



The Newsletter of the North Wales & North West Region

And the sun shone . . . and shone . . . and shone . . .

On a glorious sunny July day at Kelsall we were treated to the expertise and enthusiasm of **Mary Thomas** who gave us a fabulous insight into **the magic of Cyanotype**, one of the first forms of camera-less photography. Mary explained that the process was discovered by Sir John Herschel in 1842 and it continues to be used by many artists. The science behind cyanotype stems from the light-sensitive qualities of ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide (available ready-mixed, or the solution can be prepared at home).

Mary provided us with a variety of beautiful papers including some delicate calligraphy paper. She demonstrated the process of coating the papers with the cyanotype solution, using a foam sponge brush. We were reminded that 'less is more' at this stage and off we went to coat our own papers and place them in a dark cupboard to dry. We watched as Mary used a piece of dried coated paper. It was placed on a board and pieces of foliage were positioned onto the paper followed by a piece of glass which was secured on top of the foliage with clips. This was placed outside in the stunning sunshine to allow the UV rays to react with the coated paper.



There was certainly no shortage of UV sunlight as the temperature rose to nearly 30 degrees! We were advised that exposure would take at most four minutes. We watched as Mary's piece changed colour and as soon as the time was up the paper was removed from beneath the glass to be fixed. Washed in cold water to remove the yellow pigment, and then dipped into a tray of water and hydrogen peroxide caused the pigment to become darker and wow! a gorgeous cyanogram was created in a deep prussian blue. After a final rinse in water the work was blotted and left to dry.

Debbie Matthews' workshop review continues on p2 . . .

§ It's back! A national residential event for 2026: It has been confirmed that former Conference organiser Alan Hall has stepped up to run an International SoB Gathering at York University next year, 14/16 August.

§ Meanwhile Sue Wood is busy planning our regional programme for 2026. It will feature an on-line workshop in January, a two-day workshop in June, an Autumn Gathering in September as well as a Christmas Social. If you would like to offer to run a workshop, or have ideas for a workshop topic/tutor do please contact Sue.

§ Our Secretary Jacqueline Payne has now finalised our Local Cluster groups. We cover a wide geographical area so there will be 20 local clusters enabling members to be aware of, and keep in touch with, fellow members living locally. Opt in / opt out of this additional communication channel as you wish.

§ It's not too late to catch the annual exhibition of the Society of Wood Engravers, and a book arts exhibition, *Letting in the Light*, at the [Kirkby Gallery](#), Merseyside. The exhibitions run until 15/8 August respectively.



Mary had prepared a variety of coated papers for the group and off we went to experiment, remembering to keep our papers under cover to avoid exposure from the sunlight. There was also an abundance of materials to use including the most exquisite images which were laser printed on acetate. Within a short period of time there were various mobile phone alarms tinkling away in the background timing the four minute exposure. It was a joy to see the production of a variety of impressive designs - lots of foliage, nature-inspired images, haberdashery and much more.



As if it wasn't enough that we were creating fabulous cyanograms using the dry process, we were later introduced to the wet process creating cyanolumen. We learned about the various types of photography dark room papers and watched as Mary coated one with the cyanotype solution. Whilst it was wet, foliage and other items were placed onto the surface. Cling film was utilised to create texture and also to protect any acetate images which were placed on top of the cling film. Glass was placed over the paper and the exposure was the same as the dry process. These images were fixed by washing in water and then into a rapid photo fixer solution (gloves were necessary at this stage). They were washed again and left to soak for a short time in clean water before blotting and leaving to dry.



Some of the group experimented with toners made from acacia bark or sage to create darker prints on the dried cyanograms. Turmeric was also deployed on some prints as well as a sprinkle of fine sea salt.

By the end of the day we had created a variety of spectacular prints. My mind was racing with the magical process and the endless possibilities. I look forward to using this process in my creative practice. Mary was inspiring, patient, passionate about the process and has a font of knowledge which she generously shared with us. What an amazing day we had, my first at Kelsall and a delight to meet everyone.



Members may recall Jill Sellars' report of her attendance at the SoB/DB Cloth Marbling workshop [1] featured in the last national newsletter. Han Fleet more recently visited [Roger Gretch's](#) Shipley bindery for the last in this series of joint workshops: *Case Binding for Multiples*. Han comments: *Roger provided sewn textblocks, rounded and backed, and he tutored us through the process of making the cases and covers with handmade leather endbands and grooved spine on a quarter leather binding [2]. We also made a flatback cloth binding complete with slipcase from scratch. It was also really interesting to see the layout and design of a working bindery, and I shall be making changes to my amateur setup.*



Graham Moss and the SoB

Graham Moss who died recently after a short illness had a long association with the Society of Bookbinders. Some members have known Graham from the late 1980s when he was an active member of our former North West region. In 1988 he began **Papersafe**, selling archival-quality paper and other bookbinding materials to all at book fairs, workshops etc. A few years later, in 1994, Graham launched his Oldham-based **Incline Press** 'for the reader who collects and the collector who reads'. Incline printed and published **Forwarded and Finished** 'an amusement concerning bookbinders' celebrating the SoB's 21st anniversary in 1995: two hundred sets of sheets were made available to members and their bindings were exhibited at the 21st anniversary conference in Manchester that year. Graham reconnected with the Society and the region following his talk for us at our 2022 regional AGM at Kelsall. He contributed in many ways to our 50th anniversary celebrations. At the York Conference last year the Society awarded Graham its **Cobden-Sanderson Award** for his outstanding contributions to both bookbinding and letterpress printing. Here we share a few photographs showing Graham's recent connections with the SoB.



Incline Press



For our Kelsall 50th anniversary day Graham generously designed and printed this delightful *Keepsake* for us [1] (Jost Amman's 1568 wood engraving, Caslon type, Haddon border ornaments, printed by letterpress on a Glasgow Autovic machine); he provided multiple copies of his memoir *The book, the whole book and nothing but* for our display at Manchester Central Library [2]; and both he and Helen assisted and demonstrated there [3]. Another anniversary event . . . another generous pro bono *Keepsake*, on the occasion of Graham's Cobden-Sanderson Award at York Conference [4]. And below [5], Graham sharing his approach



to printing and binding at the Incline Press at our 2022 AGM. His passion for letterpress, for artists' illustration, and for pattern papers shone through as he explained some of the challenges in binding books with so many 'extras' tucked in, guarded, folded, enveloped . . .



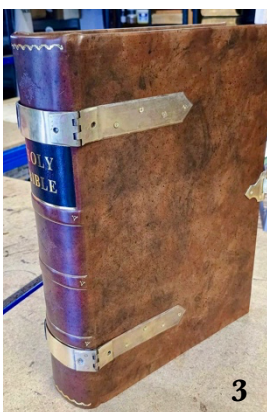
My Bookbinding Beginnings: Phill Woods

Back in 1985, as an artistic and 'crafty' 16 year-old school-leaver, I was offered a place as an apprentice bookbinder on a Youth Training Scheme, at £27.50 per week, with Paul C Delrue [1]. I studied bookbinding with Paul for many years, in his quirky, beautifully Dickensian studio on the city walls in Chester, learning all manner of binding techniques (including gold finishing and gilt edging with the late, great John Coleman). I also assisted Paul with his evening classes and bookbinding teaching retreats around the north west.

After five or six years with Paul, I went into newspaper pre-press production and then on to newspaper printing, where, strangely enough, bookbinding knowledge and dexterity did come in handy. I did also have a couple of years working as an entertainer in the Canary Islands, but most memories of this have (luckily!) been lost in the mists of time.

I worked for a press in Chester and also for The Guardian Press in Manchester's Trafford Park. However in 2006 Chester College became a University and I thought this would be an ideal opportunity to open a bindery specialising in binding theses and dissertations. I bought a Marshall hot foil blocker and lots of other equipment from Les at [Homeward Bound](#) and I opened my business (in North Wales at the time). By 2016 I had 12 shops around the north of the UK, from Aberdeen to Liverpool, purely printing and binding theses for students from universities all over the country, often with a next day service, due to the excellent Opus thesis binding and gold lettering system I was using.

However, in 2017 pretty much all thesis and dissertation submissions went online, there was no longer much demand for them to be hard bound: from printing and binding 4 or 5 sets of theses a day to pretty much zero. I closed this arm of the business and was more than happy to slow down and get back to 'proper' bookbinding, repair and restoration, which I was originally trained for all those years ago. I had always continued binding and restoring cloth books and family bibles.



After meeting my wife to be, in 2019 I moved back to my home town of Chester. The first thing I did on buying our house was to have a purpose-built, insulated bindery at the end of the garden to accommodate all the equipment that I had accumulated over the years, and enable me to continue restoration and repair work. I now specialise in Victorian family bibles and large calfskin bibles (often binding 20-30 large bibles every year), rebinding and restoring, but also a great deal of sentimental cloth bindings. I also taught myself to repair and make brass clasps and hinges, which I love doing [2 & 3].

During my years since leaving school I had kept in touch with Paul Delrue, and considered him a very close friend and always my 'boss' and mentor, who I loved dearly. Sadly we lost Paul last year and I will never forget the gift of bookbinding that he gave me - and also my appreciation of classical music, film, theatre and the arts. I was extremely lucky to have been taken under his tutelage. I have his old paring knife strop mounted above me on one of the roof spurs of my workshop [4], and lots of his inspirational calligraphy, framed, on my walls.

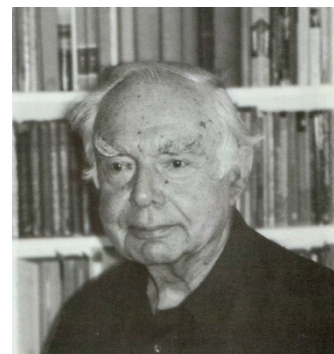


A little bit about myself: I am an avid motorcyclist, riding, touring and restoring, and often have 3 or 4 motorcycles in my possession. My wife Denise and I love to travel in our classic campervan and I have also been both a solo singer/entertainer and fronted numerous rock bands, which I also love doing. Being a professional bookbinder working from home enables me to follow my pursuits, and also walk my bedlington whippet dog, Bonnie. However, as most bookbinders who do it for a living know, you have to put the hours in and get the work out, which I seem still able to do (at the ripe old age of 56) and I often have 2-3 months' work on the shelf.

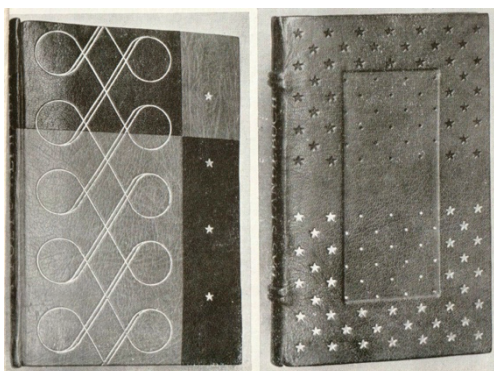
I recently re-joined the Society of Bookbinders. I think as one gets older, and also with bookbinding often being a solitary pursuit, it is nice to keep contact with old friends, many of whom will be reading this, and hopefully make some new ones.

Spotlight on: NW bookbinder William John Westwood (1919-2018)

Barry McKay writes: John Westwood was born in London in 1919, the son of a process engraver and fine etcher in the employ of Strand Engraving. In the 1930s he studied bookbinding under Katherine Pountney at Bromley School of Art and in 1940 continued his studies at the Royal College of Art in London, briefly under [Douglas Cockerell](#). In 1941, together with many of the students and teachers of the RCA he removed to Ambleside in Westmorland where his studies were interrupted by his incarceration in several of His Majesty's houses of correction as a conscientious objector. After the end of World War Two he was back at the RCA in London where he continued his studies under [Roger Powell](#).

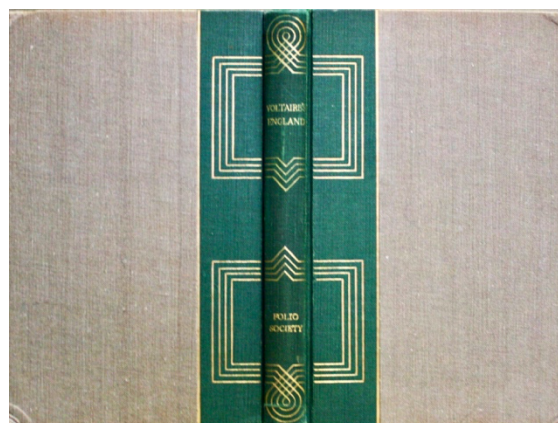


In 1948 Westwood returned to the Lake Counties to take a lectureship at Carlisle College of Art where he taught bookbinding and graphic design leaving in January 1951 when he was appointed Director of Graphic Design at HMSO; there he continued until his retirement in 1978. Thereafter, and following a move to Goring, he took an active role in the South Oxfordshire Archæological Group, became a founder member of the Printing Historical Society as well as founder editor/publisher of *International Meccanoman Magazine*. He built many Meccano models, including one of Quarry Bank mill in Cheshire.

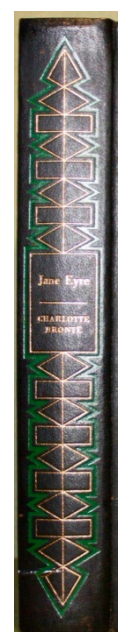


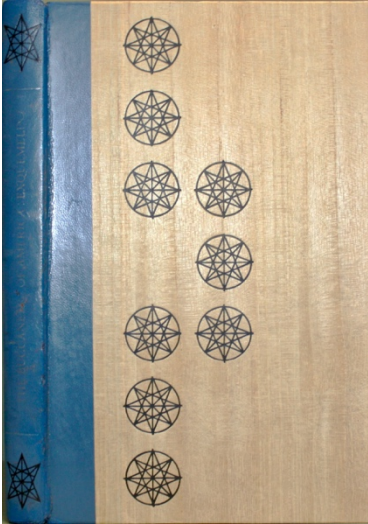
Of Westwood's fine binding I have been unable to discover much. He exhibited two bindings in the Festival of Britain exhibition, winning the Major Abbey prize for binding design. And four of his bindings were illustrated in an article by Kenneth Holmes, *Craftsmanship Leather Binding*, in the *Studio Magazine* in 1946. The two illustrated left were described as: *Morocco binding in black and terracotta, with gold tooling; and a binding in brown Morocco with toolings in gold and black.*

However, it is his designs for the binding of early [Folio Society](#) publications, several done during his period in residence in Carlisle, that most excited my interest as a book collector. *The Bookbinder* (Vol 17, 2003) contains an excellent and well-illustrated article by Westwood titled *Designing for the Folio Society* and from which we learn that his first commission was the binding design for Desmond Flower's *Voltaire's England* (1950) incorporating *parallel lines in gold to emphasise boldly but simply the hinges of the board joints* but does note that *the rather weak colours chosen for the cloth were not mine*. The same year saw his design for *Romeo and Juliet* in the Folio Shakespeare series where a simple but effective front cover design of three motifs of quill pens in gold and interspersed with quills in black and facing in the opposite direction; a design that continued on different coloured cloths until 1976.



As with the Shakespeare so with the Folio series of works by the Brontë sisters where a dramatic geometric design on the backstrips suggests the stone blocks seen in building in Haworth. Different colours of the blocking were used for each of the three sisters. The same design being used on the Folio edition of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1971) but with the blocking simply in gold.





If I had to choose a personal favourite, I should probably settle on Exquemelin's *The Buccaneers of America* (1972) which was both printed and bound by Mackay's in quarter blue leather with wood veneer boards with Westwood's design of nine eight-pointed stars each in a circle and blocked in black; simple but boldly effective.

It had been after seeing an exhibition of Folio Society books in Carlisle that Westwood wrote to Charles Ede to offer his opinion that the binding designs were the least successful feature of his books. Elsewhere he wrote of discovering the work of [Paul Bonet](#) during his student years and one cannot help but wonder if his concerns to improve the binding designs for Folio were influenced by the work of Bonet, Mario Prassinos, and others for the [cartonnage](#) binding designs on Gallimard's *Nouvelle Revue Française* volumes and which are themselves immensely collectible. One is, however, left with the feeling that Westwood was firmly aware of the importance of binding design in 'the book as object' when he wrote: ***The bookbinder is the architect of the book: what goes inside is just interior decoration*** (SoB National Newsletter, December 2005).

Yu Xin Bookstore in Shenzhen, China has become one of the city's most photographed locations, [click here](#) for more!



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of Bookbinders



