1st, 1965, both
figures tax free.

I thought I would write to you by return seeing you are off to Geneva this week so
that you would know my decision in the matter.

So again with my many thanks,

Yours sincerely

Rex Nan Kivell²

At last, they had a deal.

Sir Edwin summarised his actions in a memorandum to the Secretary of the
Prime Minister’s Department in Canberra on 19 November 1958. Wryly, he allowed
that ‘it cannot be said that the discussions have been easy’, but went on to state Nan

¹ Ibid.
² RNK to E. McCarthy 28 October 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Kivell's final position. Sir Edwin believed Nan Kivell's wish that the Commonwealth Government have the collection was clearly genuine. He would have nothing to do with a trust, even one that included only one other member beside himself. Sir Edwin could 'make no headway with him on this point'. Nan Kivell obviously had no financial problems at present, however he foresaw a time when his income might be reduced through retirement and showed real interest in an annuity in perhaps six year's time. Here, however 'the taxation issue came up at every turn'. Nan Kivell had 'an adviser in the background' and Mr Roberts, the Australian Taxation Representative had supplied prompt answers as a result of informal discussions with British taxation authorities, who had 'shown every willingness to be helpful'. Finally, reported Sir Edwin, he reached a stage of making a proposal which if acceptable he would recommend to the Government. He found it necessary to say that as it was different in character from the one already approved, he could only commit himself to a recommendation. Detailing the proposal, which he justified on the grounds that 'the financial commitment by the Commonwealth is probably not much, if anything, greater than the last offer from the Government', and that as it was almost certain that the Commonwealth would incur no liability for Estate Duty, 'its total commitment may well be considerably less than that previously contemplated'. The proposal met the taxation difficulties which had 'loomed large' in all the discussions, and 'of the many suggestions and hints put to him, this was the only one that was not met with doubt and difficulty'. In making his recommendation, Sir Edwin stated,

I would hope that the proposal be acceptable to the Government. Because of the lengthy and somewhat unusual nature of the negotiations, might I suggest that it be dealt with as soon as possible, so that I might personally bring it to finality with Mr Nan Kivell before I leave London early in the New Year.2

There was one final delicate matter to attend to. Sir Edwin asked that if the proposal were accepted, he be asked to convey to the collector a message of appreciation from the Government, acknowledging that in handing over the collection Nan Kivell had been inspired by a personal wish that it go to Australia. As Nan Kivell had 'shown himself rather sensitive' on the issue of the market value of the collection, Sir Edwin wanted the Government to assure Nan Kivell that the financial arrangements that had been entered into were not related to the collection's value in

---

1 E. McCarthy to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department 19 November 1958. NLA file.
2 Ibid.
the world's art markets. His intention was to convey to Nan Kivell that the Government was aware that Nan Kivell had assessed the collection's value at £200,000, 'not that they themselves so assessed it'. Sir Edwin clearly did not want Nan Kivell to form the impression that the Australians were congratulating themselves on getting the collection cheaply.

Late in November confirmation was obtained from the various taxation authorities that no tax liability would arise from the proposed arrangement. Income tax was avoided, assuming that the collection was not part of the collector's stock in trade as a dealer, as there was no profit involved, the collection having cost £100,000 to assemble. Stamp Duty in the United Kingdom was avoided if the instrument effecting the transfer was executed, and the goods actually passed, outside the United Kingdom. The Estate Duty position was rather more complicated. It was likely that Estate Duty in the United Kingdom could be avoided through Crown Immunity. If the Commonwealth National Library were the owner of the goods after transfer, continued Crown Immunity would depend on the continued eligibility for this under its constitution. If the Library's constitution changed before Nan Kivell's death, so could its eligibility for this exemption. Further advice received in early December from the Taxation Department in Canberra confirmed the importance of the Commonwealth's special status in avoiding Sales Tax and Estate Duty, and warned that if Nan Kivell were resident in Australia at the time of his death his estate might become liable for State death duties. Therefore is was desirable that any agreement with Nan Kivell be concluded in the ACT or outside Australia, and the property in the collection should pass to the Commonwealth at a time when the collection was situated either in the ACT or outside Australia.

Acquisition

The last obstacles to the deal were removed on Christmas Eve 1958. W.R. Cumming, Assistant Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department wrote to Sir Edwin McCarthy advising that the Treasurer and Prime Minister had approved his proposal

---

to Nan Kivell. The Prime Minister also approved the message concerning the Government's recognition of the value of the collection, which McCarthy had suggested. Sir Edwin wrote to Nan Kivell on 5 January with the news. All the tax issues had been resolved, but to cover itself the Government proposed a final condition that Nan Kivell be responsible for any Estate Duty and Voluntary Disposition Duty that might arise as the result of the collection being acquired for 'inadequate consideration', i.e., less than its value. This Nan Kivell readily agreed to. Subject to Nan Kivell's agreement, it was now proposed to arrange for the collection to be shipped to Australia in the collector's name, and for his nominee to sign there a Power of Attorney on his behalf. The costs of packing and shipping would 'of course' be borne by the Commonwealth Government.

Sir Edwin went on to say that,

When informing me of this approval the Australian Government asked me to inform you of their great pleasure and satisfaction that this arrangement has been made possible and to say how fully it appreciates that in making your collection available to it you have been inspired by the personal wish that it should go to Australia. Moreover it recognises that the financial consideration agreed to is related to neither its intrinsic worth nor to its value on the open market.

In reply Nan Kivell wrote, 'I do appreciate the paragraph in your letter expressing the Australian Government's understanding of the intrinsic worth of the collection which in years to come will be of increasing interest to future generations of Australians'. He quite appreciated the extra conditions regarding duties, but was entirely confident that this situation would not arise. Nor did he anticipate any problems with the cataloguing as he had been working for months on getting all the material schedules and 'very extensive indexing' up to date.

The Australian authorities arranged for £35,000 to be paid to Nan Kivell in advance of the instrument of settlement being signed. This payment was authorised as a charge to the Prime Ministers Department. The payment would have been one of the last authorised by Menzies in his capacity as Prime Minister, as he was defeated in a General Election at the end of 1958. An agreement with Nan Kivell was signed on 5 February 1959. The signatories were Sir Allen Stanley Brown, Acting High Commissioner of Australia, on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia, and Rex

---

1 RNK to E. McCarthy 6 January 1959. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
2 Prime Minister's Department, Division 214, Item no. 44. H. White, report to Library Committee No. 422 7 April 1959. National Library of Australia.
Nan Kivell of 4 Gosfield Street, Langham Street, London W.1. The witnesses were Larry Lake and Robert Durie. The agreement was signed in London. This was because it transpired that although the plan had been to sign the agreement in Australia to avoid Stamp Duty, this was found by Coward, Chance & Co. not to be possible if a first instalment were to be paid immediately. There was a way around this last minute stumbling block however. If a simple agreement of sale followed by immediate delivery of the goods were executed, rather than a conveyance or transfer, Estate and Stamp Duty could be avoided. What this meant in practice was that having signed the deal, there was great pressure on both parties to get the collection inventoried, packed and shipped to Canberra as quickly as possible. Writing to acknowledge his thanks, Nan Kivell remarked to Sir Edwin McCarthy ‘now we have the future of the destination of my collection nicely concluded - excluding of course the reaction of all interested New Zealanders’.\(^1\) Nan Kivell said he was very happy at all times when he met Sir Edwin to discuss the issue. He asked that his appreciation also be conveyed to Mr Menzies, for ‘his assistance in all the matters that were necessary to bring our final decision to our mutual satisfaction’. To Sir Allen Brown Nan Kivell reported that he was ‘very glad to have the responsibility taken from me’, and was now cataloguing and packing the books and pamphlets, and getting the drawings and prints mounted and the paintings framed so that there would be nothing more needed to be done to them on arrival in Canberra.\(^2\) He would start handing the collection over ‘in relays’ to Messrs Bourlets, the transport agents, and hoped to have the whole shipping exercise completed within the next three to four months. There might be a slight delay in getting all the binding done, as Messrs Bayntuns of Bath, Nan Kivell’s binders, had now some two or three hundred books to bind and cases to make. He would give Mr Lake a completed catalogue list of the collection to date, so that the items delivered could be checked off.

There were still some formalities to be concluded. Harold White reported to the Library Committee in April that the complete list of the collection had still not been supplied, though Nan Kivell was working on it.\(^3\) A press release had been issued on the 16th of January, although the terms of the agreement had not been made public [Figure 15]. White reported that ‘on the advice of the Crown solicitor, a formal

---

1 RNK to E. McCarthy 9 February 1959. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
2 RNK to A. Brown 9 February 1959. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
agreement is being drafted by his London agent, Messrs Coward, Chance, to cover all aspects of the transaction including those relating to tax.\footnote{A. McMullin to RNK 21 April 1959. National Library of Australia file P21/5/30/1.}

In a letter expressing the ‘unanimous and sincere thanks’ of the Library Committee, Sir Alister McMullin told Nan Kivell that the negotiations between Sir Edwin McCarthy and himself had reached their conclusion between the dissolution of one Parliament and the meeting of its successor following the General Election. McMullin was deeply impressed, therefore, at the ‘great pleasure’ expressed by the newly reconstituted Library Committee at the successful acquisition of the Nan Kivell when it met in April at the beginning of the new session of Parliament.\footnote{A. McMullin to RNK 21 April 1959. National Library of Australia file P21/5/30/1.}

The announcement that Australia had acquired Nan Kivell’s collection was greeted with wide press coverage in Australia and New Zealand. Privately, some individuals in New Zealand were outraged at the announcement, and a few even wrote letters of indignation to New Zealand papers. The collectors Bruce Godward and Ken Webster were among those who felt a sense of betrayal, not only by the New Zealand Government, but by Nan Kivell himself. In Ken Webster’s case, his feelings were coloured by an already difficult relationship with Nan Kivell. Webster was himself a New Zealand-born artefact dealer in London, no less, and probably more cranky than Nan Kivell, when it came down to possessiveness over trophies. Nan Kivell seems to have treated Webster with a mixture of callousness and gleeful contempt. This is nowhere more evident than in the gloating letter Nan Kivell sent Webster three days after signing the deal with Australia. This was in response to a telephone call Webster had made to the Redfern Gallery, and to an earlier letter the rival dealer had sent asking for the return of some items he had evidently lent to Nan Kivell. ‘My dear Ken’, wrote Nan Kivell,

You know I have looked everywhere for the items you mention in your letter... Also Mizouni and I have searched everywhere in our stock rooms... I heard you telephoned your surprise at my decision in letting my collection go to Australia, but I believe my explanation that 85% is Australian and only 15% New Zealand and that I did not want the collection to be divided should make people understand. Australia will in no way withhold the loan - who knows, perhaps permanent loan - of the New Zealand items to New Zealand.

Also I did offer the whole collection free to New Zealand at the time the Australian Government wanted to recommend me for a knighthood, but the New Zealand Government
did nothing about it. How can one go on thinking they are at all interested in the collection. I do wish you would explain this to anyone who makes enquiries...¹

Nan Kivell had a habit of losing other people's property, then writing letters to say that he and Mizouni Nouari (his Algerian aide-de-camp) had searched everywhere, to no avail. Since he kept very good track of his own property, it is hard not to suspect that an undertone of deception runs through these letters, and in this instance Nan Kivell seems to be making a calculated effort to enrage Webster. The tall tale of the knighthood, repeated here in typically mangled form, does not lend much credibility to Nan Kivell's claim that he could not find Webster's articles, and makes a rather shabby coda to the fine words exchanged only three days earlier with Sir Edwin McCarthy and Sir Allen Brown.

¹ RNK to K. Webster 12 February 1959. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Chapter Six
The Redfern Gallery 1923-1938

The Redfern Gallery was founded by A. Kayvett Lee and A. Maxtone Graham in 1923. The gallery was named after the Redfern fashion house, the upper floor of whose premises in Old Bond Street it occupied in its early years. Redfern produced fashion for women of means, specialising particularly in 'turf society', and made the riding habits which no woman, on either side of the English Channel, 'kept in style, loved and treated with respect, would have dreamed of forgoing'. Set up to capture the interest of the more art-inclined of the Redfern fashion house's well-heeled clientele, the gallery came into being at an intersection between the 'Paris Monde' and English 'turf society'. That such an intersection could have existed, at least in theory, is delightfully suggested by a contemporary comment made by the art critic Clive Bell. After the war English attitudes to contemporary art remained provincial and isolated from events in Europe. Critical opinion in London tended to agree that Paris was the centre of fine art, and English artists did not disagree. Bell chose a riding analogy to characterise the difference between French and English painting, when he declared that 'in old racing days... it used to be held that French form was seven pounds below English. The winner of the Derby, that is to say, could generally give the best French colt about that weight and a beating. In painting, English form is normally a stone below French'. However while well-informed English critics and artists knew something of the modern movement in Continental art, the general public were largely ignorant of the names or the works of its leaders. Painting in England was dominated by men like Alfred Munnings, who had made a substantial fortune out of painting equestrian portraits.

Before the war two major exhibitions of French painting had been organised by the critic and painter Roger Fry, assisted by Clive Bell. These shows had caused an

---

2 Edmonde Charles-Roux, Chanel, London: The Harvill Press, 1995, p. 93. How close the association was between the fashion house and the upstairs gallery that bore its name is not clear, but Redfern was a successful business in France and had excellent connections there, and it was through the sale of Continental paintings to English buyers that the Redfern Gallery made its fortune. It is possible that contacts provided by the fashion business helped to put the gallery in touch with the avant-garde of the Paris art world, from which it made significant acquisitions between the wars.
initial wave of excitement in London, which lasted for more than two years, as critical reaction to the modern movement in European art turned from vilification to cautious acceptance. *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* was held at the Grafton Galleries in the winter of 1910/11. For many Londoners this show provided their first sight of the work of Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck and Picasso. The *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition of English, French and Russian Artists*, opened at the Grafton Galleries in October 1912.¹ This exhibition provided a more up-to-the-minute selection of Continental painters, including Matisse, Picasso, Derain, Vlaminck, Van Dongen, and Bonnard. As well as introducing the exhibition-going public to such radical novelties as Cubism, the show had an immediate effect on students at London’s art schools. At the Slade School for example, Mark Gertler and others including Paul Nash formed themselves into a group called the ‘Neo-Primitives’, responding to European trends and the critical influence of Roger Fry. Artists associated with the Bloomsbury literary community, like Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, also responded to the modern movement. Another more radical group formed around Percy Wyndham Lewis, whose opposition to the excessive formalism expounded by Clive Bell and Roger Fry led to an alternative strand of development in English modernism, epitomised in his magazine *Blast*.

The war put a stop to all this excitement. In its aftermath London was effectively cut off from Europe, at least in the area of artistic endeavour. Artists in London were loosely divided between those who had returned from the war and those who had not gone at all. Of the artists who had experienced the horrors of the front, many were demoralised and dispirited. Wyndham Lewis had almost lost his appetite for critical skirmishing with Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Painters like Paul Nash who had been employed as war artists had had so much of their youthful vigour knocked out of them that they were reluctant to adopt a challenging attitude to prevailing standards in their post-war work. English painting retreated into the safety of provincialism, finding its best stimulus and reward in the landscape.

A new gallery

1923 was an inauspicious year to start a new gallery. Economically England was in recession for most of the 1920s. Although economic activity surged immediately after the war, there was no sustained growth, and unemployment grew throughout the decade. The Redfern Gallery offered a non-profit exhibition space for young art school graduates to show work.\(^1\) The particularly close association between the gallery and the major art schools at this time is apparent in the content of its earliest exhibitions. The gallery’s first exhibition, opened on 1 November 1923, included works by Orovida Pissarro, as if to herald a new wave of bright young Post-Impressionists. Other artists represented in the first show included William Orpen, William Rothenstein, A.W. Rich, Claude Lovat Fraser, Ambrose McEvoy, Muriel Hope, Rosa Hope, Colin Gill, Joseph Southall, H. Rushbury, W.B.E. Rankin, C. Maresco Pearce, George J. Charlton, Randolph Schwabe, Allan Walton, Daphne Jerrold, Sine Mackinnon, Eleanor Best and Elsie McNaught.\(^2\) Emphasising the gallery’s association with the art schools, Randolph Schwabe, principal of the Slade School, and William Rothenstein, principal of the Royal College of Art, both exhibited again in April-May 1924.\(^3\) Rothenstein’s brother, Charles Rutherston, was engaged to Essil Elmslie, a painter who managed the Redfern Gallery at this time.\(^4\) Another exhibition in 1924, ‘Original Works by a Group of Students of the Royal College of Art’, included drawings and carvings by Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth.\(^5\) The influence of the Slade School continued to dominate the gallery’s exhibition programme for the remainder of the 1920s and much of the 1930s, with works by Augustus John providing a reliable source of sales. The gallery also exhibited paintings by other senior English painters, often with strong links with the

---

\(^1\) Editorials by the ‘Lay Figure’ in *The Studio* around this time suggest both a dearth of dealer galleries and a corresponding lack of opportunities for young art school graduates. *The Studio* v. 87 1924, p. 120, ‘On Vanishing Markets’; p. 360, ‘On Chances for Students’.


\(^4\) RNK to Radleigh 12 December 1976: ‘she was the first secretary for the Redfern when we were in Bond Street and she eventually married Charles Rutherston who assembled an important collection of contemporary paintings’.

\(^5\) Information supplied by the Redfern Gallery.
Slade School, including William Orpen, Walter Richard Sickert, and Philip Wilson Steer. Paintings and watercolours by these artists were regularly exhibited alongside works by promising young unknowns. This strategy helped to keep the enterprise solvent, with sales of work by artists with established reputations effectively underwriting losses on works by artists new to the market. There was little appetite in London for Continental painting in 1924, and although the gallery helped to pioneer sales of French moderns later in the decade, its initial focus was on young British art.

It was an undistinguished time in British art. The predominance of works on paper (watercolours, drawings, etchings and wood-engravings) reproduced and discussed in *The Studio* during the 1920s gives an idea of the small-scale domestic work favoured by critics and public alike. Far from being an era of dash and daring in English art practice, the twenties were a period of cautious conservatism in all forms of art. Oil painting itself seems to have been relegated (at least in the pages of *The Studio*) to a position of secondary importance to the productions of watercolours, drawing and prints. In printmaking, groups like the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers tended to dominate. Edwardian tastes persisted in works by Brangwyn, Laura Knight, Sir Frank Short, and other members of this rather backward-looking sector of the art community. Occasionally *The Studio* would reproduce a more overtly Continental-looking work by Mark Gertler or Duncan Grant. Even the London Group, which had been in existence since before the war, fared less well out of coverage in *The Studio* than one might expect, given the prominence that this association of artists has been given in recent art histories of the period. Highly representational art dominated the market for pictures. The lessons about the artificial nature of representation itself, so strongly suggested in works by Parisian painters, occasionally seen in London galleries, seem to have been largely forgotten by the majority of the English fine art community, if they were ever absorbed at all. By English standards in 1926 a painter like Frances Hodgkins (who knew the contemporary idioms in art across the Channel as well as any English artists and better than most) was far ahead of her younger peers.

The Redfern Gallery made its entry into this stolid environment by relying heavily on exhibiting and selling works on paper. It tended to show works that were

---

1 *The Studio* v. 93 1927, pp. 256-60.
2 Harrison, 1981, pp. 85-6, 153-5, 184-5.
contemporary in the sense that they were made by competent young artists, often fresh out of the Slade, but were fairly undemanding and free from disturbing new stylistic trends borrowed from Paris. There was a reliable market for such work, and the gallery's caution in not risking anything too avant-garde soon paid off through regular reviews and reproductions of works in The Studio. From 1925 onwards the Redfern Gallery appears frequently in the magazine's monthly round-ups of London exhibitions.

Safe young artists included Miss N.L.M. Cundell, of whose watercolour paintings (at the Redfern in 1925) the Studio critic remarked that they 'made a certain appeal by their unaffected sincerity of attention and their simple directness of statement. They were agreeably free from tricks of technique'. Ethel Walker also showed work regularly at the Redfern, helping to build the reputation she earned over the course of the next decade as a leading English watercolourist. Edward Marsh cited a work by Ethel Walker as one of the most significant of his early acquisitions when he set out to collect contemporary works. It is quite possible that Marsh's first Walker was purchased from the show of her work at the Redfern Gallery in 1927. Another reliable young watercolourist was the Slade graduate Clara Klinghoffer, whose lightweight still lifes and society portraits showed the enduring influence of Augustus John.

Rex Nan Kivell joined the Redfern Gallery in 1925, possibly as a very junior partner. He was also working as a Marshall to the High Court Judges by this time, a position he held until 1935. Quite how Nan Kivell became interested in the Redfern Gallery remains a mystery, but he may have found the opportunity through social connections made through his court work, or through his amateur archaeological pursuits. His interest in the Redfern was more than a side-line however, and occupied much of his time, as contemporary gallery correspondence bears witness. Nan Kivell

---

1 The Studio v. 90 1925, p. 308.
3 The Studio v. 93 1927, p. 194. '...at the Redfern there has been an exhibition of paintings and drawings by Miss Ethel Walker, who draws on occasion with grace and distinction and manages cleverly subtle effects of colour'.
4 The Studio v. 91 1926, pp. 192-7, 'Clara Klinghoffer at the Redfern', with reproductions pp. 195-7; The Studio v. 94 1927, p. 269; v. 98 1929, p. 520. In this latter review the critic T.W. Earp writes, 'The exhibition of this artist's portraits at the Redfern Gallery is most successful when women and children are the subjects. Nearly all the paintings, while tenderly conceived, are accomplished with an admirable lack of sentimentality, and are...impressive for their sincerity as well as their ability of execution'.

123
began his apprenticeship in fine art dealing as the office assistant to Lee, Graham, and Richard Smart, another founding director [Figure 16]. He quickly proved his ability, and was soon entrusted with some important relationships, including the gallery’s correspondence with Paul Nash, who regularly exhibited works on paper at the Redfern. His interest in illustrated books and training as a bookbinder were an advantage as the technical duties of mounting, framing and hanging of works fell to him.

By 1926 the Redfern Gallery had abandoned its not-for-profit status and become a profitable business. It found its niche among the comparatively few recognised dealers in contemporary art operating in London’s West End. These included the older firms of Alex Reid and Lefèvre, the Leicester Galleries, the Beaux Arts Gallery and Arthur Tooth and Son. These galleries, while they featured work by more adventurous artists like Epstein from time to time, all depended very much on sales of work by established artists like Orpen, Flint, McEvoy, Brangwyn, Steer and Munnings for their income. Smaller quantities of works by Continental painters who enjoyed a reputation in London, like Picasso and Matisse, were stocked by these galleries. Contemporary art dealing was still a very specialised and small-scale activity in London after the war. Listings of dealer galleries in The Studio in the mid-1920s typically show no more than thirty galleries in their pages, and of these only about a dozen specialised in contemporary painting and printmaking. The Redfern’s exhibitions tended to be polite and undemanding. Among works noted by the Studio critic on display in the Redfern’s Summer Salon in 1927 were ‘serious and carefully handled’ little oils by D. de Cartaret, a vigorous view of Hendaye, by R. Ihlee, drawings by Clara Klinghoffer and Augustus John, a watercolour Decoration by Ethel Walker, and an ‘admirably sensitive and delicate’ pen and wash drawing, Segovia, by Kenneth Hobson.

**Works on paper**

While continuing with its policy of showing conservative oil paintings alongside more progressive works on paper, the Redfern Gallery made contemporary printmaking a special feature of its stock and exhibitions. The new styles of the Modern movement, if they made their way at all into the pages of The Studio in the
twenties, tended to come in by the back door of commercial art, in advertising graphics and through regular articles on modern poster design featured by the magazine. The London Underground made effective use of young design talent in its popular poster campaigns, commissioning works by artists like E. McKnight Kauffer. It is ironic that the general public of the mid-1920s became more accustomed to new stylistic devices through mass exposure to these images on the tube, than the majority of the gallery visitors and buyers. Contemporary printmaking provided the formal basis for much mass communication, and prints became an important vehicle for introducing artistic developments to the public. Prints, especially wood engravings, woodcuts and even linocuts, were especially effective in the poster design process. They had an industrial application which was seen as useful at a time when the relationship between Art and Industry was often discussed. They could also be enjoyed in the form of inexpensive limited edition works on paper supplied by selected dealers like the Redfern Gallery and its closest rival at this time, the St George’s Gallery. Contemporary prints were altogether less ostentatious than oil painting. Visitors whose conservative reactions might quickly be aroused by daring excursions into Modernism in painting, were more likely to be receptive to subtle experiments with formal representation in printmaking. Young artists who were aware of French artistic trends but nervous about unleashing them on parochial English buyers, soon learned to make their more progressive stylistic statements in prints. The progressive movement in printmaking was strongly represented in the work of Claude Flight and his students at the Grosvenor School of Art. Flight used stylistic devices found in the work of the Italian Futurists to create a style of modernist illustration which he encouraged his students to express in the relatively new medium of linocuts. Several exhibitions of these prints were held at the Redfern Gallery in the 1920s, including work by Flight, Cyril Power, Sybil Andrews, Lill Tschudi, and Ethel Spowers among others working in the medium [Figure 17].

Two potentially conflicting tendencies converged in progressive printmaking in the 1920s: on the one hand the nostalgic pride Britons took in their literary and illustrative traditions, epitomized by William Blake; on the other a recognition of the

---

1 The Studio v. 90 1925, pp. 42-3.
bold stylistic assertions of pre-war Modernism. These two strands of British Modernism came together during a revival of interest in the production of fine illustrated book editions, which was promoted by small-scale publishers like the Curwen Press, the Greynog Press and the Nonesuch Press. Wood engraving was the favoured medium for illustrating these collectible editions. In 1925 the growing vogue for wood engraving was well represented at the Redfern Gallery in an exhibition of works by Eric Gill, Robert Gibbings and Eric Daglish, followed by a group showing of the Society of Wood Engravers. Several groups of artists working in this medium formed for the purpose of showing and selling work. The most prominent of these groups were the Society of Wood Engravers and the English Wood Engraving Society.¹ It was a form of publishing that was particularly appealing to Rex Nan Kivell. The young dealer threw himself into the work of organising shows. In 1926 and 1927 the Redfern Gallery was in friendly competition with the St George’s Gallery for exhibitions of wood engravings. In 1926 The Society of Wood Engravers exhibited at the Redfern Gallery and the English Wood Engraving Society at the St George’s Gallery.² In 1927 this arrangement was reversed, the Society of Wood Engravers exhibiting at the St. George’s Gallery and the English Wood Engraving Society at the Redfern Gallery.³ In both years the exhibitions were held simultaneously, ensuring substantial notice by the art critics. Despite the favourable notices the print editions did not always sell well, and the Redfern Gallery gradually acquired an impressive stock of works by the leading printmakers in the contemporary field. This stock formed the basis of the substantial gifts of prints Nan Kivell made to New Zealand public galleries in 1953.⁴

Among wood engravers showing at the Redfern in 1927 Eric Daglish and Claire Leighton were singled out by The Studio as showing particular promise.⁵ Examples of their work from this period in New Zealand collections include Daglish’s Barn Owl and Leighton’s The Fat Stock Market.⁶ These two works demonstrate the

² *The Studio* v. 93 1926, p. 42.
³ *The Studio* v. 94 1927, p. 269.
⁶ Both in the Nan Kivell print collection of the Auckland Art Gallery.
range of illustrative interest expressed by the wood engraving movement, from bucolic idylls to social and political commentary. The outstanding artist among the wood-engravers was Paul Nash, who frequently exhibited work at the gallery alongside that of his brother John Nash. From 1926 onwards Nan Kivell was in regular contact with Paul Nash, arranging sales of the artist’s work, and all the fine detail involved in preparing works for exhibition, including mount-making and framing. Examples of his work sold by the gallery at this time include the ‘Genesis Set’, a series of twelve designs originally engraved on wood by Nash for the Nonesuch Press in London, and printed opposite the relative parts of the text of the first chapter of Genesis from the King James version of the Bible.¹ The edition of Genesis, published in 1924, was limited to 375 copies.² It was oversubscribed and sold out before publication. Copies were soon scarce. Subsequently the publishers gave permission for a small edition of twelve of each design to be printed and sold by the artist, but it was found that the last block, Contemplation, had broken in the press while the book was being printed. A few original artist’s and printer’s proofs had been taken from this block before the book was printed. Of these only four were available for the new edition, and so Nash could only make up four new sets of the twelve original designs. Of these Nash sold one to a private collector, and the other to the British Museum. Another he elected to give to the Redfern Gallery to sell, and the fourth he tried unsuccessfully to sell to a collector in America.³

In 1928 the gallery arranged a showing of Nash’s wood engravings.⁴ Included were examples from several book illustration commissions the artist had executed, among them Cotswold Characters, by John Drinkwater, 1921, Yale Press; Mr Bosphorus and the Muses, by Ford Madox Ford, 1923, Duckworth; first Book of Genesis 1924, Nonesuch Press; Welshman’s Hose, by Robert Graves, The Fleuron, 1926; Wagner’s Music Drama of the Ring, by L. Archier Leroy, Noel Douglas, 1925; and Ab-er-Rhaman in Paradise, by Jules Tellier, 1928, Golden Cockerel Press.

¹ ‘Dear Nash’, wrote Nan Kivell in November 1926, ‘what would you consider as an offer for the eight remaining prints out of that broken set of your “Genesis” series...let us know as soon as you can won’t you?’ RNK to Paul Nash 30 November 1926. Tate Gallery Archive 70-50/1095/411.
² Book of Genesis, with twelve designs engraved by Paul Nash printed with the text, Soho: Nonesuch Press, 1924.
⁴ A complete transcript from the catalogue of the exhibition of wood engravings by Paul Nash at the Redfern Gallery in 1928, showing editions as stated in 1928, is given in Alexander Postan, The complete graphic works of Paul Nash, London: Secker and Warburg, 1973, Appendix II, p. 87.
Nash’s exhibition followed soon after the publication in the *Print Collector’s Quarterly*, in July 1928, of a complete catalogue of the artist’s wood engravings with an article by John Gould Fletcher.¹ Nash’s biographer Anthony Bertram noted that the 1928 wood engraving exhibition ‘celebrated the end of the activity for Nash’, because he produced very few more after this point in his career.² Despite critical success the show failed to realise substantial sales. ‘Our score...is indeed light’, Nash lamented to Nan Kivell, ‘shall we never get away with these bloody wood-cuts?’³ Bertram felt that Nash was expressing his ‘true self’ in the wood engravings, while pursuing his stylistic development in the more ambitious media of watercolours and oil paintings. Certainly the wood engravings were a more intimate form of expression than the larger media. In their function as book illustrations they were consistent with the Redfern Gallery’s marked predilection for the illustrative in contemporary art, a taste shared by both Nan Kivell and his senior partner A. Knyvett Lee. But it can also be observed that stylistic devices suggested in cubist works could have applications in the design of wood engravings, enhancing the effectiveness of these small images as illustrations. Something of the convergence of these artistic cross-currents is suggested, for example, in *Division of Light and Darkness*, from the *Genesis* set.⁴ In this tiny wood engraving a starkly geometric, cubist-inspired approach is used to reinterpret the Biblical creation myth for a post-industrial audience.

The wood engraving exhibition was held ‘by arrangement’ with the London Artists Association, of which Nash was a beneficiary.⁵ The L.A.A. was an organisation set up after the war with the assistance of the economist John Maynard Keynes, to support struggling artists.⁶ Partly because of Keynes’ involvement, the artists supported by the L.A.A. tended to be members of the London Group, had connections with the Bloomsbury community, and had been vetted by Roger Fry and Clive Bell. The Redfern Gallery had to come to an agreement with the L.A.A. over financial returns for L.A.A. artists exhibiting at the gallery; this was readily achieved.⁷

---

² Bertram, 1955, p. 151.
⁴ One of the twelve prints in this edition is in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery collection.
⁷ P. Nash to RNK 21 June 1928, ‘I am glad the matter of the L.A.A. can be settled so easily’. Tate Gallery Archive.
Nash was very particular about mounting his prints and sent Nan Kivell detailed instructions. ‘I have only just noticed that Lee says in his letter something about putting two engravings in one frame’, he complained. He did not want more than one engraving in each frame ‘however small the engraving may be’, and any mounts cut for more than one engraving must be scrapped, or Nash would ‘take them over’ (paper products were expensive and Nash was parsimonious), and new mounts must be cut. There was one exception to this rule: in the case of the engraving Elms Nash wanted the first and second states mounted in one frame. He wanted the majority of the framed proofs exhibited but not for sale, except for the ‘Genesis Set’ for which he had fond hopes of obtaining a ‘fancy’ price: he would leave the price to Knyvett Lee’s judgement.

Sales did not always go smoothly: for example Nash’s American sale went sour. He had asked 17 guineas for the set, and agreed to send some sample prints to the American collector. But he never received the payment, or the return of the prints. In desperation he asked the Redfern to help. ‘I am sending you his letter,’ Nash wrote to Lee,

You will see what the bastard says. Do you think I have ever heard another word from him since complying with his request? No sir. I wonder whether you ever had any dealings with him or could possibly help me to recover the prints or the ‘check’ - preferably the latter. I know you have dealings with Americans from time to time & probably understand the language, you even seem to extract money from them so do help me.2

By this time Nash wanted 30 guineas for the two ‘Genesis Sets’, which he had now given to the Redfern to sell. It took a long time to find a buyer. ‘I am glad to hear you have nearly sold a set of Genesis’, Nash wrote to Nan Kivell in June 1930, ‘I shall be still more glad when you have sold it!’3 This set sold in July 1930 for £21. Less the gallery’s commission of 25% on this sale (the commission varied widely from sale to sale) this left Nash with £15.15.0.4 Eventually the gallery managed to sell the last set for 35 guineas.5

This was ideal training for Rex Nan Kivell. He could not have had a better introduction to the finer aspects of contemporary printmaking than attending to Paul

---

1 P. Nash to RNK 26 June 1928. Tate Gallery Archive.
2 P. Nash to A. Knyvett Lee, no date [1930]. Tate Gallery Archive.
3 P. Nash to RNK 19 June 1930. Tate Gallery Archive.
5 P. Nash to Redfern Gallery, no date. Tate Gallery Archive.
Nash’s fastidious requirements. Through constant contact with artists and their work Nan Kivell began to develop a specialist’s knowledge of twentieth-century printmaking. Nan Kivell began to collect contemporary prints himself at this stage. Knyvett Lee was also an enthusiastic collector of Nash’s work, and no doubt encouraged his young assistant’s interests in collecting. Over the many years of his active involvement in art dealing Nan Kivell built a virtually unrivalled collection of twentieth-century British printmaking, which realised over £300,000 when sold at Sotheby’s after his death. Wood engraving exhibitions continued to be a regular feature of the Redfern Gallery’s programme until well into the next decade, when interest in the medium began to wane. An excellent survey of the wood engravings stocked by the Redfern and St George’s galleries is given in a special feature ‘British wood engraving of the present day’ by Maximilien Vox, published in The Studio in 1930. Among the prints reproduced from the Redfern’s stock were works by Eric Daglish, John Nash, Iain Macnab, Eric Gill and Eric Ravilious. The critic drew attention to what he believed was the special Englishness of the medium, striking a patriotic note which continued to be heard in relation to illustrative art in England as the decade progressed.

Rivalry with other galleries

At the beginning of the thirties the Redfern Gallery was still a relatively small player in the market and artists of Nash’s circle tended to exhibit their best work at the Leicester Galleries or Tooth’s, because they had access to a broader base of customers and could get better exposure and prices for major works. The Leicester Galleries and Tooth’s were the Redfern Gallery’s most formidable competitors in the field of moderns at this time. They were not as old or well-established as Alex Reid and Lefevre, the market leader, and were considerably more daring in showing challenging modern painting than their nearest rivals. An arrangement with Lefevre, such as Frances Hodgkins was able to secure in 1932, was ideal for struggling Modernists. In Hodgkins’ case, the contract was shared between Lefevre and the Leicester Galleries, an arrangement which effectively squeezed out competition from

1 P. Nash to A. Knyvett Lee 31 July 1928. Tate Gallery Archive.
2 Maximilien Vox, ‘British wood engraving of the present day’, The Studio v. 99 n. 444 March 1930, pp 154-172.
other galleries for supply of the artist’s work.¹ Once in place such advantageous contracts tended to remain for several years, as artists and dealers maintained considerable mutual loyalty so long as paintings were selling. This meant that competition for artists’ work between the dealers was often quite stiff.

The Redfern Gallery’s strategy in this market was to act as a reliable retailer of smaller-scale works, especially works on paper. In this role it could remain useful to artists who needed regular sales to support themselves, while enjoying the occasional windfall of a good price for a large painting. Paul Nash held a substantial show of paintings at the Leicester Galleries in 1928.² Again, despite critical approval in the art reviews, this exhibition failed to live up to Nash’s commercial expectations, and he relied on the sale of smaller, more affordable works through the Redfern for bread and butter income. While supportive of Nash, the Redfern itself remained reliant on the more conservative end of the market for its income. The gallery’s Summer Salon in 1929 was composed mainly of pictures by younger English artists, although it included examples of the work of some whose reputation was already firmly established. There were a graceful early Augustus John Nude in Landscape, a decorative Three Graces by Ethel Walker, two small bright landscapes of the South of France by Duncan Grant, one of John Nash’s typical English scenes, a finely modelled head by Bernard Meninsky, and an exquisite impression by Lucien Pissarro, Stamford Brooke Green under Snow, according to the Studio critic T.W. Earp.³ Earp noted that a special feature of the Redfern Gallery was its support of lesser-known painters of undoubted promise.

The Redfern Gallery’s approach to marketing contemporary art, then, was to steer a careful middle course between the bold, challenging statements made by artists at the Leicester Galleries and Tooth’s, and the more expensive, established modern masters represented by the Beaux Arts Gallery and Alex Reid and Lefevre. It was an approach which ensured the gallery’s commercial survival, and gradually allowed it to take the occasional risks necessary to maintain the profile it was establishing in the popular art press as a leading-edge contemporary style-maker. A good example of the Redfern Gallery’s careful positioning in the art market in the late 1920s is provided by

³ The Studio v. 98 1929, p. 821.
its 1927 exhibition of the London Artists’ Association. The L.A.A. was led by Roger Fry, who before the War had been the arch-demon of outrage to conservative taste, through his championing of Post-Impressionism. By the late-1920s Fry’s persona had mellowed considerably, and he was beginning to be seen as comfortably modern, rather than shocking. ‘The exhibition of the London Artists’ Association, at the Redfern Gallery, was on the whole too eccentric to be taken seriously’, the Studio critic condescended to opine, ‘but among the contributions of Mr Roger Fry and Mr F.J. Porter there were some which showed a reasonable sense of responsibility and a certain regard for executive propriety’. Indeed this latter characterization could apply equally well to the Redfern Gallery’s deliberately cautious approach to marketing modern art, an approach which Nan Kivell maintained throughout his tenure as director. The L.A.A. show was a coup for the gallery, adroitly positioning it close to London’s centre of power in the administration of visual arts. Through his membership of the Bloomsbury clique Roger Fry had a commanding influence over John Maynard Keynes, one of the L.A.A.’s principal supporters, and through Keynes, a virtual stranglehold over both public and private patronage of contemporary art. With Bloomsbury won over, the Redfern Gallery could count on supplies of works by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, among others of this group. Their paintings, while not widely popular, had a ready market among the wealthier associates of Fry’s circle, for example the collector Edward Marsh.

The state of the contemporary art market at the beginning of the 1930s was neatly summarised by John Maynard Keynes in an article on the London Artists’ Association published in The Studio. Keynes felt that on the whole English artists were well served by the West End picture dealers. It had never been the intention of the L.A.A. to supplant or do without the services of the ‘regular members of the picture trade’. Indeed, without the friendly assistance of several eminent members of this profession the association would never have been able to secure sales on the scale they had achieved over the four and a half years of its existence. In that time the Association had sold ‘altogether more than’ 700 works of art by the members, for an aggregate sum of about £22,000, an average of about £30 apiece. The Association’s

---

1 The Studio v. 93 1927, p. 120.
prices had ranged in this time from £5 to £200, ‘the majority being priced at less than thirty guineas’. Whatever may have been the case in former years, it was Keynes’ opinion that the dealers now treated ‘modern movements and modern men’ with the greatest possible enterprise. Among the businesses that he singled out for special mention as helpful to the Association were the Leicester Galleries, Alex Reid and Lefeuvre, Messrs Brandon Davis, the Redfern Gallery, the Goupil Gallery and the St George’s Gallery. There was no reason to suppose, felt Keynes, that ‘amateurs, merely because they are disinterested and lovers of art, are in the least likely to be the equals of experienced and seasoned professionals in the selling of pictures.’

After the Crash

Rex Nan Kivell took over from A. Knyvett Lee as managing director in 1931.\(^1\) It is possible that this move was precipitated by the effects of the 1929 stockmarket crash. This was the beginning of the period when, as Nan Kivell later described to Harry Tatlock Miller, ‘galleries collapsed like nine-pins’. Lee, who had financial interests in the City, may have lost money and been glad to sell his shares in the business. A. Maxtone Graham seems to have left the business by 1932, as his name no longer appears on the Redfern’s letterhead after that date. Evidently buying out his partners, Nan Kivell financed the gallery using his own assets as securities. The source of his money, according to Nan Kivell, was a joint account he held with his ‘old godmother’, Fanny Hulbert. Circumstances suggest that his story is at least partly accurate, as Miss Hulbert’s will mentions interests in the Redfern Gallery.\(^2\)

A feature on London art dealers published in the *Sunday Times* in 1963 describes Rex Nan Kivell as ‘a rich New Zealander’ who was ‘early in the field’, which suggests that Nan Kivell liked to give the impression that his private fortune was responsible for the Redfern Gallery’s success, rather than the reverse.\(^3\) At any rate without substantial private assets he could not have afforded to risk money on a contemporary art business in the midst of an international financial crisis. Nor could

---

2. While Hulbert’s will left Nan Kivell the net sum of £124,990 after death duties, the possibility of gifts inter vivos from Hulbert, including paintings, cannot be discounted as the source of his wealth. Amherst, 1976, p. 205, records that ‘Napps’ Alington ‘put up’ £500 of capital towards Nan Kivell’s acquisition of the gallery.
he have attracted other wealthy backers, like Lord Alington, who joined Nan Kivell as a partner in 1932, without a heavy investment of his own. ‘Through these years...the Redfern could not have maintained itself with the expenses rising like they were’, he told Harry Tatlock Miller,¹ ‘so I made an agreement with the Bank and gave them control of my personal securities which included a joint account with my old godmother Miss Hulbert, she agreeing to this, thus they had a dual account as guarantees [sic] and this resulted in the Redfern’s survival’. Yet until 1935 Nan Kivell continued to carry on a double life as a Judge’s Marshall, frequently having to leave the gallery to don top hat and tails and dash down to Wiltshire to attend his Judge at the Court of Assizes. This Wodehousian pantomime suggests something of the cross-currents of fashion and tradition that existed in London life between the wars. In one part of his life Nan Kivell was his own man, buying and selling the works of the latest artistic talents, in the other part he was an official manservant, in the most conservative wing of British society.

In the years immediately following the Crash several of the Redfern Gallery’s main competitors were forced to close. For example the St George’s Gallery closed in 1931, forcing Frances Hodgkins to seek an arrangement with Lefevre.² The Mayor Gallery, which had been the major supporter of the Seven and Five Society artists, also closed.³ Lucy Wertheim recalled that ‘art dealers in London were so badly hit that gallery after gallery closed down and there were many suicides’.⁴ The Redfern continued to be a smaller player in the market, but under Nan Kivell’s management it secured its footing, becoming an established rival for its larger competitors. The gallery remained among a much reduced number of galleries, including Alex Reid and Lefevre, Tooth’s, Zwemmers, the Leicester Galleries, and the Beaux Arts Gallery, all vying for the work of London’s most progressive artists, and each dabbling to a greater or lesser extent in sales of Continental paintings.

The artists supplying these galleries were divided into a variety of associations and factions in their responses to contemporary trends in art. Against a background of many established societies of artists in all media, some with Royal patronage, some without, some with left wing sympathies, others deeply Tory, a few groups of painters

¹ RNK to Harry Tatlock Miller 2 August 1970. MS4000 National Library of Australia.
² Gill, 1993, p. 451
³ It re-opened in 1933. Harrison, 1981, pp. 233, 240
emerged as leaders of the English response to modern art. The London Group had been in existence since before the War. Its membership was closely associated with Roger Fry and his younger followers, but it also included more senior artists like Sickert, John and Steer. The initial membership of the London Artists’ Association was drawn largely from this group.\textsuperscript{1} The Seven & Five Society was an exhibiting society for younger artists which complemented the larger London Group.\textsuperscript{2} It existed from 1920 to 1935, holding annual exhibitions. Between 1926 and 1934 these exhibitions were held at the Beaux Arts, Tooth’s and the Leicester Galleries. The Society's final exhibition, entirely of abstract work, was held at the Zwemmer Gallery in 1935. While the Seven & Five Society never held an annual exhibition at the Redfern, several of its members, including Claude Flight and Frances Hodgkins, often exhibited individual works at the gallery. Flight was a frequent exhibitor of prints, especially linocuts, at the Redfern, and also held a one-man show of thirty-eight oils and eleven watercolours at the gallery in 1932.\textsuperscript{3}

The dealer galleries also reflected divergences of taste in the contemporary art market. As the polemical arguments about representation versus abstraction gained momentum in the thirties, factions within established artists' groups tended to polarise. The early 1930s was a period when allegiances among artists and dealers went through considerable realignment. Paul Nash began to consider forming an alternative exhibiting group in 1931. When this project crystallised in 1933 with the name Unit One, its membership included Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Edward Burra and Edward Wadsworth.\textsuperscript{4} But by this time the styles of these artists had diverged markedly. Nash, whose predominant interest was in representational work, albeit with metaphysical overtones, naturally tended towards the emerging Surrealist movement, and away from the abstraction increasingly practiced by Moore, Hepworth and Nicholson. He was at this time strongly influenced by de Chirico, whose work he had first seen at an exhibition held at Tooth’s in 1928.\textsuperscript{5} Frances Hodgkins was briefly a member of Unit One but resigned because she felt that her work was out of step with that of the more abstract-inclined artists of the

\textsuperscript{1} Harrison, 1981, pp. 184-5
\textsuperscript{2} Harrison, 1981, pp. 344-7
\textsuperscript{3} The Studio, v. 103 1932, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{4} Harrison, 1981, p. 240
\textsuperscript{5} The Studio, v. 96 1928, p. 363. See also Harrison, 1981, pp. 200-1.
group.¹ Unit One held its first and only exhibition at the Mayor Gallery in 1934 attracting considerable public attention.² Part of its effectiveness was the participation of the respected critic Herbert Read, who wrote the introduction to the catalogue. The exhibition was widely reviewed and helped to publicise the modern art movement in Britain at a time when there was little broad public awareness of its existence. However Unit One did not last long as a group because by 1934 the natural compatibility between Nash’s work and that of his colleagues had dissolved. His nostalgic landscape-inspired work and the radical abstraction practised by Nicholson and Hepworth were now so different in effect that they no longer seemed to represent a coherent artistic movement.

While it was the Mayor Gallery under the directorship of Douglas Cooper that benefited from the publicity generated by this show, the other galleries in the contemporary market also gained confidence in exhibiting unconventional work. It was advantageous for a more cautious player in the market, like the Redfern Gallery, to allow other galleries to take the risks associated with showing very challenging contemporary work. While continuing to promote the safer Slade School traditionalists, with the benefit of increased awareness of the new trends, the Redfern could exhibit individual works by Unit One painters without damaging its secure market in more conventional work. However the gallery did venture into riskier critical territory in 1934 with an exhibition of large works on paper by Jacob Epstein, depicting heroes of the Old Testament.³

Some artists tried to maintain a degree of intellectual independence from the dealers by actively negotiating sales of their work through several galleries at once. For many years Paul Nash did not sell exclusively through any one gallery, preferring to market his work to a range of dealers including Tooth’s and the Leicester Galleries, which sold the majority of his larger works in oils. He relied on the Redfern to sell his small engravings, drawings and watercolours. Nash’s reluctance to enter an exclusive contract with a dealer may have arisen in part from his reliance, in the 1920s, on his membership of cooperative organisations such as the New English Art Club, and the London Group, as well as the subsidisation he received from the L.A.A. and the

Contemporary Art Society. Support from these groups may have been compromised by an exclusive commercial arrangement, and Nash may have been reluctant to wean himself off them. However his attitude was to change dramatically. In 1930 or 1931 Nash resigned membership of the New English Art Club, the London Group, the London Artists’ Association, the Society of Wood Engravers, and the English Watercolour Society.¹ From this point on he went it alone, selling directly to a range of dealers wherever he could get sales.

The relationships the dealer galleries maintained to buy and sell works from each other's stock formed an important aspect of the contemporary art trade. This trading was a regular occurrence when, for example, it was necessary to gather together works of a certain period for a one-man show. Galleries would sometime share contracts with artists, as the Leicester Galleries and Lefevre did with Frances Hodgkins. One way that the Redfern Gallery maintained its stock of works was to purchase them at more-or-less wholesale prices from dealers like Tooth's, which maintained a larger pool of artists. The works were then included in carefully selected group hangings and sold on to buyers with a mark-up to ensure the gallery's profits. Accounts kept by the Redfern Gallery for sales of Paul Nash’s works in the 1920s and 1930s show exactly how much of this trade went on.² For a productive worker like Nash the amount of work for sale by the gallery at any one time could be quite large. When the costs of mounting and framing (which were almost invariably charged to the artist’s account) were taken into consideration, the artist would often end up substantially in debit. On the basis of such debts dealer galleries could negotiate advantageous prices from their regular artists for works.

At the beginning of the 1930s Nash moved into the neo-romantic phase of his landscape work, a period in which he led the Modernist redefinition of English landscape painting with considerable authority. Nash was clearly excited by this new phase, and found an enthusiastic supporter in Rex Nan Kivell. In a letter to Nan Kivell Nash described his working method for the important painting *Wood on the Downs*

In regard to Wood on the Downs it was ‘taken’, as people like to say, from a spot near Ivinghoe Beacon in North Bucks. Millions of motorists must have passed the place - it is on the main road on the top of the hill. I have wanted to do something about it for years. The drawing for the painting was made there on the canvas, and a separate drawing made with

¹ P. Nash to Redfern Gallery ‘Paul Nash’ (curriculum vitae) no date [1933]. Tate Gallery Archive.
² A substantial record of Nash's account with the Redfern Gallery 1926-1946 is in the Tate Gallery Archive 70-50/1095/411.
notes on the colours. A storm came on and nearly obliterated the drawing on the canvas which was done partly in watercolour. The sketch used to supplement the drawing on the canvas was afterwards coloured and exhibited at Tooth’s. Frank Rutter bought it. It differs slightly from the painting which was of course developed quite separately & un-naturalistically nearly a year later according to plan. The painting is simply a synthesis of a scene and mood of Nature at a particular time of year - March. The red ‘foliage’ is the effect of massed buds of the beeches before they break. There!¹

The letter catches Nash in a mood of renewed enthusiasm for landscape. Nash’s decision to show the sketch and finished canvas at Tooth’s reflects the non-exclusive relationships that Nash formed with the various dealers. While his letter to Nan Kivell demonstrates the artist’s willingness to involve interested dealers in the detailed aspects of his painting methods, it also suggests that he wanted to stimulate rivalry among the dealers for his works. In this case the letter to Nan Kivell records a sale of one of the artist’s best works by a rival, to an important client: Frank Rutter was a prominent art critic.

Despite the general depression, wealthy patrons still existed. Those whose tastes included contemporary painting often came from the sector of London society where art and fashion intersected in the so-called ‘Bohemian’ environs of Fitzroy Square. It was towards this social scene that Rex Nan Kivell began to steer the Redfern Gallery in the early 1930s. The favourite ‘Bohemian’ painter of rich society patrons between the wars was Augustus John, who bridged the social and intellectual gap between the world of the conservative London art schools and the intellectual life of Paris.² John’s extravagant personal style, which often included an entourage of beautiful models, was intensely attractive to society hostesses like Daisy Fellowes. These people courted John’s company as much as he courted their commissions. Slavish followers of fashion, they delighted in hosting fancy-dress parties and other weekend amusements at country houses, where a modicum of licentiousness and moral daring were the order of the day. This sector of English society looked to Augustus John and his followers as trendsetters, rather than to the serious-minded, rather left wing younger artists like Nash and Nicholson, who were simply not wealthy or glamorous enough to be invited into this milieu. A favourite meeting place of the ‘Bohemian’ community was the Eiffel Tower Restaurant in Percy Street. John

¹ Wood on the Downs 1930, oil on canvas, 28 x 36 in, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums. P. Nash to RNK 22 December 1931, Tate Gallery Archive.
was a regular, with his girls in attendance, and so was the ‘self-styled Queen of Bohemia’ the painter Nina Hamnett.¹

These artists maintained contact with the Parisian art community, and there was a keen awareness of current trends in Parisian painting among their social set. An important member of this clique was Napier, Lord Alington. Alington was a wealthy dilettante whose Parisian connections came largely through his involvement with Diaghilev’s ballet and his friendship with the eccentric musician and painter Lord Berners. Alington gave lavish weekend parties for Diaghilev and his company at his home at Crichel, Dorset, providing a lavish and louche meeting place for talent and wealth, and attracting artists and patrons from all over Europe. He was renowned for having appeared as the Sun King at a party in the Paris Ritz, naked, painted gold and radiating a corona of golden rays.² He also held dinner parties at the Eiffel Tower Restaurant in London, attended by fashionable beauties like Tallulah Bankhead, who pursued Alington relentlessly despite his notorious bisexuality.³ Alington’s friend Violet Trefusis later remembered him as ‘one of the most seductive beings I have ever encountered. Human laws did not apply, he was a law unto himself, exotic, immune, he could have taken murder in his graceful stride. He was what we dared not be; bourgeois, pedestrian, we would watch, spellbound, his breathtaking exploits’.⁴ Before the First World War Augustus John had been friendly with some members of the Bloomsbury circle, but in the 1920s ‘he moved for the first time into the land of the rich and aristocratic, of Napier Alington, Evan Morgan, Gerald Berners’.⁵ Alington and John had a mutual friend in the painter Christopher Wood, and had spent time in the South of France together with Wood and his companion, the Chilean diplomat Antonio Gardarillas.⁶ Rex Nan Kivell evidently also had some connection with Wood before his suicide, aged 29, in 1930, when Nan Kivell became his literary executor. It is possible that mutual connections with John and Wood led to Lord Alington joining Nan Kivell as a business partner in the Redfern Gallery in 1932.

⁵ Holroyd, 1976, p. 572.

139
Through his partnership with Alington Nan Kivell now had much better access to the Parisian market. He began to visit Paris regularly to buy works to sell at the Redfern Gallery, and this trade began to be an important part of the business. The Paris dealer Van Leer was an important supplier of Continental paintings to the Redfern. Alington had access to the wealthy buyers who could make the business profitable. Through this network of contacts the Redfern partners established a dependable trade, which left Nan Kivell free to pursue his interest in promoting younger landscape and portrait painters. He began to pay special attention to the work of relatively unknown antipodean painters. For example he held a posthumous exhibition in 1932 of the work of Derwent Lees, a young Australian graduate of the Slade whose great promise had been unfortunately terminated by his death the previous year.1 Lees was the type of promising Slade graduate whose work the Redfern Gallery specialised in, and Nan Kivell was also sympathetic to his Australian background. But the gallery clearly benefited from the recent death of the artist in being able to cash in on the wave of sympathy which went through the art community when he died. At this time Nan Kivell also began to acquire works by Christopher Wood, another artist whose early death had helped to create interest in his work.

New opportunities

Though many galleries closed as a result of the economic downturn, the Depression opened up new opportunities in the art market. In an article entitled ‘Prices and the Depression’ the Studio’s new and perceptive art critic Douglas Goldring noted that

one of the good results of the prevalent depression, which has hit the art dealers as severely as other trades, has been to bring into the field a large and wholly new type of picture buyer. The number of wealthy patrons who can still afford to pay £500 and upwards for the work of a contemporary artist is, alas, considerably diminished. On the other hand, now that the younger painters, and even some of the older men with established reputations are contenting themselves with modest prices for their work, the vast army of middle-class flat dwellers who formerly only aspired to reproductions, are beginning to purchase originals.2

---

1 The Studio v. 104 1932, p. 113. This review of the posthumous exhibition of Lees’ paintings at the Redfern Gallery includes a large colour reproduction of his oil The Pear Tree.
New galleries were also being launched to take advantage of this change in the market. Goldring noted a recent exhibition of paintings, sculptures, and etchings, for sale at prices not exceeding £10, which had been organised by Lady Welby at the Cooling Gallery.1 Contributors to this exhibition included C.R.W. Nevinson, Frank Dobson, Eric Gill, Charles Ginner and Algernon Talmage, showing their works alongside those of younger artists. Lucy Wertheim was another new dealer in the market. She began her Wertheim Gallery in 1930 specifically to encourage the work of younger painters like her friend Kit Wood, though he died before she was able to open it.2

A favourite practice of the galleries was to hold a summer show in the months of August and September when London was quiet and the Season, with its succession of one-man shows, was in abeyance. While critics often irreverently referred to these exhibitions as ‘jumble-sales’, Douglas Goldring found they served a two-fold purpose; on the one hand they enabled the visitor, with a minimum of exertion, to find out what had been going on in the art world over the past twelve months; on the other, they enabled him to ‘place’ the different galleries, to find out their tastes and predilections, and ‘what, if anything, they stand for’.3 For Goldring the gallery with the most clearly evidenced policy in this regard was the Mayor Gallery, whose summer exhibitions offered the viewer a ‘French window’ through which one could get an idea of what was going on in Paris. In 1934 this was Surrealism. The Redfern Gallery’s summer exhibition that year ‘contained nothing of special importance’, but offered the picture buyer a varied choice of desirable paintings and drawings, at what seemed to me very moderate prices. I noted a couple of oils by Christopher Wood, an attractive picture of a three-masted ship aground on the coast of Brittany, by Richard Eurich ... a very competent painting of Gravesend by Mr R. O. Dunlop, several good things by the brothers Paul and John Nash, and a study of a young girl, in watercolour, by the late Derwent Lees. Among the sculpture were several portrait busts by Epstein, and Frank Dobson’s ‘Susannah’.

Rex Nan Kivell’s own predilections for romantic and picturesque landscapes, maritime subjects and portraits were beginning to be strongly reflected in the gallery’s exhibition policy.

2 The Studio v. 100 1930, p. 458 mentions ‘the new ventures of the Leger and Wertheim Galleries’. See also Wertheim, 1947.
While Paul Nash's *Wood on the Downs* had been a pivotal work in the development of British Modernism, its treatment of the landscape subject derives from Cézanne through Picasso, and it is devoid of the literary and metaphysical allusions that came to characterise Nash's landscape work in the 1930s. The influences that inform this aspect of Nash's art can be traced through the works on paper sold by the Redfern Gallery in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period a deliberate archaizing trend, retreating from the stylistic developments of Cubism, and looking backwards to the romantic English landscapes of Samuel Palmer, is readily discernible in the work of many British artists. This is particularly apparent in the works by the wood engravers produced for fine book publishers: the illustrative nature of such publishing commissions naturally lent itself to the use of picturesque formulas. Although he virtually abandoned wood engraving after the Redfern exhibition of 1928, Nash continued to develop his interest in landscape iconography through the illustrations he produced for an edition of Sir Thomas Browne's twin works of English antiquarianism, *Urne Buriall* and *The Garden of Cyrus*. This edition was published by Cassells in 1932. Like Nan Kivell, Nash was deeply interested in English archaeology, and his illustrations for *Urne Buriall* explore the quality of mystery and strangeness that prehistoric monuments impart to the landscape of Wiltshire. It can be argued that in Nash's work of the 1930s an indigenous strand of Surrealism appears, that was evolving in English painting quite independently from artistic events in Paris. This was a strand clearly present in works of the 1930s by Nash and Graham Sutherland, and which came about through a conscious effort by these painters to reconcile their patriotic attempts to define the *genius loci* of the English landscape with Modernist idioms. While Nicholson and

---


2 Graham Sutherland, 'A Trend in English Draughtsmanship' in *Signature* 3 July 1936. Cit. in Graham Sutherland, *Correspondences: selected writings on art*, ed. by Julian Andrews, London: The Graham and Kathleen Sutherland Foundation, 1982, p. 32: 'In our time and in this country this approach [comparable with Blake and Turner], has derived an immense stimulus from abroad, but the best English work, whilst retaining its essential universalism, shows definite native characteristics...As far back as 1917 Paul Nash was painting with individual taste and sensibility - and later with far more than this; we find him producing work of a strangely moving kind, and asserting in unmistakable terms his imaginative personality. Not only do we see this in a series of paintings of extraordinary significance and power, but we find in his drawings for books - such drawings as "Mansions of the Dead" and "Summer" from Sir Thomas Browne's *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus* - a poetic and imaginative achievement without equal today in this country.'

142
Barbara Hepworth launched themselves into completely abstract art in 1934,\(^1\) there remained among several leading British artists a strong nostalgia for the picturesque topographical landscape tradition whose values had been formulated by Uvedale Price 120 years earlier.\(^2\)

These artists tended to be more attracted by Surrealist paintings, with their emphasis on fantasy landscape as a stylistic device in which to introduce bizarre or arcane subject matter, than in formal abstraction. The first major showing of Surrealist paintings in London was held at the Mayor Gallery's re-opening show in 1933.\(^3\) Nash was an early convert to Surrealism, which suited his inclination towards metaphysical subjects. With its heavy emphasis on the creation of viable illusions of pictorial space, through techniques commonly found in topographical art of the previous century, this trend in English landscape art was especially appealing to Nan Kivell. He himself much preferred it to abstract work. Partly for this reason the Redfern Gallery tended to favour the English artists who were sympathetic to Surrealism over those more concerned with abstraction. The incorporation of an element of 'otherness' or exotic subjects into topographical landscapes was a tradition which was heavily borrowed by Surrealist artists, in particular Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst. In the context of the emerging fashion for Surrealist-influenced work by British painters, Paul Nash's use of standing stones and other antiquarian elements in his landscapes can be seen as a conscious endeavour to suggest a surreal element, by introducing arcane material derived from Britain's prehistory. In this respect Nash could offer the conservative buyer a flavour of Surrealism which was not too disconcerting or challenging to conservative tastes. Works such as Nash's *Mansions of the Dead* [Figure 18]\(^4\) were attractive to dealers and collectors because they offered a watered down English brand of Surrealism, which while sometimes containing disconcerting subject matter, nevertheless presented a convincing illusion of pictorial space. This style of Modernist art was less challenging for conventional art buyers than the relentless pursuit of abstraction, shown for example by Ben Nicholson in his current series of

---

4 Nan Kivell owned a watercolour version of this work, which was part of a series which grew out of one of the illustrations for *Urne Buriall*. 

143
white reliefs. Besides Nash and Sutherland, John Piper worked consciously in this vein of landscape art, forming the movement now called Neo-Romanticism which gained momentum during the thirties. Through its assertion of a putative spirit of Englishness that inhabited the landscape, this movement in British art came increasingly to reflect a patriotic sentiment stimulated by increasing tension in international politics.

While working on the *Urne Buriall* project Nash made numerous watercolour studies of the English downs, including many images of stone circles and other prehistoric sites in Wiltshire. This work culminated in two highly successful shows in 1935. The first, of watercolours, was held at the Redfern Gallery.\(^1\) In this exhibition much of the work he had been doing at the beginning of the decade, in evolving a personal iconology of English landscape subjects, came to successful fruition. The second, mainly of oils related to the watercolours, was held at the Leicester Galleries.\(^2\) Critical approval followed and Nash enjoyed a relatively brief period of prosperity and productivity which resulted in further exhibitions at the Redfern Gallery in 1936 and 1937\(^3\) [Figure 19]. Nash and his wife were able to purchase a house on the proceeds of these shows.\(^4\) The Redfern Gallery also prospered, and in 1936 the partners were able to move the gallery into a fashionable new address in Cork Street. This was the renovated former town house of the Earl of Sandwich, himself a distinguished art collector and supporter of the gallery.\(^5\) The move signalled the beginning of the Redfern’s maturity as a key member of London’s West End picture dealing trade.

Despite strong support from the Redfern Gallery, Paul Nash had always struggled to sell his work. He made things doubly difficult for himself by insisting on being his own publicist and trying to manage business relationships with several

---

1 P. Nash to Conrad Aiken, 5 January 1935, cit. in James King, *Interior Landscapes: A Life of Paul Nash*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987, p. 181: ‘I wish you could see the new pictures as they are beginning to come on now...for some weeks I worked contrarily & seemed getting nowhere but just lately I feel rather released, my doubts are melting away. In April I have to assemble a show of watercolours at the Redfern Gallery, so quite soon now I shall have to concentrate in that direction.’


5 J.B. Manson, ‘Modern Paintings in the Collection of the Earl of Sandwich’, *The Studio* v. 97 1929, p. 333.
different galleries at once. Eventually he found himself impelled to sign an exclusive deal with Arthur Tooth & Son.¹ This seems to have occurred in 1938, following his exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in that year. Nash especially regretted breaking the happy relationship he had with the Referm Gallery, and his explanation to Nan Kivell is a testimony to the warmth of the relationship that had grown between artist and dealer over more than ten years. ‘My dear Rex’, he explained,

You know of course most of my present problems and particularly the difficulty I am always faced with in the business of ‘marketing’ my work. For years the Leicester Gallery have acted as my principle [sic] agents but except at one-man shows, the arrangement does not give me enough sales. For some time now I have resorted to holding exhibitions of watercolours between full one-man exhibitions and for the past two years these have been held at the Redfern and you have gradually become, without question, a very important selling agency for my watercolours. Nevertheless I find I cannot go on with this decentralised policy. I may strike a good or a bad time for a show but the fact remains. There is no steady demand for my work in any quarter and no single organisation working solidly for me all the time. I had hoped the Leicester Gallery exhibition would bring me a lot of new buyers which might justify my continuing to divide my work, virtually, between you & Broun [sic] & Phillips - supplemented by my own sales in the studio. But it was the result of the L.G. exhibition, alas, which determined me to change my policy altogether. After careful consideration I came to the conclusion that Tooth’s possessed the necessary machinery for solving my problem...²

Kit Wood

While the Redfern Gallery may not have had the ‘necessary machinery’ to provide Paul Nash with a reliable income, it was on the brink of major success with another artist. Christopher Wood was a painter whose work was very much to Nan Kivell’s taste. As Nan Kivell was Wood’s literary executor,³ it seems likely that he knew the painter before his mysterious suicide under the wheels of a train at Salisbury Station in 1930. Nan Kivell and Wood had many things in common: a taste for adventure, a keen interest in fishing boats and the sea, a delight in illustrative painting, homosexuality, Cornish ancestry, homes in Wiltshire and London, mutual friends and

¹ A precursor to this arrangement was a contract Nash signed with Tooth’s in June 1934, guaranteeing him £300 a year for sixteen canvases, three-quarters of which were to be landscapes and still-lifes. King, 1987, p. 176.
² P. Nash to RNK, no date [1938]. Tate Gallery Archive.
acquaintances. They were close in age, and though it is tempting to imagine that they might have been friends, such a friendship can only be conjectured. Later Nan Kivell claimed, in conversation with John Rothenstein, that he had lunched with Wood’s mother and sister in Wiltshire the day Wood died.\(^1\) This was a fabrication, probably intended to give Nan Kivell more prominence in Wood’s story.\(^2\) However the fact remains that it was Nan Kivell who arranged the transcription of Wood’s letters to his mother, Clare Wood, and it is on these letters that our understanding of this intriguing English painter is now substantially based. Wood was a great admirer of Van Gogh’s letters to his brother Theo, and his letters to his mother were at least partly intended as a record of his journey as an artist. Given the importance Wood placed on these letters as his personal diary, it seems unlikely that he would have put them into the care of someone he did not trust, and Wood was not a trusting person. While there is no apparent explanation of how Nan Kivell came to be the executor of Wood’s correspondence it is possible that he gained Clare Wood’s confidence at a critical moment. Relations between Wood’s regular dealer, Lucy Wertheim, and Clare Wood deteriorated dramatically shortly after the painter’s death, over details to do with the sale of his assets, which consisted almost entirely of his paintings and drawings. Nan Kivell’s role in the posthumous creation of a major reputation for Wood as a pioneering British painter is undisputed, but this took place over a number of years following the artist’s death.

Christopher Wood, Kit to his friends, was the son of conventional, middle-class parents. What we know about him is mainly derived from letters he wrote to friends, and from a substantial one-way correspondence to his mother. As a boy he was a paragon of English youth, handsome, sporty, clever. But a rugby accident in his first term at high school developed into septicaemia which partially crippled him and made him an invalid for the next two years. During his long convalescence he channelled his energy into learning to paint in watercolours and playing the flute. He also developed an intense emotional relationship with his mother, with whom he remained on very intimate terms for the rest of his short life. Clare Wood, the descendent of a wealthy Cornish family, was less conventional than her straightlaced doctor husband, and encouraged her son’s inclinations.

After a brief stint as a clerk in a dried fruit importing business Wood escaped from London to study art in Paris in 1920. As a good-looking English art student he was quickly absorbed into the heady atmosphere of Parisian intellectual life. His ‘convenient bisexuality’ gained him entry into some of the most exclusive coteries of creative minds in Europe, through the attentions of homosexual men like the collector Alphonse Khan and the Chilean diplomat Antonio Gendarillas. Wood lived and travelled with Gendarillas for several years in a curious relationship based on convenience, companionship and opium. Wood’s paintings attracted favourable remarks from Picasso, and he developed a close relationship with Jean Cocteau, who encouraged his painting and strongly influenced his draughtsmanship. Wood also had an affair with Jeanne Bourgoïnt, one of the brother and sister couple on whom Cocteau’s novel *Les Enfants Terribles* was based. At one point Wood was briefly commissioned by Diaghilev to design a set for the ballet *English Country Life*, only to be humiliated and discarded in favour of Max Ernst. Returning to England in the late 1920s he made several excursions to popular painting spots in Cornwall in the company of his close friends Ben and Winifred Nicholson. On one of these visits he and Nicholson ‘discovered’ the naive maritime painter Alfred Wallis, a retired seaman whose completely unschooled maritime pictures had a lasting influence on their work. Wood went on to develop a distinctive style of painting combining the cosmopolitan influences of Europe with an English frankness and down-to-earth naïveté of expression. These qualities charmed his friends and slowly began to bring him minor recognition as an artist in Paris and London. Among those who continued to encourage Wood in London were Augustus John, Gerald Berners and Napier Alington.

Kit Wood had a number of complicated relationships with both men and women which were affected by his dependence on opium. His addiction fuelled a growing paranoia, and he suffered bouts of acute depression and confused behaviour towards the end of his life which seem to have contributed to his suicide. He was a complex character, affable and gregarious and seemingly innocent on the outside, but concealing a tormented inner life which found expression in his paintings. His later works, such as *The Yellow Man* [Figure 20], and *Zebra and Parachute* [Figure 21], are imbued with a sinister foreboding, which has often been interpreted in retrospect as the sign of impending crisis. His conflict-ridden relationships with people and life
were poured out in the long, secretive correspondence with his mother. These letters, amounting to some 230 pages of typed transcript, were laboriously copied by Rex Nan Kivell.\(^1\) One senses the fascination of the scholar-manqué in Nan Kivell’s preservation of these important documents, but also the keen-eyed dealer on the lookout for the main chance. In 1930 Nan Kivell was not yet in command of Wood’s legacy of paintings, but he held the key to understanding them, and thus to marketing them successfully through the careful creation of a posthumous myth.

Because of the falling out between Lucy Wertheim and Clare Wood, Wertheim’s gallery did not hold the first major posthumous exhibition of Wood’s work.\(^2\) That exhibition was mounted by Alex Reid and Lefevre in 1932.\(^3\) Another exhibition at the Lefevre followed in 1933,\(^4\) and the Redfern Gallery showed works by Wood in its summer exhibition in 1934.\(^5\) In the context of Surrealism Christopher Wood’s painting, particularly in his final period, could be seen as having a stylistic relevance to works by major exponents of this new movement like Max Ernst. Wood was effectively reborn as a proto-Surrealist. In 1935 the Redfern held its first substantial exhibition of Wood’s paintings.\(^6\) Over the next three years, Nan Kivell and Alington patiently tracked down what they believed to be the dead artist’s complete oeuvre of drawings, watercolours and oil paintings. The total number of works exceeded 800.\(^7\) When it was assembled the exhibition was too large to fit in the Redfern Gallery’s Cork Street premises, and the New Burlington Galleries were hired to provide the exhibition space. The show was a massive hit. It was estimated that 50,000 people visited over the course of the exhibition. A beautifully designed and illustrated catalogue was published by Heinemann on behalf of the Redfern Gallery, with a eulogistic critical introduction by the eminent art historian and critic Eric Newton.\(^8\) Retailing at eight shillings and sixpence this edition quickly sold out and was reprinted several times. Christopher Wood’s posthumous reinvention as England’s most advanced modern master of the 1920s was complete, and prices for

---
\(^1\) Or a typist employed by him. See Ingleby, 1995, p. 261, n. 40.
\(^3\) Ingleby, 1995, p. 272.
\(^4\) *The Studio* v.106 1933, p. 219.
\(^5\) *The Studio* v. 108 1934, p. 208.
\(^6\) *The Studio* v. 110 1935, p. 175.
\(^7\) Ingleby, 1995, p. xxii.
his work escalated rapidly. Nan Kivell’s personal wealth seems also to have increased dramatically at this time, as his extravagant spending sprees on colonial art indicate.

The Redfern Gallery’s position as a leader in the contemporary art market was now firmly established. Nan Kivell was rich. He celebrated the end of the decade, and the beginning of a new phase of international relations, by acquiring one of von Ribbentrop’s limousines when the German Ambassador was forced to return to his Fatherland.¹

Chapter Seven
Carrying On – The Redfern Gallery 1939-1945

Immediately before the war the Redfern Gallery had reached a new level of prosperity. The massively successful Christopher Wood exhibition, together with a solid and sophisticated stock, including works by the best English and Continental moderns, ensured an eminent position in the market for the gallery. This had been achieved through astute buying and patience. ‘Remember the prices even up to 1940’, Nan Kivell reminded Harry Tatlock Miller in 1970:

A major Bonnard £250. (Now in the Tate). The best of the Utrillos £150. To 250. (Now in the Tate). Degas drawings £30. Matisse £75. And one at £250 (Now in the Tate). Jawlenskys bought at £25 to £50. ¹

A review by Clive Bell of an exhibition of the Camden Town Group at the Redfern in April 1939, provides a keen analysis of the gallery’s approach to hanging pictures:

The Redfern Gallery is to be thanked for organising this interesting, and to English amateurs, important exhibition. The significance of the school has been overlooked...Doubtless the organisers have their technical excuse for hanging the romantic ebullitions of John, Innes and others amongst the careful and searching works of Sickert, Gore, Gilman, Lucien Pissarro, Ginner and Lightfoot...The mixture not only destroys the homogeneity of the show, it confounds history; however let us be grateful for what we have received. This is an exhibition which will set a good many collectors and public galleries accusing themselves of obtuseness, and even the Tate, where Sickert alone of the group is adequately represented, might blush.²

In June and July the Redfern held what was described by The Studio critic as ‘one of the best of this year’s summer exhibitions’:

It went back to some of the famous dead, Boudin, Gauguin, Camille Pissarro, Innes and Derwent Lees, and, amongst the living, included some already consecrated names – there is no need at this time of day to expiate on the qualities of a characteristic work by Steer, John, Gill, Epstein, Picasso, Segonzac, Marie Laurencin, or Utrillo who were also represented. ³

The reviewer did not find the ‘not so young living artists of established reputation’ as satisfactorily represented, and it is interesting to speculate as to whether this reflects a weakness in the gallery’s representation of contemporary art in general at this time. Stanley Spencer’s Greenhouse the critic found ‘over-illustrative’, again

¹ RNK to Harry Tatlock Miller 2 August 1970. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
perhaps in reflection of Nan Kivell’s personal taste, and Pavel Tchelitchev’s *The Acrobat* was ‘too much in the nature of an academic exercise’. Max Ernst’s *Citadel* \[Figure 23\] on the other hand, was the ‘most somberly impressive work by this artist’ the critic had seen. Less widely known artists included the peripatetic Australian Ian Fairweather, whose *Peking*, ‘though its surface suggested rather a tapestry than an oil painting, was nevertheless pleasing as pattern and as colour’. Rodrigo Moynihan gained mention as the artist who ‘raised the most expectations’ at the exhibition. Among the watercolours were Paul Nash’s *Cyclamen in a Window at Iden* (bought by Nan Kivell) and works by Frances Hodgkins, R.O. Dunlop, Edna Clark Hall and David Jones. A flier for this exhibition, printed by the gallery, lists in addition to these artists, French paintings by Bonnard, Derain, Forain, Friez, Renoir, Rouault, Signac, Sisley, Soutine, Van Gogh, Vlaminck and Vuillard. Among the English paintings were also works by Eurich, Gore, Pasmore, Matthew Smith and Wood.\(^2\)

While the Redfern Gallery was still reliably mainstream in its representation of contemporary art, it was entering a new phase brought about by Nan Kivell’s increasing confidence in promoting artists through carefully crafted exhibitions. He was expanding the business, and seeking new partnerships. Not long before the outbreak of war he become acquainted with Harry Tatlock Miller, a Melbourne art critic who was associated with the so-called Merriola Group of painters.\(^3\) Miller was in London promoting the work of his friend Louden Sainthill, an accomplished theatre designer who was winning commissions in the West End.\(^4\) The introduction to Nan Kivell may have come through Maie Casey, a painter and the wife of Australian politician and diplomat Richard Casey. Always keen to promote antipodean artists, particularly those with thespian leanings close to his own tastes, Nan Kivell gave Sainthill a one-man show of designs for the Russian Ballet at Covent Garden in 1939.\(^5\) A strong rapport developed between Miller and Nan Kivell, and Miller began to sell paintings on commission for the Redfern Gallery. When the war began Miller and

---

2. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Sainthill returned abruptly to Melbourne, but they continued to promote the gallery’s interests in Australia, creating a useful link with the London art world that was exploited by many Australian artists after the war ended. Miller and Sainthill even managed to sell a Christopher Wood painting for a very advantageous price following their return to Australia. ‘I must congratulate you in obtaining such a high price for “The Acrobat”,’ Nan Kivell wrote to Miller in Melbourne in February 1940,

but as you will have seen from my cable, I am heart broken, but of all the Christopher Woods, that was the one I really and truly did not want to sell, and I shall not be at all disappointed if I have a letter from you saying that the sale has been cancelled. I know it was a high price you have obtained, but as you know very well, there are some things in life that are beyond price. ¹

The gallery staff had been engulfed with work, and there were many outstanding accounts, of which only a Lady [blank]² had paid up since Miller’s departure. As he did not expect any bombs to fall until about the end of July, Nan Kivell thought that they ‘might just be able to get away with a most successful exhibition.’

**Bombs**

The bombs had an immediate effect on art exhibitions in London. For six years, while the war raged in Europe and over Britain, contemporary art ruled the London galleries. Old masters were not risked in exhibitions in the capital, and this left the stage clear for an ascendance of modern painting. ‘Financial risk is likely to keep nineteenth-century French pictures out of sight, and this may even be welcomed as giving a better chance to living artists’, thought the *New Statesman and Nation*.³

By the end of the war public audiences were quite accustomed to newer, more experimental styles of art, and Modernism, far less shocking than the reality of war, became an acceptable movement to many mainstream art patrons.

The dealer galleries played an important role in maintaining civilian morale, often working in concert with journals like *The Studio* and official organisations like the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, the British Institute of Adult Education, and the British Council. In addition to supporting art and artists, leading dealers like Rex Nan Kivell provided entertainment in the form of carefully

---

¹ RNK to Harry Tatlock Miller 26 February 1940, MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² The fact that the name is left out of the typescript letter demonstrates the lengths to which the gallery went to maintain discretion for itself and its clientele.
³ *The New Statesman and Nation* v. 18 n. 448 23 September 1939.
selected and well-publicised exhibitions, often designed especially to complement exhibitions at the National Gallery and The Tate. 'With the National Collections invisible, one depends for visual art on the enterprise of the dealers,' remarked the New Statesman and Nation, 'we are glad that the Leicester Galleries, Messrs. Tooth and the Redfern Gallery are open and promise us pictures'. ¹ This made the dealer galleries respectable in a way that had not previously been achieved, and also made them accessible to a mass audience with enormous potential for development once hostilities ceased and life began to get back to normal.

The Studio decided to stay in business after war was announced. In an editorial entitled 'Art Must Go On' the magazine declared its wartime policy:

The Studio will continue its activities. It will endeavour to intensify its usefulness. It will strive to become a focussing point for all that is best in the realm of Art. It will search the past and the present at home and abroad. It will welcome the contributions of artist, connoisseur and art patron to the promotion of its purpose. ²

Revealed in the pages of The Studio during the war years is the extent to which journalists, artists and dealers cooperated to keep British art alive. At no other time in the twentieth century can this level of cooperation and mutual support in the normally cut-throat world of the London art market be observed. The cooperation achieved some remarkable results, perhaps not so much in the stylistic development of painting, as London was quickly eclipsed by New York as the centre of artistic development after 1945, but in establishing a dynamic marketplace with strong connections between the various participants. This in turn set the stage for the unprecedented escalation in prices for paintings that followed in the second half of the century.

Although the Redfern Gallery was not listed among those dealers who had announced their intention to keep trading in The Studio, it did 'carry on'. ³ Those who made their intentions known were reported in an editorial, 'Carrying on'. They included the Leicester Galleries, Alex Reid and Lefèvre, P. & D. Colnaghi, Arthur Tooth & Sons, the Nicholson Gallery, The Stafford Gallery, the Fine Art Society and the Cooling Galleries. In addition to the National Gallery and the Tate, which also carried on despite having much of their collections removed for safety, this handful of dealer galleries provided the main stage for contemporary art in Britain during the war.

¹ Ibid.
² 'Art Must Go On', The Studio v. 118 1939, p. 185.
³ 'Carrying On', The Studio v. 118 1939, p. 216.
years. The Studio recognised valour in the risks these dealers took to maintain a strong representation of contemporary art in London, and rewarded them with generous reviews. The magazine was itself bombed during the Blitz,\(^1\) and its pages reflect a strong sense of empathy with other sectors of the art community during the war, as Londoners drew closer together in the face of the German threat. The reviews published by The Studio during the war years provide a record of the struggle to maintain the British art movement, and reveal the spirit of complementarity that sprang up between rival dealers as they prepared their seasonal shows. For dealers who were prepared to keep trading, the war was an opportunity to establish a robust position in the market – in fact the main prize for staying in business was the prestige associated with carrying on under fire. The press and the national collecting institutions would generously support a gallery that remained open despite the Blitz. Survival through this period thus ensured the future success of several London galleries, and none more so than the Redfern Gallery.

As the Blitz intensified conditions for artists and dealers came close to being apocalyptic, yet many held firm.

Though day after day and night after night, the face of London becomes more and more pockmarked by the effects of German bombs, Londoners in all parts of the capital are braving the storm and getting on with their jobs. Picture galleries and art-dealers’ premises, many of which have suffered in air-attacks on Bond Street and the London shopping centres, are continuing to make the best of difficult conditions, though it is inevitable that dealers should hesitate to show several thousand pounds worth of paintings under one roof, when their safety hangs in the balance.\(^2\)

It is fascinating to note the rehabilitation of the image of art dealers that takes place in the accounts of wartime London, from rapacious villains bent on extortion and exploitation of artists, to heroic champions of culture under siege. Between the wars many artists and critics had sounded off about art dealers. Many left wing artists had a grudging attitude to dealers, preferring to criticise their capitalist, profit-driven ethics, rather than praise the effort many dealers made to gain markets for artist-made work.\(^3\) This attitude evaporated in the Blitz, and the Studio placed commercial dealers alongside the National Gallery in its awards of praise for bravery:

---

1 In May 1941 Theodore Roosevelt wrote to The Studio to say 'news has just reached me of the destruction of The Studio offices. I am awfully sorry and wish there was something I could do to help. My admiration for the gallantry of your nation is unbounded.' The Studio v. 121 1941, p. 145.

2 The Studio v. 120 1940, p. 168.

The National Gallery was bombed more than once, but the daily concerts went on. And there were art exhibitions in Bond Street and elsewhere. Some of them were bombed, some of them ran their course, some of them had to close before their time, but they went on and they go on.¹

The Redfern Gallery’s elegant Cork Street premises narrowly missed destruction in the raids, recalled Nan Kivell:

during the war a huge German time-bomb crashed down on the wall of the Redfern Gallery not ten feet from the stock-room where a great part of the unmounted drawing and prints were stored in cases. Fortunately the bomb was removed in a matter of hours by the bomb-disposal men, but whilst they were working on it, I got a friend to help me drag the cases upstairs & into safety in Bond Street & later had them removed to the country.²

Other galleries were closing up shop. Lefevre, for example, closed in 1940,³ despite its earlier brave stance, only opening again in 1942 when the worst of the Blitz was over.⁴ Nan Kivell’s determination to keep trading ensured that the Redfern Gallery was able to take advantage of the lack of competition for both sellers and buyers of paintings. During 1940 Nan Kivell managed to obtain a special permit to visit Paris on a buying trip, and was actually in France when the Germans invaded.⁵ It seems likely that on this occasion he had gone specifically to obtain works by Georges Rouault, which became available for a brief period after the dealer Vollard’s death following a car accident. Vollard had control over nearly eight hundred unfinished, unsigned canvases by Rouault, and his heirs proceeded to sell them off until after the war when in 1947 the artist sued for their return.⁶ Nan Kivell did manage to obtain several works by Rouault in Paris, but was forced to evacuate to Calais during the German invasion. He put the paintings in the care of a driver, arranging to meet the consignment at Calais. However driver and paintings disappeared at St Omer, and were never found.⁷ It is possible that these works were part of the disputed number claimed by Rouault from Vollard’s heirs, as in the final settlement against Vollard’s estate, Rouault was unable to regain ownership of 119 works sold after the dealer’s death. These events suggest that through his network of

¹ *The Studio* v. 120 1940, p. 203.
² RNK to Maie Casey, no date [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁴ *Burlington Magazine*, v. 80 n. 468 1942, p. 102.
⁵ RNK to Maie Casey, no date, [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁷ RNK to Maie Casey, no date, [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia. The claim is supported by a newspaper clipping preserved among Nan Kivell’s papers in MS4000, *Evening Standard* 22 June 1940.
contacts Nan Kivell got word of a potential windfall of works by Rouault when Vollard was on his deathbed, and swooped like a vulture on carrion. The impression of artistic roadkill in this instance is exaggerated by the loss of Nan Kivell’s consignment in transit during the German invasion of France. Ironically Rouault had a similar experience when he arranged for Vollard’s heirs to send him a consignment of the unfinished canvases for him to complete at his country home at Beaumont-sur-Sarthe. While working on these he was forced to flee the advance of the German tanks as far as Golfe-Juan, with his daughter Genevieve as driver. Once safely in Golfe-Juan Rouault continued to send for consignments of unfinished paintings, worried that the huge cache of his unfinished works still held by Vollard’s heirs would ruin his position in the market.\(^1\) The volatility, precariousness, and competitiveness of the market Nan Kivell was now operating in is dramatically illustrated by these events. An exhibition of large aquatint proofs illustrating the life of Christ, made by Rouault at Vollard’s request for a publishing project which was never realised, was held at the Redfern Gallery in August 1940.\(^2\) These extremely important works remained in Nan Kivell’s possession for several decades, and he often exhibited them.

Napier Alington died in Cairo in September, of pneumonia.\(^3\) In his diary Cecil Beaton gave a vivid description of Alington in his final months. ‘A milestone has gone’, he wrote, ‘Napier has died’.

His frail carcass had been wracked with appalling tubercular coughs for many years. Yet his system was of such ironlike strength that, whereas most people would have succumbed long before, he had hung on. Sometimes he looked desperately ill, like a pathetic wastrel, but he was always courageously ready for fun. Now that the inevitable has happened, one wonders why the impossible should not have continued. It is perhaps more shocking when someone near extinction for so long suddenly disappears... Napier died at forty-three, a boy. A tired boy

---

3. *The Times* 18 September 1940: ‘The death... took place at Cairo yesterday of Lord Alington. He had a short illness after pneumonia. Napier George Henry Sturt, third baron, was born in 1896 and served in the last war as captain in the R.A.F. He succeeded to the title in 1919, and married in 1928 Lady Mary Sibell Ashley-Cooper, eldest daughter of the Earl of Shaftesbury. She died in 1936 and the peerage now becomes extinct. Lord Alington had estates in Hoxton and Shoreditch, and had done much for the unemployed men on them by setting them on his Dorset estate, part of which he made into an all-the-year-round holiday camp. Amherst gives a vivid description of the Alington’s death. When the war began Alington determined to serve in uniform. He was so debilitated by illness that he was effectively useless, but he was allowed to rejoin the R.A.F and was sent to Cairo, where his alcoholism got worse. Eventually he was posted to a squadron in the Egyptian desert. His fatal pneumonia was precipitated by a flight to a high altitude for which he was inadequately clad. Amherst, 1976, pp. 148-150. Alington’s net personal estate amounted to only £298,128. He was survived by a small daughter, Mary-Anna. Last will and Probate of the Right Honourable Napier George Henry Baron Alington of Criche Wimborne in the county of Dorset.
in appearance, but essentially young, with the willowy figure of a bantam-weight champion, a neat head covered with a cap of silken hair, pale far-seeing eyes and full Negroid lips.¹

This was the man who had been Nan Kivell’s partner in the Redfern Gallery for the previous eight years. The qualities of adventurousness, daring, spontaneity and friendship which made Alington one of the leading lights of the 1920s emerge from Beaton’s prose portrait. It is easy to see how these qualities would have been useful in the contemporary art business:

None of his generation was more readily loved than Napier. Throughout the world, no matter what city he happened to alight upon, he exuded such warmth and charm that everyone threw their friendship at him. He treated such exuberance with kindness. In turn he was devoted and, genuinely devoted, to hundreds of people. But his friendship never became facile; it was never turned on just in order to chalk up another victim. Although he had such a large, warm heart his smile and charm were not circulated indiscriminately. He was easy-going only until he came across something of which he did not approve. Suddenly he could show anger and his granite sense of right and wrong. But for someone so sparkling and brilliant he was exceptionally benevolent; nearly every lame dog found a Samaritan in him.²

Alington also had a taste for gangsters and low-life, and ‘could not bear to be alone’. Beaton describes being invited to Crichel ‘to join him and his myrmidons’ in drinking all through the night. Rex Nan Kivell, one feels, would have fitted into Napier Alington’s scene as a successful ‘myrmidon’. Beaton’s characterisation suggests the common ground on which Alington and Nan Kivell met: a shady landing on the back stairs of the British class system, as Napier was descending and Rex was making his way up. Yet they were undeniably a successful partnership. Alington provided both the social contacts necessary to develop the gallery’s client base of well-heeled culture snobs among the peerage, and the genuine artistic contacts which he had through his cultivation, taste, and talent for spectacle. His mother was a Russian aristocrat, and through her he was related to many of the figures of displaced European aristocracy who hung around the fringes of the contemporary art scene in Paris: the Princess Radziwill, for example, one of Picasso’s hangers-on, was a relative. This connection also helps to explain his connection with Diaghilev and the Russian Ballet. Others of the dissipated set (recently characterised by Sebastian Faulks as ‘Eurotrash’),³ associated with Alington between the years included the drug

² Ibid.
³ Faulks, 1996, p. 12
addict Princess Violet Murat, and Luisa Casati, an Italian aristocrat who squandered several fortunes and was supported in her last years in London by charity from Alington, Berners, and John.¹

‘Napier always had a spontaneous exhilaration and enthusiasm’, wrote Beaton, a boyish glee in whatever surprising circumstances he found himself. In spite of the responsibilities and conventional ties of Crichel he was able to be as free as a bird, and felt just as at home in Persia as in France. He appreciated the nuances of luxury but could put up with any squalor. No matter where he found himself, he always behaved just as he wished. In New York exalted circles were scandalized, but in London he never became déclassé; however much pitch he wallowed in, it never stuck. ²

Alington’s funeral was held at Crichel on 22 September 1940. The estate, according to Beaton, ‘with its noble porticoes, ornamental lakes, gazebos and Adams decorations was still beautiful’, but ‘the service in the home chapel was a travesty’. A secretary-housekeeper whom Napier disliked had made the arrangements,³ and few intimates were able to be present. ‘The vicar who gave the address assumed that Napier had been a conventional young peer, and obviously knew nothing of his audacity and courage, his sophisticated taste, bubbling fun, naughtiness and kindness.’ Conventional Alington was not, yet his taste in art was less avant-garde than his reputation might lead one to suspect. This is vividly indicated in Beaton’s description of Alington’s sitting-room at Crichel, where the decorations are evocative of the Redfern Gallery’s middle-of-the-road art merchandise between the wars: while works by McEvoy and John are noted, there is no suggestion of a profusion of French moderns. The overwhelming impression is one of comfortable, undemanding, well-informed but ultimately conservative appreciation of the arts, curiously at odds with Alington’s reputation for spectacle and daring. Implicit in Beaton’s description is the sense of the end of an ‘epoch’, represented by a peculiarly English eclecticism, and bound up in the idea of patrician ‘taste’:

At the macabre tea-party, which took place afterwards, I managed to escape to Napier’s small sitting-room. It is a room replete with so much personal charm and relics of its epoch, showing the owner as a dilettante in the arts. He was on no subject a connoisseur but had an avid interest in, and tremendous appreciation for, Csípendsale furniture, Chinese jades and

³ Possibly the May Cotton-Stapleton who wrote to Nan Kivell later that year, or the Sir Alistair Hardinge mentioned in her rather frosty letter. May Cotton-Stapleton to RNK, 15 October 1940. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
porcelain, jewels, English and French literature, the stage, the Russian ballet – almost every
form of aesthetic manifestation. The room had been over-tidied, and the Casati portrait by
John had disappeared,¹ but the McEvoy portrait: still hung over the chimneypiece. This
sensitive impression completely conveys Napier’s spirit. It is a portrait to inspire a novel – a
portrait of someone who spells a distant mystery, who emanates a rare romantic and untamed
quality.²

Capturing the establishment

In London, the Redfern Gallery strengthened its ties with the art establishment. It began 1940 with a one-man show of Richard Eurich,³ a selection of works by David Jones,⁴ and a group of contemporary French prints for which the gallery was gaining a reputation.⁵ These exhibitions were followed by a one-man exhibition of Rodrigo Moynihan, exciting favourable comparisons to Manet from the Studio critic.⁶ Moynihan was approaching the peak of his teaching career and his painting practice at this point. His exhibition was an excellent strategic move by the gallery, helping to reinforce its credibility with key critics and patrons, and confirming its position as a leading promoter of British painting.⁷ Among the well-known collectors who purchased works by Moynihan in the early 1940s were Edward Marsh, Edward Le Bas, and Hugh Walpole who considered Moynihan’s achievements in painting equivalent to those of W.H. Auden in poetry and Benjamin Britten in music.⁸ Increasingly the brave stance adopted by Nan Kivell in continuing to exhibit under threat of bombardment made the Redfern a focus of British patriotic sentiment, as opportunities for Londoners to experience artistic expressions of their cultural identity diminished in the shadow of war. Later in the year the gallery was featuring Sickert and Rowland Suddaby.

Eric Gill, a favourite of Nan Kivell’s, died towards the end of 1940. The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Redfern Gallery both held memorial exhibitions

¹ Augustus John 1878-1961, The Marchesa Casati; oil on canvas; 96.5 x 68.6 cm; Art Gallery of Ontario, Purchase 1934.2164.
⁴ The New Statesman and Nation v. 19 n. 465 20 January 1940.
⁵ The New Statesman and Nation v. 18 n. 438 2 December 1939. The Studio v. 119 1940, p. 106.
⁶ The Studio v. 119 1940, p. 146.
⁷ Raymond Mortimer ‘Three Exhibitions’ The New Statesman and Nation v. 19 no. 467 3 February 1940.
of his work, which neatly complemented each other. The Redfern’s show was the first to open in December, and consisted of ‘original wood-engravings and prints, which, though many were isolated from their context as designs for book illustration, presented an attractive survey of Gill’s individual and highly developed technique in black and white’. The Victoria and Albert exhibition opened a month later in January 1941, and ‘covered a wider field of Gill’s activity’. This review suggests that the Redfern exhibition was curated mainly from the gallery’s large stock of works on paper. It also suggests how the gallery was able to use its stock collection to respond quickly to current events in the arts community, such as the death of an artist, and in turn gain valuable coverage in the press while the event was still newsworthy.

Another opportunity for a successful mixed exhibition was provided by the death of the collector Montague Shearman, whose exceptionally fine collection of French and British paintings was exhibited at the Redfern prior to its dispersal, which was managed by the gallery. Rex Nan Kivell had collected on behalf of Shearman, and some of the works were jointly owned by the dealer.

A typical Redfern exhibition of ‘Modern Painting and Drawing’ was reviewed in the Times in August 1941. The show fell into three main divisions. In the first room were oil paintings of the ‘older traditions’, including Stanley Spencer’s Elder Tree, Gloucester, a fine, large still life by Louise Pickard, a Little White Farmhouse by Christopher Wood, a landscape, Near St Tropez by Augustus John, Furniture Shop, Dieppe, by Sickert, J.B. Manson’s Rye Landscape, and Majorcan Farm by Edward Le Bas. In another room were ‘modernist paintings’ [sic]. These included Graham Sutherland’s Western Hills, which the critic thought ‘as good a thing as he has done in his present style’. In the third room were drawings including John’s ‘dramatic’ House of the Lion Tamer, and ‘agreeable examples’ by Alexandre Beuvais, Ethelbert White, Derwent Lees, Francis E. James, and Ambrose McEvoy.

Comparing the stock collections of the Leicester Galleries and the Redfern Gallery in 1941 The Studio noted their ‘very good compact collections of the contemporary schools’. The Redfern Gallery was stronger in watercolours, while the Leicester Galleries’ strength lay in oils. On this occasion the Leicester was showing

---

1 The Studio v. 121 1941, p. 89.
2 The New Statesman and Nation v. 19 n. 480 4 May 1940.
3 The Times 13 August 1941.
4 The Studio v. 122 1941, p. 113.
Rupert Sheppard, Robin Pearce, Lord Methuen, Stephen Spurrier, Braque, John Copley, Ivon Hitchens, John Aldridge, Carel Weight, Edna Ginesi and John Buckland Wright. The Redfern was showing Graham Sutherland, Michael Ayrton, Dufty, Edna Clarke Hall, Hervey Adams, David Jones, J.D. Innes, Augustus John, Frances Hodgkins and Paul Nash.

Another strength of the Redfern Gallery was its representation of contemporary European printmaking. Following a complaint from Nan Kivell about a mistake in an earlier review of prints at the Redfern, *The Studio* critic noted that

the director of the Redfern Gallery asks me to say that the French colour prints I referred to in my March notes are by not after famous masters. I am glad to make the correction if only for the pleasure of referring again to works which are, in their way, incomparable. Some of the Bonnard lithographs, most notably, are worthy to hang beside the great masterpieces of Chinese painting.¹

Here we see Nan Kivell in one of his most successful roles, that of the champion of the modern print, leaping to defend his wares and to point out their value as works of art in their own right, independent of painting. That the critic chose to compare Bonnard's lithographs with Chinese painting suggests perhaps that the message was still only half getting through. This vignette gives a vivid impression of Nan Kivell at work, making the most of every opportunity to publicise his business.

In 1941 Nan Kivell began to exploit new opportunities to assemble exhibitions, provided by the recently established American British Art Center in New York. This was a gallery which supported British artists in wartime through sales of their work in the United States. It was, according to its own blurb, 'the only gallery established on a non-profit basis for the benefit of artists in England'.² The organisation was affiliated to the British Art Centre in London and another similar enterprise in Canada. It may have enjoyed financial support from the British Ministry of Information, which supported some arts concerns on the basis of their contribution to upholding England’s cultural values during the war. The membership of the ABAC’s honorary committees included some of the most influential figures in art patronage on both sides of the Atlantic. On the American Honorary Committee were Viscount Halifax and Mrs John D. Rockefeller Jr. On the British Committee were

¹ *The Studio* v. 119 1940, p. 185
² A flyer for the American British Art Center, preserved among correspondence between Paul Nash and the Redfern Gallery in the Tate Gallery Archive, states, 'we are the only gallery established on a non-profit basis for the benefit of artists in England. If you want to help them please join The American British Art Center 44 West 56th Street New York City.'
Lord Berners, Samuel Courtauld, Lady Juliet Duff, H.S. Ede, the Earl of Sandwich, and John Rothenstein. These were key figures in the reorganisation of arts administration which took place during and immediately after the war in Britain. The activities of these committees were part of a wider effort to preserve Britain’s cultural identity in the threat of German aggression, and committee members were able to exert their influence at the highest political levels to ensure support for British painting as a vehicle for propaganda.

Nan Kivell’s association with the ABAC was a close one, as the organisation was headed by his friend and former business partner Mrs Ala von Heisenau Story. Ala Story, a partner in the Redfern in 1937, had left London and re-established herself as a dealer in New York shortly before the war. Prior to her stint with the Redfern this elegant Viennese woman had worked as Lucy Wertheim’s secretary at the Wertheim Gallery, where her enthusiasm, social skills and superior salesmanship proved a valuable asset:

Ala was at her best with chic and soigné notabilities of Society and I was very content to leave this type in her hands. Especially did she enjoy arranging cocktail parties and helping to receive our guests on Private View Days. She was an enthusiastic saleswoman and it was a delight to witness her elation when she pulled off a sale. In my mind’s eye I still see Ala affixing with childish glee a little red ‘sold’ spot on a painting or watercolour. This predilection of hers for a fashionable clientele left me more free to devote my attention to the unknown and indigent with whom I always had more in common.¹

It was this predilection, presumably, which also led to Story’s departure from the Wertheim Gallery and association with the more up-market Redfern, which under the direction of Nan Kivell and Alington had firmly established itself as a fashionable and reliable retailer of mainstream contemporary British and Continental painting. Wertheim herself did not begrudge the Redfern Gallery’s success with Christopher Wood, her former protégé, and gives Nan Kivell generous credit for organising the 1938 Wood exhibition. It is possible also that Ala Story was involved in the Wood show. Story’s business acumen and social contacts continued to be useful to the Redfern during the war, and her influence helped move the gallery into a position of real power within the established network of support for British artists. In 1939 Story established the British Art Centre in London, a non-profit gallery for the promotion of

¹ Wertheim, 1947, p. 35.
British art which was the model for her next enterprise in the United States. Lord
Arlington also served on the Committee of the British Art Centre before his death.

By 1941 Story was President and one of the nine Directors of the ABAC. The
Center, at 44 West Fifty-Sixth Street, Manhattan, was innovative in everything it did.
Not only was it a well-appointed exhibition facility with two levels of gallery spaces,
it also functioned as a club, serving refreshments and food in a stylish bar area, and
putting on lectures and music recitals. For many Americans the gallery offered the
first glimpses of contemporary British art, and a new experience:

There is a crude saying that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. The ABAC
provides snacks and drinks... Art is good conversation over a drink, and if art dealers have
seen here a hint that they should visit a catering firm or make investigations about the
licensing laws connected with the sale of intoxicating liquor, this magazine would give them
every encouragement. As things are, sherry for the private view is about the nearest we get to
the idea.¹

A good example of the ABAC’s activities occurred in 1941, when under the
direction of Ala Story the Centre received a gift of $5000 in New York to be sent to
London to buy paintings by English artists serving in the war. ³ An exhibition of
British paintings was arranged at the Redfern Gallery and of these, thirty-five were to
be selected for purchase by Sir Kenneth Clark. Clive Bell wrote a long review
praising the Redfern’s leadership in this venture, declaring that,

official exhibitions are the spawn of committees, and committees are the same the world over:
inevitably, they seek compromise and compromise makes nonsense of art. The only way of
sending exhibitions that shall do justice to British art and to American taste is to allow trusted
dealers and, better still, groups of artists, to make their own choice.⁴

Nan Kivell helped the ABAC by arranging further touring exhibitions of works from
the gallery’s stock to go to venues in America. He was something of a pioneer in this
field, and the Redfern often had several exhibitions of prints, paintings and
watercolours on tour at once, both during and after the war.⁵

One such exhibition featured paintings from the estate of a recently deceased
collector, Maurice Ingram. Reviewing a selection of these works at the Redfern, the

² _The Studio_ v. 122 1941, p. 25.
³ 'The Studio v. 122 1941, p. 25.
⁴ 'The Studio v. 122 1941, p. 25.
⁵ 'The Studio v. 122 1941, p. 25.

163
Studio critic commented, ‘alas, the cream of a very selective taste is away on show in Canada and America, but what remains is a tribute to Mr Ingram’s vision, especially in the drawings’. Works on paper by John, Epstein, Steer, Edna Clark Hall, Modigliani, Meninsky and Skeaping ‘could hardly be bettered’, and the oils included works by Vlaminck, Christopher Wood, Utrillo, Sickert, Lees, Elwin Hawthorne, Ethel Walker and Nevinson ‘at the top of their forms’. If these works were less spectacular than those sent by the gallery to North America on tour, one can gain an impression of the calibre of exhibition Nan Kivell was prepared to assemble for this purpose. Another such exhibition prepared by the Redfern for touring to the United States in 1942 consisted of an ‘astringent’ grouping of works by Paul Nash, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, ‘that playboy of abstractionism John Tunnard’, and the ‘trappists’ Ben Nicholson and Alastair Morton. The art of the last two, ‘purged of all representational irrelevancies’, made Studio critic Jan Gordon think of the verse:

Pure water is the best of things
The temperance poet sings
But who am I that I should have
The very best of things...

If these groups of works were intended to be indicative of the best of British painting during the war, they suggest also the scale of the risk the Redfern Gallery was taking in shipping such exhibition consignments across the Atlantic in wartime. The daring involved in this enterprise suggests British Government involvement, possibly through the Ministry of Information, and the suggestion is backed up by letters to Paul Nash from both Ala Story and Rex Nan Kivell in 1941. When Herbert Read, under the auspices of the British Council, wrote to artists to invite them to submit work for a tour of the USA, Nan Kivell expressed annoyance, claiming that the Council was taking all the credit after the Redfern and the ABAC had ‘done all the spade work’. In an account of British Council’s touring activities its Director of Art, Alfred A. Longden, D.S.O, commented specifically on the risks involved in the enterprise, and the ‘incredibly high rates for insurance’ incurred. In spite of these

---

1 The Studio v. 122 1941, p. 182. The New Statesman and Nation, on the other hand, noted that ‘twelve of the late Mr Ingram’s pictures were not available’, and assumed that ‘these were its gems’. The resulting miscellany was ‘disappointing and puzzling’. The New Statesman and Nation v. 22 n. 556 18 October 1941.
3 RNK to Paul Nash 2 December 1941. Tate Gallery Archive.
factors, Longden asserted, the British Council had ‘carried on as usual in sending abroad exhibitions of Fine Art at frequent intervals’. In 1943 it had exhibitions on display at venues in Canada, the United States, Sweden, Portugal, Uruguay, Argentina and Iceland. Despite Nan Kivell’s evidently thwarted ambitions for ‘official recognition’ for the work that he and Ala Story had done in promoting this initiative, the Redfern Gallery played its part. Writing to Nash in 1943 Nan Kivell reported that the gallery was still sending out lots of exhibitions ‘all over the country, and also to America, South America, Madrid and Ankara.’ Unfortunately not many sales resulted, ‘but we keep on doing it as we are told by the organisers that it is very good propaganda’. In this case the organisers were almost certainly the British Council.

In July 1942 The Redfern held a joint exhibition of John Tunnard and William Roberts. Tunnard showed some thirty new oil paintings and watercolours. ‘In strong contrast’ to Tunnard’s abstract works, Roberts’

clumsy, starry-eyed, fish-mouthed, heavy-jawed puppets may look as if they were filled with sawdust, yet they have a vigour, and sometimes a humour, and the artist manages to arrange them into very ingenious patterns, as, for example, in ‘Cricket’, ‘Errand-Boys’ (on bicycles) and ‘Folk Dance’... Mr Roberts’ art is an ugly one, but at least it is an art.

Emerging artists remained an important part of the gallery’s business, as long as they were saleable. Assessing the work of Thomas Carr at The Redfern and Anthony Devas at Agnew’s in 1942, Jan Gordon noted that both belonged to the Euston Road Group, which ‘might almost be called the earn-while-you-learn-school’, as ‘the members show an uncanny capacity for keeping their experiments in expression well within their capabilities’. Judging from Gordon’s commentary these artists presented little risk to dealers, especially those like Agnew and the Redfern Gallery who had a secure trade in established ‘blue-chip’ stock like European masters. In the case of the Redfern this dependable trade lay primarily in such English staples as John and Sickert, who continued to feature prominently in the gallery’s exhibition notices throughout the 1940s. But European paintings were becoming established as an integral part of the gallery’s trade at this time, and an exhibition of small sketches

\[1\] RNK to Paul Nash 18 May 1943. Tate Gallery Archive.
\[2\] The Times 9 July 1942.
\[4\] For example, an exhibition of eighteen works by Sickert ‘mostly paintings’, and forty drawings by John was held at the Redfern Gallery in June 1941. The Studio v. 122 1941, p. 48. John’s exhibits in this show included portrait drawings of T.E. Lawrence and James Joyce. The Times 17 June 1941.

165
by Corot in 1942 helped to reinforce the image of the gallery as a purveyor of Continental fine art, although perhaps not sufficiently to convince The Studio:

> These are a very homogenous group of small, rapid pochade notes in oil of simple and simplified landscapes. The famous Corot charm is in them, but Corot, like Wordsworth, had two voices and I am not sure whether, had Corot’s name not been attached, we would have given many of these much extensive attention...

Contrasting New Year exhibitions at the Leicester Galleries and the Redfern Gallery, Gordon noted that the Leicester’s selection was an exiting one, made up of both British and French paintings including works by Gauguin, Modigliani, Derain, Chirico, Utrillo, Vlaminck, Pascin, Rouault’s ‘poignant’ Christ et le Soldat, Chagall’s Le Poète Endormi, Raoul Dufy’s Paysage, French neo-primitives or ‘Peintres de Dimanche’, ‘a fine aerial Sickert’, Paul Nash, Kenneth Rowntree, Maurice Sochachevsky, Ruskin Spear, Fay Pearce, Frances Hodgkins, Edward Ardidzone, Anthony Devas, C. Brooke Farrar, Matthew Smith, Carel Weight, John Piper and Robert Buhler. While the Leicester Galleries show could be called ‘full dress’, that at the Redfern was ‘distinctly more intimate’.

> Why, I do not know, but it has that feeling, although there is no doubt that the best things at the one gallery can be matched by the best things at the other. For at the Redfern you will find a vibrant sketch of Poppy and Birds in oil on paper by Constable, a James Ward of a side of beef that echoes Rembrandt, a fine Daubigny Champ de Ble ... a small Renoir still life of peaches that is perfect of its kind, a bold yet sensitive Utrillo that turns all the vulgarity of a French provincial post office into a thing of joy for ever, and a Derwent Lees that seems a prediction of a certain Sickertian phase ten years before it happened.

Certainly the gallery’s profile in sales of European works increased during the war. This was due in large measure to the work of Nan Kivell’s partner Dorothy Searle. Lord Amherst provides a vivid portrait of Mrs Searle in his autobiography. She was ‘a determined, devoted and punctilious celebrant of the Roman Catholic Mass’.

> She, herself, was a musician and with such a voice that for a long time she had sung with the Bach choir. She had a great eye for a painting, preferably the French Impressionists. Distinguished, her dark hair streaked with white and piled high on her head, she would preside at the reception desk on the ground floor of the gallery. Endlessly good tempered, even affectionate, she coped with the many callers, so many just wanting to chat with no intention of buying a picture, the silly questions, the ridiculous complaints. Every now and then

---

exasperation with the shortcomings of the modern world and its ways would overcome her. But she quickly recovered her smiling composure.¹

Erica Brausen, who joined the gallery staff in 1940, provided another important contribution to the gallery’s coverage of European paintings [Figure 27]. Described as a ‘crisply intelligent German’, Brausen had been Eardley Knollys’ secretary at the Storran Gallery before taking a similar position with Rex Nan Kivell.² Brausen brought with her valuable contacts among artists, dealers and patrons, notably a friendship with Graham Sutherland which had blossomed through Knollys’ support of the artist. Nan Kivell clearly had no qualms about employing a German woman during the war, and her appointment did nothing to harm the gallery’s patriotic image. Brausen was an able dealer and Nan Kivell delegated much of the administrative work of the gallery to her during the war years. This is particularly evident in the collection of correspondence between Paul Nash and the Redfern Gallery held by the Tate Gallery Archive.

**Paul Nash**

Nash continued to be praised as one of England’s foremost painters during the war, but his health was seriously in decline in the 1940s and his output dwindled. Still he managed to complete some notable works during the early 1940s. Early in 1942 Nash and Nan Kivell began to plan an exhibition scheduled for June of that year. This was to be mainly of watercolours, and both men set great store by it. Preparations for the show were complicated by the fact that Nash frequently used the Redfern Gallery to arrange the mounting and framing of works he was selling through other galleries. Nan Kivell displayed enormous forbearance with Nash’s complicated arrangements, even when he felt himself disadvantaged. While planning the Redfern show Nash was also supplying watercolours to the Leicester Galleries, and Nan Kivell felt obliged to complain mildly: ‘the watercolours arrived but I am naturally depressed that the two you have selected for the Leicester Galleries are definitely sellers and I haven’t anything to which my heart goes out like those two, to include in our very important exhibition’.³ In another letter concerning preparations for the show Nan Kivell makes

---

³ RNK to Paul Nash 1 January 1942. Tate Gallery Archive.
some suggestions of his own about the content. This letter is worth reproducing at
length because it is very revealing both of Nan Kivell’s modus operandi when
planning exhibitions, and of his style of communication, which was quite as
idiosyncratic as Nash’s. Indeed it is perhaps because they recognised in each other a
certain fussiness (that often infuriated others), that Nash and Nan Kivell enjoyed such
a harmonious relationship:

Yes why not let us make for June now as this will give all things time to settle down, and give
you time to do some lovely Spring new ones that will sell like baskets of fruit. I will adjust the
Rothenstein group and they will simply have to fit in or go somewhere else. I am getting too
old to get worried by the demands and instructions of these youngsters, I have spent my life in
this game too long, and am even just now beginning to realise that after all, why should I be
worrying about it at all? I just read back, and the baskets of fruit caught my eye, what about
one or two bowls of flowers for the show, watercolours I mean. I haven’t seen a flowerpiece
by you for years, and they would be lovely. The fruit I know is out of necessity, but just think
what RENOIR’S and CEZANNE’S watercolours of fruit and flowers are worth to-day. Yes I
liked the drawing of Russell Square but somehow I do like my watercolours on white paper,
only because it is the tradition I know, but then I never could feel myself going ‘ever so
modern’.1

As the impact of the war bit into the British economy, buyers for paintings
became hard to find. Writing to Claire Neilson later in the year about the Redfern
exhibition, Nash lamented ‘just when all was surging along we ran into trouble. Since
Tobruk I understand not one has been sold … I am very worried … Life just gets
mangier and mangier – we dwindle, the lights dim, the shadows creep nearer. The only
thing to do is to keep one eye steady on the target’.2 A reviewer suggested that Nash’s
gloomy outlook had made its presence felt in his work: ‘Mr Paul Nash in his
watercolours uses so limited a range of colours and tones that the effect of a whole
roomful is to cast a certain chill’.3

There was a further, more agonising disappointment. The Queen took a fancy
to one of the watercolours in the exhibition, and had it on approval. In July Nan Kivell
reported that ‘from inside information, I hear that things are very favourable at the
Palace, the lady likes it and so I do hope that noone [sic] will put it into her head that
perhaps it can be bought a little cheaper’.4 This may have been a tacit warning to Nash

---
1 RNK to Paul Nash 8 April 1942. Tate Gallery Archive.
3 The New Statesman and Nation v. 23 n. 590 13 June 1942.
4 RNK to Paul Nash 7 July 1942. Tate Gallery Archive.
not to try to cut the Redfern out. But in August the Queen still had the painting, and Nash was plaintively asking for news of ‘her Britannic Majesty’. As Nan Kivell was on holiday it fell to Erica Brausen to break the dismal news, and she replied enclosing a letter from the Queen herself:

As for the enclosed I haven’t enough words to tell you what I think about it as we all thought that she would buy it after having it for such a long time. I didn’t want to tell you first but then I thought you better know. But I promise you the moment Rex is back we shall try one of our clients who liked it so very much. It is such a masterpiece of yours I can’t understand her Britannic Majesty. P.S. could you be so kind and return the letter from the Queen for Rex to read.¹

Other clients, though more charitable than ‘her Britannic Majesty’, still drove a hard bargain. Brausen had found a buyer for Nash’s important oil, Coronilla, a Dr Mayne of Luton. The Redfern had been touring the painting ‘around the country’ with the approval of Dudley Tooth, who had fixed the price at £65.0.0. Dr Mayne had offered £50.0.0. ‘I don’t like cheapening my Coronilla – a favourite of mine’, Nash complained to Brausen, ‘& I should hate it if he were a rich man getting a bargain but I suppose I must not refuse the offer. Perhaps the commission might accommodate itself, gracefully declining in time with me...You must insist on cash & I think it should be in guineas but I will leave it in your fair and capable hands’. John Geilgud liked a Landscape in Wiltshire but according to Nan Kivell had ‘apparently spent all his money on his Macbeth’ – could they ‘tempt him by my writing and saying that for him we would accept 25 guineas?’

Despite Nash’s supposedly exclusive contract with Tooth, Nan Kivell was still able to obtain good quality oils by the artist, usually by arrangement with Dudley Tooth, with whom he was on very good terms. ‘I am off to Dudley’s to-day to try and wheedle something out of him’;² he remarked in one letter to Nash, providing a good example of how dealers were prepared to cooperate with one another during the war. In 1941 it had seemed likely that the Redfern would be permitted to show Nash’s oils if Tooth’s closed down for the duration, but Tooth’s stayed open.³ Occasionally though, as Nash’s account with the gallery reveals, the artist let one or two oils go directly to the Redfern. This seems to have happened rarely enough not to have compromised the relationship between Nan Kivell and Dudley Tooth, but the fact that

---
¹ Erica Brausen to Paul Nash, no date, [1942]. Tate Gallery Archive.
² RNK to Paul Nash 5 May 1944. Tate Gallery Archive.
³ RNK to Paul Nash 10 October 1941. Tate Gallery Archive.
it did happen shows both Nash’s habitual promiscuity and Nan Kivell’s willingness to profit from it. But Nan Kivell regretted never being able to take his pick of Nash’s best work: ‘it is strange but apparently every oil of yours that we have sold has not belonged to you...always to clients. But I know the reason for this is that “never, never, never” have I yet been allowed to pick an oil painting for sale of yours that I personally liked’.\(^1\) Nan Kivell also took the opportunity to add several Nashes to his own collection at this time, including a watercolour which was the original study for the major oil painting *Madamite Moon*.\(^2\)

**Art in wartime**

Nan Kivell’s eclecticism and love of romantic landscape continued to dominate the Redfern Gallery’s portfolio. The resulting blend of nostalgia and whimsy no doubt provided a comfort to the shattered nerves of patrons and probably helped to win sales. A memorable show of Edward Lear watercolours, mounted at the gallery during 1942, epitomised this taste:

> Lear himself has been deified as the Spirit of Nonsense. Might he not be visualised as like his own creation the *Dong with the Luminous Nose*? We realise that behind the luminous nose, wandering over the great Grombalian plain, there is the heartbroken Dong himself ‘playing his pipe with silvery squeaks’. So, behind the wealth of inspired nonsense that Lear has endowed us with there still remains the figure of Lear. Might not these watercolours of his be considered as the plaintive pipe tunes calling to his Jumbly Girl (the Muse of Poetic Landscape)?\(^3\)

In the context of the war the romantic landscape movement characterised subsequently as Neo-Romanticism took on an enhanced significance as an embodiment of patriotic pride in the English countryside under the threat of German invasion. Much critical writing was devoted to lyrical analyses of the so-called ‘spirit of place’, or *genius loci*, apparently discernable in works by Paul and John Nash, John Minton, and John Piper, and to a lesser extent Graham Sutherland and Frances

---

\(^1\) RNK to Paul Nash 16 March 1944. Tate Gallery Archive.


As the war continued new support from the British government became available for these artists, as their work was regarded as a useful tool in maintaining popular morale and fighting spirit among civilians. The Redfern Gallery was extremely well positioned to take commercial advantage of the benefits offered to artists through schemes set up by powerful administrators, including Sir Kenneth Clark and Maynard Keynes, to 'prevent them from being killed'. As one of the few retailers left for their works, it could rely on sales to a small but lucrative clientele of private collectors and public institutions who were united in their efforts to preserve British cultural life and expression. Neo-Romantic landscape painting, in which the Redfern had long maintained a special interest through Nan Kivell's taste for the Picturesque, was ideally suited for use in propaganda campaigns.

Both the British Council and the British Ministry of Information made use of contemporary artists for political purposes during the war. The outstanding example is of course Henry Moore, whose Shelter works, depicting civilians underground during the Blitz, are among the most famous works of art from the war years. While the Redfern was not the first to exhibit the Shelter works (they were first exhibited by the Leicester Galleries), Nan Kivell remained on good terms with Moore as an early supporter, and frequently exhibited drawings and prints which he obtained through purchases from other galleries.

One returning war artist supported by the Redfern Gallery was Humphrey Spender. After seven months' training in a tank regiment in 1941 Spender was made an official photographer by the War Office. Using this experience as inspiration he made a series of landscape paintings, which were exhibited as a one-man exhibition in December 1942 at the Redfern. After 1942 Spender was transferred to a Photographic Interpretation Unit, where his analytical skills were employed in reading highly abstract aerial photographs of military targets in Europe. Ironically, considering the pervasive prejudice against abstract art at the time, Spender's familiarity with the principles of abstraction proved a valuable contribution to the war.

---

effort. Spender held a second, highly successful exhibition at the Redfern in 1947, demonstrating what a helping hand from the gallery could do for an artist’s career.

As far as trends in contemporary art were concerned in 1942, artists and critics were not always certain as to who was calling the shots. C.R.W. Nevinson was an artist who did feel certain, and was able to express his trenchant view on the condition of British painting:

To come to immediate times, all European art is now under State Dictators. It is interesting that in England art should reflect so nicely, artistically and officially, the escapism of our intellectuals, their amateurish interest in naval or military manoeuvres, their horror of reality, their detached superiority, and their worship of wishful thinking.1

However provocative this statement is intended to be it is neither clear nor direct in what it is trying to say. Presumably it is a gibe at Kenneth Clark’s wartime patronage of artists like Paul Nash, who were loosely aligned with the Surrealist movement. Nevinson reserved his most potent vitriol for surrealists, considering them ‘mere illustrators, sentimentalists in reaction, indulging in Freudian nightmare, displaying a pseudo-scientific malnutrition of psychology, a mawkish adolescence, an exaggerated egoism usually found in erotic youth of all ages’. Certainly Nevinson’s comments betray some resentment and negativity in relation to works commissioned or bought by the officials in charge of wartime artists’ schemes. Needless to say, things could have been a lot worse, as Nevinson well knew. He praised The Studio for its brave example: ‘how marvellously The Studio has continued during this ghastly civilisation’, suggesting that within its pages could be found a more satisfying reflection of British art than that expressed through official patronage.

The Studio critic Jan Gordon, however, felt that the Bond Street dealers had a lot to do with leading trends in contemporary art. An argument about wartime acquisitions by the Tate Gallery had erupted when Hesketh Hubbard, the Vice-President of the Royal Society of British Artists, demanded to know how many works had been purchased from the ‘Royal’ or ‘diplomad’ societies, and how many from the dealers around Bond Street. Hubbard complained that for an artist to accept a diploma was ‘almost tantamount to getting himself ruled out of the category of “contemporary” artists’. Reporting this, Jan Gordon noted that a well-known curator of contemporary art, Sidney Pavière had recently claimed that the Societies were now ‘so doddering’ that they would no longer admit younger, more progressive artists to

diplomaship. In the midst of this debacle the Bond Street dealers were stealing the lead. ‘There is no doubt that time is now having its revenge upon the Royal Societies’, felt Gordon.

The dealers are selling to the public because they are giving it what it wants. The Royal Societies as a whole are out of touch with this advancing element of the public... the new generation of picture buyers is of the young, and it is beginning to buy pictures that belong to its own generation. It demands research and experiment even if tentative, rather than reminiscent complacency. And here we hit upon further coincidence. At such a moment when questions have been raised and answered in such a manner three of our leading dealers decide simultaneously to stage exhibitions in which this tentative, experimental side is strongly stressed. The coincidence is emphasised by the fact that dealers do not, of course, act in concert. These three exhibitions ‘just happened’. ¹

The three exhibitions were ‘Imaginative Art since the War’ at the Leicester Galleries, ‘Michael Rothenstein and Eileen Agar’ at the Redfern Gallery, and ‘Six Scottish Painters’ at the Lefevre. There was a strong surrealist theme common to the shows, compared by Gordon to a ‘wave running along the surrealistic strand’. ² The tentativeness identified by Gordon no doubt served to reinforce Nevinson’s worst misgivings about British art, but there was obviously a reasonably strong market for escapist painting at the time, or the dealers would not have risked showing it.

Prices for paintings were at a low point, and this advantaged buyers. When CEMA, the recently constituted, state-funded Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, held an exhibition of seventy-five contemporary works it had purchased for the National Gallery, none of the paintings cost more than £20.³ The painters included Tunnard, Hodgkins, Ginner, Pasmore, Ceri Richards, Edward Le Bas, Burra, Rothenstein and Spear, representing at least two generations of living artists. The money for the purchases came from the American Pilgrim Trust. Although prices for painting were low throughout the war, and painters’ incomes correspondingly meagre, there were many opportunities to exhibit, as state and community patronage united to support English culture in the context of the war effort. This in turn helped to keep the art market alive, by stimulating ideas and productivity. One major exhibition in 1942 was organised by the Central Institute of Art and Design. This was the ‘Artists Aid Russia’ exhibition at the Wallace

² Ibid.
Collection. Nine hundred works were displayed, and it was commented that ‘never before has a cross-cut of contemporary British art been shown that leaves such a stimulating effect’. 1

The Redfern Gallery continued to maintain a special character in its exhibitions during this period, which made it a favourite of the critics. Jan Gordon often commented on the imaginativeness of its selections, and gave a good account of the gallery’s stock in reviews. In December 1942, for example,

The Redfern Gallery shows a very varied collection, and several of the paintings are rather unexpected examples. You can of course get the good ‘regular goods’, a Henry Moore ‘Shelterers’, a Piper ‘Castle Howard, Yorks’, a John Tunnard ‘Imago’, a Frances Hodgkins ‘Brook by the Field’, a William Nicholson ‘Flowers in a Lustre Jug’, an Edna Clark Hall ‘Wuthering Heights’, all giving you great pleasure but what you may have been expecting. But you will find things that you weren’t quite expecting, a small sketch from Giorgione’s ‘Pastoral’ by Delacroix, a little gem of a Bonington sea-piece, a still life by Van Gogh, before he had got hold of his cadmiums and viridians, an early Dernin still life with his sonorous red ochres, a Daubigny corn-field that keeps you trying to guess the author, John’s little panel ‘The Fairy Tale’, Wilson Steer’s oddly prim ‘The Chemise’, Marie Laurencin’s ‘Deux Femmes’. 2

This was extraordinarily good advertising for the gallery, as it was virtually a promotional catalogue, and one can imagine sales deriving directly from notices like this in the pages of The Studio.

Also in December 1942 the Redfern Gallery pulled off another attention-grabbing exhibition with a one-man show of large watercolours by Edward Burra. This was war art with a difference. Burra was not an official War Artist, and nor were the spectacular works he exhibited on this occasion intended to be records of ‘wartime activities’ as defined under the War Artists’ Scheme. But their subject was war, and their impact was strong, establishing Burra as a new force to be reckoned with in British painting. Jan Gordon recognised an unusual and original talent, describing how Burra had ‘suddenly burst upon London at the Redfern Gallery with a series of extraordinary watercolours’. 3 The works, ranging ‘from a yard wide to two yards in length,’ were ‘extraordinary in every way:’ as feats in the medium, as colour vision, as composition and as ‘imaginatory renderings of mood states.’ Their subject was war.

---

but they were conceived as imaginative responses to the intrusion of warfare into civilian life. In this respect the works were extremely expressive of brutality and fear. They were also, in a way that would have especially appealed to the Redfern Gallery’s directors, covertly and subversively camp. Their surrealist leanings, led Jan Gordon to conclude that Burra belonged to ‘that class of mind that today is making most of the outstanding successes in British art’ – it was a ‘haunted’ mind. This quality, felt Gordon, brought Burra ‘into line’ with Henry Moore, Paul Nash, William Roberts, Graham Sutherland, and ‘on a rather different plane’, Stanley Spencer.

Burra’s significance, however, chiefly is stressed by objects, a hangman’s noose, in the powerful black and white ‘Three Fates’, a hurling arm, a stone and two cloaks of vividly contrasting colours in ‘Riot’, a fantastic figure and strange gun (which might have been taken straight from Callot in ‘War in the Sun’, the impinging reds in ‘Wheels in a Wood’, or the hawklike masks in ‘The Soldiers’, which last has been acquired by the Tate Gallery, from a fund placed at its disposal through The Studio).\(^1\)

The acquisition of The Soldiers, or Soldiers at Rye\(^2\) [Figure 24] by the Tate, with The Studio’s support, was a coup for gallery and artist alike.\(^3\) The Studio marked the event by publishing a large black and white illustration of the work with Gordon’s review.

In many ways the Tate acquisition signalled an important development in art patronage during the war. The War Artists’ Scheme, run by the Ministry of Information and chaired by Sir Kenneth Clark, was effectively a propaganda service for the war effort. In constituting the war Artists’ Advisory Committee, Clark had deliberately excluded John Rothenstein, Director of the Tate, along with other leading members of the British arts establishment, in order to maintain a consistent relationship between the art and war representatives on the committee, thereby avoiding dissent within the committee which might have led to its dissolution.\(^4\) While

---

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Clive Bell, ‘Current Exhibitions’, The New Statesman and Nation v. 24 n. 617 19 December 1942: ‘Dr Rothenstein does well in acquiring examples for the Tate’.
\(^4\) Ross, 1983. In the ‘Foreword’ he wrote for Ross’s book Sir Kenneth Clark states that in proposing the Scheme ‘I was able to work through the Ministry of Information, of which I was a senior member’. He also explains that the War Artists’ Advisory Committee was constituted, at his suggestion, from representatives of each of the four government departments participating in the scheme: Air Ministry, Admiralty, War Office and Home Office. ‘This had the immediate advantage of keeping out some official bodies who might feel that they ought really to be running the whole scheme themselves’. The committee’s Secretary, E.M.O’R. Dickey, wrote to Clark on 22 December 1940, putting forward reasons for ‘not wanting a gallery man’, such as Rothenstein, on the committee, ‘because of possible conflict... over ultimate disposal of pictures.’ Ross, 1983, p. 30.
this strategy achieved its objective, it resulted in a highly manipulated representation of wartime subjects by the artists employed on the scheme.

Excluded from this degree of direct state control, the Tate was able to represent more fully the response of civilian artists to the war. By acquiring Burra’s unusual and provocative *The Soldiers* the Tate was asserting the important role it played in supporting civilian culture during the war. As the direct impact of war on civilian life was felt much more powerfully in the Second World War than the First, the importance of reflecting civilian responses to war in art needed to be stressed. Burra’s achievement in this respect has been singled out by at least one historian of the period’s war art as especially important.¹ And it can be argued that this achievement was in itself greatly dependent on the promotional efforts of Rex Nan Kivell on the artist’s behalf. In the case of *The Soldiers* Burra’s inspiration came from a group of Canadian soldiers stationed near his home at Rye. The work is strongly representational but highly stylised, depicting heavy, uniformed and armed figures engaged in a violent, almost orgiastic activity whose purpose is not clear, but is inherently sinister. Unaccountably they are wearing hawk-like masks with sharp beaks, giving the work a macabre, carnival-like flavour. The suggestion is of a celebration of violence for its own sake, in which the spectator is placed in the position of a helpless onlooker rather than a participant. In this sense *The Soldiers* works as a vivid evocation of the civilian’s helplessness at the intervention of military agendas in modern life.

Gordon noted the influence of non-British art on Burra’s work, and its appeal to popular imagination: ‘Burra’s imagery (or mythology) is not one very remote from popular imagination, it belongs to the classic imagery of grue’[sic].² Its derivation in art came from ‘Italian or Flemish’, and above all Jacques Callot served up with sauce Mexicane. His pictorial gift and vehemence makes his phantasmagoria ring true and so people who may find difficulty in forging a link with, say, Moore or Sutherland, will probably acclaim Burra as an excellent *grand guignol*[sic].

In this sense Burra very much epitomised a strong tendency in Rex Nan Kivell’s personal taste in art, a taste which matured considerably during the war years and which to a large extent characterises both the Redfern Gallery’s representation of British and Continental art, and the position it secured in the London art market. This

¹ Ross, 1983, pp. 23, 186-7
² Jan Gordon ’London Commentary’, *The Studio* v. 125 1943, pp. 60-61
was a combination of the illustrative tendency expressed in painting and printmaking, the inclusion of literary or psychological elements beyond purely formal aesthetic concerns, and a subtle undercurrent of mischievous and often rather theatrical humour. This taste, or blend of tastes, provides the imaginative link between Edward Lear and Wenceslaus Hollar, on the one hand, and Edward Burra and Richard Eurich on the other, all of whom were represented by special exhibitions at the gallery between 1942 and 1943. It also provided the Redfern Gallery with the essential appeal to the ‘popular imagination’, (as identified by Gordon in the passage already quoted in relation to Burra), which helped to attract visitors and critics to the gallery and to sell paintings, prints and drawings. The exhibition of Richard Eurich, an official artist under the War Artists’ Scheme, held by the gallery late in 1943, emphasised this populist approach to art:

Richard Eurich, who carries off honours at the Academy, reveals an interesting development at the Redfern Gallery. Along with several of his new well-known precisely finished works he is showing several smaller sketches, ‘From Dachau’, ‘Grook’, ‘Internees’, and ‘Negro Harlequin’. These reveal broader aspects of beauty, clearly and forcibly, without straying too far from popular comprehension.1

Other artists who held one-man exhibitions at the gallery in 1943 and 1944 included Victor Pasmore,2 Matthew Smith,3 and Rodrigo Moynihan.4 Meanwhile the gallery’s mixed hangings continued to receive good reviews:

The summer show at the Redfern is delightful. To see again ‘L’atelier’ of Matisse is in itself a handsome treat. This is a noble trophy from one of the most ardent and experimental phases of the master’s career. Other great French artists – Corot, Courbet, Bonnard, Vuillard, Rouault, Utrillo, Boudin – are represented less magnificently, but are represented; and the English cut a good figure.5

The Redfern Gallery provided a refuge for the work of artists who managed to flee Europe at the height of the war. In 1943 the gallery held the first London exhibition of works by Jankel Adler, a Polish artist who had worked in Germany until forced to leave in 1933, then in France, finally managing to escape to Scotland in 1940. Again the exhibition provided a startling element to engage the critics. Jan

---

3 The Times 22 February 1944.
4 The Times 12 April 1944.
5 The New Statesman and Nation v. 26 n. 652 21 August 1943.
Gordon admitted that ‘we came upon these thirty powerful works with something of a shock’,\(^1\) noting that stylistically they lay somewhere between later Picasso and the imagery of Ernst, with an ‘unexpected’ mastery of colour and invention that was, for the critic, a ‘new and moving experience’. While the phantasmagorical element now familiar in Redfern Gallery shows was present in some of Adler’s works, especially *Priest, Still Life with Cabbalistic Signs, Two Rabbis, The Mutilated*\(^2\) [Figure 25], and *Destruction*, others like *Room with a Cat* and *Venus of Kirkendbright* seemed to have been painted ‘with a twinkle in the eye’. This was the kind of thematic mix that characterised hangings at the Redfern during the war. Another émigré artist featured by the gallery was Geza Szobel, who exhibited ‘grim drawings of the war’, and ‘fantastic, partly cubist’ paintings.\(^3\)

**Art as entertainment**

Nan Kivel’s flair for eclecticism showed itself a winner again in 1944, in a winter season that was characterised by ‘variety’ shows at the national galleries as well as the dealers. Taking the lead, CEMA had organised an exhibition of *English Book Illustration since 1800* at the National Gallery. This was complemented by *Hogarth and English Caricature* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. The Redfern’s contribution to the theme was called *Aux Spectacles*, and was based on a suggestion by C.B. Cochran. The exhibition consisted of ‘queer and interesting records’ in oils, watercolours and prints of events connected with theatre, sports, ceremonies, politics and disasters. There were more than five hundred ‘sparkling and lively’ examples, including such subjects as *A Mud Bath, Adam and Eve in a State of Happiness, The Queen and Prince Albert at Home, Lord Nelson’s Funeral Car, Grimaldi Dancing, Prospect in a High Wind*, and *The Vengeance of Hop Frog*. In a similar vein, an exhibition of early nineteenth-century French caricature prints was held at the gallery.

---

\(^1\) Jan Gordon ‘London Commentary’, *The Studio* v. 126 1943, p. 59. The *Times* critic thought Adler’s work had ‘a certain force, though it is strongly alien, or even repellant, to British minds’. *The Times* 15 June 1943.

\(^2\) Jankel Adler 1895-1949; *The Mutilated* 1942-3; oil on canvas, 864 x 1118 mm; Tate Gallery T00372; see also Alley, 1981, p. 2, for details of another work by Adler acquired from this exhibition: *No-man’s Land*, 1943; oil on canvas; 86 x 111 cm; Tate Gallery N06202, Prov. Charles Collingwood, London, purchased from the artist through the Redfern Gallery, London, 1943.

\(^3\) *The Times* 20 November 1943.
in December.¹ Jan Gordon felt that Aux Spectacles set a useful standard for others to follow:

The subjects interest, not only because of their vital variety, but because of the differences of treatment they demand of the artists. This is not, indeed, to say that all the works shown at the Redfern are superior to those at the R.B.A., but a sharp walk from one exhibition to the other does bring out, distinctly, the rut into which even the best contemporary representative art has fallen.²

This was virtually the last review Jan Gordon wrote, as he died in February 1944. His wife Cora, who continued to support the dealer galleries enthusiastically, carried on his column in The Studio. ‘People make a special point of coming up to town to see the Academy’, she noted in July.³ ‘Why not also make a special visit in the latter half of July in order to get a survey of the work of the artists who for the last forty years have not been afraid to brave tradition in order to find out still a little more about painting’. The implication is fairly clear that: if one wanted to see contemporary developments in art they were to be found at the dealers, rather than at the Academy. The Redfern’s show that month drew a rather larger bow, with another eclectic mix of four hundred ‘French and English Paintings, Drawings and Prints’, ‘well hung and not crowded’. The works ranged from examples by Gericault, Tissot and Lear, through John, Wyndham Lewis, George Bissill and Frances Hodgkins, to Stanley Spencer, Sutherland, Allinson, Moore and Piper. Among the newer English exhibitors were Adrian Ryan, John Minton, Humphrey Spender and Edward Wolfe. ‘Naturally’, (because of the war) there was not ‘any very young French art’, but ‘Rouault, Picasso, Derain and Matisse etc.’, were well represented, while there were some good examples by younger European painters of other nationalities, including Anna Meyerson, Fred Uhlman, Adler, Knerluk and Samson Schames.

This exhibition in many ways typifies what had happened to art in London during the war, how artists, dealers and patrons had responded to the challenges of London’s isolation, and how exhibitions came to express the city’s sense of identity during a protracted period of crisis. The selection is characterised above all by variety, and a conscious effort to represent an artistic continuum linking contemporary British art with the Continent of Europe. The illustrative tradition favoured by Nan Kivell is catered for in Lear, Tissot and Gericault, while the old guard of comfortable English

¹ The Times 12 December 1944.
² Jan Gordon ‘London Commentary’, The Studio v. 127 1944, p. 102
avant-gardism, on which the gallery had built its fortune and reputation, was well represented by Augustus John and Wyndham Lewis. French moderns of the School of Paris were strongly represented by works which would have been obtained before the war, either by clients now wanting to sell, by rival dealers, or by the gallery itself. Works by ‘Rouault, Picasso, Derain and Matisse etc.’ which had still been quite novel and difficult to accept for Londoners at the beginning of the war, were now firmly established in the market as reliable investments. This was due in no small part to the comparative lack of competition for wall space such works enjoyed, while the best historical paintings were hidden from the threat of destruction by bombs.

In the summer of 1945 a great change took place on the walls of the London galleries: the Old Masters began to return from their hiding places. ‘This summer’, wrote Cora Gordon, ‘the usual group of mixed exhibitions has no longer been limited to contemporary work...mixed shows of living painters are not quite so numerous this year’. An exception was the Redfern Gallery, whose summer exhibition was composed mainly of the best works from recent one-man shows. Gordon found a discordant note in the hanging of the first room, with works by Christopher Wood ‘seeming to quarrel’ with several pictures including a large, ‘high-toned’ Basil Jonzen. Sickert and Moynihan were there, but seemed ‘happier apart’. The other room was more harmonious despite grouping exponents of such disparate movements as Abstraction, French Sunday Painters, and Surrealists together with Bissill, Burra, Mervyn Peake and Eileen Agar, Louise Pickard, J.B. Manson, Michael Ayrton and Winifred Nicholson. Another feature of exhibitions in London that season was colour. After several seasons of ‘grey’ exhibitions, suddenly London’s contemporary galleries were ‘blazing’ with vibrant primaries, perhaps in celebration of impending peace and hoped-for prosperity.

In Cora Gordon’s review there are hints that amidst this explosion of exuberance the Redfern Gallery’s dependable eclecticism, so reassuring during the years of crisis, was beginning to seem a little cautious, even tired. It was time for a change of emphasis.

Chapter Eight
Mixed Grill – the Redfern Gallery 1946-1965

1946 was a threshold year for the Redfern Gallery. It was a year in which several cross-currents within the post-war British art movement converged in exhibitions at the gallery, only to fly apart again in radically different directions.

At the end of the war there were signs that the gallery's formula of quirky eclecticism, the 'hotch-potch' and 'mixed dish' shows,¹ was wearing a little thin, and that what critics wanted were events that were signs of the times. However a dependable menu is a good recipe for business success, and the Redfern with Nan Kivell as maître d', went on serving up rich enough platefuls of stock to visitors, supplemented with enormous helpings of limited edition prints. One critic even suggested that anyone who liked everything in a Redfern Gallery exhibition 'would be a monster of artistic digestion.'²

Nan Kivell's own tastes, he admitted, would never be 'ever so modern'.³ This was by no means a disadvantage: it has often been noted that another great art entrepreneur of the era, Sir Kenneth Clark, had comparatively conservative tastes and baulked at abstraction.⁴ However Nan Kivell needed partners who were willing to venture into the riskier, more intellectually challenging end of the contemporary movement. Erica Brausen helped to manoeuvre the Redfern Gallery closer to the group of artists with whom she maintained important friendships, including Graham Sutherland, John Minton, and John Piper. These artists and writers fitted the Redfern Gallery's wartime and reconstruction profile of respectable nationalism, while at the same time providing the intellectual credibility necessary to appeal to the leading art critics. John Piper's book British Romantic Artists identifies a group, among them Sutherland and Nash, who led the so-called Neo-Romantic tendency in British art.⁵ By exhibiting their work the Redfern Gallery helped to maintain the patriotic reputation it had earned during the war. This strategy was well judged to appeal to

---

¹ Phrases like these used in reviews of Redfern Gallery exhibitions which appeared in The Times in the 1940s; e.g. 'hotch-potch', The Times 7 December 1943, p. 8, 'mixed dish', The Times 11 January 1944, p. 8.
² 'An exhibition to suit many tastes', The Times 7 July 1944, p. 7.
³ RNK to Paul Nash 8 April 1942. Tate Gallery Archive. See also RNK to Hazel Berg, recorded interview, 1970 National Library of Australia.
⁴ For example Garlake, 1998, pp. 11, 20.
private patrons like Peter Watson who were often the major source of income for artists.1 The Redfern did not have exclusive contracts with these artists and obtained their works through a variety of sources, often utilising Brausen’s connections.

The Redfern Gallery also remained committed to exhibiting work by Continental surrealists, and held a ‘vital and haunting’ exhibition of Paul Delvaux in 1946.2 This was his first exhibition in London, and had its season extended due to its popularity with visitors and critics. Art critics in the 1930s and ’40s used the term ‘surrealism’ to describe a vast range of styles and practices, to the extent that within British art criticism painters as widely different in approach as Michael Ayrton and Francis Bacon could both be labelled surrealist.3 What the Redfern did very successfully with its ‘mixed dish’ shows was to engage the visitor’s interest through exploiting pictorial similarities between surrealism and the topographical landscape tradition. In this way its eclectic mixtures of nineteenth-century travel illustrations of exotic subjects, for example watercolours by Edward Lear, hung in juxtaposition with fantastical images by Max Ernst or Delvaux, made surrealism seem more palatable, by drawing attention to familiar pictorial formulae common to both genres. The more literary of the British artists continued to be described as surrealists after the war, including Sutherland and Nash, who despite their familiarity with Continental idioms were inclined towards representation and illustration. These artists suited the gallery’s profile well, and their presence guaranteed press coverage of exhibitions at the gallery. Their watered-down surrealism remained firmly within the English tradition, helping to maintain the gallery’s dependable position within the established network of British support for the arts.

A younger painter and critic, Michael Ayrton, took it upon himself to champion the cause of the British tradition in the aftermath of war.4 The Redfern Gallery’s association with Ayrton at this time helps to define its position in relation to the prevailing trends in contemporary art in London at the beginning of the reconstruction period. Ayrton had first exhibited at the Redfern Gallery in 1943, showing the first of his Temptation of St Anthony paintings [Figure 26], along with

---

1 See Garlake, 1998, p. 15.
3 For example The Times 29 July 1946, p. 8, notes that in the Redfern’s summer exhibition of several hundred French and English paintings, watercolours, drawings and prints, ‘one room is almost entirely given up to illustrations with a surrealist tendency and abstract paintings.’ Among these works was Bacon’s Painting.
preliminary studies. His work was exhibited again at the Redfern in 1945 and in 1948. In a series of articles called 'The Heritage of British Painting' published in The Studio in 1946, Ayrton attempted to define the British tradition and to show that it was resurgent in the work of the painters he most admired, among them Sutherland and Nash. These writings were to some extent an echo of ideas expressed in John Piper's 1942 book, and were defensively nationalistic in sentiment. Ayrton believed that an 'indigenous gift for linear illustration' had been 'the backbone of the English tradition since the "Winchester Bible".' Over the course of four articles he traced the development of this tradition through artists like Lear and Beardsley, into the work of the neo-Romantic painters whose work he so admired. As Rex Nan Kivell had made a continuous feature of this illustrative tradition in the Redfern Gallery's hangings, Ayrton could hardly have found a gallery better suited to his painterly and polemical ideals. By exhibiting work alongside Sutherland and Nash, and at the same time promoting their work in his critical writings, Ayrton was carefully creating a place for himself in their company. Yet for all his ambition, Ayrton's vision was essentially conservative. The final article in the 'Heritage of British Painting' series, entitled 'Resurgence', reproduced works by Hodgkins, Spencer, Scott, Colquhoun, Minton, Paul Nash, Burra and Sutherland. Several artists of a significantly older age-group than Ayrton's own were discussed in this article, with the younger Minton, Scott, Colquhoun and Burra signalling a possible way forward out of the cosy heritage that Ayrton was trying to define. Burra was represented in the article by a reproduction of Bal des Pendus, which had been exhibited at the Redfern in his one-man show in 1942, and which remained in the gallery's care. This work was bold and shocking enough, perhaps, to engage jaded interests and suggest new ways of seeing, but it remained firmly anchored in the formula of illustration on which both Ayrton and the Redfern Gallery depended to a large extent for their share of public attention.

Burra epitomised the tendency in Redfern Gallery hanging selections, often noticed by critics, to emphasize grotesque and macabre undercurrents in the

---

illustrative tradition. The word ‘caricature’ is also frequently employed by the Times in relation to works included in Redfern hangings, not always, one suspects, to describe work intended to be humorous. The taste for the bizarre that is detectable in the gallery’s selections, especially its summer shows, was one of the characteristics that helped to distinguish the gallery from others. Sometimes this characteristic was the only thematic element in mixed hangings that otherwise were complete miscellanies. It was almost as though the Redfern Gallery’s response to the atmosphere of intellectualism that hovered around the practitioners of surrealism was to poke fun at it, by finding examples of grotesque and incongruous images within the rich illustrative heritage that was Nan Kivell’s personal interest. Refusing to take the intellectualism inherent in surrealism too seriously, (as some of his competitors, for example Helen Lessore and Oliver Brown, were wont to do), Nan Kivell’s contribution to the debate was simply to lower the tone to a comfortable level of popular comprehension, by placing surrealist works within a historicizing context of images of fun and nonsense on the walls of his gallery. That Michael Ayrton was comfortable exhibiting in this sort of context suggests that his own nostalgia for tradition placed him in a conservative position in relation to his more intellectually progressive contemporaries. In fact the extreme resistance to European influences articulated in his writings began to isolate him from his peers.

Paul Nash’s death in 1946 provided another indication that the Neo-Romantic movement was soon to be consigned to art history. Though Nash’s memorial exhibition was held at the Leicester Galleries, relations between Rex Nan Kivell and Margaret Nash remained affectionate, and Nan Kivell prepared a group of Nash’s graphic works from his own collection for presentation to the Victoria and Albert Museum, as a tribute to his friend’s life and work. This act began a substantial series of gifts of prints that Nan Kivell made to public collections over the next decade.

---

1 Michael Ayrton’s 1943 show at the Redfern was also characterized as ‘macabre.’ The Times 17 July 1943, p. 6.
2 For example in relation to drawings by Gaudier-Brzeska. The Times 23 May 1944, p. 8. Michael Ayrton’s portrait by John Minton exhibited at the Redfern Gallery in 1945 was described as ‘a serious kind of caricature’ . The Times 11 January 1945, p. 6.
3 This is such a frequent term used by critics in relation to Redfern Gallery exhibitions that individual citations are too numerous to list. For example, ‘Two miscellaneous exhibitions’, The Times 11 August 1943, p.8; ‘interesting miscellany’ The Times 5 July 1951, p. 8; ‘As always, it is a complete miscellany’, The Times 19 July 1952.
5 RNK to Margaret Nash.
Bringing home the Bacon

Meanwhile, Erica Brausen proved she was in her element at the cutting edge of modern art when she purchased Francis Bacon’s Painting, of 1946 [Figure 28]. It went into a mixed grill of several hundred French and English paintings, watercolours, drawings and prints, proving an explosive success in the company of works by Masson, Bonnard, Vuillard, Derain, Matisse, Picasso, Utrillo, Smith, Trevelyan, Gore and Gertler. Interestingly the Times critic, while clearly impressed by Painting, could not resist the temptation to discuss the work in relation to illustration:

One room is almost entirely given up to illustrations with a surrealistic tendency and abstract paintings. Among these Mr. Francis Bacon’s very large picture is easily the most alarming, and in a film this extraordinary vision might well make one jump out of one’s seat, as such, or conceived as an illustration in a book, it would be more easily justified than as a large canvas which one would hardly know what to do with if it was left on one’s hands.¹

Brausen’s introduction to Francis Bacon had come through her friend Graham Sutherland. On Sutherland’s recommendation she had several times written to Bacon asking to see some of his work. Finally in 1946 he invited her to his studio where she bought Painting for £100,² bringing it to the Redfern for exhibition, though it remained her personal property. Bacon’s new rise to prominence had begun in April of the previous year when his Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion were exhibited at Lefevre.³ This work drew an immediate critical response, attracting comparisons to Picasso’s Guernica, and with images, recently released, of the horrors of German concentration camps. In fact Bacon had been working on crucifixion themes since the early 1930s. Sir Colin Anderson bought one of these works, Study for a Crucifixion, 1933, from the Redfern Gallery in 1946.⁴ John Rothenstein later considered that a small group of works painted between 1944 and 1946 announced

¹ The Times 29 July 1946, p. 8.
⁴ Sinclair, 1993, p. 94.
Bacon’s ‘sudden and formidable maturity’. These were *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, Figure Study I, Figure Study II, Figure in a Landscape* and *Painting.* Bacon was suddenly hot property, and the Redfern Gallery was one of several lining up to cash in on his success. The Lefèvre Gallery exhibited *Figure Study II* in 1946, which was bought by the Contemporary Art Society. Despite the interest of other galleries, only Erica Brausen was able to gain Bacon’s confidence as a regular dealer. Armed with her cheque for £100 for *Painting,* he promptly headed for Monte Carlo and the Casino.

If Bacon’s shock-value helped to keep the Redfern Gallery at the forefront of developments in British painting, association with this painter also had its disadvantages. Although Bacon’s paintings of 1945 and 1946 were a critical success, his talent was still not widely recognised or understood. Nor was he at all a respectable member of the art establishment, in the way that Rodrigo Moynihan was, for example. In this sense exhibiting Bacon’s work carried with it the risk of alienating more conservative gallery patrons, and it is likely that this was a risk with which Rex Nan Kivell was uncomfortable. Francis Bacon in this sense represents the limit of exposure to artist-associated risk that the Redfern Gallery was prepared to countenance at any time in its history.

It is quite clear from subsequent events that Brausen was prepared to tolerate a much higher level of risk in her own dealings with artists, to endure the inevitable losses, and, eventually, to reap the benefits of her daring. Her association with Bacon is a case in point, and helps to define a territorial boundary in the Redfern Gallery’s influence and share of the post-war London art market. A rift in relations between Brausen and Nan Kivell began to appear around the time of her first association with Bacon. Brausen’s taste for risk undoubtedly helped her to gain the confidence of artists like Bacon who were prepared to risk social disapproval in their effort to express a new artistic vision for the post-war period. Her intellectual daring meant that she was also tolerant of the rougher element within the London art world, of the homosexual and alcoholic backdrop to Bacon’s work, for example, that was beginning to flourish in Soho and Fitzrovia, around notorious watering-holes like the French Pub

---

1 Introduction by John Rothenstein to Alley, 1964, p. 11.
2 Gowing and Hunter, 1989, p. 182.
3 Alley, 1964, p. 12.
and the Colony Room. This element included other up-and-coming contemporary artists like ‘the two Roberts’, Robert Colquhoun and Robert McAlpine, together with their even more disreputable hangers-on. Such company was not necessarily welcome in a gallery like the Redfern, which had always tried to appeal to the aristocracy and was at pains to retain the Queen among its list of clients. There was an uneasy middle ground between the hard-won respectability for contemporary art that the Redfern Gallery had done so much to achieve, and the extreme social (and legal) risks of associating with artists, however talented, who flaunted not only their homosexuality, but their addictions to gambling, alcohol, and drugs as well. Some artists, like John Minton, tried to maintain a foot in each camp. Minton was conservatively respectable in his work and appearance, and seemed to be the logical extension of the British illustrative tradition so earnestly championed by Michael Ayrton. But he could not resist hanging around on the fringes of Bacon’s disreputable, but exciting, circle, even at the risk of tarnishing his clean image.

Rex Nan Kivell was himself no stranger: to the low-life. His own rise to prominence in the art community had been won through association with some of the most notorious rakes, homosexuals, gamblers and drug addicts of the 1920s and ’30s London art world: Augustus John, Napier Alington, Christopher Wood. Despite the reflected notoriety, as managing director Nan Kivell had built up the Redfern Gallery’s success on a reputation for dependable art sales and service. His own indulgences were kept carefully hidden away from public scrutiny. At the same time he cultivated a personal image of gentrification, of which his extraordinary name was the most obvious manifestation. As well, the government included among its official establishment some very powerful figures who were outspoken champions of the arts and at the same time tolerant of artists’ foibles, even of homosexuality. A recommendation from Maynard Keynes, for example, could go a very long way both within the Bloomsbury community, but also within official circles. The influential critics Clive Bell and Raymond Mortimer had been enthusiastic about Redfern Gallery exhibitions during the war. Despite his private excesses, Nan Kivell’s partner

---

2 On this subject the Gimpel brothers of Gimpel Fils commented in 1960: ‘some [artists] are even more rakish than people suppose and would be in jail if they were in any other industry.’ Atticus among the Art Dealers, The Sunday Times 15 May 1960.
Napier Alington had done much useful work on arts committees in London and New York before his death in 1940. These were powerful friends and allies, and the Redfern Gallery built its reputation with their help. Most importantly, some of these allies were themselves homosexual, and belonged to a generation of homosexual men who were careful to hide their sexual inclinations, not only from the public, but also from middle-order levels of government, behind a smoke screen of aristocratic detachment. Nan Kivell however was not an aristocrat, and his social credentials would have been conspicuously phony to anyone who cared to look. His usefulness to people like the Clive Bell and Maynard Keynes, and thereby his success, lay in his skill in marketing the work of their friends to increasing numbers of art buyers. Nan Kivell had cemented his gallery’s position within the contemporary art establishment through his stubborn determination to keep trading during the worst of the Blitz. He had played an active role in the official support system for the arts that developed in response to wartime needs. He was therefore understandably reluctant, immediately after the war, to risk his earlier efforts on an unreliable, potentially dangerous wild card like Francis Bacon.

Questions of personal taste and compatibility no doubt contributed to the breakdown in relations between Erica Brausen and Rex Nan Kivell. Brausen was poised to play a pivotal role in bringing together highly intelligent and creative minds on both sides of the English Channel. European, sophisticated, intellectual, and fluent in several languages, she epitomised the adventurous spirit of post-war art entrepreneurship. The Redfern Gallery had been a convenient refuge for Brausen during the war years, a shelter in which her German nationality could be forgiven in the service of English patriotism through the arts. With the war over, and the Redfern remaining firmly attached to tradition through its support of artists like Michael Ayrton who continued to express nostalgia for the genius loci in British painting, Brausen may have felt more than a little constrained. It is hard to imagine that this forceful woman, a veteran of the Republican campaign in the Spanish Civil War, could have had much sympathy for Nan Kivell’s spurious affectations of pedigree. There were indications too that the gallery’s continued exploitation of British Council connections was producing exhibitions of limited intellectual credibility. An exhibition of contemporary Italian art which was organised through diplomatic channels and
held at the Redfern in 1946, was criticised for its lack of examples by leading Italian practitioners, such as Modigliani.\footnote{The Studio v. 132 n. 644 November 1946, pp. 155-8.}

Another reason for Brausen’s break with the Redfern Gallery may have been her lack of a partnership in the Redfern business, as Nan Kivell and Dorothy Searle continued to be the only partners until 1947. While Brausen was doing tremendously valuable work for the gallery, she may have felt left out of the profits. This would account for the fact that ownership of Bacon’s important *Painting* remained in her name after it was exhibited at the Redfern in 1946, rather than becoming part of the gallery’s stock. Still another source of disharmony may have been the company Brausen was keeping. She had found a new business associate in a wealthy American resident in London, Arthur Jeffress. At 42 Jeffress had lived most of his life in Britain. His money was rumoured to have come from Virginia tobacco. Like Alington, Jeffress maintained a ‘cruelly witty facade’ to his personality, which hid ‘an inner melancholy and a variety of inferiority complexes’; he was ‘a bit of a snob’, and was openly homosexual at a time when it was dangerous to be so.\footnote{Berthoud, 1982, p. 137-8. Jeffress in turn founded his own gallery, the Arthur Jeffress Gallery. See David Wolfers, ‘A Gallery of names that mean Galleries’. *The Tatler and Bystander* 20 May 1959, pp. 428-31.} This new association may have been threatening to Nan Kivell’s own carefully maintained facade. At any rate Brausen left the Redfern Gallery in 1947 after ‘a row’ with Nan Kivell,\footnote{Berthoud, 1982, p. 137-8.} and struck out on her own. With Jeffress’ backing she lost no time in founding the Hanover Gallery, a new enterprise solely focused on the avant-garde.

The Hanover Gallery attracted immediate critical attention, drawing away from the Redfern not only patrons but more importantly many of the major artists whose works Brausen had been encouraging onto the walls of her previous employer. The Hanover Gallery’s opening exhibition featured the first post-war one-man show by Graham Sutherland.\footnote{Ibid.} Francis Bacon also followed Sutherland to the Hanover Gallery. Brausen had more success with Bacon in 1948 when she sold *Painting* to Alfred Barr, the Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for £150.\footnote{Alley, 1964, p. 12; Sinclair, 1993, p. 100; Berthoud, 1982, p. 130-1.} Although the price represented a mere £50 profit on Brausen’s initial investment, this was the first work by Bacon purchased by a museum, and the acquisition promised international recognition for post-war British painting. It also set the scene for the
artist’s subsequent dramatic rise in fame and prices. While Brausen’s initial success with Bacon may have seemed encouraging for her gallery and for British painting, her later experiences with the artist were less enviable. Brausen never signed a formal contract with Bacon. She continued to bankroll his excesses, in exchange for a trickle of paintings, for a further eight years. Then in 1958 he abandoned her for a lucrative contract with the Marlborough Galleries, leaving her with little to show for her inspired sponsorship.  

Meanwhile however Brausen ensured the survival of the Hanover Gallery by forming a strong association with Peter Gimpel of Gimpel Fils. With his help she launched Giacometti and Arp on the London market. In 1963 The Hanover Gallery and Gimpel Fils opened a gallery in partnership in Zurich.

It is clear from the rift with Brausen that if the Redfern Gallery was to maintain its position at the centre of the expanding market for contemporary art, it needed brains. There was a feeling after the war that new art needed ‘new men’ to promote it, and although Rex Nan Kivell ‘had a way of keeping in touch,’ he and Dorothy Searle needed new partners and associations to keep the gallery prominent. Nan Kivell proved his tenacity and entrepreneurship by recruiting Harry Tatlock Miller, in 1947, into the gap left by Brausen. Miller was an established art critic in Australia. He had had some dealing experience with Nan Kivell in London immediately before the war, and on his return to London he was able to gain a partnership in the business. His close personal association with the successful Australian stage designer Loudon Sainthill proved useful to the Redfern Gallery by helping to renew contacts with the theatrical community, which the gallery had enjoyed before the war through Napier Alington’s partnership. Jeffrey Holmesdale, the Earl Amherst, also joined the gallery as a partner in the late 1940s. It is possible that Holmesdale brought private resources into the business and acted in the capacity of a silent partner, but his most useful contribution lay in his contacts within the theatrical community. He had been a close friend of Napier Alington and a long-term companion of Noël Coward.  

Members of this close-knit community of theatre personalities, which also included John Gielgud and Charles Laughton, were regular

---

2 Robertson et al., 1965, pp. 174-5.
3 Ibid, p. 25
patrons of the Redfern Gallery. Another recruit to the business around this time was
Major Peter Cochrane. Cochrane was an energetic young dealer, who despite much
effective work for the Redfern did not acquire a partnership in the business,
eventually moving on to establish, with David Gibbs, the highly successful avant-
garde wing of Arthur Tooth & Sons.¹ Nan Kivell also made an unsuccessful attempt
to recruit Bernard Smith to the business around 1947. Through these appointments
and partnerships Nan Kivell demonstrated his authority within the art trade as one of
the most encouraging of the surviving pre-war dealers, offering a wealth of experience
and training to a generation of younger men and women wanting to learn the business
in a growing market.

The importance of Nan Kivell’s personal contribution to the development of
the London art market in the 1940s and ‘50s is no: to be underestimated. John Russell
made this clear in 1965:

Even now you can’t treat art, and still less artists, as a commodity. Once you do, your business
collapses. Anyone who looks back on the dealers who really made a mark on London will find
that they made it as human beings, quite apart from their business ability. You felt that you
could drop in at any time, and be shown something worth seeing, and wander round without
being pestered to buy. That was one of the gifts of Oliver Brown at the Leicester, and Rex Nan
Kivell at the Redfern, and Freddy Mayor wherever he was.²

A major factor in this ‘gift’ was Nan Kivell’s ability as a collector. His delight in
making collections was communicated simply to gallery patrons through encouragements to enjoy the fruits of his labour. He had an enormous capacity for
gathering together works of art with a certain common theme, and while his ability to
provide a coherent analysis of that theme was limited, there is no doubt that he could
arrange the results of a collecting binge attractively on the walls of his gallery. A case
in point was the 1950 Redfern exhibition Pointillistes and their Era, which was
praised by The Times as a welcome reminder of the achievements of that movement.³

In this way the Redfern Gallery could fulfill an educational role more akin to that of a
public gallery than a commercial dealer. Nan Kivell certainly saw himself in the role
of public benefactor and actively sought recognition for it, providing many loans and
gifts to public collections and exhibitions, and generously helping with publication
projects by arranging photographs, often without charge. Through persistent

¹ Robertson et al., 1965, p. 174.
² Ibid. pp. 181-2
encouragement and patronage of certain artists and institutions Nan Kivell increased his influence on the London art community. This influence was enhanced by his holdings of very influential European paintings such as Soutine’s *Landscape at Céret*, [Figure 29] which he exhibited more in order to attract visitors than for sale.2

Middle ground

Following the departure of Erica Brausen the Redfern Gallery was largely left with what Margaret Garlake has called the ‘middle ground’,3 continuing to exhibit less challenging contemporary painters like Victor Pasmore.4 The ‘middle ground’ was epitomised by the paintings and writings of the artist-critic Patrick Heron. Unlike his contemporary Michael Ayrton, Heron welcomed the influences of Europe, especially those of the Ecole de Paris, and opposed the isolationism inherent in Ayrton’s stand against the influence of Europe on British painting. The Redfern Gallery’s policy of exhibiting Continental and British paintings together helped to stimulate Heron’s vision of a School of London that could equal the achievements of the Ecole de Paris. During the war Nan Kivell had acquired the loan of a large canvas by Matisse, *L’atelier rouge, or The Red Studio* [Figure 30], removing it from the Gargoyle Club in Soho where it had been hanging, largely unnoticed, for many years.5

---

1 The Tate Gallery catalogue for this work reads (in part) as follows: Chaim Soutine, 1894-1943. *Landscape at Céret*, c. 1920-1/ Inscribed ‘Soutine’ b.r. / oil on canvas 61 x 84 cm / purchased from Sir Rex de C. Nan Kivell (Special Grant-in-Aid) 1964/ Prov: With Redfern Gallery, London, 1938 (purchased from the artist?); Sir Rex de C. Nan Kivell, Loncon. The Tate Gallery catalogue gives a full exhibition history for this work. The catalogue also notes Sir Rex de C. Nan Kivell, the previous owner of this work, wrote as follows of its provenance (26 June 1976): ‘This Soutine was one of the collection I brought over from Paris in 1938 and which we showed at the Redfern in one of the rooms but of which we had no catalogue, only a typed list pinned to the wall. My recollection is that we only sold three or four, the Céret one in discussion I bought myself and I also bought another one Route de Cagnes. The majority of the pictures came on loan from Mme Zac of the Galerie Zac [Zak] Paris, and were returned to her. She got them direct from Soutine. I chose a number from a collection Soutine brought unframed to the Café Deux Magots, the Céret painting being one of the Soutine collection.’ See also Ronald Alley, *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery’s Collection of Modern Art other than Works by British Artists*, London: Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, 1981, pp. 700-1, reproduced p. 700.

2 For example Francis Bacon was especially influenced by Nan Kivell’s Soutines, and took David Sylvester to the Redfern Gallery to see them around 1953. Sylvester believed that these and other works of Soutine’s Céret period ‘had a critical influence on Bacon’s work between 1956 and, say, 1957.’ See Sylvester, 2000, pp. 87-8.


4 The *Times* critic described Pasmore’s exhibition at the gallery in 1947 as containing ‘interesting and unexpected experiments in pointilism.’ *The Times* 9 December 1947, p. 6.

The gallery exhibited this work frequently from at least 1943. Notwithstanding The Times critic’s dismissal of this work as ‘an empty piece of pseudo-naiveté,’ The Red Studio exerted a profound influence on Heron – ‘I paid endless visits to the Redfern Gallery’ he later recounted, ‘simply to absorb, in every detail, the revelations of this great masterpiece. It was...by far and away the most influential single painting on my entire career.’ The revelation of The Red Studio at the Redfern Gallery indicates the extent to which younger artists were deprived of contact with French painting during the war. Public galleries in London were unable to present the full impact of European art to their visitors until after the war, when exhibitions gradually began to appear at the Tate Gallery which could rival the holdings of the dealers. Another ‘middle ground’ painter represented by the Redfern who was strongly influenced by Matisse was Ceri Richards, who exhibited a Red Interior at the gallery in 1951 containing obvious references to the similarly titled work by the French master.

Until 1955 Patrick Heron was based in London, but spent holidays in Cornwall where he was associated with the Bernard Leach pottery, and worked with artists of the St Ives community including Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo. These artists were all working with abstraction, although they tended to retain a vestigial emphasis on the spirit of place as a starting point for their abstract constructions, which maintained links with the British landscape tradition. Heron’s first exhibition at the Redfern Gallery in October 1947 showed him developing influences absorbed from a variety of sources including Matisse, Braque, Derain, Nicholson, Christopher Wood, and the Cornish naïve painter Alfred Wallis. The exhibition consisted of still lifes, landscapes, and interiors, of which a most characteristic work was Boats at Night [Figure 31], now in the Tate Collection. The paintings were well suited to express the eclectic mixture of traditional and

Modern Art, New York. Purchased from Keller through Bignou Gallery, New York, in January 1949.’ On the basis of this information one must assume that Nan Kivell negotiated the loan of the work from Georges Keller when the latter acquired it from David Tennant in 1942. That Keller was happy to leave this very important work to be exhibited at the Redfern through the war years suggests that the owner and the dealer consciously risked the painting in order to make a bold statement about the role of art in the face of war, although there is nothing recorded among Nan Kivell’s personal papers to support this inference.

The Tate Gallery catalogue entry for this work reads (in part) as follows: Heron, Patrick/ Boats at Night 1947/ Oil on wood/ support: 450 x 495 mm/ painting/ Presented by the National Art Collections Fund 1992/ T06554.
contemporary styles that made up the Redfern Gallery's usual 'brand' of exhibition. Heron's show was well received and a strong relationship was established between the artist and the gallery that continued for a further ten years. During this time Patrick Heron exhibitions were an almost annual event at the Redfern.

Though Heron represented a less immediately challenging aspect of the contemporary London art scene than Francis Bacon, he was by no means unintellectual. As a writer and critic for various journals Heron was widely influential. His persistent critical support for French (and later, American) painting helped to ease British xenophobia towards European art, and was therefore helpful to galleries like the Redfern who actively promoted it. Other critics recognised the strong influence of French painting on Heron's work, and it was noted that in his next show at the Redfern in the autumn of 1948 Heron was 'shedding some of his earlier French influences developing a more personal style and outlook'.¹ The promise of this development was borne out in Heron's 1950 exhibition at the Redfern. Characteristic works from this show included *Courtyard, Antibes: January 1949*, and *The Round Table: 1950*, which was bought by the Arts Council. The Tate Gallery showed an interest in a large *Harbour Window* which Heron exhibited in his 1951 Redfern exhibition, temporarily removing it from display in order to consider it for purchase.²

As his style developed Heron moved further towards abstraction, both in painting and as an art critic. Having spent the early phase of his development in the company of Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, Heron was no stranger to either the aesthetics or the politics of abstraction. Between 1951 and 1953 he was involved in 'a ferocious squabble about abstract art' with his rival critic John Berger, in letters published in *The Listener* and *The New Statesman and Nation*.³ This debate centred not so much on whether abstraction was a valid means of artistic expression, as on differing ideological positions in the interpretation of abstract art, with Heron asserting the autonomy of the artist to express the self through abstraction in painting and 'to hell with any audience', and Berger arguing that abstract art must play a social role.⁴

² Although the Trustees did not acquire the work on that occasion they did purchase it nearly thirty years later: Gooding, 1994, p. 74. The Tate Gallery catalogue entry for this work reads (in part) as follows: Heron, Patrick/ *Harbour Window with Two Figures, St Ives: July 1950/1950*/ Oil on board/ support: 1219 x 1524 mm/ painting/ Purchased 1980/ T03105.
⁴ Ibid.
Heron’s interest in abstraction was further stimulated by the 1952 exhibition in London of so-called ‘Tachiste’ painting by Nicolas de Staël.

However the foundation of Heron’s relationship with the Redfern gallery lay not in art politics but in marketing. One of the factors in the profitable relationship that developed between Patrick Heron and the Redfern Gallery was a congenial mutual interest in Cornwall and the Cornish landscape which he shared with Nan Kivell. Nan Kivell was proud of his Cornish heritage, was a former sponsor of Christopher Wood and, with his own interest in maritime art, was especially receptive to the stylistic developments that Wood and Nicholson had derived from the works of Alfred Wallis. Both Nan Kivell and Heron were enthusiastic gardeners. In 1956 Heron purchased a property called ‘Eagle’s Nest’ at Zennor. Described as ‘the windiest garden in Britain,’ the property had been planted with a large collection of New Zealand natives,¹ which would have appealed greatly to Nan Kivell. This was the inspiration for Heron’s successful Garden series of paintings, which had broad appeal due to their non-confrontational subject matter. However Nan Kivell’s conservatism eventually led to the end of Heron’s relationship with the Redfern. Nan Kivell was personally never comfortable with entirely abstract work, preferring the Garden series of paintings that Heron exhibited at the Redfern in 1956 to the non-figurative Vertical series that the artist was beginning to produce. The 1956 exhibition was a transitional one for Heron. Besides works from the ‘tachiste’-inspired Garden series, the show also contained an ambitious non-figurative work, Vertical: January 1956² [Figure 32]. Rival critics John Berger and Neville Wallis wrote condescending reviews of this exhibition, sneering at the decorative qualities of the brightly coloured paintings.³ Heron saw the exhibition as a revelation of his discovery of the painterly potential of ‘tachisme’, which he attempted to define in 1957: ‘the dripping, sliding interpenetration of different pigments weaves webs of design which end as a sort of revelation of the natural laws involved in the movement of matter.’⁴ Driving to London with the contents of the 1956 Redfern show in the back of his Dormobile, Heron exclaimed to his wife: ‘here comes London’s first exhibition of tachiste

¹ Gooding, 1994, p. 115
² The Tate Gallery catalogue entry for this work reads (in part) as follows: Heron, Patrick/ Vertical: January 1956/ 1956/ Oil on hardboard/ unconfirmed: 2438 x 1219 mm/ painting/ Purchased 1993/ T06744.
³ Gooding, 1994, p. 111.
⁴ In the journal Arts in 1957. Cit. in Gooding, 1994, p. 136.
painting!" Nan Kivell was dishearteningly cautious, remarking when he received the works that he was 'just beginning to find a market for the still lifes.'

Risks and rewards

Despite the lukewarm critical response to Heron's 1956 Redfern exhibition, the gallery continued to depend on the artist to provide a sense of critical direction. Nan Kivell's natural eclecticism tended to weaken the gallery's credibility within the intense critical debate over trends in contemporary art. A valiant attempt to reverse this situation was made in the exhibition Metavisual Tachiste Abstract: Painting in England Today, which was held at the Redfern Gallery in 1957. This exhibition, organised with Heron's collaboration, sought to define the state of non-figurative painting in Britain. The title was suggested by Delia Heron, who proposed the term 'metavisual' as a sort of catch-all phrase to describe a wide range of non-representational artistic styles. Consisting of 280 works by 29 non-figurative artists, Metavisual Tachiste Abstract was accompanied by a catalogue essay written by the critic Denys Sutton. Though the critical response was mixed, and there was confusion on all sides as to the exhibition's overall rationale, it has since been noted that Metavisual Tachiste Abstract was one of the very few group exhibitions held in London in the 1950s that did actively seek to define a movement, and that all of these exhibitions were held in commercial rather than public galleries. In this sense Metavisual Tachiste Abstract was a landmark exhibition for its time. The exhibition drew some conservative flack for the Redfern Gallery, with the Spectator critic Basil Taylor remarking that the gallery 'had recently fallen for action painting and fallen in a most uncritical spirit.' The Studio's G.S. Whittet, usually very supportive of new trends, was also disparaging. Noting that it was 'one of the largest exhibitions of its kind,' Whittet felt that the show,

in spite of its high-keyed miscellany of colour shapes, mostly in large pictures, so strenuously avoided any reference to visual illusion that the effort defeated itself and left an impression of

---

1 Gooding, 1994, p. 97.
2 Ibid. p. 137
3 'as many... as Rex Nan Kivell could muster'. Gooding p.136. The exhibition subsequently travelled to Liège under the title Peinture Anglaise Contemporaine. See Garlake, 1998, p. 79, n. 130.
calculated pattern. ‘Action painting,’ says Mr Denys Sutton in the catalogue preface, ‘possesses one single and irresistible quality: that of life enhancement.’ The same might be said of the fabric designers whose products are reproduced each year with such gay abandon in Decorative Art – from painters who are said to be interpreting life, however, it seems no more than the latest form of escapism.¹

Patrick Heron used the exhibition to show new non-figurative works such as Horizontal Stripe Painting. But while non-figurative painting helped to gain critical attention for the Redfern Gallery, both positive and negative, financially it was not successful. Patrick Heron’s last show at the gallery, in 1958, was also a financial flop, with hardly any of the paintings being sold. Heron felt that Nan Kivell’s management of the exhibition was insensitive, and that through his conservative approach the dealer had failed to promote the work adequately. As a result he ended his association with the Redfern Gallery, commencing a new relationship with Bryan Winter at the Waddington Gallery.²

Although he was an astute buyer and an energetic promoter of modern paintings, Rex Nan Kivell lacked the necessary critical skills to provide a coherent curatorial focus for the gallery in the 1950s. He seems to have been able to acknowledge this failing, and relied on his ability to recognise talent in others to recruit partners who could make up for it to the business. This ability had been evident before the war when he hired Eric Newton to write the essay for the highly successful catalogue produced for the 1938 Christopher Wood exhibition. The same approach was used in hiring Denys Sutton to write the catalogue for Metavisional Tachiste Abstract. As a partner Harry Tatlock Miller brought at least some of the critical ability necessary to provide focus to the Redfern Gallery’s exhibition programme [Figure 33]. Metavisional Tachiste Abstract was a rare excursion for the Redfern Gallery into uncharted curatorial territory, and although Goolding gives Rex Nan Kivell credit for its organization, it seems more likely that the driving force behind the show was the younger Miller’s sense of needing to move with the times.

Despite the occasional risk-taking exhibition venture, throughout the 1950s the gallery continued to depend on the ‘mixed dish’ approach in order to maintain sales. This was partly because it had a good stock of Modern paintings bought cheaply before, during, and immediately after the war, and these began to appreciate rapidly in

value after 1948, as the English economy got back on its feet. The works by Rouault and Soutine which Nan Kivell had collected energetically before the war are examples of such strategic acquisitions. These works helped to fill out many mixed exhibitions in the late 1940s, and occasionally made up a special feature exhibition. For example Nan Kivell owned a set of large aquatints by Rouault, which had been commissioned by the dealer Ambrose Vollard to illustrate two books by André Suarès before 1916, and on which the artist worked intermittently for more than twenty years. An exhibition of these works mounted at the Redfern Gallery in 1948 claimed to include one print from every plate Rouault had completed for the series.¹ Works by Soutine owned by Nan Kivell were featured in a mixed exhibition, *Russian Emigré Artists in Paris*, in 1953.² The disadvantage of the mixed grill approach was that critics and collectors were coming to expect an intellectual focus to exhibitions. In order to compete successfully for buyers against galleries like the Hanover, Bryan Robertson’s non-profit Whitechapel Gallery, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, the Redfern Gallery needed to recapture valuable intellectual territory lost when Erica Brausen resigned. Editorial interest in the form of press reviews was vital to the Redfern’s survival, as it provided not only free advertising, but also the means to promote the gallery’s public role as a leader in the contemporary field. Nan Kivell was acutely aware of his role in guiding public opinion about contemporary art, expressing his ethos as a promoter explicitly in a letter to *The Times* concerning a ban on importing works of art which was being contemplated by the New Zealand Government.³

One of Harry Tatlock Miller’s early achievements as a Redfern partner was organizing the first London exhibition of his friend Sidney Nolan, in 1951. Miller was keen to present Australian artists in London, and Rex Nan Kivell, with his own sentimental attitude towards the antipodes, was supportive. Nan Kivell would have responded to Nolan’s topographical vision, but his encouragement may not have been entirely without ulterior motive, as support for Australian artists gave him a diplomatic advantage when dealing with Australian officials in London over the

---

¹ *The Times* 27 January 1948, p. 6.
² Many of these artists were Jewish. Peter Stone, writing in the *Jewish Chronicle* to mark the Redfern Gallery’s 50th anniversary in 1973, acknowledged Rex Nan Kivell’s long history of support of Jewish artists. Undated clipping from Rex Nan Kivell’s album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
³ ‘(Being the Director of a Gallery specialising in Contemporary paintings), I know the absolute necessity in acquainting the public with every new change in idiom, and that pictures must be seen to appreciate the rapidly changing theories and emotions of cultural development.’ RNK to the Editor, *The Times* 22 August 1958. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
disposal of his Pacific collection. Miller had helped to promote Nolan’s work in Australia, writing favorable reviews for Australian newspapers. Now Miller prepared to launch the artist on the London scene. Nolan was an excellent match for the Redfern Gallery’s exhibition profile, as his work combined a freshness of vision with a scenic interest that had been consciously developed out of the topographical landscape tradition. Nolan’s interest in early Australian painters (for example the Port Jackson painter) provided a point of mutual engagement for the artist and the gallery partners. The exhibition consisted of a selection from the Outback and Central Interior series together with some of the Ned Kelly-related Eureka Stockade paintings on glass. Nolan chose, for the most part, large topographical works in which he was seeking to transform the landscape tradition literally onto a bigger canvas. The new works treated the Australian landscape as a series of gigantic semi-abstract forms, helping to suggest the vast scale peculiar to the outback. At the same time Nolan introduced innovations in technique, which he was developing in order to explore the traditional genre of topographical painting within a new context of expressive art practice. The new works were informed by various influences including Australian colonial paintings of the sort that Rex Nan Kivell collected, pseudo-naïve painting in the Christopher Wood style, surrealism, and abstraction.

Nolan encountered two problems in the reception of his Redfern exhibition. The first was coincidental: his compatriot Russell Drysdale was simultaneously given a show at the Leicester Gallery, and this tended to reduce the impact of his own work on display at the Redfern. The second was that the observational accuracy of Nolan’s vision of the Australian landscape, and the truthfulness of its translation into paint, were lost on English commentators who had no experience of Australian conditions with which to compare Nolan’s painting. This meant that his work tended to be interpreted on formal grounds by comparison with contemporary art practice in England, and the essential accuracy of Nolan’s vision was missed, along with the strength of the contribution his technical innovations were making to the revitalization of the topographical tradition. The diffident reaction of the painter Victor Pasmore to the show highlights the challenge Nolan faced in communicating with an uncomprehending London audience. Nolan had greatly admired Pasmore’s own work.

---

Pasmore came into the gallery one day while Nolan and Miller were hanging one of Nolan’s large desert paintings, ‘sporting a light coloured suit, white hat and...cane...looking like a character from a Somerset Maugham novel.’ As he inspected the painting Pasmore’s comments were dispiritingly narrow, admiring the brushwork but failing to mention the subject. Nolan was downcast, feeling that in remaining with representational work he was being left behind by the abstractionists, Pasmore by this time having abandoned figurative painting. At the same time critics in Australia complained that the austerity of the vision Nolan and Drysdale were applying to the Australian landscape was doing their nation an injustice in London. Nevertheless John Rothenstein appreciated both artists’ work, selecting two works by each for consideration by the Tate Trustees for acquisition. As a result Nolan and Drysdale entered the Tate collection at the same time. The work by Nolan acquired by the Tate from the Redfern Gallery was *Inland Australia*, 1950 [Figure 34].

Despite the mostly encouraging reception of the Redfern Gallery exhibition, Nolan was not an overnight success in London. John Russell later considered that Nolan first ‘broke through’ on the London market in 1957, with an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. By this stage the artist’s association with the Redfern Gallery had weakened considerably, though Harry Tatlock Miller continued to ply him with requests for work. In one such request Miller asked Nolan if he would provide a flower painting for a ‘very selected’ exhibition of flower art the gallery was preparing. This sounds like an echo of Rex Nan Kivell’s exhortations to Paul Nash to provide flower paintings on the basis that they would sell ‘like baskets of fruit,’ and typifies the greengrocer-like approach to selling contemporary art that characterized the Redfern Gallery’s commercial profile. Given the rather uninspiring attitude to new work suggested by this approach it is hardly surprising that the more thoughtful artists tended to form new associations after an initial run of shows at the Redfern. Like Patrick Heron’s, Sidney Nolan’s association with the Redfern in the 1950s suggests that the gallery provided a very useful launching pad in Mayfair for artists on the verge of success. Once that success was endorsed by sales to public collections, which

---

1 Adams, 1987, p. 117.
2 The Tate Gallery catalogue entry for this work reads (in part) as follows: Nolan, Sir Sidney/ *Inland Australia*/ 1950/ Oil on hardboard/ support: 1219 x 1524 mm/ painting/ Purchased 1951/ N05993.
3 Robertson et al., 1965, p. 71.
4 Harry Tatlock Miller to Sidney Nolan 13 August 1957. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
5 RNK to Paul Nash 8 April 1942. Tate Gallery Archive. See Chapter Seven of this study.
the Redfern facilitated, they often moved on, presumably bored and irritated by the
gallery’s tendency to stay safely within the ‘middle ground’. Other artists found the
mainstream approach suited their style very well indeed. Alan Reynolds held a
number of successful exhibitions at the Redfern in the 1950s, including his Four
Seasons show in 1956, from which the Chantrey Bequest purchased the painting
Summer: Young September’s Cornfield for the Tate Gallery [Figure 35]. The gallery
continued to provide valuable introductions to the London market for little known
artists of major talent. One of these was the Portuguese painter Vieira da Silva, whose
1952 exhibition at the Redfern was well reviewed in The Times. While da Silva’s
career developed more strongly outside London, in Europe and America, Graham
Sutherland noted her among Nan Kivell’s successes in his obituary.

While the biggest names in contemporary British painting often chose to
exhibit their major works in other galleries, the Redfern Gallery continued to provide
a reliable outlet for their minor studies and works on paper. Works on paper were an
inexpensive way of adding colour and interest to the walls of city apartments. At the
end of the war half a million homes had been destroyed in London and a quarter of a
million more were severely damaged. Reconstruction and rebuilding provided a
growing bonanza for the interior decorating trade, and the gallery’s framing business
was well positioned to take advantage of this developing trade. The Redfern’s stock in
works on paper was very large indeed, as Nan Kivell was unable to resist the
temptation to acquire prints and drawings which captured his fancy. These could be
retailed at affordable prices during the reconstruction years when money for bigger
purchases was scarce. As paper itself was still subject to restrictions on use in 1948, the
value of paper commodities, including works of art, tended to appreciate. As well,
Nan Kivell’s long-standing promotion of works on paper as worthy additions to
collections eventually helped to increase the status of the graphic arts. The Redfern
Gallery’s proven ability to sell works on paper was an advantage to artists who
needed to make as much income as they could from all aspects of their artistic
enterprise, and who valued the opportunity to sell their working drawings through a

\footnotetext{1}{The Times 7 February 1952, p. 9.}
\footnotetext{2}{Sir Rex de Nan Kivell [sic] Art dealer and connoisseur, The Times 21 June 1977, p. 16.}
\footnotetext{3}{Garlake, 1998, p. 5.}
\footnotetext{4}{Cora Gordon remarked on this difficulty in her ‘London Commentary’, The Studio v. 136 n. 669 December 1948, pp. 188-90.}
reliable retailer. This had been a distinct pattern in the Redfern’s relationship with Paul Nash, and after his death the pattern repeated itself with Graham Sutherland.

In 1950 Sutherland was commissioned to paint a large canvas for the Festival of Britain, on the subject of *The Origins of the Land*.¹ The Festival of Britain had been conceived during the war as a national celebration marking the centenary of the Great Exhibition in 1851. When the multi-site Festival opened in 1951 its intention was to demonstrate Britain’s recovery from war and the strength of its reconstruction.² Sutherland’s commissioned work was intended to invoke pride in the land of Britain through the medium of landscape art. As such the work drew on the combined aesthetic canon of Neo-romanticism, the *genius loci*, and the heritage of traditional landscape painting, and indeed marked the climax of the Neo-romantic tendency in mid-century British painting. Portentously perhaps, an unidentified slasher vandalized the gigantic painting almost immediately after it was hung in the Exhibition’s South Bank site. Sutherland adopted a meticulous approach in executing the commission, producing hundreds of working sketches in watercolour and gouache as he planned the various components which were brought together in the final work. Curt Valentin, the artist’s New York dealer, suggested that these preparatory works would make an excellent exhibition,³ but it was the Redfern Gallery that put the idea into action. Fifty preparatory sketches for *Origins of the Land* were exhibited at the Redfern in 1952. Critical reception was favourable, the *Manchester Guardian* waxing especially lyrical: ‘In a haze of yellow, pink, green, orange and red the organic and inorganic energies rise together and put forth their strange progeny’.⁴ *The Times* critic admired the ‘genuine amplitude of form’ present in the Festival of Britain canvas, but felt that the artist’s talent was better seen in the ‘small and rather slight’ studies exhibited at the Redfern.⁵

Sutherland’s studies became, from this point on, a regular source of income for artist and gallery alike. In 1980 Harry Tatlock Miller described expeditions he and Nan Kivell made to Sutherland’s studio in Kent to obtain watercolours and gouaches for stock:

---

¹ Berthoud, 1982, p. 145.
² Garlake, 1998, pp. 73-75.
⁴ Cit. in Berthoud, 1982, p. 145.
⁵ Ibid.
You had to step over them ... He seemed to work and throw them aside. Some would have coffee spilt over them. I thought he would be meticulous, but he wasn’t. There was always a feeling of activity, of force and power. Graham would simply state his price. That was it, no bargaining, but it would always be a fair price. It was all wonderfully comfortable, delicious food, and a wonderful feeling of sophistication and simplicity. Yet I was always conscious with Graham that he was in a sense tormented ... it was as if he wore a crown of thorns himself.¹

Other dealers, including the Redfern’s neighbours in Cork Street, Rowland, Browse and Delbanco, also bought large quantities of Sutherland’s studies direct from the artist, as they sold very well. However it was the Redfern Gallery that achieved the greatest financial coup with Sutherland’s works on paper.

Sutherland was commissioned to design an enormous tapestry for the new Coventry Cathedral in 1952, and worked on the commission for ten years, producing great quantities of studies as he resolved various aspects of the design. As he worked Kathleen Sutherland salvaged many of the drawings, which he gave to her. The Redfern Gallery helped her to select from these a group of 127 drawings and paintings made for the Coventry project, including the first two cartoons. At the beginning of 1964, with Sutherland’s permission, Kathleen sold this group of works to the Redfern for £30,000 [Figure 36]. It was planned to show them in May of that year, to coincide with the publication of Andrew Revai’s book on the tapestry and its creation. Meanwhile the newspaper magnate Lord Iliffe had become interested in the preparatory works, on the advice of the Duchess of Leeds. Iliffe consulted Sir Kenneth Clark, who said that the tapestry was a great work of religious art, and that the studies were important and should be kept together. In March Lord Iliffe bought the works from the Redfern Gallery for £80,000.² In a matter of weeks the gallery had made a profit of £50,000 on the deal. It is interesting to note the role that Sir Kenneth Clark played in this transaction. Arguably the most powerful figure in the British art establishment at the time,³ and a man of iron integrity, Clark would not have willingly endorsed a sale which would seriously distort the market. Clark had had cordial, if distant, contact with Rex Nan Kivell over a period of decades, and it is tempting to speculate that his favourable advice to Lord Iliffe contained an element of calculated recognition for the dealer’s efforts on behalf of British art over the years.

¹ Ibid. p. 163.
² Ibid. p. 222.
acquisition of the studies Iliffe presented them to the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, situated adjacent to Coventry Cathedral, where their relationship to the finished tapestry could be revealed to the public in perpetuity.

**Modern prints**

Rex Nan Kivell’s importance as a champion of the modern print is well acknowledged by British writers on the subject. His only real rival as a collector in the field of twentieth-century British prints was Robert Erskine of the St George’s Gallery.¹ During the Second World War Nan Kivell established an important relationship with two sisters, Frances Byng Stamper and Caroline Lucas, who had founded Miller’s, a gallery in Lewes in Sussex. The aim of this enterprise was to provide artists with encouragement and means to promote their industry, and it received considerable official support.² In 1945 The Miller’s Press was set up as a lithographic studio in an outbuilding on the sisters’ property at Lewes, and attracted artists from London where there was a shortage of lithographic facilities in circumstances congenial to artistic work. An energetic programme of exhibitions, concerts and lectures was held at the studio, which Maynard Keynes, then chairman of CEMA, helped to support. Duncan Grant was also closely involved with the Miller’s Press. In 1948 the sisters, in conjunction with the Redfern Gallery, founded the Society of London Painter-Printers, with the aim of promoting exhibitions of original colour prints.³ Many well-known artists joined the Society, among them Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, Ceri Richards [Figure 37], Robert Colquhoun, Robert MacBryde, Prunella Clough, Michael Rothenstein, and Duncan Grant. The Society’s first exhibition was held at the Redfern in 1948, and included 110 lithographs and 43

---

¹ See Garton, 1992, p. 308. Graham Sutherland wrote that Nan Kivell’s print collection was ‘second to none’. *The Times* 21 June 1977, p. 16.
² Clive Bell documented the sisters’ progress enthusiastically in *The New Statesman and Nation*. For example in 1942 Bell reported under the heading ‘Millers,’ that ‘the exhibition of French and English drawings, which was opened last week by Sir Kenneth Clark, is perhaps as good as any yet seen in this admirable gallery in the Lewes high street.’ Clive Bell, ‘Millers’, *The New Statesman and Nation*, v. 24 n. 608 17 October 1942, p. 222.
monotypes by more than 70 British artists. The accompanying catalogue contained an introduction by Clive Bell.¹

An important part of the appeal of this enterprise to artists and public alike was that lithographs are a very painterly medium. British artists made an intensive exploration of the sympathetic relationship between painting and lithography in the 1950s. In this way lithographs could provide an affordable means for collectors to acquire and enjoy the latest formal developments in the work of well-established painters. Lithographs had the advantage of colour and scale over other print forms (for example wood engravings), with some artists producing lithographs that were as large as medium-sized paintings. An example is the Turning Forms by Henry Moore, which was reproduced on the cover of the catalogue for the 1948 exhibition. Prints made on this scale were capable of making very strong statements in an exhibition context, and were able to stand out successfully even in the company of painted works. For painters the discipline of translating painterly ideas into lithographs provided a valuable method of formalizing motifs more loosely resolved in paint, and disseminating these to a much wider buying public than they had access to through sales of paintings.

Like working drawings, lithographs were a means by which the effort of painterly experiment and research could be turned into valuable additional income. Prices for lithographs at the Redfern in the mid-1950s began at one or two guineas, exclusive of frames, whereas paintings by the same artists could be priced at hundreds of pounds.² This was a distinct advantage for artists, dealers and buyers alike, as it helped to extend and popularize the market for contemporary art. The Redfern Gallery featured regular exhibitions of work by the Society of London Painter-Printers throughout the 1950s, the Society’s 1950-51 exhibition including work by Eduardo Paolozzi, Julian Trevelyan, Robert Adams, Sven Berlin, Merlin Evans, Ceri Richards, William Scott and Patrick Heron.³ The Miller’s Press was eventually forced to close in the mid-50s due to the frailty of the founding sisters, who were getting too old to keep it going.

³ Garton, 1992, p. 255.
In addition to exhibitions held in the Cork Street premises, the Redfern also made up touring exhibitions of prints which it sent out to venues around the world, following a pattern established during the war. One such exhibition was sent to the Suter Art Gallery in Nelson, New Zealand, in 1952, and prints were sold from it to private buyers, with the host gallery getting a 25% discount on purchases. In May 1953 Stewart Macleman, Director of the National Gallery in Wellington, opened an account for Nan Kivell at the Bank of New Zealand, into which proceeds from sales of prints at the Suter Gallery exhibition and a subsequent show at the National Gallery were paid.¹

The size and range of the Redfern Gallery’s stock of British prints in the early 1950s is well demonstrated by two groups of prints that Nan Kivell donated to public art galleries in New Zealand in 1952 and 1953. The first of these gifts was initially made in 1952 to J.C. Beaglehole, who, embarrassed by the dealer’s generosity, persuaded him to give it instead to the National Art Gallery in Wellington. This group of 181 prints was almost entirely made up of wood engravings, both monochrome and colour, and three linocuts, collected between the wars. Artists represented included Adrian Allinson, John Farleigh, Robert Gibbings, Eric Daglish, David Jones, E. McKnight Kauffer, Clare Leighton, Iain Macnab, John Nash, Agnes Miller Parker, Gwendolen Raverat, Eric Ravilious, and Ethelbert White. Many of the examples had been produced as illustrations for fine books, in which Nan Kivell and Beaglehole shared a mutual interest.

Gratitude for the gift to the National Art Gallery expressed by Beaglehole and Macleman stimulated Nan Kivell at the beginning of 1953 to make up a second group of prints, divided into four consignments for distribution to each of the main public art galleries in New Zealand: Auckland City Art Gallery, the National Art Gallery, the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in Christchurch, and Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Taken as a whole this was quite an extraordinary gift to Nan Kivell’s homeland, covering the full range of graphic output by British printmakers from the early 1920s to 1952. Several important movements were represented, including the wood engraving revival of the 1920s, the colour linocut movement, the fine book movement, and the more recent lithography movement. Individual artists ranged from

the Nash brothers through Eric Gill, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Gwendolen Raverat, Anges Miller Parker, Claude Flight and his linocut pupils, to more recent work by Graham Sutherland, Eduardo Paolozzi, Michael Ayrton, Prunella Clough, Keith Vaughan, Ceri Richards, William Scott, and Henry Moore. In all over a thousand individual prints were distributed among the four galleries, with Auckland receiving 307, Christchurch 300, Wellington 400, and Dunedin 152. Of these collections only the Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin groups remain intact. This is because the Director of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery refused to accept them into the collection, evidently on the basis that the works were too modern, and arranged for some of them to be sold to the public. Roger Duff, the Director of the Canterbury Museum, who initially received the consignment intended for Christchurch, contrived to conceal this information from Nan Kivell so as not to offend him. Some of the Christchurch prints were rediscovered in a drawer at the Canterbury Museum in the early 1990s, while others, with Duff’s assistance, made their way into a loan collection held by the Canterbury Public Library. The rest vanished.

The possibility that Nan Kivell had an ulterior motive for the gifts to New Zealand cannot be discounted. The gifts were made during the period of the most intense negotiations with the Australian Commonwealth over the disposal of Nan Kivell’s Pacific collection, during which the subject of a knighthood, possibly coming from New Zealand, repeatedly appears in Nan Kivell’s correspondence. Nan Kivell sent the consignments of prints to New Zealand only a few weeks before the Australian Government was advised that its efforts in support of a New Zealand Coronation Knighthood for Nan Kivell had failed. The conclusion seems unavoidable that the gifts represent a last-ditch effort by Nan Kivell to obtain sufficient recognition as a benefactor in his homeland to obtain the coveted knighthood. Unfortunately for the collector, the significance of his work as a supporter of the arts in London was scarcely understood in New Zealand.

**Postwar prosperity**

Slowly but surely, recognition for a lifetime’s dedication and service to the fine arts in London began to come Nan Kivell’s way in the 1950s. In 1951 G.S.

---

Whittet published a series of articles called 'A Gallery of Art Dealers' in *The Studio*. One of these profiled the Redfern Gallery and presents a friendly picture of Rex Nan Kivell at work at his desk in the basement of the cluttered gallery. The article specifically mentions Nan Kivell's efforts in support of contemporary printmaking, and highlights a number of important paintings that had passed through the gallery's hands. Several of these works are reproduced in the article, including Michael Ayrton's masterly portrait of Sir William Walton. Of this work Wyndham Lewis wrote in 1955 that it 'would take its place anywhere in a collection of great historic portraits'. Other works reproduced in this article include a Toulouse-Lautrec, *Les Deux Amies*, Christopher Wood's *Douarnenez*, Utrillo's *Montmartre*, and Edward Burra's *War in the Sun*, as well as works by Bonnard, Gertler, Sickert, Rodrigo Moynihan, Victor Pasmore, Ceri Richards, and Bryan Winter. 'No one,' concluded Whittet, 'who professes an interest in the art of today...can afford to miss a visit to the Redfern Gallery. One may spend there a fortune or a few guineas but one can be sure of coming away the richer for experience and pleasure.' Whittet also noted that to talk to Rex Nan Kivell was to be 'convinced of the value of paintings as precious things to own and look at, as decorative elements in the home and only incidentally as...merchandise.'

Nan Kivell actively sought public recognition for his role as a promoter. There can be no doubt that his quest for a knighthood embodies a desire to acquire the social status denied him by his illegitimate birth. But the quest also represents a desire to be

---

3 This work was in the Montague Shearman Collection which was exhibited and distributed by the Redfern Gallery after the collector's death. Whittet's article confusingly describes the work as being in the collection of Rex Nan Kivell. The Tate Gallery catalogue entry reads (in part) as follows: N05142 *Les Deux Amies (The Two Friends)* 1894/ Inscribed 'HTL' (in monogram) b.l./ Oil on millboard, 18 7/8 x 13 3/8 (48 x 34)/ Bequeathed by Montague Shearman through the CAS 1940.
4 The Tate Gallery catalogue for this work reads (in part) as follows: Christopher Wood 1901-1930/ *Douarnenez, Brittany* 1930/ T00545/ oil on cardboard 330 x 460 mm/ Bequeathed by Alberta, Countess of Sandwich, 1962/ Prov. Purchased from Dr Lucius Wood, the artist's father, by Rex de C. Nan Kivell for the Redfern Gallery (after 1938) Purchased from Redfern Gallery by Lord Sandwich 1947. The catalogue entry also cites a letter, RNK to Tate Gallery, 29 October 1962, in which Nan Kivell states that this painting was the only work of Wood's owned Dr Lucius Wood.
5 The Tate Gallery catalogue for this work reads (in part) as follows: Maurice Utrillo 1883-1955/ N05143 *Le Passage Cottin* c. 1910/ Inscribed 'Maurice Utrillo V.' b.l./ Oil on canvas 54 x 73 cm/ Bequeathed by Montague Shearman through the CAS 1940/ Prov. With Louis Libaud, Paris (purchased from the artist), with Galerie Van Leer, Paris, Montague Shearman and Sir [sic] Rex de C. Nan Kivell, Paris and London; Montague Shearman, London. The catalogue adds that the picture has been known since at least 1928 simply as 'Montmartre', but it is actually a view up the Passage Cottin. Alley, 1981, pp. 736-8, reproduced p. 737.
rewarded for his long years of personal investment in the careers of individual artists, and in the establishment of a network of commercial support for the arts long before CEMA, the Arts Council, the British Council and other state-funded institutions had evolved to move into this role. The establishment of a viable contemporary art market in London (which by 1965 had grown in value to rival those of Paris and New York) was likewise due to the determined investment of resources and effort by a small number of visionary traders in the middle years of the century, and Nan Kivell was one of them.\(^1\) Artists and dealers alike reaped the benefits of this economic infrastructure once the post-war boom in art prices got underway [Figure 38]. This is presumably what Nan Kivell was referring to when he said that an honour would be a recognition of ‘thirty year’s work by a New Zealander in England.’\(^2\)

Dealers were often reckoned to be no more than hard-nosed businessmen driven by self-interest alone. Jacob Epstein, an occasional exhibitor at the Redfern Gallery, expressed his particular cynicism about dealers in his autobiography of 1955:

The Art Racket is rarely in favour of the artist. A favourite trick is to take great care that the work does not sell, and this can be easily managed ... [Naturally the work falls into the hands of the dealer] ... There is hardly a manager on earth who will not see, with artists to deal with, he can easily feather his own nest. Thus the temptation to dishonesty is more than likely to overcome him. There is something about the art dealing business, an element of gambling, which can convert an ordinary businessman into a potential inmate of a gaol sooner than almost any other occupation. Dealers, as a rule, adopt towards the artist an attitude of benevolence, such as the poor-house inmate meets at the hand of the County Council visitor or Charity Organisation inspector. He is just a poor devil who would starve if not for them. Perhaps he would.\(^3\)

Nan Kivell and his partners were certainly up to playing artful dodges, and did so. Some of the mass-produced prints by Continental masters they sold were misrepresented to seem like limited editions, and two buyers complained bitterly.\(^4\)

---

1. Cf. Art v. 2 n. 21 15 November 1956, ‘Portrait of a Gallery – the Redfern Gallery:’ ‘for a young artist to make good under the aegis of Mr Nan Kivell is to ensure for himself fame... One gets the feeling that there is something for everybody... this immense variety is most manifest in the annual Summer Exhibition. There can be no doubt that this is a policy which pays. The spectacular success of Alan Reynolds, for instance, a “Redfern boy,” and the amazing way in which in exhibition after exhibition... the paintings are bespattered with small red labels, all testify to the pre-eminence of Mr Nan Kivell among the impresarios of modern British Art.’

2. RKN to H. White 15 December 1952. MS4000, National Library of Australia.


4. The two unhappy print buyers were Dr T.G. Milihen and Professor Erna Mundowski. For example, T.G. Miliken to RKN 14 November 1962: ‘I have been learning more about prints ... and have been quite distressed to find that the value of some of those I have from you is much less that the price you ask. I am particularly disturbed to learn that the un-numbered Chagall “Le Reve” (no. 287), 250
Sometimes works seemed to go missing, and Mizouni Nouari would hunt high and low for them, to no avail. On one occasion Harry Tatlock Miller obtained a canvas by Graham Sutherland from the Marlborough Galleries, for sale at the Redfern. To his great glee Miller discovered a second canvas by the painter underneath the first, the two works having been laid one over the other on a single stretcher. Miller let Nan Kivell and their framer, Dino de Biasi, in on the scoop, without telling the painter or the Marlborough Galleries, effectively getting two works for the price of one. The painter Humphrey Spender claimed that, on entering the Redfern basement unannounced one day, he discovered Nan Kivell and an assistant sawing an abstract painting in half, in order to make two for sale. Such antics were part and parcel of staying afloat in a tough business.

But there was genuine altruism as well as profit. More than one writer has reported Nan Kivell’s kindness to the poor, alcoholic Nina Hamnett in 1948. And there was hard work. Staying in business meant an endless succession of exhibitions. The volume of works that passed through the Redfern Gallery was enormous. An average hang at the gallery lasted no more than a few weeks, and would often consist of 300 to 500 paintings, drawings and prints. In addition to sourcing the works there was the business of mounting and framing, which, while profitable, added considerably to the amount of activity needing to be transacted within the limited space available at the Cork Street premises.

---

1 Harry Tatlock Miller to RNK 26 July [1962]: ‘Now for the VERY THRILLING NEWS! [sic]. Some days ago the Marlborough delivered the Allfrey-Miller two big Sutherlands in their dad Hecht frames. Rang Dino who called for them to reframe and do their big gingering on them. An hour later Dino phoned me very mysteriously to say I HAD to get in a cab to go and see him as something very strange had happened! Rushed there. Dino and Gaby bright-eyed with excitement. Under one of the Sutherland they had found another much better one - and signed and dated - He had put two on the one stretcher?????? [sic]. How very honest of Dino. I told him we’ld go thirds on it with him and of course I have not told Peter or another living soul. I bag thirds?????? [sic]. So now we have a supply of two top Grahams. All good sellers too. I hope you don’t mind my having been quite so generous and spontaneous with Dino and Gaby but I am sure you would have done the same under the circumstances. And anyway they won’t know what we sell it for if you and we get a bit foxy when it comes to the share out!!! [sic].


While the art market expanded dramatically in the late 1950s as the phenomenon of Swinging London began to take shape, it also became very much more competitive than it had been immediately after the war. Many more galleries entered the market, and dealers scrambled to obtain the best works from well-known masters. Even within established art dealingships individual dealers sometimes jostled over commissions. Harry Tatlock Miller gave a strong sense of the hustle and bustle of dealing in a letter he wrote to Nan Kivell, who was away on holiday in St Tropez, in 1962:

Stan has the biggest news: three days ago a pretty young American girl spent an hour with him just chatting away. Ended up buying:-
“Two Girls” gouache by Kit Wood £150
“Nu assis” by de Stael £1750
“Abstract black and white” Nicholson £475
“Pastel” Hartung £350
“Watercolour” Singier £350

She is called Mrs Drummond, lives in Chester Square and then I pushed my way in over Dot’s and Stan’s feet and she has the big Singier on approval. But sad sad she does not want it but has confirmed all the rest. She and her husband are now wanting pictures for their YACHT decorated by Dave Hicks … Have tempted her with a photograph of our Kalman de Stael bout. They are both coming in again this week. So here’s hoping. But for two days it has rained solidly here: a downpour and I am sure that it has kept them away.

The Sutherland sale still hangs fire: Dorothy has half clinched it with the Rochdale Art Gallery and I’ve got Bryan Forbes writing letters about it and supposedly coming again today to see it at £2900 but Dot quoted £3500 to Rochdale.

Have sold a pretty good and big seated nude drawing by Moore (from Pilkington) to Stewart Mason for cost price £412. As Stewart’s investment. He’s thrilled and I should think it’s pretty safe for £600 to £700. And I bought a very good Moore drawing from Lewin for £300. ¹

Tough competition

Before the 1960s exclusive contracts between artists and dealers for the production of works of art had not been unusual, but nor were they were standard practice. Many artists preferred to do their own marketing, and sold works through a number of galleries. This was hard work, as Paul Nash had discovered in the 1930s. A

¹ Harry Tatlock Miller to RNK 26 July [1962] MS4000, National Library of Australia.
new pattern of artist-dealer relationships developed in the 1960s as certain galleries began to offer very lucrative contracts in which high-profile artists were paid regular amounts of money at fixed intervals in return for an agreed number of works over a given period – effectively a salary.\(^1\) Naturally this was an attractive arrangement for artists and before long many of the biggest names in the British art scene were signed up. Henry Moore, for example, had contract arrangements with several galleries in the 1960s. Galleries which had tended to rely on unstructured personal loyalties between artist and dealer in previous decades had to wake up to the need to secure the supply of work from major artists, before other businesses made better long-term offers.

For the Redfern Gallery, and for many other smaller businesses in the increasingly crowded market, getting around the larger players became a major part of the game. A fine example of the manoeuvering needed to negotiate sales around other dealers is provided in correspondence preserved among Nan Kivell's papers, relating to sales of works by Henry Moore which the dealer negotiated between 1959 and 1964. Moore had standing business arrangements with several galleries during this period, including the Leicester Galleries, Knoedler’s and the Marlborough Galleries, and Nan Kivell had to work his way around these relationships in order to get his commissions when selling Moore's work. In November 1959 Nan Kivell introduced a Los Angeles television executive, Taft Schreiber, to Henry Moore. Nan Kivell had met Schreiber through their mutual acquaintance Charles Laughton, who sometimes bought paintings on Schreiber's behalf. On 10 November Nan Kivell reported to Moore that he had just spent a week in Paris with Mr and Mrs Schreiber, and that they were coming to London – would Moore come to lunch?\(^2\) Moore had tonsillitis and while waiting for him to recover the Schreibers purchased two small bronzes from the Redfern, *Seated Girl*, 1958, 32 inches high, for £800, and *Animal Head*, 1957, 22 inches high, for £400.\(^3\) The proposed lunch took place a few days later. Nan Kivell had also invited Mr Sidney Bernstein ‘whom you may know is the president of the Granada T.V. circuit’.\(^4\) The lunch party met at the Redfern at 1.00 pm and retired to the Guinea. On 11 December Nan Kivell received the payment for the two small bronzes and sent it on to Moore, making it a cash cheque ‘just in case it helps in any

---

1 See especially Robertson et al., 1965, pp. 172-3.
2 RNK to Henry Moore 10 November [1959]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
4 RNK to Henry Moore 17 November [1959]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
way.¹ Evidently Schreiber had also commissioned a substantial work by Moore in the interim, and this worried Nan Kivell. He felt he was being left out of the deal, as Schreiber seemed to want to negotiate directly with Moore, and he was also anxious about the sculptor’s relationships with other dealers:

Taft Schreiber has said that he is having photographs taken and you should be receiving these soon - You will remember that he said that he was sending you a photograph to show you the position or rather the proposed position of the large sculpture. He will probably be sending this to you direct as I have given him your address. I am still wondering what we are going to do about the commission because I suppose Taft has got £6000 fixed in his head which is the nett price to you. It is tricky having to be submitted to the Leicester Galleries and New York. I do feel that as Taft is my friend and I have made the introduction that I should come in somewhere on the commission.²

However the three-way relationship between Moore, Nan Kivell and Schreiber continued on amicable terms. In 1961 Nan Kivell became involved in the acquisition by the Los Angeles County Museum of a major sculpture by Moore. The sequence of events leading up to the purchase is recorded in detail here as an example of the anatomy of an art deal, and it must be assumed that it was for this reason that Nan Kivell preserved the relevant letters as a sequence among his papers. In July Nan Kivell took a wealthy friend of Schreiber’s, Mrs Rose Birch, to visit Moore, possibly in relation to the museum project.³ In the same month Schreiber approached Moore directly about the project:

I have become involved with the new Museum of Art which is being built in Los Angeles and have undertaken the responsibility of fund-raising for the contemporary art group. This promises to be one of the most beautiful museums in the country, and we are hoping to pattern the collection after the Tate-Gallery in London -- a collection inclusive of all great art up to the present. I would like to make a contribution to the Museum of one of your large bronzes and hope we can, in the near future, be privileged to get one of these wonderful pieces for the sculpture garden.

¹ RNK to Henry Moore 11 December [1959]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² RNK to Henry Moore 11 December 1959. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
³ Taft Schreiber to RNK 18 July 1961: ‘How can I ever thank you for the wonderful kindness you extended to Mrs. Rose Birch while she was in London. She hasn’t stopped raving about your thoughtful help and consideration while she was there, and of course she is ecstatic about the wonderful visit with Henry Moore. The other evening, Mrs. Birch talked, I think, for a couple of hours about her visit with you and Mr. Moore and what she learned from him. What enthusiasm and what respect she has for this man! As for you -- and your car, I think you made a conquest. All I can say is, this should be followed through, and I am awaiting your trip to Los Angeles for the next stage. You can use my Bentley so she will not feel ill-treated if you should call on her here.’
Schreiber copied this letter to Rex Nan Kivell saying that he wanted him to be aware of his approach to Moore, and suggested that ‘maybe a few words from you to Moore would help.’ This effectively cut Nan Kivell into the negotiations. However the assignment for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was still a tricky one for the dealer, as Moore had existing contracts with other galleries. Moore seems not to have responded to Schreiber’s letter, and the American evidently wrote again to Nan Kivell asking for his help. Nan Kivell now approached Moore himself, but there followed a further delay of several months before the matter progressed any further. Meanwhile Nan Kivell obtained a set of four bronze maquettes made by Moore for his *Time Life* screen, and offered these to Schreiber for £4500, which he said was a ‘superb find’ in relation to prices now being asked for small bronzes by Moore. Schreiber declined the purchase, writing to say that he and his wife Rita had seen a number of plaques and maquettes that Moore had ‘developed’ and that none of them seemed to excite them. Schreiber noted that he had written to Sir Kenneth Clark ‘under separate mail’ hoping that Clark would be able to join them while they were staying in Kent. Nan Kivell now forwarded Clark a copy of a letter that Schreiber had sent him. Which letter this was and why Nan Kivell felt it appropriate to forward it to Clark is unclear, especially as Schreiber had mentioned that he had written to Clark himself ‘under separate mail’. Perhaps Nan Kivell felt anxious that Schreiber would cut him out of the deal, and wanted Clark as a witness to his involvement. Whatever Nan Kivell’s motive was in contacting Clark directly, Clark’s response was cordial, addressing Nan Kivell as ‘Dear Nan Kivell’ and signing himself ‘Kenneth Clark’. Clark told Nan Kivell that he hoped it might be possible for him to meet up with Schreiber in California. Presumably Clark’s advice was being sought in relation to the Los Angeles art museum project. The next letter in the sequence is from Nan Kivell to Schreiber, to say that now Moore had sent him a full set of photographs of works which were available for purchase. Nan Kivell was now careful to establish his own interest:

---

1 Taft Schreiber to RNK 18 July 1961. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
2 RNK to Henry Moore, 22 September 1961. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
3 RNK to Taft Schreiber 26 January 1962. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
4 Taft Schreiber to RNK 30 January 1962. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
5 Kenneth Clark to RNK 29 January 1962. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
I think it best to send his letter on to you at the same time, and you will [sic] that he has given nett prices to himself. I think it would be better to suggest now that we work on a ten per cent basis. Perhaps you would let me know if you think this would be agreeable to you.¹

Early in March Moore returned from New York and gave Nan Kivell details of two works which he was prepared to make available to Schreiber. At this point the negotiations had to proceed cautiously because of the various contractual obligations Moore had with other dealers, and Nan Kivell pointed this out to Schreiber:

Henry is just a little worried that you might tell Knoedler’s that you had purchased direct in England, and he thought this might worry them, thinking that he had side-tracked them, also he is sure that Knoedler’s prices will be considerably more than those quoted to you, and although he did not actually ask me to say this to you, he inferred [sic] that he would prefer your saying nothing to Knoedler’s about the transaction. Another point was that when the suggested Museum piece is carried further, we will have to make some provision allowing the Leicester Gallery to be acknowledged as they have apparently some mutual agreement, not that the Leicester Gallery worry about me when such transactions are arranged with other artists under our control. However, I would not like to get Henry involved in any controversy.²

Details of delivery times for four available sculptures were advised by Nan Kivell. These were listed as Reclining Mother and Child, Three Piece Reclining Figure, Standing Figure (Bone) No. 3, and Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 3. In February 1962 Schrieber confirmed the purchase of the Standing Figure (Bone) for his friend Lew Wasserman, and the Reclining Mother and Child for himself. The confirmed prices were £4000 plus £400 as Nan Kivell’s fee for the Standing Figure (Bone) and £10,000 plus £1000 for the Reclining Mother and Child.³ Correspondence in September and October 1963 confirms that the Redfern acted as an agent between the Marlborough Gallery, Henry Moore, and Mrs Anna Bing Arnold of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for the sale of Moore’s large work Seated Woman for $35,000.⁴

These transactions demonstrate some of the basic strengths and weaknesses of Nan Kivell’s business practice in the early 1960s, a period during which he was widely recognized as one of the most important dealers of contemporary art in London. Among the commercial strengths were the well-established goodwill that existed between an important artist (Moore) and a trusted dealer (Nan Kivell), a well-

¹ RNK to Taft Schreiber 12 February 1962. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² RNK to Taft Schreiber 9 March 1962. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
³ Taft Schreiber to RNK 22 February 1962. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁴ Anna Bing Arnold to RNK 25 September 1963; RNK to Marlborough Gallery 1 Oct 1963. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
established and exclusive client base established through patient nurturing, and Nan Kivell’s personal ability to negotiate around existing dealer relationships without risking infringements. A major weakness was the Redfern Gallery’s lack of exclusive contracts with major artists. This meant that Nan Kivell and his partners were constantly picking around the edges of contracts held by artists with other galleries at this time. The most competitive operators in the practice of contracting top artists were Frank Lloyd and Harry Fisher, of Marlborough Fine Art. These partners were Austrian refugees who had met in the British Army during the war. They had a lot of capital derived from dealing businesses owned by their families in Europe before 1939.¹ They founded Marlborough Fine Art in 1946, with premises in Albemarle Street, and quickly established themselves among the leading dealers in the market. By 1960 it was apparent that Marlborough’s strategy of signing artists to contracts which guaranteed them a regular income had been extremely effective in luring many of the most successful artists away from other dealers. Dealers like Nan Kivell and Brausen, whose methods of operation were based on informal relationships and goodwill, were vulnerable to incursions on their territories from Marlborough Fine Art, which was cash-rich and armed with attractive contracts ready for the best artists to sign. Brausen, whose approach at the Hanover Gallery was to buy all of an artist’s work, was especially vulnerable because of her heavy investment in individual artists: when Francis Bacon left her for a contract with Marlborough in 1958 she was devastated.

The Redfern Gallery’s approach was more cautious, spreading its risk by buying selections of works from a number of sources, so that the gallery was not directly dependent on the productivity of individual artists for its income. While this strategy helped to minimize losses on backing artists who were risky investments, it also meant that it missed out on the huge gains that could be made by controlling an artist who suddenly became very famous. For example Marlborough’s strategy with Bacon eventually paid off handsomely for the gallery, as the artist’s prices continued to increase in leaps and bounds through the 1960s and ’70s. Evidence that the Redfern Gallery was conscious of the need to retain promising artists can be found in a letter to Rex Nan Kivell from Harry Tatlock Miller concerning the artist Bryan Kneale. In 1965 Kneale had an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, and the Redfern Gallery

benefitted by handling a ‘signed and sealed’ commission Kneale obtained through this show, worth £4500. On the strength of this Kneale asked Miller for a banker’s order for £100 per month, which the Redfern’s accountant agreed was wise. ‘All the critics have said he is the next now only to Moore and we mustn’t lose him,’ wrote Miller.\(^1\)
While exclusive contacts were certainly a good way of securing commissions for dealers, they were not entirely necessary to obtain excellent profits, as the Redfern’s success with the sale of Sutherland’s preparatory drawings for his Coventry Cathedral tapestry demonstrates.

Nan Kivell himself seems to have steered well clear of contracts with artists - there are none preserved in his archive at Canberra. Throughout the 1960s the Redfern Gallery relied on soaring prices for pre-Second World War French paintings as its most reliable source of income. The escalation of prices at this time is well documented, and was recognized at the time as extraordinary.\(^2\) Newspaper and magazine reports throughout the decade announced each record price, and the resulting attention helped both to glamourize the art market, and to popularize contemporary art among an increasingly wide mass market of readers. Suddenly investing in art seemed an exciting and realizable prospect to many people who had never considered it before. Even the dealers became stars of the exploding market. A rash of glossy magazine articles featured Rex Nan Kivell among the leading contemporary art dealers of the decade, along with Erica Brausen of the Hanover Gallery, Helen Lessore of the Beaux Arts Gallery, Arthur Jeffress, the Gimpel brothers of Gimpel Fils, Dudley Tooth and Peter Cochrane of Tooth’s, and Oliver Brown of the Leicester Gallery.\(^3\) A *Sunday Times* color supplement feature on the ‘Barons of Bond Street’ included Nan Kivell among a line-up of top dealers which included the Old Master dealers Thomas Agnew and Son and Colnaghi’s, demonstrating that Nan Kivell’s prominence in the market was not simply limited to the contemporary field.\(^4\)

---

1. Harry Tatlock Miller to RNK Wednesday 30 [month\(^a\)] [1965], MS4000, National Library of Australia.
The best survey of the contemporary art scene in mid-60s London is provided by the wonderful book *Private View*, published in 1965.¹ This large format, cloth-bound volume took the form of a series of long conversations between *Sunday Times* art critic John Russell and Whitechapel Gallery director Bryan Robertson. Ranging over three broad areas of current art practice, administration and commerce, the two critics provided a fascinating insight into the vibrant world which artists and their supporters had managed to create within the resurgent British economy. Most revealing of all was the brilliant photo essay by Snowdon accompanying the text, which highlighted with acute perception and great intimacy the accomplishments of the featured artists, curators, educators and dealers, within the context of the social and artistic environment they lived and worked in. Dealers came in for a full share of the tribute for the creation of this environment, and Rex Nan Kivell was among those singled out for special mention [Figure 39].

¹ Robertson et al., 1965.
Chapter Nine
Portraits

Rex Nan Kivell relied on personality, and personalities, to get to the top of his trade. The Redfern Gallery depended to a great extent on forming successful relationships with artists, viewers and buyers— in short, on people. In this milieu Nan Kivell’s habit of collecting and exhibiting images of people provided him with a practical means of encouraging visitors to the gallery, to engage with its wares. He had particular tastes when it came to portraiture. Some contemporary portraits shown at the Redfern, for example those exhibited by Bryan Kneale in 1958,¹ seem to reflect the dealer’s personal enjoyment of the grotesque [Figure 40]. A portrait of Nan Kivell himself, arguably the best portrait painted of the collector, was illustrated in The Studio² [Figure 41]. Another portrait of Nan Kivell by Kneale,³ now in the collection in Canberra, is clearly the result of a commission [Figure 42]. This work is intended to show Nan Kivell as he liked to be seen. The composition bears a close resemblance to publicity photographs Nan Kivell had taken of himself at this time, posed in an attitude of connoisseurship in front of his ostentatious bookshelf of elaborately bound books and albums. An exhibition entitled Elegance Militaire, held at the Redfern Gallery in 1955, epitomised Nan Kivell’s personal taste in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century military portraiture.⁴ This exhibition is an excellent example of the kind of eclectic exhibition for which Nan Kivell gained a considerable reputation during the Second World War.

Personal identity was a matter of obsessive concern for Nan Kivell, so it is perhaps not surprising that he collected records of personalities in the form of portraits. Having drawn attention to a whole category of travel art through his Pacific collection, in preparing material for his projected book he eventually narrowed his focus to portraits. A sense of dislocated identity lay at the core of his imagination. With his obsession with social status, ambivalent attitude to facts, and penchant for acting out fantasies and social deceptions, Nan Kivell was irresistibly drawn to the

³ Bryan Kneale, Portrait of Rex de C. Nan Kivell 1960; oil on composition board; 127 x 71.2 cm; Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK9530, National Library of Australia.
romantic aspects of colonial portraits. Many of the images in his collection show impressions of people in the process of creating and recreating their social roles and identities, usually in locations exotic to Europeans, within historical contexts of dramatic change and dislocation. In accordance with his social status as an expatriate New Zealander in London, Nan Kivell was sensitised to attempts to fix people’s identities in place and time, in portraits which often had as their context encounters between radically different social and ethnic groups. The portraits collection, extracted as a subset of the wider Pacific collection, became the vehicle for his study of variations on this theme.

A great range of media, styles and qualities is covered in Nan Kivell’s sweepingly inclusive use of the term ‘portrait’. From fine oil paintings by highly trained academicians to mass produced prints cut from illustrated books, every aspect of the European tradition of portraiture is represented in the Nan Kivell Collection. Much can be learned about the European response to Pacific subjects from studying the portraits alone. The record of encounters between cultures provided by the portraits collection in this way is necessarily one-sided, as the works reflect the European perceptions, prejudices and insights of their makers. However the collection is so vast that a remarkable range of such perceptions is recorded among its individual works. One explanation for the richness of insights to be found among the portraits is that the freshness and immediacy of unfamiliar subject matter provided a great stimulus to European artists working in the Pacific. Artists found new ways of applying their formal training to the exotic subjects they encountered on their travels.¹

Another important factor, which contributes to the diversity of imagery found in the collection, is the great variation in training and skill exhibited by individual artists. Works by highly sophisticated practitioners of the European portrait tradition such as Alan Ramsay and John Webber can be compared with images made by amateurs like Horatio Robley and Joseph Jenner Merrett, and the anonymous illustrators of printed books.

There is not enough space in this work to deal comprehensively with individual portraits in the Nan Kivell collection. Even within the broad grouping of images of individual persons there are many hundreds of paintings, drawings and prints that

could be discussed at length. However those works which can be considered formal portraits, in the strictest sense of the term, are a relatively manageable group within the collection for the purposes of discussion. Of these the portraits painted in oils are generally the most substantial and significant works. A related category can be made up of group portraits and history paintings depicting episodes in the narrative of Pacific exploration by Europeans. The variety of treatments adopted by artists in their use of factual material in the creation of such works ranges from more-or-less factual documentary reportage (for example C.D. Barraud’s *Baptism of Maori chief Te Puni*)¹ to historicising melodrama (for example George Carter’s *Death of Captain Cook*).² I shall deal with this group first before discussing the portraits of individual subjects.

**History paintings and group portraits**

In describing these paintings a logical starting point is the beginning of Nan Kivell’s sequence of numbers, which he allocated to items in his collection.³ Especially in the very early part of this sequence the assigning of numbers gives clues to the relative importance which the collector ascribed to individual works. Initially he seems to have catalogued them by rank. Later in the sequence (after the first twelve hundred or so works had been listed) the numbers begin to reflect the order of acquisition more closely.

NK1, the first number, was given to John Webber’s imposing *Chief of the Sandwich Islands*⁴ [Figure 12]. This work was painted in 1787, several years after Cook’s death in Hawaii at the hands of indigenous Hawaiians during his third Pacific voyage, and Webber’s return to England from his tour of duty as illustrator on that voyage. The painting is therefore the artist’s dramatisation of an imagined or remembered event, worked up from the raw material of illustrations made on the spot into a grand studio piece. The painting was made at the height of the public appetite in

---

¹ Charles Decimus Barraud, 1822-1897, *Baptism of the Maori chief, Te Puni, Otaki church, New Zealand* 1853, oil on canvas; 63.5 x 76.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1103, National Library of Australia.
² George Carter, 1737-1795; *Death of Captain Cook* 1781; oil on canvas; 151.2 x 213.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2, National Library of Australia.
³ The numbers are a numerical sequence starting at ‘1’. Some numbers have sub-numbers, including those given to albums containing several individual works. For example the Augustus Earle watercolours are numbered in a sequence beginning 12/1. The ‘NK’ prefix was added by NLA staff.
⁴ John Webber, 1752-1793, *A chief of the Sandwich Islands* 1787; oil on canvas; 147.3 x 114.4 cm, Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1, National Library of Australia.
Europe for information and dramatic entertainment based on the theme of Pacific exploration, and is consciously crafted to appeal to that audience. As such it reflects a fashion of its time that has been well documented by writers such as Bernard Smith. It is not so much a portrait as a characterisation of a type: the noble savage. The chief’s rank is connoted not only by the Hawaiian feathered helmet he wears, (which looks so remarkably like a classical Greek helmet), but also by his clearly commanding role in relation to the two followers behind him. The sharp spear he wields, which would have strongly suggested the death of Cook to viewers, implies the chief’s savagery. This work epitomises the notional frontier between cultures which is a major theme of Nan Kivell’s collection of images of people. What is particularly interesting about the work is the degree to which it describes a potential common ground between the Polynesian and European worlds, of mutual respect for feudal rank, which is implicit in the painting’s recognition of chieftainship among the indigenous Hawaiians. This is not simply a documentary picture of a native with a spear (as is the case for example in Captain Otway’s *Native about to throw a spear at kangaroos*, NK863).\(^1\) Rather it is a romanticised characterisation of an opposing force in the campaign of British imperial expansion in the Pacific. The work represents an attempt by an artist who was personally involved in this campaign to reconcile the grandiose impulse of empire, in a suitably grand manner, with the reality of indigenous armed resistance.

The second work in Nan Kivell’s sequence is George Carter’s *Death of Captain Cook*, 1781 (NK2). This large oil painting was one of a number of treatments of the subject attempted by British painters in the decade or so following the incident, in which Cook was elevated to heroic status, including works by Webber, D.P. Dodd, John Cleverley, and Johann Zoffany.\(^2\) In terms of conception and style these works are closely related to Benjamin West’s highly successful *Death of Wolfe*, forming an interesting group defining the state of British history painting in the grand manner at the end of the eighteenth century. Carter’s image is less academic in conception than Zoffany’s *Death of Cook* (c. 1795), in the National Maritime Museum, London, and was designed to appeal to a general audience already familiar with the story through numerous publications and theatrical productions based on original accounts. The inclusion of this work adds a great deal of art historical weight to the Nan Kivell

---

1 Captain Otway, *Native about to throw a spear at kangaroos* [18--], oil on academy board, 21.6 x 27 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK863, National Library of Australia.

2 Smith, 1985, p. 120.
collection, as it epitomises the contemporary aspirations of British artists, both in the
conception of great historical dramas and in the treatment of Pacific subjects. It is also
interesting in relation to the broadening of English audiences for the arts which was
occurring at the time it was painted, its scale and ‘cinematic’ approach indicative of
the artist’s awareness of the potential appeal to a mass audience of public spectators.
Its acquisition was a major achievement for Nan Kivell, which he loved to recount.¹

The third work in Nan Kivell’s ‘top three’ is the fine oil attributed to Jacob
Gerritsz Cuyp (c. 1637), which is claimed to represent the Dutch navigator Abel
Tasman and his wife and daughter² [Figure 43]. The attribution of this work and the
identities of the subjects are problematic. J.C. Beaglehole queried the identification in
1953,³ but no significant challenge has been mounted since then. The work is
unsigned and there is no contemporary verification of its authorship or subjects.
Despite the lack of documentary authentication for the work, Nan Kivell supplied
provenance information to the National Library of Australia which appears credible.⁴

Generally, group portraits in the Nan Kivell Collection tend to record two basic
kinds of documentary information, both closely related to the context of European
exploration and colonisation in the Pacific. One type is the historical drama,
epitomised by Carter’s Death of Captain Cook, but also exemplified by such works as
C.D. Barraud’s Baptism of the Maori chief, Te Puni, Otaki church, New Zealand,
1853 (NK1103), and James Smetham’s Maori chiefs in Wesley’s house, July 22nd

¹ ‘The superb important painting of “The Death of Captain Cook” by George Carter. from the family
of the Earl Crawford, was another example of the Collection benefiting from the initiations [sic] of
Hitler. The hour of the sale at Christies at their temporary premises - they had been completely bombed
out of their King Street premises - a raid warning sounded & the auctioneer asked his audience if he
would continue, a number said no and left hurriedly, more said yes so with a depleted attendance I
secured the painting, a real crown for any Australasian collection. Who knows but one of those who
left may have been tempted to run me up & up & it may have been lost to Canberra perhaps forever.’
RNK to Maie Casey, undated MS draft letter, [1966]. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
² Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp, 1594-c.1651; Portrait of Abel Tasman, his wife and daughter, [Jacob Gerritsz
Cuyp], [1637]; oil on canvas, 106.7 x 132.1 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of
Australia.
³ J.C. Beaglehole, ‘Brilliant harvest of patience and determination’, The Listener v. 28 n. 752 11
December 1953, p. 8.
⁴ ‘It was originally in the possession of the SPRINGER [sic] family in Yorkshire and was sold by a
Robert Springer of Bradford at Christies in 1877. It remained in the family of the buyer until it
appeared again at Christies in 1941 when it was sold to a dealer from whom I bought it...Tasman’s
widow married as [sic] second husband on Feb. 6th 1661, Jan Mayderts Springer. The connection
between this Jan Mayderts Springer and the Yorkshire Robert Springer is perhaps concerned with the
emigration of a large number of Dutch families in the 17th century to Yorkshire where the wool
industry was rapidly expanding.’ RNK, TS note on Cuyp provenance, MS4000, Folder 2, Series 2,
National Library of Australia.
1863¹ (NK138). Such works, recording or dramatising actual historical events, were intended by their painters to signify transitional moments in the conquest of Pacific territories, or the symbolic acquiescence of indigenous peoples to colonial rule and European customs. The other type is more anthropological in conception and includes many studies of tribal or family groups, sometimes portrayed as relatively unmarked by outward signs of European influence, but also in various stages of adopting European styles of dress and custom. Generally pencil and watercolour studies in the collection tend to be more empirical in their analysis of such groups than oil paintings, which tend to dramatise or sentimentalise their subjects. Thus for example Robert Park’s watercolour image depicting *Natives of Ahuriri (Hawkes Bay) alive in 1851*² (NK203) [Figure 44], is conceived in the nature of straight documentary reportage, whereas Alexander Schramm’s *Aborigines with dogs on the tram*³ (NK1167), painted around 1850, is a sentimental image of a picturesque nuclear family group consisting of a father, mother, baby and dogs, treated by the artist with much bathos. This latter style of sentimentalising portrait became more common towards the end of the nineteenth century. Another contrived group portrait depicting indigenous sitters is Gottfried Lindauer’s *Three Maori girls and a boy sitting on a large carved Maori canoe by a lake*, 1899⁴ (NK6775). Here the portrayal of the group of Maori children seems to reflect little empirical purpose, and the subject is simply a vehicle for an exercise in Victorian ‘picture-making’, although the precision with which the painter recorded the decorative details of the canoe prow, paddle and greenstone pendant is remarkable. The inclusion of this work in the Nan Kivell collection is curious in relation to the collector’s prejudice against Goldie. However another work by Lindauer, the very fine *Ana Rupene and child*, c. 1880⁵ enters Nan Kivell’s numbering sequence at NK4, which suggests that he had a great liking for the work of this painter.

¹ James Smetham, 1821-1889; *Maori chiefs in Wesley’s house, July 22nd, 1863*; 1863; oil on wood panel, 18.5 x 35.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK138, National Library of Australia.
² Robert Park, 1812-1870; *Natives of Ahuriri, Hawkes Bay, alive in 1851* (1851); watercolour; 25 x 35.2 cm, attributed to Robert Park. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK203, National Library of Australia.
³ Alexander Schramm, 1814-1864; *Aborigines with dogs on the tram in South Australia* [c. 1850]; oil on canvas; 37 x 31 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1167, National Library of Australia.
⁴ Gottfried Lindauer, 1839-1926; *Three Maori girls and a boy sitting on a large carved Maori canoe by a lake* 1899; oil on canvas; 213 x 152 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6775, National Library of Australia.
⁵ Gottfried Lindauer, 1839-1926. *Ana Rupene and child* [c. 1880]; oil on canvas; 76 x 63.3 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK4, National Library of Australia. Another version of this painting is in the Auckland City Art Gallery collection.
The little tondo by William Strutt, *Hare Pomare, his wife Harriet and infant son Albert Victor, and a chieftain who accompanied them to England*, November 1863¹ (NK5651) [Figure 45], presents an unusual variation on the theme of the Maori group portrait.² This work contains a mixture of historical fact and fiction. It refers to the visit of a Ngapuhi group, including Hare Pomare and his wife Hariata, to England in 1863, where they were received by Queen Victoria. The infant Albert Victor Pomare was born during the visit and the Queen, taking a personal interest, acted as a sponsor for the child. However Strutt’s portrait poses the sitters in traditional costume in a New Zealand setting. The image is conceived in the style of a nativity, with the beautiful young Maori parents tenderly nursing their infant child. Also present, although occupying a different psychological space to that of the family group, is the statuesque figure of the chief Patuone. His inclusion in the portrait is somewhat incongruous, as he was not among the group that visited Queen Victoria. However as he was an ally of the British Crown in the Northern War of 1846, and was Hare Pomare’s uncle, it seems likely that his inclusion in the portrait is intended to convey to the spectator connotations of Maori aristocracy and hereditary succession. Another incongruous feature is the inclusion of volcanic peaks resembling Tongariro and Taranaki in the background, mountains that lie far to the south of traditional Ngapuhi lands.

Portraits depicting family groups of English colonists in Australia and New Zealand are also included in the Nan Kivell Collection. One of the most interesting of these is John Linnell’s *Portrait of Mrs Darling and two of her children*, 1825³ (NK1102). A feature of this charming work is the use of the device of placing the main sitter, Mrs Darling, against a landscape background. However unlike many contemporary portraits of indigenous sitters where this device is unmediated by civilising influences, this work modifies the effect of the landscape background by making it into a view seen through a window behind the sitter. The mother and her children are safely ensconced in a well-appointed domestic interior, protected from the wilderness seen through the window outside. Learning and literacy are suggested

¹ William Strutt, 1825-1915; *Hare Pomare, his wife Harriet and infant son Albert Victor, and a Maori chieftain who accompanied them to England* November 1863; oil; 28 cm (circular). Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia.
³ John Linnell, 1792-1882; *Portrait of Mrs Darling and two of her children* 1825; oil on wood panel; 53.4 x 64.7 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1102, National Library of Australia.

225
by writing equipment on the table and the book held by the older child. The positioning of these symbols of civilization in relation to the untamed wilderness outside the window is strongly suggestive of the precarious nature of Australian colonial existence in the 1820s. The mother's determined features also suggest that Linnell was attempting to convey an image of courage and strength of purpose in relation to the political and physical hardships of colonial life. As Eliza Darling was the wife of the Governor of New South Wales it seems reasonable to assume that the portrait was intended to emphasise these virtues to visitors to the gubernatorial home.

A poignant contrast with the Portrait of Mrs Darling is provided by a small, unattributed oil painting depicting Mrs Peter Barr, née Martha Freeman Hewlings and her two brothers, George and Henry Hewlings (c. 1850)¹ (NK6586). The painting is especially touching for the extreme youth of the sitters. Mrs Barr appears to be less than twenty years old. The younger of the two brothers seems very close in age to her, and the elder brother not much older than either of his siblings. He extends a protective arm around his brother and grips a staff. Like Linnell's portrait of Mrs Darling this work is suggestive of colonial courage, but unlike the former work, the sitters are not posed in a setting suggestive of material wealth and comfort. The sitters are compressed into a small space relative to the picture frame. This compression of the composition, together with the vulnerability suggested by youth of the subjects, and the protective gesture of the elder brother with his staff, conveys a sense of external danger. This impression in turn is suggestive of the rigours of colonial life, for which a certain spiritual fortitude, implied by the clear, resolute expressions of the youths, is presented as a necessary attribute. Another version of this subject (NK2769)² is either a preparatory study or a poor copy. This version is interesting in that the expressions of the young people convey considerably more tension and anxiety than the finished work. Both versions convey an impression of the need among colonists to preserve a strong sense of identity in relation to their new environment. Small, unpretentious and deeply sympathetic, as expressions of the

¹ Unknown artist; Portrait of Mrs. Peter Barr, née Martha Freeman Hewlings and her two brothers, George and Henry Hewlings [c. 1850]; oil on academy board; 45.7 x 35.3 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6586, National Library of Australia.
² Unknown artist; Portrait of Mrs. Peter Barr, née Martha Freeman Hewlings and her two brothers, George and Henry Hewlings [c. 1850]; oil on academy board; 46.2 x 35.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2769, National Library of Australia.
emerging psyche of colonial New Zealand identity, these little paintings have few rivals in public collections.

**Portraits of individuals**

Portraits of single individuals abound in the Nan Kivell Collection. Because Nan Kivell collected along thematic lines of association with events in Pacific exploration and colonisation, he included many conventional portraits of important European figures in his collection. Some of these, painted in England by established senior portraitists, are useful to compare with examples painted in the colonies a generation or two later, as they demonstrate the standard to which colonial practitioners of the art aspired. Two works attributed to Sir William Beechey provide good examples of this standard. The *Portrait of King George III*, c. 1800,\(^1\) is a head and shoulders depiction of the monarch dressed in naval uniform, in three-quarter profile [Figure 46]. The inclusion of this work in the Nan Kivell Collection derives from the fact that George III was the monarch under whose reign the practice of transporting convicted criminals to Australia was instigated. It is a dashing painted work, showing much stylistic similarity to portraits by Reynolds, especially in the treatment of the background, where washes of thin paint create a sense of atmospheric drama, complementing the bold curve of the king’s tricorn hat. Despite the suggestions of imperial might, which the king’s attire was doubtless intended to convey in this portrait, the work is not hieratic in effect. The imperiousness of the royal gaze is subverted by its direction away from the spectator, leaving us free to ponder the implications of the slightly open mouth and rather weak chin. In this sense the portrait is thoroughly romantic in conception, its emphasis falling on the psychological analysis of the king’s personality as an individual rather than on the conversion of his features into an emblem of power.

The other portrait attributed to Beechey in the Nan Kivell collection is the *Portrait of George Barrington*, c. 1785,\(^2\) (NK13). While this work is very much a model of conventional English portraiture, its subject provides a complete sociological contrast to that of George III. Barrington, known as the ‘prince of

---

\(^1\) Sir William Beechey, 1753-1839, *Portrait of King George III*, [William Beechey]; [c. 1800], oil on wood panel; 29.2 x 23.9 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6229, National Library of Australia.

\(^2\) Attributed to Sir William Beechey, 1753-1839, *Portrait of George Barrington*, [William Beechey]; [c. 1785], oil on canvas; 77 x 63.3 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK13, National Library of Australia.
pickpockets', was an English gentleman whose extravagant kleptomania resulted in his transportation to Botany Bay in 1790. These two portraits, ostensibly by the same artist, epitomise Nan Kivell’s intention to include among his collection portraits of the ‘famous’, exemplified by King George III, and ‘infamous’, exemplified by the celebrated thief Barrington. In the case of the Barrington portrait neither the attribution to Beechey nor the identity of the subject is necessarily secure, and one is left wondering whether Nan Kivell conveniently ascribed the subject to the painting in order to fit it neatly into his conception for the collection as a whole.

Another portrait in the Nan Kivell collection is similarly affected by suggestions of deliberate misidentification of the subject by the collector. This is the so-called Portrait of William Nan Kivell [Figure 47]. Rex Nan Kivell catalogued this competent oil portrait as a representation of the younger of the two ‘Nan Kivell’ brothers who emigrated to New Zealand on the Bolton in 1840. Rex was descended from the elder brother, Robert Rogers Nankivell. As described in the first chapter of this study the brothers were humble labourers sponsored by the New Zealand Company with assisted passage on the voyage out to the new colony. Neither became wealthy in New Zealand. It seems unlikely that this portrait could represent the real William Nankivell. The man in the painting is posed in a setting consistent with similar images of Pacific locations. The atmospheric details of lighting and cloud formation are suggestive of the South Pacific and the view of a snow-clad peak seen across an expanse of water suggests New Zealand. The man holds a very large axe, and there is a felled tree trunk in the background, which suggests the clearing of virgin forest. He is exceptionally well-dressed and presented for a rugged bushman, in a blazing red woollen blouse and flowing black scarf, knotted around his chest in the manner of a cravat. His hair and dashing side-whiskers are well groomed, and his upper lip and chin clean-shaven. His gaze is direct and confident. He is a perfect

1 George Barrington, portraits, views, cuttings from pamphlets, newspapers &c. relating to the career of this celebrated pickpocket 1 album; 34.2 x 26.2 cm. National Library of Australia. See also Nan Kivell and Spence, 1970, pp. 22-3.
2 Mary Ann Musgrave, fl. 1821-1847. Portrait of William Nan Kivell. [Mrs. Musgrave]; [c. 1840], oil on canvas, 150 x 71 cm; attribution by NLA Pictorial Section. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK4397, National Library of Australia.
3 Rex Nan Kivell, MS catalogue of the Nan Kivell Collection. MS4000, National Library of Australia. Nan Kivell changed his mind about the identity of the sitter: in 1956 he wrote to Peter Maling, 'I have a very romantic portrait of the surveyor Robert Nan Kivell. He is dressed in a bright red blouse, holding an axe and behind him a gigantic tree which he has presumably just cut down. It is a very gay picture, and unfortunately we have no record of who painted it.' RNK to Peter Maling 20 April 1956. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
model of the sort of colonial gentry that the English colonists sought to promote in New Zealand following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. However William Nankivell seems an unlikely candidate for such treatment in colonial portraiture, because of his relatively insignificant status in the social order prescribed by his sponsor the New Zealand Company. Nor does it seem likely that he would have had the means, or the sophistication, to have himself portrayed in this way on his own initiative. It seems reasonable to conclude therefore, that the identification of the subject as Nan Kivell’s forebear is spurious. Rex Nan Kivell made the identification himself. He did not know the identity of the painter when the work was transferred to Canberra. He claimed to have obtained it from distant relatives living in Cornwall, along with some other portraits which he identified as representations of Robert and William Nan Kivell, and their father, another Robert Nan Kivell, according to his notes.1

When staff at the National Library attributed the Portrait of William Nan Kivell to Mary Ann Musgrave, on stylistic grounds, Nan Kivell was delighted, and immediately formulated another myth to the effect that Mary Ann Musgrave had painted the work while staying with the ‘Nan Kivell’ family in New Brighton. 2 In fact Mary Ann Musgrave never visited New Zealand, although her brother, the surveyor and painter Charles Heaphy, emigrated on the New Zealand Company’s first ship, Tory, in 1839. Mary Ann Musgrave did paint a watercolour portrait of Lieutenant-Governor William Hobson3 (NK5277). This portrait is likely to have been painted in 1839 in England, before Hobson’s departure for the colony. There is a decided resemblance between the watercolour image of Hobson and the oil of ‘William Nan Kivell’, which raises the interesting possibility that the oil painting, if indeed it was painted by Musgrave as the National Library staff suggest, is actually a portrait of Hobson in mufti. Perhaps even more compelling is the possibility that the painting is a


2 RNK to Peter [Malling] 19 April 1972. MS4000, National Library of Australia.

3 Mary Ann Musgrave, fl. 1821-1847; Lieutenant Governor William Hobson of New Zealand drawn by Mrs Musgrave [1839?]; watercolour; 44.2 x 32.3 cm, title from inscription on original mount. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK5277. See Pamela Gerrish Nunn, ‘The Other Heaphys’, Bulletin of New Zealand Art History v. 14, 1993, pp. 3-8. See also Minson, 1990, p. 34.
fond portrait of Charles Heaphy, made by his sister in London. While this idea can only be speculative, it is much less unlikely than Nan Kivell’s claim that the oil portrait represented William Nankivell. Ironically, Charles Heaphy is likely to have known the Nankivell brothers as he and Robert Nankivell both worked as surveyors for the New Zealand Company in Wellington in the early 1840s. Subsequently both Heaphy and William Nankivell moved to Auckland. However the Heaphys and the Nankivells belonged to different English social classes, and such class divisions were maintained by the New Zealand Company in the early phase of colonisation. Rex Nan Kivell would have been all too aware of this historical detail, as his knowledge of New Zealand colonial history was very good indeed. But he could rely on the deception going unnoticed in Canberra.

A second grand oil portrait by Webber, *Poedooa, daughter of Orea, King of Ulietea, Society Islands*, c. 1782,1 (NK5192), joined *A Chief of the Sandwich Islands* somewhat later in the development of the Nan Kivell Collection. Again, this work epitomises the theme of the noble savage in British painting. It is one of several versions of this subject made by Webber. Like many such works an important visual device employed by the artist to elevate his subject is the placement of the figure against an expanse of sky and landscape. This device has the effect of monumentalising the figure, enhancing its stature. At the same time the wildness and sublimity of the exotic landscape form a dramatic backdrop to the image, emphasising the untamed nature of the realm of this savage princess. This is a device which is used again and again in images of indigenous identities, found throughout the Nan Kivell collection, and it is particularly common when notions of rank and nobility are associated with the sitter. The technique is not confined to oil painting and is also found often in watercolour portraits of the pre-colonial era. For example Augustus Earle made frequent use of this technique in portraits including those of the Australian Aborigines Bungaree and Desmond, and in several studies of individual Maori.

Much more anthropological in conception than Webber’s *Poedooa* is the painting attributed to H. Ainsworth, *Man of the island of Nukuhiwa, Marquesas*

---

1 John Webber, 1752-1793: [A portrait of Poedua]; [John Webber]; [c. 1782]; oil on canvas; 144.7 x 93.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK5192, National Library of Australia. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, holds a similar portrait dated Nov. 1777, apparently made while the subject was a hostage aboard *Discovery* see Rudiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, The Art of Captain Cook’s Voyages, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, 3.149, 3.150.
group, c.1820,1 (NK2649) [Figure 48]. This work takes the form of a formal portrait
in oils, but the concentration on the detail of the extraordinary tattoos, unmediated by
any romanticisation on the part of the artist, makes this a very different kind of work
from Webber’s portrait. Here it is possible to see the strain of empirical observation
that ran parallel to the romanticising thread in images of indigenous people made by
artists in the Pacific during the early period of European contact. In this work the
strangeness of the body decoration to European eyes is so intense that the artist
needed little imaginative embellishment of the subject to make the image a striking
one. This left him free to explore the formal aspects of his composition without
recourse to the literary allusions that frequently cloud European interpretations of
Pacific subjects in this era of painting. As a result a powerful dialogue is allowed to
develop between the Polynesian art form manifest in the tattoos, and the European art
of portraiture used to describe it. One senses in this work a threshold in cultural
exchange, the venturing of the European painter outside the convention inherent in his
chosen medium, in order to meet, on more or less equal ground, an alien art form
which has captured his eye and imagination.

Such threshold moments in artistic expression occur frequently in the Nan
Kivell Collection, in works that demonstrate European artists gradually coming to
grips with the technical challenges they encountered as they tried to copy accurately
the complicated designs made by their Polynesian counterparts. Many were forced to
admit the difficulty in meeting these challenges. Augustus Earle was one artist who
respected the sophistication of traditional Maori design. A relatively late work which
adopts an ethnographic approach to the treatment of traditional costume and body
adornment is the Queensland native with tribal decorations, c.1860, (NK3646) by M.
Jilt2 [Figure 49]. Unusually for an image created at this time, Jilt’s portrait is
relatively free of the Victorian bathos seen in contemporary treatments of indigenous
subjects, such as Eugene Von Guérard’s Natives catching game, 1854,3 (NK108).

The acquisition of European dress and customs by indigenous people is
vividly recorded in the Nan Kivell collection. This aspect of the collection makes it an

---

1 H. Ainsworth; Man of the island of Nukahiva, Marquesas group; [H. Ainsworth]; [c. 1820], oil on
canvas; 53.1 x 43.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2649, National Library of Australia.
2 M. Jilt; Queensland native with tribal decorations [c. 1860], oil on canvas, 76.5 x 51.3 cm. Rex Nan
Kivell Collection NK3646, National Library of Australia.
3 Eugene von Guérard, 1811-1901; Natives catching game 1854, oil on canvas, 46.5 x 37 cm; also
known as: Aborigines met on the road to the diggings. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK108, National
Library of Australia.
enduringly valuable resource for anthropological and historical scholarship. The potential of this resource, first recognised in the 1950s by Bernard Smith, continues to be mined at the present time by contemporary scholars like Nicholas Thomas, whose work on the Nan Kivell Collection has underscored its importance to modern studies in Pacific history. Among the oil paintings several works stand out as especially memorable records of the Europeanisation of Pacific peoples. Augustus Earle’s *Portrait of Bungaree, a native of New South Wales*, c. 1826,⁴ (NK118) is a good example [Figure 50]. The subject was a well-known figure in Sydney, an Aboriginal leader and disenfranchised holder of indigenous title to the occupied territory. He is depicted standing barefoot against a background of expansive sky, with Fort Macquarie in the distance, clad in trousers and an elaborate naval jacket. He doffs a naval hat in an elegant gesture of salute. The treatment is calculated to imply a certain social status in the figure of Bungaree, but this implication is made ambivalent by the incongruity of the tattered European finery worn by the barefoot native. As with many works by Earle the treatment of the subject verges on caricature, but here the caricature is turned back on European values by the unequivocally sympathetic characterisation of the face, which creates a sense of pathos. Earle’s acute sense of social satire is strongly evident in this work, which carries the implication, unusual for its time, that Europeanisation was a destructive rather than constructive agent in relation to indigenous identity. An interesting comparison can be made between this work and Earle’s watercolour image of *Desmond, A New South Wales Chief*, c. 1825-7,⁵ (NK12/61), where the chief is depicted in traditional costume and body adornment, again positioned essentially in silhouette against a broad expanse of sky with a landscape background [Figure 51]. Here the impression created is one of relatively intact indigenous command of the landscape, connoted by the proud, uncompromised bearing of the chief and his resolute expression. By contrast, two portraits by J.M.

---


² Augustus Earle, 1793-1838; *Portrait of Bungaree, a native of New South Wales, with Fort Macquarie, Sydney Harbour, in background* [c. 1826]; oil on canvas, 68.5 x 50.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK118, National Library of Australia.

³ Augustus Earle, 1793-1838; *Desmond, a N.S. Wales chief painted for a coron [i.e. corroboree] or native dance* [1826?]; watercolour, 25.7 x 17.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/61, National Library of Australia.
Crossland painted in the 1850s, *Portrait of Namulterra*¹ (NK6295) and *Portrait of Samuel Kandwillan*² (NK6294), show young aboriginal men re-cast as prototypes of assimilation into British customary dress and activities.

The theme of as-yet untainted indigenous identity is further explored by Earle in a number of watercolour images of Maori painted during his residence in the Bay of Islands in 1827–8, including *A New Zealander*³ (NK 12/89), *Amoko a New Zealand Girl*⁴ (NK12/88) [Figure 52], *A New Zealand Chief from Terra Naki*⁵ (NK12/87), and *A New Zealand Chief*⁶ (NK12/86). One of the most accomplished of Earle’s portrait studies in this vein is the *Native of the Island of Tucopoeia, 1828*⁷, (NK12/90) [Figure 53]. In this work the artist has fully abandoned his customary tendency to caricature. The resulting empathetic treatment demonstrates a technical and emotional maturity in his work which coincides with the relinquishment of self-consciousness in his approach to the subject. Although the work is painted in watercolour, as a formal portrait it is far superior to any social portrait in oil that he painted for patrons in Sydney, and this quality no doubt derives from the artist’s newly achieved independence from conformity to colonial social conventions.

One of the most exceptional depictions of individual Maori in the Nan Kivell Collection is an unattributed and undated oil, NK3956, which has been given a cumbersome title, *Tattooed Maori with tiki, feathered earring, feathers in his hair and wearing a native cloak*, by the National Library of Australia.⁸ This extraordinary work suggests the authorship of a European-trained artist, perhaps German rather than British. The work is especially striking in its placement of the subject against a light coloured background. This is unusual in an era when the norm for Maori portraiture

---

¹ J. M. Crossland, 1800-1858; *Portrait of Namulterra, a young Poonindie cricketer, [J.M. Crossland]; [1854]*; oil on canvas; 99 x 78.8 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6295, National Library of Australia.
² J. M. Crossland, 1800-1858; *Portrait of Samuel Kandwillan, a pupil of the natives training institution, Poonindie, South Australia; [J.M. Crossland]; [1854]*; oil on canvas; 98.6 x 78.9 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6295, National Library of Australia.
⁴ Augustus Earle, 1793-1838; *Amoko, a New Zealand girl* [1827?]; watercolour; 19.1 x 18.1 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/88, National Library of Australia.
⁵ Augustus Earle, 1793-1838. *A New Zealand chief from Terra Naki [i.e. Taranaki] [1827]*; watercolour; 21.4 x 17.2 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/87, National Library of Australia.
⁶ Augustus Earle, 1793-1838; *A New Zealand [i.e. Zealand] chief [1827]*; watercolour; 20 x 17.1 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/86, National Library of Australia.
⁷ Augustus Earle, 1793-1838; *A native of the Island of Tucopoeia [i.e. Tikopia] [1827]*; watercolour; 24.8 x 22.2 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/90, National Library of Australia.
⁸ Unknown artist; *Tattooed Maori with tiki, feathered earring, feathers in his hair and wearing a native cloak* [18-?]; oil on canvas; 61 x 50.9 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK3956, National Library of Australia.
was to place the subject against a dark background. An emphatic contrast is achieved between the light background and the dark features of the subject. This provides an interesting comparison with works by Lindauer, for example, where the use of a dark background tends to artificially lighten the skin colour of Maori subjects, making them more palatable to European tastes. The treatment of the full-face moko is very finely and accurately realised, and while a tendency to romanticism is strongly evident in the sensitive characterisation of the features, this does not descend into the sentimentality often found in Victorian images of Maori. The way in which the lips curl back from the teeth suggest the interesting possibility that the artist used a moko mokai, or preserved head, as a model for this painting.¹

While Augustus Earle’s images tend to dominate, in terms of quality and interest, among the watercolour portraits in the Nan Kivell Collection, several works on paper by other artists are especially worthy of mention in this brief survey. Charles Meryon’s dramatic charcoal portrait of *Toma Keke, chef de tribu*, 1846;² (NK127), depicts an Akaroa chief, probably Tikao [Figure 54].³ This highly finished, realistic portrait is in contrast to Meryon’s heavily romanticised cartoon of the *Death of Marion du Fresne*, which came to the National Library of Australia as part of the Nan Kivell Collection, and was subsequently gifted to the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington.⁴ *Toma Keke* is a study of indigenous identity and rank, and, by implication, of a certain recognition of indigenous sovereignty on the part of the French artist, expressed within the idealising tradition of the noble savage in European art. Less ambitious, but equally observant, is the watercolour by John Sylvester of *Tupai Cupa with full tattoo on face*, 1826, (NK1277).⁵ This work depicts the Ngati Toa chief Te Peehi Kupe in European costume, and was made in Liverpool by the artist during Te Peehi’s visit to England in 1826 to obtain muskets. Te Peehi participated fully in the making of this representation, supervising the depiction of his

---

¹ I am grateful to Dr Paul Tapsell for this convincing observation.
² Charles Meryon, 1821-1868, *Toma Keke, chef de tribu de la Nouvelle Zélande* 1846; charcoal; oval image 47 x 35 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK127, National Library of Australia.
⁵ John Sylvester. [Portrait of Te Pehi Kupe, with full tattoo on face and wearing European clothes], [1826?]; watercolour, 21.1 x 15.8 cm, an engraving after this portrait, with title *Tupai Cupa*, is reproduced on p. 331 of *The New Zealanders*, London: George L. Cruik, London, 1830. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1277, National Library of Australia.
moko so that it would be a completely accurate representation.¹ A full-length pencil
and watercolour portrait of an unidentified Maori, made in New Zealand by Joseph
Jenner Merrett during the 1840s (NK2183),² provides an excellent example of the
quality of ethnographic description that was occasionally achieved in this medium by
artists working in New Zealand in the early colonial period. As with Sylvester’s
portrait of Te Peehi, the emphasis in this work by Merrett is on the completely
accurate documentation of the subject’s fine moko, kaitaka and mere, denoting high
rank. The rendering of the silky texture of the kaitaka is very well executed,
demonstrating that watercolour could have advantages over oil in depicting
ethnographic detail.

One of the most poignant watercolour images of European colonists in the
Nan Kivell Collection is that of Elizabeth Broughton, (NK417),³ a small girl who
escaped the burning of the Boyd by Maori in 1809. This image was a favourite
acquisition of Nan Kivell’s. He was fond of telling the story of his discovery of this
little painting, and his account illustrates his delight both in collecting and in his
chosen field of inquiry:

A nice discovery was made - I like to think it had something more than just perception - when
I saw in the window of an antique-shop in Salisbury, England, a portrait of a rather quiet little
girl sitting in a landscape. The lighting in the painting, I knew was not English lighting, it had
a different Australasian conception. It was in a heavy frame sealed up at the back. I bought it
and took it home with me. The glass being dirty I took it out, & wonder of wonders, a long
letter on double sized foolscap was folded in behind the sealing paper. What a human
document it proved to be.

The little girl was Elizabeth Isabella Broughton, born Norfolk Island in 1807. She
sailed for England in 1809, with her mother in the ship ‘General Boyd’ & touching at New
Zealand the whole of the crew and passengers (with the exception of one woman a boy and
two infants) were murdered by the Maoris. This little girl was one of those saved. She was
rescued by Mr Berry owner of the ‘City of Edinburgh’ which went on to Lima thence to Rio
de Janeiro. He transferred the child onto the ‘Atlasia’ going to N.S.W. and she reached there
in May 1812 (can one fail to feel the father’s joy & thankfulness). Eventually he had her
portrait painted (probably by Richard Read, Senior) and sent it with his long documentary, a

¹ Minson, 1990, p. 27.
² Joseph Jenner Merrett, 1816-1854. [Chief Tariki, the Lizard Eater]; [c. 1850]; pencil and watercolour;
34.2 x 21.9 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2183, National Library of Australia. See Minson, 1990,
p. 42.
³ Richard Read, c. 1765-1827? Portrait of Elizabeth Isabella Broughton, about seven years old, 1814;
[Richard Read]; 1814; watercolour, 36.3 x 30.3 cm; attributed to Richard Read senior, and title
few extracts being to “...Don Gaspar de Rico, and the other Spanish gentlemen & ladies as a tribute of...their humanity...with the child during her residence at Lima for 11 months...from their humble servant William Broughton, Sydney, New South Wales, 8 April 1814.” The size of the portrait is 14” x 12” ...Again what a document of human emotions. This little girl is a piece of Australian & New Zealand history. Survivor of what is now called the ‘Boyd Massacre’, she apparently stayed in Australia, because I have had reported to me her subsequent marriage to her family. What did happen to the portrait? Did it ever get to Lima? How did it eventually turn up in Salisbury & what a lucky fate that I should pass the window in that town at that moment! 

Portraits of the Famous and Infamous

Nan Kivell struggled with the problem of how to interpret the vast range of his materials coherently, but his efforts at assemblage reveal a restless, intuitive visual intellect whose ability to pick out themes in art was prodigiously developed at the expense of analytical reasoning. His magnum opus, the large and unwieldy pictorial dictionary entitled Portraits of the Famous and Infamous, is a frustrating volume to describe. Overtly intended to impress by its size and lavish production, the work fails to provide any real scholarship, offering instead a veritable mine of misinformation about the individual items it lists, and about Pacific history in general. Far from being the impressive contribution to scholarship which it purports to be, the work is a grandiose monument to the chaos of Nan Kivell’s mind.

Nan Kivell collaborated on the work with an English bibliographer, Sidney Spence, who helped him sort the material and provided texts for many of the detailed entries. The entries give details of images of people associated with the history of exploration and colonisation in the Pacific, together with brief biographical notes. One of the book’s principal idiosyncrasies is its inclusiveness. The entries are not confined to the Nan Kivell Collection in Canberra, but include many references to material in other collections. The biographical details are peppered with inaccuracies and the book is an unreliable source of factual information. No real clearly defined criteria for inclusion or exclusion are adhered to and this has resulted in a very random and at times incoherent selection. Nan Kivell struggled for at least twenty years to give the work shape and bring it to publishable form, eventually spending a gigantic amount of

1 RNK to Maie Casey, MS draft letter, no date. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
money on its publication in 1970. Another of the work’s striking eccentricities is the inclusion of biographical notes on many of Nan Kivell’s acquaintances, friends, associates, as well as people in public life whom he sought to impress. So for example his partners Dorothy Searle and Harry Tatlock Miller are included, along with himself and his chauffeur and friend Mizouni Nouari, as well as Sir Robert Menzies and Sir Harold White, all by association with the collection. These inclusions give the book a quaintly personal flavour completely at odds with its aspirations to impersonal scholarship.

In their foreword to Portraits of the Famous and Infamous, Nan Kivell and his collaborator Sidney Spence declare, ‘we have excluded no medium at all, including portrait illustrations from books and photographs where a photograph is the only known portrayal, in order to make the listing as complete as possible’. However Nan Kivell did exclude some portraitists from his collection on the basis of style and thematic content. For example he remarked to one correspondent that ‘except for a few depicting towns’, he ‘always excluded’ works by the New Zealand painter C.F. Goldie from his collection, as he felt that ‘they were more picture making than that in which I was interested: the development of the country as seen by an artist’. The exclusion is curious when one considers that the axial theme around which the Pacific collection revolved was identity, and Goldie’s portraits were concerned with recording specific Maori identities, albeit within the Eurocentric and sentimental conceit of preserving the memory of a dying race.

A possible explanation for Nan Kivell’s prejudice against Goldie lies in the general rejection of Victorian aesthetics and tastes which followed the First World War, and which was shared by members of Nan Kivell’s generation. After all, for most of the period during which Nan Kivell was active as a collector and a dealer in contemporary art, the art world was in revolt against the aesthetics of the previous century. Even though the Nan Kivell collection contains many works which belong to the Victorian era, these works often tend anachronistically towards the topographical art of the eighteenth century, rather than the overblown sentimentality of High Victorian painting. As many of the paintings which illustrate New Zealand and Australia in the nineteenth century were produced by artists who were amateurs or out

---

2 RNK to Doris McIntosh 2 January 1963. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
of touch with contemporary trends in European painting, the overall feel of the Nan Kivell collection, from a stylistic point of view, is determined by the anachronistic tendency of travel artists to look backwards to the works of the first Pacific illustrators for their artistic formulas, rather than ahead towards the reassessment of landscape that took place in the work of Cézanne. The archaizing flavour which thus characterises the portraits book reflects the tastes of the collector, who belonged to the modern era. He was thoroughly at home dealing in works by Picasso, Soutine and Ernst, and was by virtue of his own historical context, aesthetically disinclined to favour High Victorian art. So although he prized fine landscapes by Eugene von Guérard, who despite being a Victorian painter was conservative by the standards of his own era, Nan Kivell was contemptuous of works by the less talented and more sentimental New Zealand watercolourist John Gully: ‘Gulley [sic] I have always relegated to my miscellaneous albums never giving them the honour of mounting them individually’. 1 Something of this attitude is responsible for Nan Kivell’s rejection of works by Goldie. Goldie’s most ambitious portraits were done after the turn of the century, in an academic style, and were well out of date by avant-garde standards in Europe when they were made. Nan Kivell evidently shared in this disapproval. Similarly the large number of images of strangely tattooed ‘natives’ that are reproduced in the portraits book appeal to a taste for the anachronistic, grotesque and incongruous which is by no means incompatible with trends in modern art during the time the collection was assembled.

Curiously, one of Nan Kivell’s most significant acquisitions is not included in his book of portraits. This is the self-portrait by Gauguin, Self Portrait with Yellow Christ [Figure 55], which is now in the collection of the Musée d’Orsay, Paris. 2 Nan Kivell bought this work around 1928, believing it to be a portrait of Gauguin by his friend Emile Bernard. Subsequently it turned out to be a self-portrait by Gauguin himself. When this became apparent, and Professor Douglas Cooper verified the new attribution, Nan Kivell showed the work at the Redfern Gallery in an exhibition entitled ‘The Christian Vision’. 3

1 RNK to Doris McIntosh: 2 January 1963. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
2 Paul Gauguin, 1848-1903, Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ (1889), oil, 38 x 46 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
3 Graham Dark, ‘The Great Art Whodunit - £75 painting is really a £20,000 Gauguin’, Daily Express 2 April 1958. It is possible that Nan Kivell subsequently became secretive about his ownership and eventual disposal of this painting for tax reasons.
Portraits of the Famous and Infamous is perhaps best enjoyed by simply turning the pages and allowing the layouts to present a random guide through the collection. This is undoubtedly what Nan Kivell intended. The volume is not meant to be read as a coherent text, but dipped into and sampled at random, the reader relying on alphabetical order to provide the systematisation of the information. A feature of the layout is that no real attempt has been made to place the reproductions near to the page in which the explanatory text occurs. The sequence of images thus unfolds completely separately from the alphabetical sequence of names. Cross-references are given with each image to the page number with the relevant text. This arrangement almost inevitably leads the browser to turn backwards and forwards through the volume, following this or that reference according to personal interest. Following the images in cardinal order of appearance from page 1 onwards, an intentional sequence may be inferred, based on the introduction of identities to the viewer. Immediately apparent is that social rank is of the utmost importance. But as its title suggests, the attitude towards rank implied by the book’s organisation is ambivalent. This fundamental ambivalence concerning the status of the individual in relation to established order links the work to other post-war compilations of images in which the hierarchical social order of Europe is increasingly questioned and undermined through the progressive re-enfranchisement of minority interests, including those of the indigenous peoples of former European colonies. As a resource for historical research however Portraits of the Famous and Infamous is subverted by its factual unreliability and its grandiosity. The latter quality derives mainly from its author’s own ambivalent social identity. Consistent with Nan Kivell’s obsession with titles, chieftainship and royalty in many visual manifestations form a powerful theme. He was careful to incorporate his own heritage into this order. Midway though the book, as we leaf through the pages in numerical order, we encounter, amid a page of portraits of Polynesian princes, the dubiously-identified image of ‘William Nan Kivell’. This arrangement provides a graphic demonstration of Nan Kivell’s elaborate efforts to construct a pedigree for his family name, and to place his heritage within a context of rank, both indigenous and colonial.

The portraits book can be seen as a naive assemblage. A strong influence on its design came from a series of books designed by Nan Kivell’s close friends Harry
Tatlock Miller and Loudon Sainthill, published in the 1950s and ’60s. These works are emblematic and hieratic in their use of portrait imagery, especially photographs, and their flavour carries through into Nan Kivell’s layout work for *Portraits of the Famous and Infamous*. But where Miller’s and Sainthill’s use of a hieratic approach in celebrating dignitaries like Winston Churchill and Queen Elizabeth II was highly sophisticated and calculated, Nan Kivell’s adoption of these techniques was much less confident. Nevertheless *Portraits* provides an interesting precursor to the great explosion in reproductions of historical images of Pacific subjects that has taken place in the decades following its publication, and an index by which contemporary changes in attitude towards such images can be measured. Drawing on contemporary influences as well as those absorbed through his devotion to the imagery of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel art, the collector created an amalgam of ethnic resonances. These are deeply symptomatic of the turning of European thought away from progressive nationalism towards the inevitable recognition of the power of the notion of the Other, to shape and reshape notions of identity through cultural exchange. Implicit in the works is the abandonment of a single narrative thread in favour of a multiplicity of readings of Pacific history, many of them profoundly in conflict.

While Nan Kivell’s motivations in deciding what to include and reject from his book are difficult to deduce, one strong motivation is discernable: the need to impress people in positions of influence. Undoubtedly this urge derived from the collector’s profound insecurity about his own identity. Who, then, was Nan Kivell attempting to impress with his collecting and book-making activities?

Two distinct audiences can be identified as specific targets for Nan Kivell’s activities in promoting images of Pacific exploration and colonisation. One was made up of members of the British aristocracy who were descendents of colonial administrators, and who continued to cherish the mementoes of the exploits of their illustrious ancestors in the service of the British Empire. The other consisted of politicians and public service officials in New Zealand and Australia who were anxious to promote their own importance in relation to the construction of national

---

identity. The first group included the Earl of Sandwich (a long-standing patron of the Redfern Gallery), the Onslow family, and his own business partners Lord Alington and the Earl Amherst. Eventually even the Royal Family was drawn into Nan Kivell’s web of archival connections. These aristocrats were heirs to great traditions of service to the Crown in the British colonies. A shared interest in colonial history undoubtedly helped to ingratiate Nan Kivell into this exclusive group. Through his bibliographic knowledge he drew out the hidden connections between paintings, documents and artefacts in family collections, skilfully relating them back to the sense of pride felt by living descendents. Through his appreciation he helped to maintain a sense of tradition among the group by taking on the role of keeper of the memories represented by such artefacts. In times of national crisis this was a valuable role, as British pride depended on maintaining a strong sense of identity linked to former world domination. His efficacy in the role was demonstrated not only through his ability to forge links with certain families by beating a path to their doors in search of material for his collection, but also through success on the auction room floor. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s he was often able to secure important material which came onto the market when many leading British families were forced to sell off their material assets as a result of death duties and other hardships. In some cases he was able to parade certain collection items almost as if they were trophies of the triumph of his own wit over hereditary right, as he did with his acquisition of drawings carelessly discarded from the Royal Collection. Even the kindly Sandwich was forced to raise an eyebrow on one occasion when Nan Kivell acquired a document which, the peer intimated, had been inappropriately separated from his family’s collection.¹

Nan Kivell was always careful to present himself as a successful New Zealander in the company of his aristocratic acquaintances, never attempting to pass himself off as a Briton, but rather as a loyal and committed colonial subject of the British Crown. He usually flew a New Zealand flag on his limousines. No doubt this ingenuousness was regarded as quaint, but it was non-threatening to the established order. As a promoter and provider of artistic entertainment, Nan Kivell’s light-hearted contribution to English artistic life was greatly valued by influential aristocrats like Amherst and Sandwich, who appreciated his talent for amusement. Amherst’s wry but essentially fond pen portrait of Nan Kivell suggests that one valuable service

¹ The Earl of Sandwich to RNK, 5 June 1946. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
performed by the dealer consisted of providing a comfortable middle ground on which members of the upper classes could mix privately with those they regarded as social inferiors without fear of scandal. Thus, in Amherst’s account, after the reader has been introduced to ‘Rex Nankivell’ (he deftly puts Nan Kivell’s absurdly sectioned name back together) and his colourful partners, we next meet Nan Kivell’s builders, who also became close friends of the Earl, and then their friends, and so on down a list of increasingly shady individuals upon whom Amherst benignly bestowed his friendship over the years. The strong suggestion is that through his discreet management of this middle ground in the class system, Nan Kivell facilitated a sort of elegant slumming opportunity for Amherst.¹

The audience of Australian and New Zealand officials to whom Nan Kivell directed his efforts in promoting his collection included leading figures of the 1940s, ‘50s and ‘60s in political and cultural matters in these emergent nations. In Australia, the group included two Premiers, Chifley and Menzies, and many other senior politicians and bureaucrats. While New Zealand failed to produce a Prime Minister who was sufficiently interested to secure even a portion of it for the nation, the Nan Kivell Collection won many supporters there, of whom A.D. McIntosh was the most dedicated. Ultimately Harold White and Robert Menzies, through their consistent interest and effort, triumphed for Australia. That Nan Kivell was able to capture this select audience and manipulate it to his own advantage demonstrates the hold he was able to wield over the imaginations of influential people. This interest was in turn transferred to the general public of both nations, through the succession of loans to exhibitions made by the National Library to regional galleries and museums. Just as the Nan Kivell Collection appealed to a sense of identity among members of the British peerage through its representation of their ancestors and their colonial activities, so its success with mass audiences in New Zealand and Australia lay in its ability to suggest a common history and sense of belonging to the descendents of settlers, who were still only vaguely aware of the facts of their nations’ beginnings. The wave of popular interest sparked by the string of initial exhibitions compiled from the Nan Kivell Collection, following its transfer to Australia, in turn reflected prestige back onto the officials who had helped in negotiating the acquisition of these icons of cultural identity by the Commonwealth.

¹ Amherst, 1976, pp. 205-6.
At best then, Nan Kivell's collecting was emblematic rather than analytical. The portraits can be seen as emblems of power and of powerlessness set against the backdrop of Pacific history. Within the context of his collecting, they can also be seen as emblems of rank and status. Association in turn incorporates these emblems into the collector's elaborate personal affectation of rank. He collected works of art as emblematic trophies of a self-initiated and largely self-directed pilgrimage of discovery into the history of European art at the margins of empire. But in so doing he made available a vast treasure trove of pictorial material in which others could discover and rediscover their own narratives of identity.
Chapter Ten
Conclusion: The Midas Touch

John Thompson’s essay ‘Self-made: towards a life of Rex Nan Kivell,’ imagines the collector ‘pressing his nose to the window’ of British society, his uncertain status as an ‘outsider,’ ‘illegitimate, homosexual, self-educated, an Antipodean colonial,’ presumably denying him access to the exclusive world on the other side of the pane.\(^1\) While that characterisation of Nan Kivell has some basis in fact, it is also true that for most of his life Nan Kivell expertly manipulated the notional glass that separated him from the clients who bought paintings from his gallery, and the artists, dealers and collectors who supplied them. As I have demonstrated in previous chapters, Nan Kivell was a consummate middleman plying his trade as a dealer in the ‘middle ground’ of the English contemporary art scene, serving several cliques of English society which had their intersection in the fine art galleries of Mayfair. Nan Kivell was in some ways more of an ‘insider’ than an ‘outsider.’ He claimed to eschew a social life, and yet he was extremely well connected. Through his engaging character and sense of adventure he carefully acquired and nurtured personal relationships with British aristocrats like Napier Alington, who in turn gained him access to exclusive groups of clients and supporters. He proved his worth and reliability to these groups by performing valuable services, helping to distribute their assets and promote their interests in the arts. His habit of rescuing waifs and strays no doubt helped in this – Alington was one such, a recalcitrant ne’er-do-well, persistent gambler and drunk who rarely completed a day’s work in his short life, but whose hereditary title and personal charm gave him automatic entrée into the highest social circles in London and New York. Nan Kivell gave Alington a sort of social alibi by coopting him into the Redfern business. For men like Alington, and later his close friend the Earl Amherst, Nan Kivell provided an extremely reliable business front which suited their dilettante interests and lifestyles, and also paid good dividends. Amherst states quite categorically that he relied on Nan Kivell’s professional advice for investment in paintings, which suggests that more often than not it was Nan Kivell who called the shots as far as which artist to back,

and when, rather than his partners. In this sense Nan Kivell was an insider within the art world, providing the necessary expertise which enabled amateurs like Alington and Amherst safely to indulge their interest in art. Amherst also acknowledges Nan Kivell’s guidance in the formation of his tastes in art. This is an important point in the sense that it shows Nan Kivell in a role of leadership in artistic appreciation among private art patrons in London. This chapter seeks to identify the success factors in Nan Kivell’s practice, both as a dealer and as a collector.

**Success as a dealer**

As the proprietor of a gallery in London’s fashionable Mayfair, Nan Kivell’s success depended greatly on the contribution he could make through the business to the London ‘scene’. What this meant in practice was that through the medium of the gallery, he participated in, and where possible actively directed, the formation of tastes and values among the public. That he proved an able publicist is attested to by several contemporary writers, among them John Russell. What is more difficult to analyse is the extent to which Redfern gallery exhibitions helped to change trends in art appreciation in London during Nan Kivell’s tenure as managing director. He achieved his greatest successes as an exhibitor by representing to various audiences things which were close to a collective sense of identity. By putting on eclectic exhibitions during the war he gained a reputation for his gallery as a place of visual entertainment for the public. In so doing he also helped to create an environment in which more conceptually challenging art could be enjoyed in an unthreatening atmosphere.

A sense of humour and a taste for the exotic and bizarre were vital to the brand of exhibition Nan Kivell became known for. These attributes can safely be said to have been Nan Kivell’s personal contribution to the branding of his gallery. The entertaining approach had consistent appeal for the popular press, and ensured regular coverage of the gallery in the *Times* and *Evening Standard*. The range of Nan Kivell’s pictorial offerings was very broad and also unfettered by academic scruple when it

---

1 Amherst, 1976, p. 205.
2 See especially Robertson et al., 1965, pp. 174-5, 181-2. See also John Russell, ‘Getting down to earth’, *Sunday Times* 15 March 1964: ‘I admire the total involvement with which Mr Nan Kivell likes to give new ideas a free run’.
came to mixed hangings. The hangings, as recorded in the gallery’s catalogues and in newspaper reviews, express an increasingly sophisticated development of his tastes in bizarre and exotic pictorial subjects, and the humorous and cheerful sharing of those tastes with his audiences. Thus in addition to showcasing new talent he brought back into public discussion such diverse pictorial subjects as the travel illustrations of Edward Lear as well as military portraiture. Here he relied on his particular talent, his ‘eye’ for spotting the original in pictorial invention.

Nan Kivell’s other great talent lay in his ability as an entrepreneur. He was especially effective in choosing business partners who could carry on his regular business, leaving him relatively free to go off on the collecting expeditions which gave him his greatest satisfaction. He trained many young dealers in the essential skills of survival and profit in the unpredictable and highly specialised market for fine art. Many of his protégés went on to become highly successful dealers in their own right, including Erica Brausen, Ala Story and Peter Cochrane. Amherst provides an excellent insight into Nan Kivell’s perspicacity in choosing partners:

In latter years, and I think with retirement in mind, he brought in an Australian friend of his, Harry Miller, who was knowledgeable about the picture business. Of medium height, slim and elegant, Harry shared a house with another warm-hearted Australian, Loudon Sainthill and his sister Kath. Loudon made a considerable name for himself both in London and New York, with his stage designs both for settings as well as costumes, not the least of which were those for Noel Coward’s Sail Away, and The Canterbury Tales at the Phoenix Theatre. He really was on the crest of a wave when, tragically, he died suddenly of a heart attack in New York. When Rex actually did retire from the day to day business of the gallery, he left London except for occasional visits. In his place he brought in John Synge, like Harry Miller, well conversant with the business. And then the destinies of the Redfern gallery were, happily for those destinies, in the hands of the triumvirate, Harry Miller, John Synge, and Mrs Searl [sic].

The precise date of Nan Kivell’s retirement as managing director of the Redfern is difficult to determine, but it is likely that he stepped down as chairman of the board of the company in 1965, while continuing to be the major shareholder. This would have ended a stint of some 30 years in the leading position. He had led the gallery through very lean times into an era in which the market for contemporary art became very profitable, and he had played an important role in developing that market. He had made, by any standards, a success of his trade as a dealer. He was

---

1 Amherst, 1976, p. 205
also the owner of considerable archival collections of modern paintings, drawings, and prints.

To a large extent the dealing was the means by which Nan Kivell satisfied his collecting urge, yet the activities of dealing and collecting are so interdependent in his story that it is often difficult to separate them. Like the magician in the Aladdin story who offered new lamps in exchange for old, Nan Kivell used his profits from sales of contemporary paintings to obtain the old colonial works he coveted for his collection. In promoting contemporary art he often employed the same skills in picking out work of unrecognised quality that he applied in his collecting of Australiana, profiting handsomely in the process. However as Graham Sutherland suggested in Nan Kivell’s obituary, his instincts were more a collector’s than a businessman’s. While he certainly played a significant role in the establishment of a vibrant art market in London in the middle years of the twentieth century, Nan Kivell’s enduring accomplishment lay in making fine art collections of unusual imagination and discernment.

Nan Kivell’s success as a dealer depended on building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with artists and collectors. We have seen how the Redfern Gallery’s early establishment in the London art market was based initially on a relationship with the Slade School. As a junior partner in the firm in the 1920s, Nan Kivell maintained important relationships with significant leaders in contemporary British art like Paul Nash, while continuing to exhibit the work of senior artists like John and Sickert, whose work could be relied on to maintain the sales necessary to keep the gallery afloat. An important factor in Nan Kivell’s management of such relationships was his own dogged reliability. He worked hard to provide a consistent standard of sales and service for both artists and customers, using his private resources to maintain the gallery when times were lean. In carrying out his work as a dealer Nan Kivell relied on two crucial skills: a natural aptitude for business, and an ability to recognise unusual artistic talent in others. A collection of catalogues of Redfern Gallery exhibitions, which Nan Kivell gave to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1960, demonstrates the extent of his entrepreneurship over several decades.¹ This collection provides an accessible survey of the work exhibited at the

gallery between 1923 and 1959. The catalogues are testimony to the gallery’s early promotion of work by artists relatively unknown in London at the time of first exhibition at the Redfern. They also demonstrate the eclecticism and taste for the bizarre which were so much a feature of its hangings, and which helped to make it a popular destination for art lovers. The Redfern was pivotal in launching or establishing many significant artists on the London market. In the 1920s these included Orovida Pissarro, Clara Klinghoffer, R.O. Dunlop; in the 1930s Claude Flight, Christopher Wood, Chaim Soutine, Loudon Sainthill, Edward Burra, Ian Fairweather; in the 1940s Jankel Adler, Paul Delvaux, Michael Ayrton, Richard Eurich, Rodrigo Moynihan; in the 1950s Keith Vaughan, Alan Reynolds, Vieira da Silva, Sydney Nolan, Patrick Heron, Bryan Kneale, Ceri Richards, Victor Pasmore. The gallery also helped to introduce, with varying degrees of success, some movements in art which were unfamiliar to London gallery patrons, for example Tachism and kinetic art.¹

While the promotion of young and previously undiscovered talent was a feature of the Redfern’s public profile, the recreation of a market for the work of dead or forgotten artists’ work was also a particular interest for Nan Kivell. This form of artistic necromancy can be seen in his promotion of paintings by Derwent Lees, Christopher Wood and Pierre Dumont. Nan Kivell played on the unfortunate facts of these artists’ lives to stimulate the creation of popular artistic tragedies in the press, incorporating elements of thwarted talent, madness and suicide, and attracting attention and sales in the process. This process depended heavily on his personal efforts in researching these artists’ lives and tracking down their works for acquisition, often over an extended period. This was essentially a collecting activity, with the eventual cash profit only eventuating after many years of collecting both biographical data and works. But showmanship, in the sense of dramatic timing, also played a vital role in Nan Kivell’s presentation of these artists to the public. The success factor in such promotions lay in his ability to assemble the elements of melodramatic narrative around the artists’ personal histories, in a way that was easy for journalists to weave into stories for the papers, virtually guaranteeing editorial coverage for exhibitions of their work.

The story of Christopher Wood, that shooting star of English painting, would not be as well known as it is today, had it not been for Nan Kivell’s well-timed rescue of his reputation. The details of Nan Kivell’s capture of Wood’s archive are worth revisiting here as they illustrate his flair as a promoter as well as his perspicacity as a collector. Nan Kivell was never Wood’s dealer while he was alive, but it was he more than anyone else who capitalised on the artist’s memory. Lucy Wertheim was Wood’s dealer immediately before his death. Nan Kivell and Wertheim had a cordial relationship, and it is possible that Wertheim sought Nan Kivell’s advice and assistance in dealing with problems arising out of the artist’s estate. While Wertheim’s relationship with Wood’s mother soured, an important aspect of Nan Kivell’s subsequent success with Wood was the fact that he managed to form a strong empathetic bond with the mother. While Nan Kivell’s later claim that he had lunched with Wood’s mother and sister on the day of the artist’s death was fictitious,¹ it is clear that a considerable rapport did develop between the dealer and the mother. Nan Kivell must have obtained the letters from Clare Wood with her blessing. There seems no other way to account for the mysterious fact that Nan Kivell became Wood’s ‘literary executor’, and thus the controller of the large group of colourful, intimate letters Wood wrote to his mother over the ten-year period in which he struggled to make his name as an artist. Under the acutely distressing and shameful circumstances of her cherished son’s suicide, Clare Wood could hardly have entrusted such an intimate archive to a stranger without a clear and determined intention to rehabilitate his image in public. Her confidence in Nan Kivell is well illustrated by a photograph showing the two in conversation before a painting in the large Wood exhibition arranged by Nan Kivell at the New Burlington Galleries in 1938.² Strangely, the original letters are no longer extant. Nan Kivell had them typed, and subsequently sold the entire group of some 300 typed transcripts to Dr William Mason. Mason in turn deposited a complete copy of these in the Tate Gallery Archive. Presumably Clare Wood kept the originals herself.³

In the years following the first memorial exhibition of Christopher Wood, at Alex Reid and Lefevre in 1932, Nan Kivell gradually built up a large collection of Wood’s paintings and drawings, eventually including some of his most important

¹ Ingleby, 1995, p. xxiii, n. 3
² Nan Kivell album, MS4000, National Library of Australia.
³ Ingleby, 1995, pp. 275-281 gives a complete list of the letters.
paintings in his personal collection. He exhibited Wood regularly at the Redfern in mixed hangings throughout the next three decades. The great success of the 1938 exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries depended on three factors, which were entirely Nan Kivell's responsibility. Firstly, he and his partner Alington managed to track down over eight hundred individual paintings and drawings, enough to claim that the show represented the artist's complete oeuvre. That it fell slightly short of this claim is a matter for subsequent academic interest only – the essential point made by the exhibition was that despite his many personal problems, Wood certainly completed enough good work during the ten years of his artistic career to be posthumously considered a serious figure in British painting. Secondly, Nan Kivell held the key to interpreting Wood's oeuvre from a personal and psychological perspective – the letters. These enabled Eric Newton to construct an enormously appealing narrative about the tragic life of the artist for the exhibition catalogue, which quickly sold out of its first printing and was reprinted several times. A second edition was published in 1959. The third success factor was Nan Kivell's entrepreneurial skill in putting the show together. The decision to use the Burlington Galleries rather than the more cramped Redfern quarters was well judged, and the choice of Eric Newton as commentator was inspired. The catalogue itself, published by Heineman in association with the Redfern Gallery, is a model of the best in 1930s art publishing.

Another artist whose personal tragedy Nan Kivell was able to turn into a captivating story for the media was the French painter Pierre Dumont. A painter of the Impressionist era, Dumont was a contemporary of Monet and Renoir. His favourite subject was cathedrals, and he completed many spectacular oils of the magnificent gothic cathedral at his home town of Rouen. Dumont died in obscurity in a Paris asylum in 1936. He had been committed at the age of fifty after trying to kill his mother. In 1938 Nan Kivell came across a painting by Dumont in the storeroom of a gallery in Paris. Noticing a similarity to the work of Gauguin and a comparable talent in the painting, he bought it.¹ After the war Nan Kivell returned many times to France to try to find more of Dumont's work. Over a period of ten years he succeeded in gathering together fifty-four paintings by Dumont, many acquired from friends of the neglected master. These he exhibited at the Redfern Gallery in March 1954. The show

¹ 'Neglected Master', *Time* 15 March 1954.
was an overnight success, and in three days twenty-five paintings were sold for a total of £12,000, and another twelve reserved for eager buyers. The exhibition was reported as 'one of the biggest stampedes for the works of an almost unknown artist London has ever seen.'\(^1\) While the tragic tale of the demented artist provided an appealing angle for the press, an equally important factor in the success of this exhibition was the guest list for the opening. 'It was celebrity night at the Redfern Gallery', reported the *Evening News*.\(^2\) The guests included Richard Attenborough, Sir Lawrence Olivier and Lady Olivier, John Mills and his wife Mary Hayley Bell, Sheila Sim, Margaretta Scott, Lord Faringdon, and Aneurin Bevan. '22 PEOPLE SPEND £8000 IN AN EVENING AT THE ART SHOW' was the headline reported by the *Evening Standard's* Night Reporting Corps.\(^3\) Prices ranged from 200 to 750 guineas for the paintings. Among the buyers were the Director of the Toledo Museum, Blakemore Godwin, who purchased one work for 550 guineas, and Richard Attenborough, who purchased two.

Yet another artist 'rediscovered' for the general public by Nan Kivell was the French modern painter Alphonse Quizet. Like the 1954 Dumont exhibition a one-man show of Quizet’s work held at the gallery was well-publicised and the opening private view studded with celebrity guests. John Geilgud, Michael Powell, Anthony Bushell, Mrs Emlyn Williams, Godfrey Winn, John Perry and Hugh ‘Binkie’ Beaumont all bought works, and Noel Coward telephoned the gallery to reserve one for himself.

'Somehow, word got around', one newspaper reported, describing Nan Kivell's elation at the show's success. 'I confess I thought Quizet had been dead for twenty years. I sold his pictures in the twenties for £10-15. I’ve bought back one of those £15 canvases for £250'.\(^4\)

Public successes like the Dumont and Quizet shows gained Nan Kivell a reputation for connoisseurship. This renown was reinforced by some spectacular sales of works from his personal collection. One such attention-grabbing sale was that of the influential *Landscape at Céret* by Soutine. Nan Kivell sold this work to the Tate Gallery in 1964 for £17,000, having paid 60 guineas for it when he purchased it in the

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) *Evening News* 3 March 1954.
\(^3\) *Evening Standard* March 3 1954.
\(^4\) Undocumented newspaper clipping, Nan Kivell album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
early 1930s. Occasionally however he made embarrassing errors of judgement. For example, in 1968 the Redfern exhibited a work on paper, signed ‘Gleizes’, and priced at 750 guineas, in a mixed show of British and French paintings. A visitor to the gallery took issue with the authenticity of this work, and wrote to Nan Kivell voicing his complaint. Somehow the Observer picked up the story. The complainant, a sixty-year-old Liverpool shop assistant called Roderick Bisson, who was also a part-time art critic for the Liverpool Daily Post, claimed that he himself had painted the work as a young art student. He had exhibited it anonymously in a group exhibition in Liverpool in the 1920s. He pointed out that the painting could not possibly be by the French master, and anyone with more than a passing familiarity with Gleizes’ work would recognise the error of attribution. As for the signature, that was clearly false. The story attracted considerable attention in the press. With his reputation as an expert on French paintings at stake, Nan Kivell was compelled to respond. He claimed that the gallery had simply made a mistake: in the busy schedule of hangings at the Redfern there was not always time to examine each work closely before it went up on the wall. Among the gallery’s large stock of paintings were some that, regrettably, had acquired erroneous attributions at one time or another. He had no idea how the signature had got onto the painting. He withdrew the work from sale immediately and sent it to the Courtauld Institute for ‘tests,’ to try to resolve the mystery. In press interviews Nan Kivell deftly turned the attention back onto the former artist from Liverpool. What a pity, he declared, that he had not had an opportunity to discover the man’s talent all those years ago. The work showed evidence of great promise, and was just the sort of thing Nan Kivell had been actively seeking in the 1920s, when the Redfern Gallery was establishing its reputation as a promoter of young British art. He wondered whether the Liverpool man had any other work, which might be made into an exhibition at the Redfern, and proved a belated opportunity to make his reputation as a major British talent. This tactic had the effect of putting the shy Bisson on the back foot. He had given up painting many years ago, and had nothing to show. Perhaps regretting that he had missed his vocation, he made a rather embarrassed retreat from the argument. Nan Kivell on the other hand managed to rescue the reputation of his gallery, and even benefited from the publicity. He allowed himself to be photographed

---

with the work for the papers, making a media spectacle out of the mystery of the false
signature, the inconclusive tests carried out by the Courtauld Institute, and the
potential discovery of a previously unrecognised talent.

For all the showmanship and public relations skill exhibited by Nan Kivell in
his handling of the ‘Gleizes affair,’ the episode represents a considerable dent in his
credibility, both as an expert and as a merchant. One wonders how many other works,
either accidentally or deliberately misattributed, passed successfully through the
dealer’s hands, perhaps yielding substantial profits on the way. As with Nan Kivell’s
claim that an anonymous portrait of a pioneer represented one of his own ancestors,
the ‘Gleizes affair’ is a case of mistaken identity over which the suggestion of
deception hovers ominously.

Among Nan Kivell’s papers are a couple of curious tracings of paintings by
Leger – simple lines, and shading in pencil to show areas of colour. There is no
indication as to what their purpose might have been. The Leger tracings raise the
interesting possibility that Nan Kivell may have tried his hand at copying, perhaps
even forgery. He once told the National Library of Australia Liaison Officer Larry
Lake that he had tried painting in his youth, with little success. An ambition to paint,
thwarted by lack of talent, could conceivably have lingered on in his career, perhaps
becoming diverted into the odd pastiche which could easily have slipped into the
gallery’s stock under the guise of another artist’s name.

Towards the end of his life Nan Kivell was chagrined by another apparent
failure of connoisseurship. He put up for sale at Sotheby’s a work he believed to be by
Degas. He was embarrassed when the dealers reported that the item was merely a
cheap reproduction, which had been coloured with pastels to look like an original.
Whether or not this was a genuine mistake is a matter for conjecture, but in the
context of other suggestions of occasional misrepresentations of authenticity to buyers
in Nan Kivell’s dealings, one cannot rule out the possibility that he had known of the
deception, or even had a hand in the object’s manufacture himself.

Despite these occasional peccadillos, Nan Kivell managed to gather an
impressive personal collection of modern paintings with which he decorated his

---

2 A.T. Eles, Sotheby’s, to RNK 7 November 1972: ‘Now the Degas drawing. We have checked this
carefully and we have come to inescapable conclusion that it is in fact a reproduction with added red
and white chalks. It would seem to be a facsimile of the drawing in the Bibliotheque Nationale.’
private apartments. An indication of Nan Kivell’s personal taste in modern pictures can be found in a list he provided to his partner Harry Tatlock Miller for insurance purposes in 1968:

My dear Harry,

I have just had a letter from Jackson and he has left me flat without any insurance on the pictures in my flat... In the flat are some pricey pictures, I haven’t my list before me, but there are the following:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUTHERLAND</td>
<td>Thorn Cross with Orange background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standing Form Pink background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEORGES SEURAT</td>
<td>Au Concert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HENRY MOORE</td>
<td>Reclining Figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEN NICHOLSON</td>
<td>Still-life, 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDGAR DEGAS</td>
<td>Promenade au Parc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VICTOR PASMORE</td>
<td>Coast of the Inland Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICOLAS DE STAEL</td>
<td>Le soleil de minuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desin au couleur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX ERNST</td>
<td>Clairiere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forêt et la lune bleue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTOPHER WOOD</td>
<td>La Plage, Hotel Ty-mad, Treboul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEAN DUBUFFET</td>
<td>Paysage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIEIRA DA SILVA</td>
<td>La cite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAM FRANCIS</td>
<td>Composition bleue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAHAM SUTHERLAND</td>
<td>Study for Origins of the Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEAN-PAUL RIOPELLE</td>
<td>Fou de Basan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALAN REYNOLDS</td>
<td>Bleak November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAVALLO PEDEZZI</td>
<td>La route de la ferme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOULOUSE-LAUTREC</td>
<td>Homme avec Ourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCONNU</td>
<td>Femme avec parapluie rouge au plage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. PIETTE</td>
<td>Paysage a Pontoise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is all I can remember but it is enough to get a covering or a provisional covering until say end of November... when I can get everything sorted out perhaps by the new insurer. I think we can say £20,000. Will you ask the new man you wanted me to contact sometime ago? By the way did Leonard Hutton ever sell any of my pictures we lent to him? The Van Rysssebergh or the Picabias? Did he sell anything? You are looking after my Pierre Dumont “La cathedral de Beavais” aren’t you? I don’t want to sell that, at least yet. Also I do not want to sell my De Castro “Red Rocks, Agay”, I do not know why but I really like that painting. I have just remembered Leonard Hutton had my big Valtat, I think we are silly to sell that yet, even though I did put a real price on it for Leonard. Also at the flat, to tell the insurer, is a large collection of
my modern lithographs and aquatints - all signed tell Michael, I mean Director Michael. Many of these are those which were too large to get into my print cabinet. Tell Michael that there are some REALLY IMPORTANT ones there. These could be included [sic] in the present £20,000 even though I know Michael will tell me he could get me £20,000 for these prints alone. I have taken a number of my pictures to No. 8 and have done nothing more about the insurance there. Perhaps I should let you have my list to see if it is urgent before I return end of October. Anyhow it is always interesting to talk and write about thousands and thousands, it gives one a phoney feeling of being in IT, and not on the bread-line. Let me know your reactions to any of these suggestions.¹

This list demonstrates the eclecticism of Nan Kivell’s private taste in modern paintings, suggesting a predominant, but not exclusive preference for pictorial and representational works, but also a sophisticated grasp of the modern movement and a pronounced love of painterliness. The lack of precision in the list also demonstrates Nan Kivell’s rather chaotic and disorganised mind. The comments made to Miller are suggestive of an ambivalent attitude to material success, and, rather tellingly, to authenticity. It is interesting that he uses the word ‘phoney’ in relation to his feeling of being ‘in IT, and not on the breadline.’ Since some aspects of the collector’s persona really do seem to have been ‘phoney’, (for example the Danish honour he claimed to hold), this remark suggests a certain defensiveness and self-consciousness in relation to status measured in material terms.

El Farah

For all his imaginative flights of fantasy, there can be no denying that Nan Kivell was a materialist in every sense of the word. Undoubtedly one of his most impressive acquisitions was the house El Farah in the suburb known as the Old Mountain in Tangier, which he bought in 1963.² The house had been built in the 1820s, and was at one time owned by the Victorian painter Sir John Lavery. El Farah was a magnificent villa with two stories and many rooms, set in large grounds, affording spectacular views from windows and terraces overlooking the Straits of Gibraltar [Figure 56]. Nan Kivell planted the garden with many species from New Zealand and Australia, seeds of which he obtained by mail from friends in the ‘colonies’ as a way of keeping in touch. Following his retirement from the day-to-day

¹ RNK to Harry Tatlock Miller, 7 September 1968. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
management of the Redfern Gallery in 1965, he tried to spend at least six months of
the year at El Farah. His move to Tangier was motivated partly by the need to live in a
warmer climate necessitated by his severe chronic arthritis and sciatica, but also
because Tangier was an international tax haven at this time, a hangover from the
period of the notorious ‘International Zone,’ when Tangier was administered by a
consortium of European colonial powers.¹

The social life that Nan Kivell had been at pains to avoid throughout the
middle part of his career now began to play an important role in his activities. In
Tangier he cast himself in the role of a wealthy and influential grandee. His latent
snobbery and long-repressed flamboyance now blossomed, finding a late and rather
bizarre expression in his new role as a leading patron of the Tangerine Scene. ‘There
are many more of the right sort of people in Tangier these days. Previously they used
to be a lot of rich merchants. It’s now more intellectual and artistic. Then the
Moroccans themselves are such wonderful people. They are so interesting to meet and
wonderful people to talk to and look at,’ he was reported as saying.² The stables at El
Farah were converted into artists’ studios, and a steady stream of creative people,
young and old, came to visit and to use the facilities he generously provided for their
comfort and entertainment. ‘I don’t know if the abstract boys will get much out of it,’
remarked Nan Kivell.³

There were many unusual expatriates resident in Tangier. Leonard Hutton, the
estranged husband of the Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton, sold paintings on behalf
of the Redfern Gallery. In a letter to Harry Tatlock Miller in 1968 Nan Kivell
reported,

I had to stop then because Barbara Hutton’s husband Prince du Champac came to call. He had
bare feet, a Hippy coat and trousers, long hair to his shoulders, but not a fly on him. He is an
intelligent fellow, so now do you tell me where Barbara Hutton comes in on this one? We have a
terrific DOO to-morrow night here, over 250 have sent in acceptances. I wish you all were here,
it is really your cup of tea.⁴

The ‘DOO’ was an extravagant happening called ‘Rainbow of Colours,’ styled
along psychedelic lines, held at El Farah. The invitees included many of Tangier’s

¹ See Gavin Maxwell, Lords of the Atlas, The Rise and Fall of the House of Glaoua 1893-1956,
³ Ibid.
⁴ RNK to Harry Tatlock Miller, 7 September 1968. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
most notable socialites. It was widely reported in the Tangerine papers. 'A LA VILLA EL FARAH UNE ELITE DE TANGEROIS ET D'ESTIVANTS RENCONTRE DES ARTISTES,' reported *Le Journal de Tanger* on 14 September 1968:

L'étroit et sinuex accès de la Vieille Montagne fut, dimanche dernier, une découverte pour un certain nombre des invités du groupe d'esthètes, "Rainbow of Colours". Les arrivants se trouvaient d'abord dans le noir, puis suivaient les torches bordant une allée d'un jardin un peu sauvage - avant d'atteindre la demeure de M. Rex Nan Kivell C.M.G., Order of Dannebrog, hôte d'honneur, puisqu'il était chez lui, avec Mme Mohammed Lahrichi, M. James L. Hall et M. Malcolm McConnel, l'attaché culturel des Etats Unis La Princesse Ruspoli offrait des fleurs.¹

David Herbert acted as M.C. on the night, and the live entertainment included displays of fashion and hairstyles.

In Australia, Nan Kivell's place in Tangerine society was vividly (indeed luridly) reported in the *Bulletin*, in an article entitled 'Tangier, home of the hippies, kooks and pirates,' by Russell Warren Warne:

In Tangier, the American Consulate General stands in Chemin des Amoureux - Lover's Lane. And well it might. More than half the two thousand Americans living here are free-love hippies, homosexuals or just adherers of marijuana - known locally as *kif*. According to the epicures, *kif* is the same as most forms of pot, only better, cheaper, and nearly legal.

For the Western World's problem children, this city is the end. Or the beginning. Even the jet set here is queer. At the social top are queer peers from Westminster, then ballet dancers, dress designers and hairdressers in retirement, and finally, auto mechanics from Detroit or Dusseldorf in gorgeous evening dresses. There are even a few queer hippies, who have bare feet and dirty hair and love each other dearly - or cheaply, when bread is thin... This is a town in which much of the moola comes from king-size Swiss bank accounts or art collections. Tangier was once an International Free City and remains a pirate capital. There are houses in which Picassos and Chagalls crowd even the corridors leading to the powder room. Some say the harsh Atlantic winds do thousands of dollars of damage every winter to the old masters owned by old millionaires' mistresses on Marshan Hill.

*Kif* is the common denominator here for hippies, homos, highnesses or relatively squaresville folk like passé writers and surrealist artists. Because so many people are hallucinating as they talk, it is hard to take everybody seriously... A few of the hippies are talented painters, composers, poets, psychedelic light-show impresarios. A gray-haired, youthful-looking Cornishman, Rex Nan Kivell, a director of London's Redfern Art Gallery, has taken this cream of the flower people under his wing. Nan Kivell has now transformed a Haroun el-Raschid mansion on a mountainside into a cluster of luxurious studios. Only the

¹ *Le Journal de Tanger* 14 September 1968.
omnipresent African beads distinguish the denizens from the Montparnoso of Picasso’s or Modigliani’s youth.¹

The atmosphere of gentle dissipation which prevailed at El Farah in the late 1960s was not confined to visiting artists. Among Nan Kivell’s Arab servants was one named ‘Kiffy,’ whose likeness was recorded for the Bulletin in a pencil portrait by Paul William White, a young Australian who was a frequent resident at El Farah.²

El Farah was also home to Nan Kivell’s collection of Nelson memorabilia. He was proud of the fact that his terraces commanded views of the scene of the Battle of Trafalgar. Among the items relating to Nelson in his collection were several pieces of a Copenhagen porcelain dinner service, and an original order of battle for Trafalgar, which he claimed had come into his family in about 1850 through a marriage. Some of these items he eventually gifted to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.³

During his residence at Tangier Nan Kivell played up the Danish honour which he took great pleasure in claiming for himself. The Order of Dannebrog has seven classes ranging in status from the equivalent of a knighthood to an honourary award for chivalrous action. It is usually reserved exclusively for Danish citizens, but a few were awarded to British officers for services during the Second World War.⁴ References to the honour appear draft biographical notes prepared by Nan Kivell for submission to Debrett’s and Who’s Who directories in 1962.⁵ The draft entries contain other spurious biographical details, including the claim that he was a Captain in the First World War, and false identification of his parents. He continued to maintain until his death that in 1935 King Christian X of Denmark had awarded him the Order of the Dannebrog in recognition of his services to archaeology. He claimed the honour had been conferred because of his work on material from the La Tene cultures which he had excavated at Cold Kitchen Hill. The La Tene I and La Tene II cultures belonged to peoples who had supposedly come to Britain from the Danish peninsula during the Iron Age. Nan Kivell claimed the Danish King shared with him an interest in these cultures, followed his journal articles on the subject, and even accompanied him on

³ RNK to Durunt, 16 November 1968. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁴ H.T. Dorling, Ribbons and Medals: Naval, Military, Airforce and Civil, revised ed., London: George Philip & Son, 1957, p. 188.
some of his diggings.¹ In 1961 a journalist described Nan Kivell wearing a small lapel decoration which she identified as the ‘Order of Dannebrog’, presumably having been given the name by the collector himself.² Another journalist described Nan Kivell ‘wearing a Danish order in his lapel’ at the gallery in the 1960s.³ Curiously, there is no material evidence that Nan Kivell ever received the Order of the Dannebrog, and the medal or brooch that supposedly went with it is not to be found either.⁴ The title ‘Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell, C.M.G., Order of Dannebrog’ appears on his will, and the deception even made its way into his obituary in The Times.

One possible explanation for the source of the Danish honour in Nan Kivell’s personal mythmaking is the fact that a former Librarian of the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand, Johannes Carl Andersen, was a genuine recipient of this honour. Andersen was a serious scholar, gaining a truly impressive haul of honours during his life as an administrator of library and museum collections in New Zealand. In addition to his long period of tenure as Librarian of the Turnbull Library from 1918 to 1937 he was chairman of the Dominion Museum management committee 1944-46. He edited the Transactions of the New Zealand Institute 1915-24 and the Journal of the Polynesian Society 1925-1947. In recognition of his services as President of the Anglo-Danish Society he was awarded the King Christian Freedom Medal in 1946, and made a Knight of the Dannebrog in 1948.⁵ There are a number of curious parallels between Andersen’s career interests and those of Nan Kivell, and it seems unlikely that Nan Kivell would have been unaware of his life and work. Andersen had lived in Christchurch in his youth after his family had emigrated from Denmark. He

¹ Rex Nan Kivell, undated manuscript draft letter to Maec Casey c. 1966: ‘Became interested in Archaeology and excavated on Romano-British sites principally in Wiltshire, the large quantity of “finds” were given to Devizes Museum and a room was devoted to the display. Met at this time King Christian of Denmark, who used to accompany RNK on his “diggings” & following the RNK publications of the discoveries in various Wiltshire Archaeological Journals - particularly interesting to the King was the discovery by RNK of a La Tene site in Wiltshire, the people who occupied this site having come from what is now Denmark - he gave RNK the Order of Dannebrog’.
³ Undocumented newspaper clipping, Nan Kivell album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
⁴ An inquiry made to the Historian of the Order of the Dannebrog in 1995 by the author failed to confirm that Nan Kivell had received the Order. Egon Graabøl, for Ordens Historiografen, to Oliver Stead 7 June 1995; letter in possession of the author. Pauline Fanning of the National Library of Australia also made an unsuccessful approach to the Danish authorities in the 1970s. The National Library of Australia received Nan Kivell’s CMG and Knight Bachelor medals after his death, and one would expect the Danish medal to have been included with these, if it had been genuine. There is a lingering suspicion that Nan Kivell did receive some sort of recognition from Denmark however, as Barbara Perry believed she saw his name inscribed on a list of holders of the honour when she visited Denmark in the 1970s.
was also deeply interested in the craft of fine printing, and contributed chapters to the *Centennial Book of Printing in New Zealand*, published in 1940. With his competitive feelings towards rival collectors and the Turnbull collection in particular, it is possible that Nan Kivell envied Andersen’s honours and professional accomplishments. With characteristic mischief, Nan Kivell may have appropriated Andersen’s Danish honour to himself after the librarian’s death, perhaps acting out some sort of infantile revenge fantasy fuelled by a grudge. Perhaps he had experienced an unsatisfactory exchange with Andersen over his collection and wanted to revenge himself by means of a perverse appropriation of the scholar’s genuine credentials.

On the other hand Andersen’s death may have provided an opportunity for social subterfuge that was irresistible. The Danish honour only appears in Nan Kivell’s story after Andersen’s death. He may have considered that the likelihood of anyone discovering the deception during his own lifetime was low enough to get away with. Whatever the origins of the spurious honour, the deception is crucial to Nan Kivell’s story. The appearance of the ‘Order of Dannebrog’ in his autobiographical myth manifests a craving for honours which is inextricably linked to his creation and public disposal of collections. This craving for public recognition in the form of honours and titles was not unusual in itself, especially in a person who was self-conscious about his dubious colonial pedigree and thus his problematic role in relation to the aristocratic English social circles to which he aspired. Nor was his choice of collecting as a vehicle for his social aspirations especially unusual, as the accumulation of valuable material possessions as markers of social status is an all too familiar human activity. What made Nan Kivell’s quest for recognition through collecting unusual was that he alternated between a supreme determination to possess the objects of his heart’s desire, and an equally powerful compulsion to dispose of them, usually at a price, but sometimes as magnificent gestures of generosity. This complex is undoubtedly what made him one of London’s most successful art dealers. But it is also what made him, in the words of one commentator, ‘one of the greatest institutional benefactors Australia has seen’.¹

Arguably the magnificent gifts came at a price too - Nan Kivell craved honours, which to him were worth far more than money. If, as seems likely on the face of it, he went so far as to fabricate the Danish award, he was even prepared to

---

make things up in order to decorate himself. This inference is borne out by other autobiographical falsehoods, such as his claim that he was gassed at Messines,\(^1\) and suggests that his appetite for honours surpassed even his desire for beautiful objects.

**Success as a collector**

In 1966 Nan Kivell received his first genuine honour, a C.M.G in the Australian Queen’s Birthday Honours List, ‘for services in providing the National Library with valuable early Australian and Pacific paintings and manuscripts’.\(^2\) The honour came less than two years after he had received the second and final payment for the collection in Canberra. He showed his appreciation by progressively donating a second large collection of Australian, New Zealand and Pacific material to the National Library. While the second collection was less substantial than the first, it nevertheless included some magnificent individual items. It was assessed by National Library staff as comprising 859 book titles, 32 manuscript groups, 70 maps, 13 original oil paintings, 529 original watercolours and drawings, 7 albums of original drawings, 483 prints, 16 photographic albums and 96 individual photographic items.

In 1969 a new story concerning the collecting exploits of Rex Nan Kivell emerged in London’s daily papers. Sir Anthony Blunt, Surveyor of the Queen’s Pictures, was appealing for the return of some 400 seventeenth-century drawings, which had previously been in the Royal Collection. A former Windsor Castle librarian had carelessly sold the works many years earlier in order to start a book fund. Rex Nan Kivell had bought a large number of the drawings from various dealers, paying between £2 and £15 pounds apiece for them. Blunt was ‘terribly disappointed,’ reported the *Daily Mail*, that his appeal had only netted one lot of ten from a private collection.\(^3\) He was well aware of Nan Kivell’s substantial holding of these drawings, as the dealer had lent them for an exhibition held at the Courtauld Institute, of which Blunt was the director. ‘But they’ve all gone back now,’ Blunt told the journalist ‘sadly.’

---

3 Charles Greville, ‘Hunt goes on for Royal Paintings’ [sic], *Daily Mail* January 17 1969.
Perhaps more than any other in Nan Kivell’s collecting career, this acquisition demonstrates just how acute his eye for a bargain was. The works were of considerable importance to the history of both art and science. A press release issued by Blunt describing the works gives their provenance and significance in detail.¹

In the early 1970s, under increasing pressure to avoid capital gains tax and estate duties, Nan Kivell began to dispose of his collections. ‘You surely have the Midas touch,’ wrote Ken Hanks, of Norman Alexander & Co., Nan Kivell’s accountants, in a letter to the dealer in 1972.² Hanks’ letter was prompted by recent advice from Nan Kivell concerning current valuations for paintings he owned. Hanks was writing to warn him of the enormous taxes he could be liable for:

I am staggered by the insurance valuations. Very pleased to know of your expertise but horrified when I think of the Estate Duty cheque I will have to write out to the Government!!

If your valuations are fair, when one adds on El Farah and its contents, your bank balances,

¹ In 1763 George III acquired the entire collection of drawings belonging to Cardinal Alessandro Albani. These had mainly come from his uncle, Pope Clement XI, who had acquired among other things the collection of drawings formed by Cassiano dal Pozzo in the first half of the seventeenth century. Pozzo was a man of immense learning, with a great interest in archaeology and also in the natural sciences. He was for some time Secretary to the Academy of the Lincei, of which Galileo was a prominent member and which was devoted to the study of natural sciences. After the trial of Galileo the Academy discreetly dissolved itself, and it seems that the members divided up amongst themselves some of the collections which had been formed. It may be from this source that Pozzo acquired the large series of drawings connected with natural history which came with the Albani Collection to the Royal Library.

² A few years after the First World War some volumes of these drawings were disposed of and eventually broken up. A large block of them were bought just before the Second World War by Mr Rex Nan Kivell of the Redfern Gallery, and a few others are known in private collections in England and America.

The five volumes of geological drawings are still at Windsor, but those dealing with zoology and botany are scattered. The group at present on show [at the Courtauld Institute] is a fairly typical cross-section of the whole group and shows Pozzo’s particular interest in freaks of nature, which was one widespread in the early seventeenth century.

The authors of the drawings are unknown, and there is no means of identifying them on stylistic grounds. Pozzo employed a band of important artists, including Nicolas Poussin, Pietro da Cortona and Pietro Testa, mainly for the purpose of making drawings after antiquities, and it is conceivable that some of these artists may have been employed on the drawings connected with natural history, but, if so, the nature of the commission would make it very difficult to recognise their style. Moreover, it is more likely that Pozzo or the Academy should have employed specialists in drawing scientific specimens.

The geological drawings have been studied, and they include a number which are the earliest known records of types of minerals. No significant study of the other drawings has been possible, since they are scattered, but it is likely that they would throw much light on the history of science in the seventeenth century.

The greater part of the drawings are in full watercolour [sic], and on most of them is a number in a very small hand in brown ink. These numbers are those put on by Pozzo and range up to well above a thousand.

‘It would be of very great interest to find out whether other drawings from this collection are traceable in private collections in this country or abroad.’ Press release by Sir Anthony Blunt. MS4000, National Library of Australia.

² K. Hanks to RNK, 21 February 1972. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
shares and other sundry items you are going to be close to the 85% rate which means half a million pounds to the Government. This is almost criminal. Won't you not [sic] consider giving it away now?

Unlike many collectors, Nan Kivell was not fundamentally averse to disposing of collections he had built up over many years. This ability to dispose of accumulated material is undoubtedly one of the major factors which contributed to his success. Faced with the difficulties imposed by his tax situation, he willingly set about selling off significant parts of his collections. One of his first moves in this direction was to sell a collection of 68 paintings at Sotheby's in February 1972. Among these were an oil portrait of Paul Robeson by Sickert and a gouache of Notre Dame by Max Jacob.1

A sale of English Illustrated Books of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at Sotheby's on 22 May 1972 presented, from Nan Kivell's personal collection: 87 items from Ayton to Whistler, including Beardsley & Wilde Salome 35/300 Melmoth & Co1904; Gill & Pepler The Devil's Devices, or Control versus Service, 11 wood-engraved illustrations by Gill, original cloth backed boards, uncut; Gill, Emblems engraved on Wood (for The Devil's Devices) 26/33, signed by artist, 7 wood engravings, original wrappers, uncut, with the bookplate of Michael Ernest Sadler, fitted case; 9 other Gill items; 5 David Jones items including three of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner; 7 Wyndham Lewis items including Blast 1&2, The Enemy 1&2; Thirty Personalities and a Self Portrait 97/200 signed by the artist etc bookplate of Sadler; Timon of Athens 15 plates (of 160 unbound as issued in original paper folder) The Cube Press 1914; 35 Paul Nash items; and Sutherland & Maugham, Cakes and Ale 924/1000 signed by author and artist original calf, 1954. In July 1972 he sold a number of T.E. Lawrence editions through Sotheby's for £477.

In October 1972 Nan Kivell sold a Gauguin folio to R. Alistair McAlpine of Cork Street for £5,500. In 1974 Harry Tatlock Miller reported that he had sold a Sam Francis belonging to Nan Kivell for £4000.2 Later that year Nan Kivell wrote to Duncan Grant concerning a nude of the mountaineer George Mallory, which he was intending to sell:

I am selling a number of my paintings, I find I have too many and they are just put in store. Amongst them is that lovely early nude of George Mallory, which you kindly signed and dated for me one day in the Gallery. This painting has excited Sotheby's and they have asked me if I can let them have some details, such as where it was painted, and better still how you got

---

1 List of 68 items sold at Sotheby's 9 February 1972. MS4000, National Library of Australia,
2 Harry Tatlock Miller to RNK, 23 July 1974.
George Mallory to pose in the nude. Everybody who has seen the painting has asked me to sell it to them, and it almost makes me regret I included it with the other paintings.  

In another letter to Grant, Nan Kivell promised to share the proceeds of the sale with the painter. ‘Duncan, whatever price it fetches at Sotheby’s, I am dividing between yourself and myself, so let us hope that it fetches a good price, I am sure Sotheby’s will protect it.’  

Despite his sales of collection items, Nan Kivell continued to acquire property. In 1974 he bought a Regency house in Drayton Gardens, Kensington, ‘trees all along the road and a garden with flowering shrubs, garage for two cars, three bathrooms and four loos’.

Nan Kivell’s long quest for a knighthood came to an end in 1976. He was very happy. Perhaps to show his appreciation, he returned to the Royal Collection the seventeenth-century drawings he had so cleverly rescued from dispersal in the late 1930s, although without actually relinquishing ownership. His disposal of collections continued, and his last will, which he changed several times before his death in 1977, documents a long list of final deaccessions. Included among these items are Albani’s drawings, bequeathed at long last to Her Majesty the Queen. But the final act in the disposal of the Nan Kivell collections came in October 1977, when a comprehensive collection of British printmaking of the twentieth century was sold by his estate at Sotheby’s for £377,000. This collection was in many respects the finest of its kind in existence, and it is interesting therefore that he chose not to donate it to an institution, for example the Victoria and Albert Museum, to which he had given similar items on previous occasions. In this instance, the dealer in him evidently overcame the benefactor. As this was arguably as fine a collection in its way as the Nan Kivell Collection in Canberra, one is left wondering whether, with his knighthood safely achieved, he no longer felt the need to make a grand gesture of benefaction towards a public collection. Another dramatic disposal was achieved when a screen by Bonnard was sold by his estate, reaching a record price of £26,000.

***

1 RNK to Duncan Grant 25 September 1974.
2 RNK to Duncan Grant 1 October 1974.
3 The Times 5 October 1977.
4 Ibid.
The art historian Bernard Berenson, ruminating over his sense of failure as a writer, wrote in his memoir that ‘travel debauched me’.

I could follow up any road, any bypath, with the same zest that I would read a story, for the fun of going on and on... On the pretext of having to see certain works of art, and to see them where they grow, I make costly tours and give them time that in deepest conscience I suspect of being unnecessary.1

This seems to me directly analogous to Rex Nan Kivell’s peripatetic wanderings in search of items for his collection, and seems to express a certain syndrome shared by many collectors - the enjoyment of ‘going on and on’ at the expense of stopping to take stock. Berenson put this down to ‘the small boy’s dread of a journey coming to an end’. With devastating self-awareness, Berenson admitted to another fatal characteristic which also could apply equally to Rex Nan Kivell. ‘Perhaps’, wrote Berenson,

I have wasted too much of myself in attempting to establish my position as a monsieur - a less ambivalent term than our word “gentleman” which may refer to birth alone, whereas the French term refers to breeding and standing. Seeing I had no roots in any of the countries I was living in, it was but natural, although neither noble or even wise, to harbour such an ambition, and to resent any question as to my right to a place in society.2

Berenson’s speciality was the knowledge which could establish beyond question the identity, and therefore the legitimacy and value, of treasured objects. This knowledge gave both the connoisseur and the dealer enormous power and status by association with the material and iconic worth of the object at hand. This was enough for Berenson. He did not consider himself a collector. In this respect Nan Kivell was different from the great art historian. Not having Berenson’s scholarship in existing categories of valued art, he directed his attention to identifying new categories, attracting attention to them, and reaping the benefits of his promotion of them. This was the case with his Pacific collection, and also with his championing of contemporary British printmaking and illustration. And Nan Kivell was a collector in the very terms Berenson used to denigrate an activity he looked on with disdain. ‘Such a one loves to compete, to get the better of the seller, to gloat over the object as a scalp or trophy, and finally either to enshrine it in his halo of self-satisfaction or to sell it a high profit in money or pride’.3

2 Ibid.
A high profit in money or pride – through his collecting habit Nan Kivell achieved both, and of the two prizes pride was the greater, because it was necessary for him to bolster his status as a gentleman. He certainly made a lot of money, and enjoyed a lavish lifestyle. But just as important to the whole complex of behaviour that surrounds Nan Kivell’s collection was the impulse to benefaction, to gain approval by presenting collections as gifts. Perhaps at the most basic level this impulse was driven by a childish desire to gain approval by presenting a pristine object to a notional mother-figure, played out in the pantomime of gifting valuable collections to public institutions, to the ultimate conclusion of bequeathing a collection to the Queen.\footnote{RNK, Last Will and Probate, 1977.} While Nan Kivell was not a connoisseur in the sense of having a trained academic knowledge in his chosen fields of art and social history, he did have an unusually acute eye for talent in artistic expression, unfettered by the scruples of scholarship. He could distinguish very good work from the ordinary, and this was the basis of his success in business. People looked to his gallery as a showcase for artistic talent, and he provided this commodity to the English public for more than 50 years. In this sense he exercised a sort of naive connoisseurship, which reached a considerable maturity over decades of experience, gained through constant exposure to works of art in a busy marketplace.

Authenticity remained a central problem for Nan Kivell throughout his career. The theme of doubtful authenticity runs though his life like an unruly stream which frequently changes its course. In his personal mythology he embodied the anxiety about social status, typical of many self-made entrepreneurs of his generation, which is epitomised in the character of Gatsby in Fitzgerald’s 1926 novel. Indeed there are some uncanny parallels between the fictional businessman Gatsby and Rex Nan Kivell. Both had phoney names. Both were of poor, immigrant farming families in the New World. Both started their careers as beachcombers, both angled cleverly to become the heir of a benefactor. Both went to the First World War. Strangely, Fitzgerald’s fictional character and Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell’s impersonations seem to intersect in the story of Christopher Wood. Wood mixed in the same circles as Fitzgerald, and may have met him.\footnote{Ingleby, 1995, p. 107.} One of his last paintings, *Tiger and Arc de
Triomphe\textsuperscript{1} [Figure 22], seems closely related to a passage in The Great Gatsby where the narrator listens in skeptical amusement to Gatsby’s fanciful account of his youth as a wealthy dilettante in Europe:

With an effort I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter. The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned ‘character’ leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne.

A few lines further on we find Gatsby showing off a medal, the ‘Order of Danilo’, apparently awarded him by Montenegro for services during the war. The similarity of this passage to Nan Kivel’s claim to the Order of Dannebrog is uncanny. Is it pure coincidence, or was Nan Kivel, who was Kit Wood’s executor and himself a hanger-on of the ‘beau monde’ to which Fitzgerald and Wood belonged, well aware of these precedents to his own fictions? It is impossible to be certain whether Nan Kivel consciously made a connection between his own fictions and Fitzgerald’s. Perhaps someone far wittier than he crafted the connection for him to act out naively. But it is precisely the sort of associative trickery that the collector revelled in.

Nan Kivel perpetrated many deliberate deceptions, claiming false authenticity both for his personal credentials and for material items in his possession. To his credit he rarely, if ever, attempted to pass himself off as a scholar. His contribution to scholarship, while significant, would have been greater had he paid more attention to establishing accurate provenances for works in his collections. Whether by sale or gift, his contributions to public collections were often of a very high order. In considering his life’s work in the management of British art in the twentieth century, it must be concluded that he made a great contribution to his era, and that his knighthood for services to the arts was richly deserved.

\textsuperscript{1} Christopher Wood 1901-1930, Tiger and Arc de Triomphe 1930, oil on cardboard, 18.25” x 21.75”, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.
Select Bibliography

Unpublished sources

Nan Kivell Collection File, National Library of Australia.
Paul Nash Correspondence, Tate Gallery Archive.
Rex Nan Kivell Papers, MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Volume of press clippings relating to the Redfern Gallery, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Published sources – articles

‘An exhibition to suit many tastes’, *The Times*, 7 July 1944.


268
Bell, Clive, 'Pictures for America', *The New Statesman and Nation*, v. 22 n. 560, 15 November 1941.

Bell, Clive, 'The Camden Town Group', *The New Statesman and Nation*, v. 17 n. 423, 1 April 1939.


Carson, Oliver, 'Is the Art Craze Framed?' *The Queen*, 14 September 1960.


Dark, Graham, 'The Great Art Whodunnit - £75 painting is really a £20,000 Gauguin', *Daily Express*, 2 April 1958.


Earp, T.W., 'Clara Klinghoffer at the Redfern', *The Studio* v. 91, 1926.


Fanning, Pauline, 'Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell', *Art In Australia*, November 1977.


Howe, Russell Warren, 'Tangier – the hippie city', Canberra Times, 26 October 1968.


McCulloch, Alan, 'Prints Display is Fascinating' by the Herald Art Critic, Melbourne Herald, 20 March 1951.


Manson, J.B., 'Modern Paintings in the Collection of the Earl of Sandwich', The Studio, v. 97, 1929.

Mortimer, Raymond, 'Three Exhibitions', The New Statesman and Nation, v. 19 no. 467, 3 February 1940.

Nan Kivell, R. de C., 'Objects found during excavations on the Romano-British site at Cold Kitchen Hill, Brixton Deverill, 1924' Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine v. 43 1927, pp. 180-191.

Nan Kivell, R. de C., 'Objects found during excavations on the Romano-British site at Cold Kitchen Hill, Brixton Deverell [sic], Wilts.', Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine, v. 43 1927, pp. 327-332.


Nan Kivell, R. de C., 'Objects found during excavations on the Romano-British site at Cold Kitchen Hill, Brixton Deverill, 1926', Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine, v. 44 1929, pp. 138-142.

'Neglected Master', Time, 15 March 1954.


'New Movements', Sunday Telegraph, 15 March 1964.

‘On Chances for Students’, *The Studio*, v. 87, 1924.


‘Rare Fascination in the Nan Kivell Collection’, Canberra Times, 7 February 1959.


‘Some Forgotten Artists’, *The Times*, 16 November 1950.


Taylor, Basil, ‘In the bazaar’, *The Spectator*, 16 August 1957.

271


Vox, Maximilien, ‘British wood engraving of the present day’, *The Studio*, v. 99 no. 444, March 1930.


**Published sources – monographs and exhibition catalogues**


Gilbert, Davies, *The Parochial History of Cornwall*, 4 volumes, 1838.


Redfern Gallery, *Christopher Wood, the first retrospective exhibition since 1938*, exhibition catalogue, London: Redfern Gallery, [1959].


Redfern Gallery, Exhibition of the collection of paintings formed by the late Maurice Ingram, exhibition catalogue, London: Redfern Gallery, [1941].


Redfern Gallery, [an exhibition of works from John Tunnard, Sigmund Pollitzer, Ben Nicholson, Paul Nash, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, Barbara Hepworth, Leslie Hurry, and Alistair Morton], exhibition catalogue, London: Redfern Gallery, [1941].


Redfern Gallery, Fittings from His Majesty’s yacht “Britannia”, exhibition catalogue, London: Redfern Gallery, [1936].

Redfern Gallery, Flower Paintings, exhibition catalogue, London: Redfern Gallery, [1936].

Redfern Gallery, French and English paintings, drawings, prints, also aquatints by Georges Rouault, exhibition catalogue, London: Redfern Gallery, [1940].


Redfern Gallery, *Metavisional Tachiste Abstract*, exhibition catalogue, preface by


Figure 1. Reginald Nankivell c. 1916, in the uniform of the NZEF. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 2. Reginald Nankivell and friend, c. 1917. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 3. Page from Rex Nan Kivell’s album showing Rex Nan Kivell and friend (possibly Fanny Hulbert), England, c. 1920s. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 4. Photographs from Rex Nan Kivell’s album, c. 1920s. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 5: Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell, c. 1920s. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 6. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; Negro fandango scene, Campo St. Anna, Rio de Janeiro c. 1822; watercolour; 21 x 34 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/98, National Library of Australia.
Figure 7. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; *A bivouac of travellers in Australia in a cabbage-tree forest, day break* c. 1838; oil on canvas; 118 x 82 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK14, National Library of Australia.
Figure 8. Conrad Martens 1801-1878; View of Fort Street and the North Shore, from Flagstaff Hill 1843; oil on canvas; 31.3 x 79.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK19, National Library of Australia.
Figure 9. George Carter 1737-1795; Death of Captain Cook 1781; oil on canvas; 151.2 x 213.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2, National Library of Australia.
Figure 10. Charles Meryon 1821-1868; *Death of Marion du Fresne at the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 12 June 1772* 1846-8; crayon, pencil and chalk on paper with linen backing 100 x 200 cm. Alexander Turnbull Library.
Figure 11. Joseph Banks’ house-front, diagram by Bruce Godward. Hocken Library.
Figure 12. John Webber 1752-1793; *A chief of the Sandwich Islands* 1787; oil on canvas; 147.3 x 114.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK1, National Library of Australia.
Figure 14: Rex Nan Kivell, 1950s. Portrait photograph by James Mortimer. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 15. Rex Nan Kivell handing over his collection to Senator the Hon. Sir Alister McMullin, President of the Senate, at a ceremony at Australia House, London, 16 January 1959. National Library of Australia.
Figure 16. Photograph of Rex Nan Kivell, Richard Smart, Mrs Ethelbert White and Ethelbert White, c. 1920s, from Rex Nan Kivell’s album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 17. Cyril Power 1872-1951; *Whence and Whither*; colour linocut; 310 x 242 mm. Auckland Art Gallery, gift of Rex Nan Kivell, 1953.
Figure 18. Paul Nash 1889-1946; Mansions of the Dead 1932; pencil and watercolour on paper, 578 x 394 mm. Tate Gallery T03204, purchased 1981.
Figure 19. Paul Nash 1889-1946; *Swanage* c. 1936; Pencil, watercolour and photographic collage on paper; 400 x 581 mm; Tate Gallery, T01771, purchased 1973.
Figure 20. Christopher Wood 1901-1930; The Yellow Man 1930; oil; 20” x 24”. Collection of Sir Binsley Ford CBE. Ingleby, 1995, pl. 30.
Figure 21. Christopher Wood 1901-1930; *Zebra and Parachute* 1930; oil; 18.25" x 21.75". Private collection. Ingleby, 1995, pl. 51.
Figure 22. Christopher Wood 1901-1930; Tiger and Arc de Triomphe 1930; oil on cardboard; 18.25” x 21.75”; The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.
Figure 23. Max Ernst 1891-1976; *The Entire City* 1934; oil on paper laid on canvas; 502 x 613 mm. Tate Gallery N05289, purchased with assistance from the Knapping Fund 1941.
Figure 24. Edward Burra 1905-1976; *Soldiers at Rye* 1941; gouache, watercolour and ink wash on paper; 1022 x 2070 mm; Tate Gallery N05377, presented by Studio 1942.
Figure 25. Jankel Adler 1895-1949; *The Mutilated* 1942-3; oil on canvas; 864 x 1118 mm. Tate Gallery T00372, presented by Robert Strauss 1960.
Figure 26. Michael Ayrton 1921-1975; *The Temptation of St Anthony* 1942-3; oil on wood; 581 x 752 mm; Tate Gallery T03611, purchased 1983.
Figure 28. Francis Bacon 1909-1992; *Painting* 1946; oil and tempera on canvas; 198 x 132 cm; Museum of Modern Art, New York (Purchase Fund) 1948.
Figure 29. Chaïm Soutine 1893-1943; Landscape at Céret c. 1920-1; oil on canvas; 559 x 838 mm; Tate Gallery T00692, purchased 1964.
Figure 30. Henri Matisse 1869-1954; *The Red Studio* 1911; oil on canvas; 181 x 219.1 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Figure 31. Patrick Heron 1920-1999; *Boats at Night* 1947; oil on wood; 450 x 495 mm. Tate Gallery T06554, presented by the National Art Collections Fund 1992.
Figure 32. Patrick Heron 1920-1999; *Vertical: January 1956* 1956; oil on hardboard; 2438 x 1219 mm. Tate Gallery T06744, purchased 1993.
Figure 33. Rex Nan Kivell and Harry Tatlock Miller at the Redfern Gallery, 1957. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 34. Sir Sidney Nolan 1917-1992; *Inland Australia* 1950; oil on hardboard; 1219 x 1524 mm. Tate Gallery N05993, purchased 1951.
Figure 35. Alan Reynolds b.1926; *Summer: Young September's Cornfield* 1954; oil on board; 1022 x 1549 mm. Tate Gallery T00105, presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1956.
Figure 36. Page from Rex Nan Kivell’s album with photograph of one of Graham Sutherland’s studies for *Christ in Glory*. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 37. Ceri Richards 1903-1971; *The Pursuit* 1949; colour lithograph; 410 x 540 mm. Dunedin Public Art Gallery, gift of Rex Nan Kivell, 1953.
Figure 38. Peter Cochrane, Rex Nan Kivell, unidentified man, Mizouni Nouari with work by Utrillo, Redfern Gallery, c. 1950s. Photograph from Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 40. Detail of photograph by Alec Murray from *The Queen*, 25 November 1958, showing Bryan Kneale and Charles Laughton with Kneale’s portrait of Laughton, and portrait of Rex Nan Kivell. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.
Figure 41. Detail of portrait of Rex Nan Kivell by Bryan Kneale [1957], reproduced in *The Studio*, February 1957.
Figure 42. Bryan Kneale b. 1930; Portrait of Rex de C. Nan Kivell 1960; oil on composition board; 127 x 71.2 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK9530, National Library of Australia.
Figure 43. Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp 1594-c. 1651; *Portrait of Abel Tasman, his wife and daughter* [1637]; oil on canvas; 106.7 x 132.1 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK3, National Library of Australia.
Figure 44. Robert Park 1812-1870. *Natives of Ahuriri, Hawkes Bay, alive in 1851* [1851]; watercolour; 25 x 35.2 cm; attributed to Robert Park. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK203, National Library of Australia.
Figure 45. William Strutt, 1825-1915; *Hare Pomare, his wife Harriet and infant son Albert Victor, and a Maori chieftain who accompanied them to England* November 1863; oil; 28 cm (circular). Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia.
Figure 46. Sir William Beechey 1753-1839; *Portrait of King George III* [c. 1800]; oil on wood panel; 29.2 x 23.9 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6229, National Library of Australia.
Figure 47. Mary Ann Musgrave, fl. 1821-1847; Portrait of William Nan Kivell [c. 1840]; oil on canvas; 150 x 71 cm; attribution by NLA Pictorial Section. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK4397, National Library of Australia.
Figure 48. H. Ainsworth; *Man of the island of Nukahiwa, Marquesas group* [c. 1820]; oil on canvas; 53.1 x 43.4 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2649, National Library of Australia.
Figure 49. M. Jilt; *Queensland native with tribal decorations* [c. 1860]; oil on canvas; 76.5 x 51.3 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK3646, National Library of Australia.
Figure 50. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; Portrait of Bungaree, a native of New South Wales, with Fort Macquarie, Sydney Harbour, in background [c. 1826]; oil on canvas; 68.5 x 50.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK118, National Library of Australia.
Figure 51. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; *Desmond, a N.S. Wales chief painted for a rarobb [i.e. corroboree] or native dance* [1826?]; watercolour; 25.7 x 17.5 cm. Rex Nan Kivel Collection NK12/61, National Library of Australia.
Figure 52. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; *Amoko, a New Zealand Girl* [1827?]; watercolour; 19.1 x 18.1 cm; Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/88, National Library of Australia.
Figure 53. Augustus Earle 1793-1838; A native of the Island of Tucopa [i.e. Tikopia] [1827?]; watercolour; 24.8 x 22.2 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK12/90, National Library of Australia.
Figure 54. Charles Meryon 1821-1868; Toma Keke, chef de tribu de la Nouvelle Zélande 1846; charcoal; 47 x 35 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK127, National Library of Australia.
Figure 55. Paul Gauguin 1848-1903; *Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ* [1889]; oil; 38 x 46 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Figure 56. Rex Nan Kivell at 'El Farah', Tangier, 1972. Rex Nan Kivell Album. MS4000, National Library of Australia.