



The Newsletter of the North Wales & North West Region

New year, New Binding project

We kick off our new year of bookbinding activity with Kathy Abbott's on-line stub binding workshop. It is fully booked, and Kathy will be posting out materials shortly to all those fortunate enough to secure a place. However there are no number restrictions on our **2025 Regional Binding Project** that we will officially launch at the AGM on Saturday 8 February at Kelsall Community Centre. And we do want *everyone* to participate by creating a binding of your choice for our chosen set book. So: no competition, no judging, each of us binding however we wish. The set book will be Barry Clark's recently published history of the Arts and Crafts movement in Manchester (more details [here](#)). Comprising of 14 sections, printed on a coated matt 130gsm paper (Arctic Volume, details [here](#)), it will be available folded, collated, cut to size and ready for sewing; £10 per copy. The cover of the bound book will also be available. Can anyone recall when we last had a regional binding project? Did you participate? Share your memories with newsletter readers.

AGMs are always an opportunity to look back and reflect on the previous year's activities. As well as an illustrated review of our 50th anniversary year, there will be mini-displays around the hall of our work in 2024 - Kelsall workshop makes, our Anniversary Day, Portico talks and workshop projects, our four exhibitions at various libraries, as well as our demo days at Manchester Central Library. Maybe even an anniversary key ring and badge to purchase! And in the afternoon, as well as launching our Binding Project, **Glenn Malkin** will share his approach to **Binding the Booker** (winner!) in an illustrated talk. For a sneak preview click [here](#) and [here](#)! There will also be a raffle with prizes. An AGM **plus** indeed!

Regional newsletter changes afoot . . .

The first draft of this para read: *This will be the last monthly NW2 regional newsletter for a while. The February edition, as usual, will be the Annual Report and thereafter we go quarterly.* However I'm not sure. Your editor does need a break from the treadmill of generating up to six pages of copy every month. This issue for example there was no copy sent in; I've managed four/five pages. Yet I feel a newsletter should be frequent with newsy and topical content. And in any case we now have the revived national newsletter on a quarterly basis. So maybe we continue with a monthly edition, but shorter . . . AND maybe more members could contribute? It doesn't have to be a perfect piece of writing - there's no such thing, and in any case I will and do edit. It doesn't have to be a written piece, but maybe sharing info on an upcoming event? If you feel that you could play a part in maintaining our regional newsletter please do have a chat to discuss what you may be able to contribute, with no commitment other than what you feel able to offer. Something to talk about at the AGM?

And a quick reminder of events following the AGM . . .

- 08/03: Tanja Bolenz: **The Three-Piece Slot Book**
 - 12/04: Dominic Riley: **Tudor style leather covering**
 - 10 & 11/05: Glenn Malkin: **Making an Off-Boards (or three-part) Binding**
 - 14/06: Lori Sauer: **The Magic Box**
 - 12/07: Lynne Connolly: **Cyanotypes**
 - Wed 06/08: Mark Allen: **Visit to the North East Wales Archives and the Gladstone Library**
 - 13/09: **Our Autumn Gathering** (demos and talks) and a display of members' responses to our 2025 Binding Project
 - 11/10: Barry Clark: **Creating Multiples**
 - 08/11: Ruth Brown: **Creating your own book cloth**
 - 06/12: **Christmas lunch / social**
- See the full programme for details. Book with programme organiser Sue Wood (swoosal@btinternet.com)

Irish conservation project in the news

A few days ago the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland ([PRONI](#)) announced that work has started to preserve and digitize one of the oldest paper documents on the island of Ireland. The ecclesiastical register, dating back approximately 650 years to the medieval period, belonged to the former Archbishop of Armagh, Milo Sweteman. These church registers contain copies or draft documents prepared by the chancery office of the archbishops, which includes among other things legal papers, episcopal letters, letters exchanged, receipts, and testaments. The Sweteman register dates from 1361 to 1380. Similar work has already been undertaken on the later Archbishop John Swayne's register from 1418 to 1438; view the digitized version along with the translation summary [here](#).

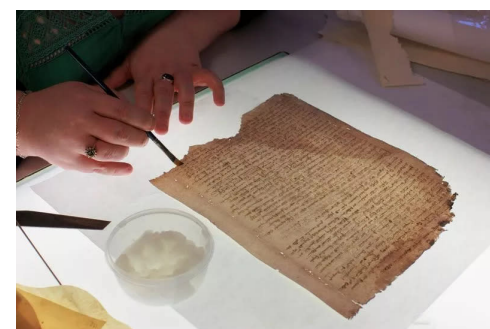
The conservation process for Swayne's register included the removal of 17th-century bindings, gentle washing of paper folios, and consolidating each piece with a weak gelatine solution. Tears and losses in the paper were repaired with Japanese kozo paper before rebinding the books in 17th-century binding material. Work on Sweteman's register is partly to correct damage done in earlier conservation efforts. Tracing paper had been inserted between the pages; it was acidic, accelerating the corrosion of the ink and the paper. The tracing paper is being removed with a specialist gel followed by a low-pressure wash. Kozo paper and wheat starch paste repairs applied to Swayne's register are again being used.

Sarah Graham has commented that the use of paper in Ireland at this time was extremely unusual, parchment was still the preferred writing material. The watermarks show that it is Italian and Spanish in origin, probably imported by the archbishops during their European journeys.

Ireland's historical archive at the Public Record Office of Ireland in Dublin was largely destroyed by fire at the start of the Irish Civil War in June 1922. PRONI is part of the [Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland](#) partnership aiming to partially recreate an all-Ireland digital archive.



Sarah Graham is Head of Conservation at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and an accredited book and paper conservator. She graduated from Lincoln University and was an intern at the National Archives of Ireland and Glasgow University. Sarah went on to be a project conservator at Glasgow before moving to The London Archives to work on their Anglo-Jewish collections. She returned to Ireland in 2018 and was book conservator at Maynooth University before taking up her current role at PRONI in Belfast.



Ripe for conservation . . . or not?

A conservator's dilemma? This copy of Dickens' *David Copperfield* has been through a lot. Captain Scott's men read it aloud every night while they were trapped in an Antarctic ice cave. Stained with black fingerprints from the seal blubber lamps that were used to light the ice cave, the 1910 edition of the Dickens novel still bears a faint whiff of smoke and fish. It was one of three books that a group of Scott's men used for entertainment while they were stranded in the ice cave for seven months; they read aloud a chapter a night for 60 nights to keep up morale.

Scott and his group reached the South Pole but failed to make it back to camp; the group in the cave survived the expedition, but never reached the South Pole. They brought the novel back to New Zealand with them, from where it made its way, eventually, to the [Charles Dickens Museum](#) in London, where it is a star attraction in a forthcoming exhibition*.



* maybe take a look at a previous exhibition at the museum: [Beautiful Books](#), [click here](#)

A pictorial report of our new-look Christmas Social



Storm Darragh may have struck that weekend but it was not enough to deter twenty regional members from trekking their way to Cheshire to enjoy our Christmas social at Kelsall Community Centre. For those who couldn't get there, you can see we got off to a fine bookbinders' start: folding paper of course! Making our own Christmas Hats, with decorative papers and designs supplied by Catherine. Tea, coffee, mulled wine and festive snacks added to the mood.



We had hoped to have a decorative paper demo from Simeon: Storm Darragh put paid to his visit. However we had two small making projects from Barry (*below*). Stocking fillers? Or is it that many of us love taking ourselves back to primary school making things to take home to delight(?) our parents. The Turkish Map Fold (*left*) came alive with the beautiful art work supplied by Val. And *right* we all made a mini hand-held clip board using up off cuts and once-used A4 paper. And the only tools needed were our hands (well, plus a brush and a pot of pva).



Meanwhile Jeanne was preparing the hall for our Christmas Quiz that she and Catherine had devised.



Some of us had naively provided a photo of ourselves at a young age. These became the first of five rounds, as friends attempted to spot the resemblance of our current self in a photo taken some fifty years ago! And that was perhaps the easiest of the five rounds in our *simple general knowledge quiz*. Really? Lots of fun as we cooperated and competed to get somewhere near a respectable score.

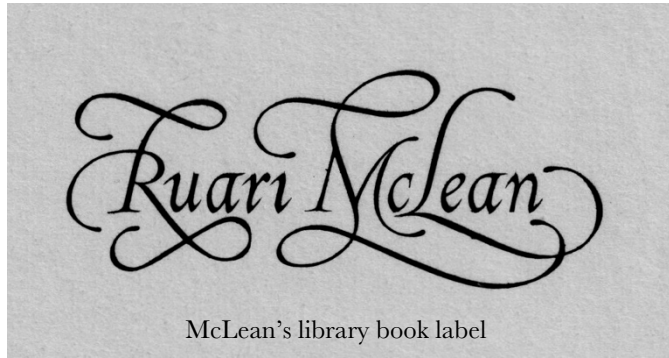


We were well-served with lunch by Alison's Country Kitchen. Then some more time to ponder on those quiz questions (*left*) before the winning team gloated over their success. Time to pack up (*right*) and brave the elements and journey home.



Spotlight on:

One of the delights of being the newsletter editor is that members send all sorts of snippets that soon have me scurrying away into my library, or onto the internet, to discover more. One such moment occurred during the Christmas festivities. Peter Criddle e-mailed this extract (*opposite*) from the autobiography of typographer Ruari McLean. It's both a dismal and amusing piece. Now, I know McLean largely for his books on Victorian bindings (*see below right*), but it didn't take long to discover that he was one of the most important typographical designers of the twentieth century. Here's his story.



McLean's library book label

As part of my education in HMSO affairs, I was taken to visit their main printing establishments. The biggest factory I was taken to see in 1970 was a newly-opened works at Gateshead, on Tyneside, where most of the country's telephone directories were printed, using the latest computer-assisted technology. Paper went in on enormous reels at one end and came out as finished directories at the other. At the end of a long sort of chute, on which the printed sheets were folded and then bound, finished directories were being unloaded and stacked on trolleys by men with rolled-up sleeves. The books were heavy, and they came off fast. I observed to my guide that these men were obviously picked as being particularly brawny. Oh no, he replied, actually they are all fully trained bookbinders. As bookbinders, they earn about £40 a week, but as labourers, about £80. (Figures quoted from memory, but facts basically accurate).

Ruari McLean was apprenticed in the printing trade at the Shakespeare Head Press where he worked on limited edition fine books. He worked for various publishers/printers in Germany and in the UK, later moving to Lund Humphries based in Yorkshire. He was greatly influenced by the work of Jan Tschichold, the German typographer; and later wrote his biography.

Post-war, McLean worked for Penguin Books but soon he was freelance - designing books, book jackets, magazines including the *Eagle* a new boys' comic. He was an adviser to the new *Observer* magazine; Typographic Advisor to HMSO 1966-80; a trustee of the National Library of Scotland; and external examiner at many Art Colleges. His scholarly work on the history of typography culminated in the much-praised *Thames and Hudson Manual of Typography* (1980). In 1969 he had written the standard text on *Magazine Design*. He was awarded a CBE for services to typography in 1973.

In later life he returned to Scotland and re-located to Mull where the local diving club benefited from his considerable talent as a cartoonist.

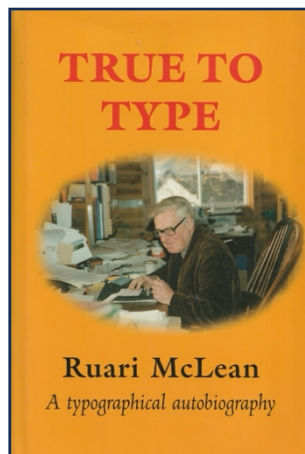
[Click here for his Guardian obituary](#)

McLean published his pioneering *Victorian Book Design & Colour Printing* in 1963, following it with *Victorian Publishers' Bindings in Cloth and Leather* (1973) and *Victorian Publishers' Bindings in Paper* (1983), all based on his own large collection, and all copiously illustrated and designed by himself.

RUARI McLEAN VICTORIAN PUBLISHERS' BOOK-BINDINGS



IN CLOTH & LEATHER



McLean's autobiography *True to Type* (Oak Knoll Press, 2000) has been described as *anecdotal, engaging, laddish and sometimes a bit chaotic and unusually, true to the man*. His second book of memoirs *Half Seas Under: Seaman, Submariner, Canoeist* focused on his decorated secret service work in world war two. More [here](#) on that. A third, said to be about *girls*, was never published . . . and maybe his reputation is the better for it?



Nice logo above of Bath-based bookbinder [Maria Kay](#) (possibly not an SoB member), that has come to your editor's attention over Christmas - a relative, determined to find me a book-related gift, opted for this fully functioning mini book tree decoration found on Etsy.



Poster seen recently at a National Trust second-hand bookshop

The Committee for 2024

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