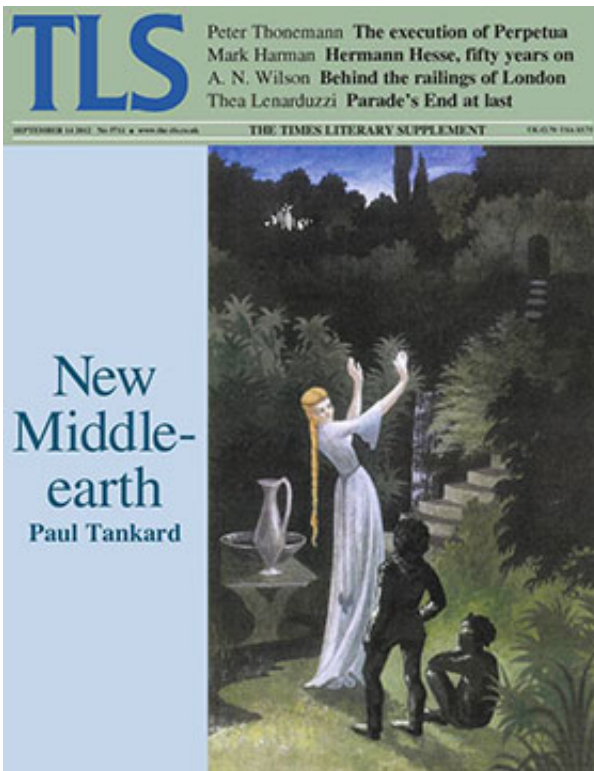


# Previously undiscovered 'Lord of the Rings' illustrations unearthed by literary researcher

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A University of Otago literary researcher has uncovered some hitherto unknown paintings and drawings for the *Lord of the Rings* that the book's famous author, the late J.R.R. Tolkien, had believed best depicted the scenes in his un-illustrated novel.

University of Otago English Department senior lecturer and researcher Dr Paul Tankard believes that [correspondence](#) he has uncovered between the painter, Mary Fairburn and the late Tolkien show that the author would likely have chosen her drawings to illustrate his novel had it ever been rendered as an illustrated edition.

The author was famously known to believe that illustrations did "little good" to stories of the fairy-tale kind – but the work of the Australian artist, now aged 78 and living in Australia, made him reconsider.

Dr Tankard's literary detective work is featured as the cover-story of this month's prestigious *Times Literary Supplement* printed in London.

The Australian-born Dr Tankard says he learned about the existence of some of the drawings, at least nine in total, because the widowed artist lived in the same country town near Melbourne as his relatives. He went to visit her and when she showed him her letters from Tolkien he decided to follow the thread, locating her letters to Tolkien, with the help and permission of The Tolkien Estate.



The correspondence, in 1968, showed that Tolkien had praised the illustrations and that if he could have produced an illustrated edition of his novel, then these would be the pictures most apt to show the scenes in the book as he imagined them.

Many artists submitted pictures to Tolkien, but however he liked them, he usually thought them "bad as illustrations."

Dr Tankard hopes Ms Fairburn will finally get the recognition she deserves. Her impressions of the novel were never published, and she has experienced times in her life of extreme financial hardship.

"I'm delighted for her – she really deserves recognition for her artwork. It is hugely important and means a lot to her that Tolkien liked them so much he changed his mind about whether his famous story could ever be illustrated," he says.

Dr Tankard is becoming quite the literary detective of the Otago English Department. Last year, the Times Literary Supplement profiled his work tracking down a lost transcript of a television interview with celebrated British writer C.S. Lewis.

Provided by University of Otago

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