



The Newsletter of the North Wales & North West Region

Our collective 'show and tell' was the focus for our AGM and Spring Gathering held at Kelsall Community Centre on Saturday 8 February. Thirty of us chatted and mingled, exploring the various displays around the hall, recollecting our Kelsall and Portico workshop makes as well as our exhibitions / talks / demos in Manchester as part of our 50th anniversary year. The formal AGM noted healthy numbers for 2024 - more members, and more money in the bank, at year end than year beginning. Existing officers were all willing to continue, and were duly re-elected. There was time for discussion about the new-look Christmas Social (much liked), an idea for sub-regional Whats App groups (let's give it a go), and plenty of ideas for more outreach work (volunteers please!). The committee will follow up on all points raised. Many members donated prizes for the raffle which added a frisson of excitement to the day, and the takings contributed significantly to the cost of the hall hire. We were particularly pleased to welcome our national chair Sally Dore, and Gary Coleman - youngest son of our founder and first president John Coleman. Gary, and his wife Tracey, brought along some of his Dad's bindings, a trophy and certificate awarded in recognition of significant SoB service, as well as the student register when John taught at Fielden Park College. It was John's teaching there, apprentices and leisure binders, that inspired him to establish the society in 1974. All in all a fitting conclusion to 2024 and our golden anniversary celebrations.

New member David Scanlon so enjoyed his first outing with us, the AGM / Spring Gathering, that he penned the following:

OVERWHELMED IN THANKS

I can now only say thank you, so,
In these ways, my ways, my poetry -
I speak now of yesterday's joys!
Of smiling moments shared;
Of aching moments laughed;
Of your overwhelming welcome!

Friendship is always within, beyond
All other ways, our ways, our words -
So shout now for all of life's joys!
Your twin bundles that bind;
Your partnership at peace;
Of overwhelming opportunities!

I can now only say thank you, so,
In these ways, my ways, my poetry -
I speak now of this moment of joy!
In remembered partnerships;
In the excitement of futures:
Present to overwhelming love!

Read how David came to bookbinding and the SoB in his *My Bookbinding Beginnings* piece on p6&7.



One of the many AGM display tables - this one focusing on founding member John Coleman.

Stop Press: Kathy Abbott's on-line Stub Binding workshop is to be repeated. Our first workshop of the year was so over-subscribed that Kathy has offered to run it again. The date is **Saturday 29 November**. Same workshop (see **2025 programme** for details), same cost (£30 plus £13 for materials). It will get fully booked, so do get booked in with Sue, swoosal@btinternet.com. Two of our newer members - Nicci Riley and Emily Macaulay - attended the January workshop (their first with us) and report back on p3&4.

Glenn Malkin's Booker binding is a winner!



In his first year of binding the Booker shortlist Glenn Malkin has bound the winning novel: *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey (Jonathan Cape, 2023). At our Spring Gathering Glenn took us through his process: *the book follows the thoughts, emotions and actions of the crew of six aboard the International Space Station as they repeatedly circle the Earth over a twenty four hour period. The design represents the sixteen orbits they make during this time. Each circle on the cover suggests a different abstracted view of part of our planet as the space station crosses our globe, set against a background of our own galaxy. The doublures feature a representation of Carl Sagan's 'Pale Blue Dot', a view of our own planet from a distant spaceship and which highlights the author's vivid exploration of our own insignificance in the cosmic timeline.*



The book is sewn onto four linen tapes, trimmed and edge decorated with acrylics and sprinkled palladium leaf. The hand-sewn endbands are silk. It is bound in full dark blue Pentland goatskin, airbrushed with black and white acrylic inks. The leather inlaid circles are surrounded by channels painted with blue acrylic and are decorated with leather dyes and acrylics including craquelé details. The doublures are edge-to-edge airbrushed Pentland leather with an inlaid dot of pale blue. The endpapers are dyed spiderweb Lokta paper. The book is presented in a bespoke wooden box lined with suede, with a lifting ribbon and a decorative leather title panel on the lid. For more info and images [click here](#).



Our Spring Gathering also saw the launch of our **2025 NW2 Binding Project**. The set book was available in sheets, now all sold. We look forward to the display of members' bindings at our Autumn Gathering on 13 September.



Out and about?

§ **Enfolded Journeys** is a touring exhibition of new artists' books relating to travel, displacement, geographies and borders, and migration. Launched at [The Leeds Library](#) [fascinating, worth a look in its own right] 18-25 March, it moves to Appleby-in-Westmorland 3-14 June and Doncaster (May-July 2026). Whilst in Leeds it coincides with the [Pages Artists' Book Fair](#) at Leeds Art Gallery and Central Library (21&22 March).

§ The **Friends of the Blackden Trust's** annual lecture on 5 April will be given by our own Dominic Riley. The fine binding of Cheshire author Alan Garner's Booker Prize shortlisted novel *Treacle Walker* will feature, as well as Dominic's reflections on his life in bookbinding. More details by [clicking here](#).

§ The annual exhibition of the [Society of Wood Engravers](#) (SWE) featuring over 120 prints comes to the Kirkby Gallery in Prescot, 6 May-15 August. Since its founding in 1920 the SWE has championed the practice of wood engraving by holding annual exhibitions to celebrate the vision and versatility of contemporary engravers. Running alongside is an artists' book exhibition [Letting in the Light](#).

Or, staying in?

The BBC recently featured the making of hardback books, at Clays of Bungay in Suffolk, in their series **Inside the Factory**. It's a fascinating insight to the modern mass production of books. [Catch it here](#).

Not your thing? If you missed our chair's talk on our own story - **50 years of the SoB** - it is now available to view in the members area of the SoB website, [click here](#).



Kathy Abbott's on-line workshop for us in January was heavily oversubscribed. However three of our newer members had been very quick off the mark to secure a place. Here Nicci Riley and Emily Macaulay each share their first experience of an NW2 workshop

Nicci writes: At Ludlow Bookbinder's we often get asked by customers to bind their art work, or as an artist they want pages to lay flat in their sketchbooks. I knew **stub bindings** could achieve this but had never had a chance to explore the structure. This online opportunity to discover more about the structure with the prodigious Kathy Abbott was more than perfect. I was so excited to participate in one of Kathy's workshops and it did not disappoint. It was great to finally put names to faces from the society and meet other bookbinders, and the array of different interests that bring them to bookbinding. Kathy gave us an overview of the uses of stub bindings, fashions and examples of bindings, partially made, so we could see how the structure worked and could be used. I didn't expect there to be so many uses, and was surprised that it could be used for a book printed in the wrong grain to allow the book to fall naturally, rounding and backing the stub rather than the book block. Attempting to round and back a book block with the wrong grain, beating it into submission, is not advisable says Kathy: it will only damage the structure of the paper and crush the fibres leading to an unsatisfactory result. It is these nuggets of bookbinding wisdom that were littered throughout the workshop, a massive boon to the likes of me, a relatively newbie binder.

Kathy made it clear that the strength of the book is in the sewing. This is the foundation of your book and therefore it is important to get it right - the right thickness of thread, the right size needle and awl. Large holes pricked with a cumbersome awl, she explained, will allow the thread to wiggle about in the hole and increase the risk of tears, eventually compromising the integrity of the book. I will be investing in a pin vice for my needles to make sewing holes from now on. After sewing our stubs to our sections we had an insightful explanation on how to determine and create the right amount of swell in the spine for rounding and backing. The final part was to sew our sections onto tapes. I achieved the dreaded Weaver's knot, which I never got the hang of even when I was a weaver, and understood the kettle stitch in more detail and the importance of not over tightening them.

This workshop gave more than just what the label said on the tin. I feel I have learnt so much: not just how to make a stub binding, but more about all the elements of bookbinding that I never have time to explore at Ludlow Bookbinders. It will enrich all of my practice and enjoyment of making books.



Nicci displaying to camera her completed stub binding

Nicci adds: My road to bookbinding has been a very long and winding road. I have a background in textiles and I love books. I have also trained and worked as a Youth and Community Worker specialising in delivering the arts. As part of my own artistic practice, I started making basic book structures or repurposing old books for sketching, journalling and design work. I have a City and Guilds in weaving, spinning, dying and was a member of the Lancs and Lakes Guild for 5 years until I moved back to Shropshire in 2008 to bring up my son. Following my study of fashion / pattern cutting / design, I found a passionate interest in structures, surface decoration and fibre manipulation. I thought to develop my textiles practice in relation to books somehow by following a Masters in Craft at Hereford, but on the day I handed in my notice for my youth work role, I saw the job at Ludlow Bookbinders and applied. I have been working for Ludlow Bookbinders' sister company ***The Index Bindery***, for 3 years now. The Index Bindery uses up off-cuts from Ludlow Bookbinders to make into stationery to sell, along with bespoke short runs of books, thesis bindings, and book repairs. I find textiles and bookbinding a very neat fit. Many of the skills are transferable or overlap. I love it! My current passion is English embroidered books, and I'm about to embark on a goldwork embroidery diploma course, so that I can reproduce some of the historic techniques on books. Finally, I think I have found my niche!



Emily writes: I am a graphic designer and bookbinder based up in north Cumbria and I joined SoB last year. Kathy Abbott's stub binding workshop is the first I have signed up for, not for the lack of intrigue at others but Kelsall is a fair distance from me and a busy calendar often keeps me studio bound. Offering some workshops online is wonderful for those of us that live rurally, what a luxury to be taught from another part of the country whilst sitting at home. I definitely missed out on the pleasure of chatting to fellow north west bookbinders face to face, but I did get a tiny glimpse of the varied and creative worlds they inhabit as the collection of people sat in their studios or at kitchen tables included illustrators, photographers, conservators, and enthusiastic bookbinders.

I spend **my time at work** binding plenty of books for clients. Usually single section structures with fold-out pages to show off the varied work I am sent. It's been a while since I've done any formal training, so even though I bind hundreds of books I describe myself accurately as a novice. And even though I was introduced to bookbinding a long time ago by a great tutor at Brighton University, I accurately describe myself as self-taught. I frequently make stuff up or learn new techniques as a project requires them. I love considering what a book can be in all its forms, and being self-employed allows a certain amount of creative freedom. However, I also know I am likely to have picked up bad habits and forgotten some of the core skills; it is a treat to have a whole day of focussed time to learn how to make something new.

A few weeks before the workshop a mysterious package arrives in the post, it is carefully wrapped in brown paper with a warning not to open until the workshop. When we finally get to open the parcel it includes a carefully curated selection of materials to make our book, the paper is cut to size, as is the thread, which is labelled with tiny handwriting to help us distinguish between the two we are to use. This one package contains years' worth of experience!

After personal introductions, and an introduction to the varied uses of the stub binding, we spend the next few hours carefully binding our books. Along the way I am reminded of skills I have forgotten or am introduced to new ones. We learn how to fold paper properly, starting in the middle of the sheet and pushing out to the edges so we don't stretch the paper fibres. We learn to carefully fold our sections, with the first sheet creased hard with a folder, the second with a finger, and the third soft so that they slot together well. I learn new ways to measure, to stagger knots to reduce bulk and what to do if you get blood on paper. I learn you can sharpen a bone folder with sandpaper. I learn about why thread is numbered as it is, and I will always remember the expert advice for pricking sections. All this invaluable knowledge implanted in my brain whilst focusing on making a single book.

The workshop concludes with the concertina stub variation. Seemingly there are many variations to stub binding, so we end with an invitation to discover more. Kathy's own book, *Bookbinding: A step-by-step guide*, has been sitting on my bookshelf for a while now, it has been joined by my beautiful stub bound block. I need no further reminder to go through the projects; who knows what other wonderful tips and tricks I will gain along the way? I will definitely be signing up to as many future workshops as life allows. My first workshop was a wonderful introduction to the society.



Books in the news . . . Books in the news . . .



[Friends of the Nations' Libraries](#) has successfully raised the £90,000 needed to buy a stunning 13th-century Bible, illuminated by the famed Sarum Master. It has been donated to Salisbury Cathedral Library, where it is *now on display* (until 20 March). Measuring just 17cm by 11.5cm, the book is an early example of a portable Bible. Anne Dutton, the Cathedral librarian, has said: *the volume is clearly intended for private use. It's too small to have been intended to be used in church services. It's an expensive book, and would have been commissioned by a wealthy individual.* The **[Library](#)**, founded in 1445, is one of the earliest purpose-built library rooms in England.

The Sarum Master was one of the greatest artists of his time, a manuscript illuminator working in the mid-13th century. He led a large workshop at a time when no other cities, apart from London and Oxford, are known to have supported this scale of book production. The Bible is one of only six manuscripts definitively attributed to the Sarum Master. The artist is known for his intricate and highly stylised illustrations that were characteristic of Gothic art. The work includes detailed images of saints, biblical scenes, and illuminated initials, with vibrant colours, flowing lines, and elaborate gold leaf.

For more detail, and images, visit the Sotheby's [website here](#). The binding is described as: *generally in fine condition. It was sewn on six bands and bound in nondescript 'brown calf' by 1930, and in 'modern vellum' by 1974, rebound c1990 by James Brockman in wood boards covered with white pigskin with blind fillets and two clasps; in a fitted black leather box, with a spine-title in gilt capitals: 'Biblia Latina / Sarum Master / England 1250'.*



Meanwhile, closer to home the **[University of Manchester Rylands conservation team](#)** have been involved in a project to conserve and digitise eight volumes of early financial ledgers. These financial records not only reveal how the Manchester Guardian newspaper was partly funded by the profits of slavery but also enhance our understanding of Manchester's industrial past and the role of cotton in the city's fortune. Rylands Conservator Amber Russell found that many of the bindings were in significant disrepair. Her blog continues: *The ledger in the worst condition was Guardian Ledger 270. This was also the largest of the ledgers, it had a missing spine, both boards were loose, and it was heavily water-damaged, with extensive mould growth . . . The greatest challenge lay in the ledger's sewing, which was found to be entirely disintegrated on the spine. With 987 pages in total, each page was at risk of being lost if the book's structure was not properly stabilized. The ledger was entirely disbound. The process began by removing the deteriorated spine material and unpicking the damaged sewing from each signature. Only 12 of the 60 signatures retained their original stitching. With each page carefully freed, the team worked to clean the remaining soot and protect the most fragile signatures with Japanese tissue guards. Once the signatures were ready, the ledger was resewn with conservation-grade thick sewing thread, on new tapes, using an all-along format for added durability. The spine was reinforced with layers of Japanese tissue panels, linen strips, aerocotton, and handmade paper, ensuring both strength and flexibility. The boards were then carefully reattached. This restored structure allowed for the ledger to be handled safely and efficiently, facilitating its digitisation and future use. [Click here](#) for more on these 200 year-old ledgers.*

Cover illustration of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* translated into Russian by Vladimir Nabokov, Berlin 1923



The Guardian recently reported: *thousands of letters, photographs, illustrations and books from one of the largest [private Lewis Carroll collections](#) have been donated to the UK by an American philanthropist. The gift has been made to Christ Church, University of Oxford, where Carroll lectured and where he met Alice Liddell, the inspiration for Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Highlights of the Jon A Lindseth donation are [on display](#) at the Christ Church Upper Library, until 17 April.



My Bookbinding Beginnings: David Scanlon

Very soon after revising our regional newsletter, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we regularly featured this **My Bookbinding Beginnings** column. Each month we invited a member to reflect on how they got started in bookbinding, and perhaps how they discovered the Society of Bookbinders. It was a great way to continue to get to know each other when we could not meet due to lockdowns. It was paused in 2024 as we looked back on our collective beginnings as a society in its 50th anniversary year. With a welcome influx of new members the column is back! David Scanlon joined last year and came to his first regional meeting last month. Here he shares his bookbinding beginnings . . .

It is always an interesting reflection to answer, how did you stumble into us on this day? Where to start? First I should say I am a poet, a publisher and a fool. A fool to have believed, in my professional work in the pharmaceutical industry, that the digital world can solve the world's problems and give more joy than the making of things with your hands; creating things of beauty from truth-speaking through the love of making will never be replaced. No machine can ever replace the joy of making and creating! But maybe joy from work is no longer expected?

First I discovered the joy of making with poetry and the creation of small artefacts (booklets, cards, and letters) for friends and family. The joy of turning words into poems, poems into collections and both into things is a wonderful feeling. My first collection of poems I hand-made and stitched a hundred copies and gave them to friends and family with a letter thanking them for inspiring me in both life and poetry. As most of my poems are inspired by, as Jung would say, the *Collective Consciousness* of friendship, sharing in this way seemed right. The passion for making books started here, I guess! I received so many wonderful responses but one of my friends, who was with me in Portugal when, in the house of Fernando Pessoa, I discovered I was truly a poet, wrote back with the added gift of an *Ariel Poem* from his mother's collection.

For years I had only shared individual poems in emails. However seeing this beautifully bound booklet from the Curwen Press of a C.K Chesterton poem with illustrations by Diana Murphy (*opposite*) something hooked me even more about making books and booklets. *Ubi Ecclesia* (1929) is Number 21 of the *Ariel Poems* (Faber & Faber, London). Something was planted but time was needed for full germination. I knew *bookbinding* was in my future, I just did not know where to turn! Resources are a-plenty but I wanted something different.

Some years later, after quite a few other twists and turns, I was inspired to take up another project! The *Ariel Poems* are two series of pamphlets that contained illustrated poems published by Faber and Gwyer and later by Faber and Faber. The first series had 38 titles published between 1927 and 1931. The second series, published in 1954, had 8 titles. They were a passion project of *T.S Eliot* and designed to be used a *thank yous* to friends on special occasions. The connection with my own process was clear to me, and it inspired me to write 38 poems as echoes to the originals.

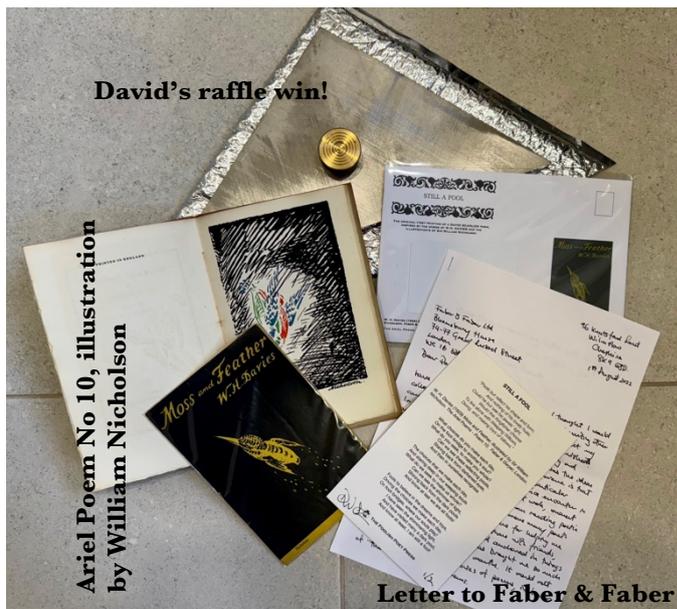
Each numbered hard back *Ariel Poem* pamphlet had an illustrated cover naming the author and illustrator and were signed. Four pages were sewn inside the cover. The frontispiece had another illustration, usually multi-coloured. Following that page was the poem. Many of the famous poets and illustrators of the day contributed to the series. A softback version was also produced. This was the way I wanted to share my poems!



My first attempt at creating something was a single card with the illustration one side and my poem, plus the inspiring line from the original poem, on the other. To do this I also needed to find and collect the original poems!! It took quite a while but once completed, one card with letter was given to my wife. The other, with a letter of thanks, was sent to Faber and Faber. I also published the collection: *The Ariel Poems: An Echo* (The Foolish Poet Press, 2021) [Ed: [click here](#) to view a digital copy].

The first two Ariel pamphlets I made I gave to my mother and mother-in-law. My *Love's Three Pure Moments* was a response to *To My Mother* by Siegfried Sassoon, drawings by Stephen Tennant (Faber & Gwyer, 1928). But full printing and binding still seemed a way away. A chance encounter with a leather artisan in Norfolk lead me to the Society of Bookbinders.

Since retiring from work I have been creating pamphlets, with envelopes, which I give to friends and family as thanks. These contain my own poems, images and artwork plus work on *The Ariel Poems* pamphlets has started. The next few I have made 25 copies, stapled for ease currently! Now, with the inspiration provided at the February gathering and AGM, I can see a way forward to more elaborate making! So I am looking to get even more joy out of making books. Thank you all for inspiring the next step in my making of things. I will certainly be donating for future Raffles after my early success!



For sale: cast iron nipping press (above right) with brass fittings and gilt decoration; manufactured in the late Victorian period by S Mordan & Co of London; positioned on its original, bespoke mahogany stand which has two side flaps and two drawers with working lock and key. The press is 37cm high and the stand is an additional 73cm high; the width of the stand when fully opened is 110cm and when closed, 68cm; the depth is 49cm. A very heavy item estimated to weigh around 80kg and therefore a 2-person lift. It is in fine antique condition and in working order with signs of wear commensurate with its age. Available from Peter Robson, Curiosity House Antiques (Chester), 07770 625532, at an asking price of £400.

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