



The Newsletter of the North Wales & North West Region

Regional Programme Update

Following our well-attended and highly enjoyable visit to Hawarden last month - *see Maurus O'Donnell's report opposite* - we look forward to another busy event in a few weeks' time. Our **Autumn Gathering** on Saturday 13 September is previewed further on in this newsletter. About thirty members are currently booked in for our day of talks and demos, displays, raffles and auctions. Both our October (**Creating Multiples**) and our November (**Decorating Book Cloth**) Kelsall workshops are fully booked with waiting lists - but do come along anyway; no need to book, no charge for observers. Sue Wood will soon be circulating details and taking bookings for our **Christmas Social at Kelsall** on Saturday 6 December. We will repeat the format that worked so well last year - small making projects, a quiz, and lunch provided by outside caterers.

Some people like to plan things well ahead. And we are fortunate that our Programme Organiser Sue Wood is one of those people! For other like-minded members here are the **key dates for 2026**:

- 10 January: an on-line workshop with Mylyn McCall
- 14 February: Springback to bookbinding: AGM plus
- 14 March / 11 April / 9 May: Kelsall one-day workshops
- 13 & 14 June: a two-day workshop with Glenn Malkin
- 11 July: Kelsall one-day workshop
- Date tbc: A visit to Liverpool Libraries
- 14/16 August: International SoB Gathering at York Uni
- 12 September: Our Autumn Gathering
- 10 October / 14 November: Kelsall one-day workshops
- 5 December: Christmas Social

Our August outing to Hawarden

On a pleasant summer's morning eighteen of us met at the **North East Wales Archives** (NEWA) located in the Old Rectory adjacent to St Deiniol's Church in Hawarden (*image below*). We began with chat, tea, coffee, biscuits and cake, plus a resounding rendition of *Happy Birthday* for someone's memorable day! Soon Mark Allan, who has been a conservator at NEWA since 1992, led us through a fascinating history of the collections which are housed in the Archives, describing not only some of the items stored in the collection, but also some of the conservatory services which are provided to public, private and business bodies in the locality and beyond.

The records are stored in 24,000 boxes, made by volunteers from acid-free boxboard. Recent projects include conservation work on photographs, vellum bindings without hollows, 30 - 40 parchments dated 1300 - 1600 from Jersey's archives, a book of maps with broken leather covers, restoration of two National Trust journals listing the contents of Erddig Hall, restoration of a chef's book from Plas Newydd of recipes hand-written by one of the Two Ladies of Llangollen for their own use; and so on. Mark had examples to show of all these, and the interchanges of conversation between him and different members in the audience, about the problems faced and solutions arrived at, brought to life the very human aspects of preserving important episodes in past people's lives for the benefit of people whose lives are yet to come.

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Hawarden . . . continued

The next project will be one of preserving a deteriorating collection, found in a local historian's loft upon his demise, of a Weigh bill book from the Ceiriog Valley Railway, containing 2000 loose slips of thin paper used on site and later glued along one edge on to thicker paper, listing the goods sent out by the Llyn Ceiriog Tramway.

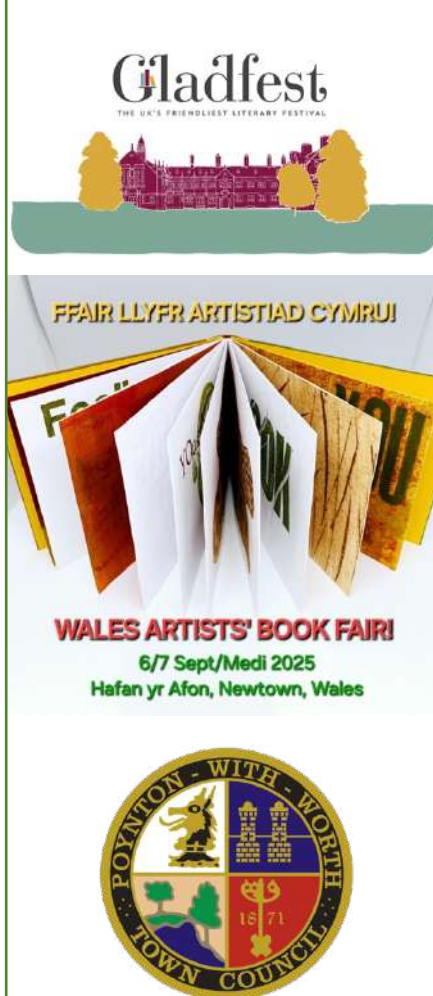
There is a training dimension to the Archives' work also. Currently a student from Cardiff is on site, and a Jersey archivist was accommodated while the parchments above were restored. The Archives also contribute to the three-year practical training programme for already qualified conservators now in employment. New conservators have a great theoretical knowledge but less practical experience. This programme enables them to improve their practical skills by spending hands-on time with experienced conservators teaching them some of the skills and techniques developed across the country, rather than each service relying only its own in-house programmes.

In two smaller groups we had both a tour with Steve of the large Victorian family building, both imposing and warren-like in its size and construction building, and also a closer examination of the work being done by Mark in his own workshop.

The tour of the building included one strong room. There are ten in total, located mostly on the upper floors and are temperature controlled. The Archives were opened in 1962. Records include Church in Wales records, chapels, Holywell Parish, etc. Most of the records are digitised: censuses, circuit court records, parish councils, schools, Halkyn mining area records, etc. Paper records are stored in their own folders, tied with linen tape, and knotted at the top to avoid pressure points in the middle when stored flat in a box. Electronic records pose problems of presentation and reproduction. The fire alarm system is a pressured gas system (no water), and the central unit of ten valves and ten gas cylinders - it was a joy to behold and marvel at. The gas is not toxic, but it would give you a sore throat if deeply inhaled.

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Some upcoming events this month:



The **Gladstone's Library literature festival** returns this 5 & 6 September with a variety of talks, discussions, and an evening lute performance. We'll be there with our SoB regional outreach stand sharing some bookbinding techniques, and enabling all visitors to make their own sewn single section pamphlet. [Click here](#) for more.

Still in Wales, on 6 & 7 September the **3rd Wales Artists' Book Fair** will feature over 20 artists' stalls, demonstrations, and mini workshops. With the Newtown Food Festival on at the same time the town should be buzzing. More details [here](#).

The annual Heritage Weekends see a return of the **Poynton Civic Society's Heritage Craft Fair** on Sunday 14 September. We'll be there with our regional Outreach stand sharing our knowledge and enthusiasm for all things bookbinding. Details [here](#).



Hot Bed Press in Salford are hosting **an exhibition of giant letterpress community murals** from the Shipley-based People Powered Press. More details [here](#).



Our Autumn Gathering: a pictorial preview



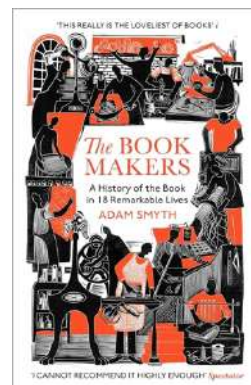
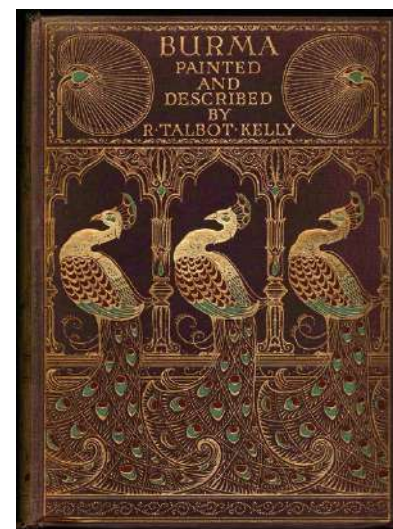
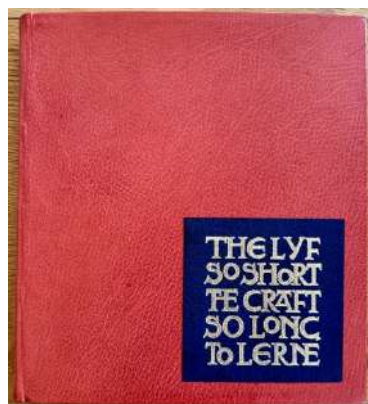
We have an action-packed day planned for our Autumn Gathering on 13 September. The core revolves around Glenn's demo of the *Craquelle* decorative technique, Dominic's demo of *Tree Calf* decoration and Barry's illustrated talk on *Publishers' Arts and Crafts book covers*. However there is more, with **fringe events abounding**: we feature these below. Check out your stock levels, and pre-order from [Hewit's](#) and [Harmatan](#) to save the postage costs. Both suppliers are also generously providing substantial gift vouchers for our **Raffle**; the region is adding in a free place on a 2026 one-day workshop, plus Adam Smyth's informative and entertaining book *The Book-Makers*.



No doubt many members are working hard to complete their **binding of our set book for display** on the day. It is not a judged event, and the names of all those contributing will go into the hat and have a chance of winning a copy of Jen Lindsay's book *Fine Bookbinding*. Members in other regions are also binding the book. John Chettoe of the Western Region shares his binding (*opposite*), and comments: *As an admirer of the work of William Morris and the Arts & Crafts movement, I really enjoyed binding this book. I bound it to one of my favourite shades of leather (from Harmatan), using the iconic Strawberry Thief by Morris for the leather-jointed endpapers. I was very struck by the phrase 'The Lyf so short the craft so long to lerne' that I found in the book as it reflects my attitude to bookbinding: a craft I came to, alas, very late in life after retiring in my mid 60s.*

Programme for the day

- 10.30: Craquelle demo / Glenn Malkin
- 11.30: Tree Calf demo / Dominic Riley
- 12.30: Lunch; time for our two displays, silent auction bids, raffle & trade stands
- 2.00: Silent Auction ends
- 2.15: Publishers' Arts and Crafts book covers / Barry Clark
- 3.15: Drawing the Raffles
- 3.30: More mingling; wind up 4ish



Maintaining the Arts and Crafts theme we will have **another display for viewing, and handling: a selection of publishers' bindings** from the 1870s-1910s. These trade bindings ensured that attractively-designed books were available to the many and not just the few who could afford a hand-bound book. The illustration *above right* is a commercial cover design by A A Turbayne, a much-acclaimed and in-demand book cover designer of the period.

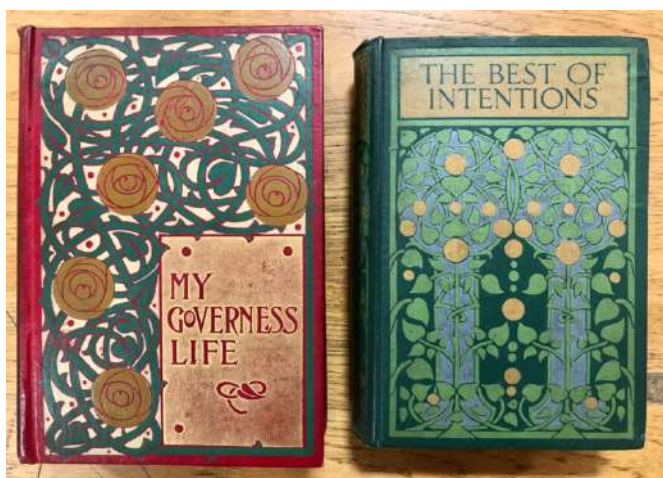


A **Silent Auction** will run through the day. Glenn Malkin is donating this long, counterweighted board-shear (*left*) which can be mounted on the edge of a bench. The cutting edge is around 92cm, and the maximum length from the handle to the counterweight is getting on for 150cm. Will it fit into your workspace? And Paul Johnson has donated this as new finishing press (*right*). **Please bring along any items that you would like to donate.**

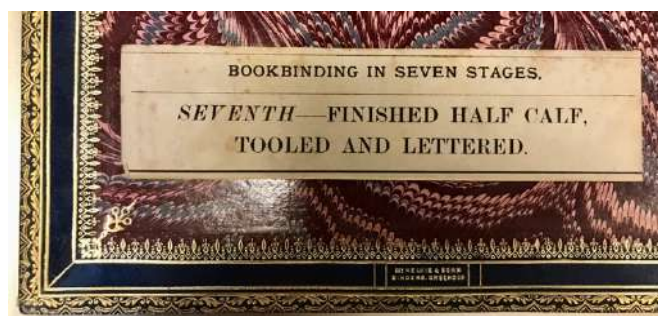


Scotland: and a tale of two libraries

Your editor is on holiday in Scotland, and bookbinding features - as planned, but also by chance! Spending a few days in Glasgow had prompted me to contact the splendid Glasgow public library, [The Mitchell](#), with a request to view some of their [Blackie & Son](#) bindings. Special Collections staff duly obliged and we were treated to a trolley-load of [Glasgow-style](#) bindings. Most well-known are the cover designs by their Art Director Talwin Morris, but featured here are three covers designed by [Ethel Larcombe](#). Mainly a children's book illustrator, Larcombe was frequently commissioned by Morris, some of her covers feature her EL monogram, but many are unsigned and are often wrongly attributed to Morris himself.



Greenock is twenty five miles west of Glasgow, the birthplace of steam engine inventor James Watt, and home of the [Watt Institution & Library](#). Uncatalogued and randomly scattered around I found a dozen or so superb bindings by James McKelvie & Sons, Greenock (publishers /printers/bookbinders). Although beautifully bound, with spine labels plus decorated and titled front covers, the text blocks were oddly all completely blank. The library assistant understood that the bindings were donated by the company (on their closure?) to show the people of the town the nature of their work and the various stages of fine bookbinding. Sadly the explanatory slips were all mixed up, and these hand-crafted bindings seemed uncared for. A sharp contrast to the machine-printed bindings I had seen earlier at the Mitchell library in Glasgow.



Mark's studio/laboratory is equipped with all sorts of stuff, and all sorts of piles of stuff, under boards and presses. He showed us linen linings he had put on a large map, and a big stationery springback book of shipping records from 1840 which had had loose and torn pages. He repairs loose leaves using Japanese papers. But the best part was his own demonstration of repairing a tear from the family's collection of Gladstone's letters.



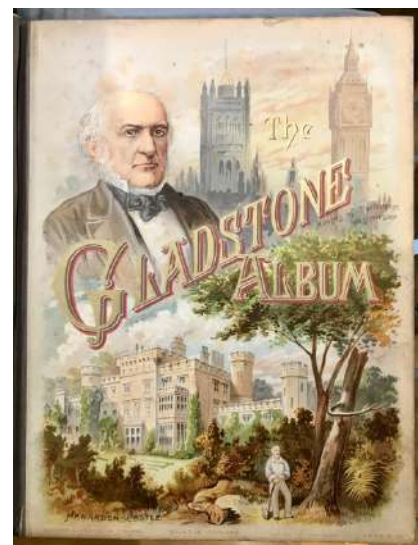
And soon it was time for lunch - a short stroll through the St Deiniol's church grounds took us to [*Gladstone's Library*](#) - followed by Isabel's, the Librarian, welcome and a quick history of this unique residential library, from its foundation in 1880 using William Gladstone's own personal library. The Library now has a wide range of books, mainly on biblical studies, theology, spirituality, histories of Christianity, travel books, and politics. It became a theological college in the 20th century, without any affiliation to a seminary or other place of learning, for the personal studies and training of individual clergy. Gradual developments led to the provision of food, accommodation, and now a wide-ranging programme of literary, philosophical and spiritual lectures and other social activities.

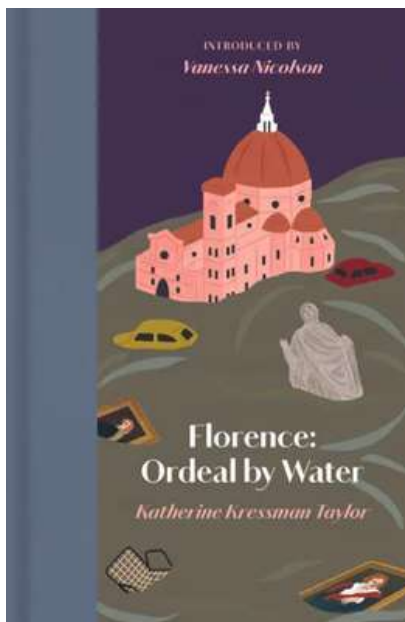
Again in two smaller groups, we explored the building and its purpose. Alice (the learning and engagement officer), gave a short history of Gladstone and his achievements. He had married Catherine Glynne in 1839 and lived at her ancestral Hawarden Castle and estate. His legacy is the residential library, which he founded for the advancement of 'Divine Learning'. The first building in the late 1880s was called a 'tin tabernacle', stocked with his own collection of 20,000 or so books. He died in 1898. The Reading Rooms were opened in 1902 - very ornate; the Lounge and Residential wing in 1906 - much less so. With Alexandra (archivist) we visited the three Reading Rooms in which complete silence is de rigueur at all times, and were able to browse among the books, and the readers. The largest is the Theology room, with a gallery above; the middle one the History room, also with a gallery above (housing William and Catherine's own collections); the smallest, the Wisdom room (housing a collection of Muslim books). Fascinating variety of content, run of the mill (but to us quite posh) Victorian bindings, even some paperbacks. Plus, a window lounge area of comfy armchairs in the Theology room with a very large selection of current and mostly theological periodicals. Work-tables and power points all over the place - and readers! Leading off from the History room is a corridor link to the single storey Annexe where the rarer books, manuscripts, maps and drawings are stored, and where a host of library and archival works - cataloguing, conserving, and so on - are performed by a small, enthusiastic, and very knowledgeable staff.



Our visit concluded with a display of books set out for us to study and handle. The books were an eclectic collection - some lovely and indeed unusual bindings, books on bookbinding and marbling as well as memorabilia dealing with Gladstone's life. One of these was a curious collection of family photographs, The Gladstone Album, with front cover decoration of Hawarden Castle and surrounding woodlands, which was half text and half music box operated by a coiled wind-up spring, which still works! There was also an 1835 map of Liverpool (Gladstone's city of birth), covering the townships and ports from Litherland past the Pier Head in Liverpool and on through to Garston.

We gave our three Library guides, and Mark Allen and Sue Wood for organising the day, a resounding thank you for our enjoyable and informative visit to Hawarden. Some members had stayed overnight and enjoyed a nostalgic Victorian experience and breakfast. Some had fitted in a visit to the church and viewed its stunning stained glass windows, and a few were staying on in the area for more relaxation. A fine summer outing indeed.





Val Corrigan/Greeley writes: Sometime last year I was in contact with Rebeka Russell who runs a small publishing house, Manderley Press. At that time there was a possibility of maybe doing some sort of collaboration together. I read one of her books [Florence: Ordeal by Water](#). It's a new edition of Katherine Kressmann Taylor's forgotten diaries, chronicling the 1966 floods in Florence - re-issued over 50 years after they were first published, with a new introduction by novelist Vanessa Nicolson (her 2021 novel [Angels in Mud](#) was partly set in Florence and the flood). Katherine Kressmann Taylor was a recently retired American living in Florence in 1966. She remained there to witness the flood and its aftermath, including the days of isolation without light, food, water that followed the disaster.

Rebeka and I chatted about the Florence flood, and I mentioned that Paul Delrue had been one of those *Mud Angels* who went out to help. Paul had published his photographs on Facebook. Rebeka was really interested in learning more so asked me if I would write an essay for her website. With the help of bookbinder Adam Jurkojc and Paul's son Marcel, and using Paul's own writings, I put together some words and Marcel - keen to keep Paul's memory alive - very kindly supplied some of his dad's photographs.

For Val's piece, and some photos from Paul's time in Florence [click here](#). We re-produce two of the photos.



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