



the Society of Bookbinders



The Newsletter of the North Wales & North West Region

Time to book for Christmas and new year!

Sue Wood has started taking bookings for our **Christmas Social at Kelsall** on **Saturday 6 December**. Last year's format worked so well that we will go with similar this year: refreshments to start, communal making projects in the morning, outside caterers looking after us for lunch whilst we cooperate - and compete! - in a fun quiz. It's not just for the 'regulars', it's for new and old, newer members will be made most welcome. It's £30 all in; **book with Sue** (swoosal@btinternet.com).

We have a full autumn programme coming up:

- 11 October: **Creating Multiples**
- 8 November: **Decorating Book Cloth**
- 29 November: **Stub Binding (on line)**

Vacancies often arise at the last minute so do contact Sue if you would like a place but haven't booked. Or come along anyway for free, as an observer. As ever our Kelsall meetings are more than a workshop - bring along bookbinding items you'd like to sell, and we'll have a table if you have any free giveaways. Many members exchange useful materials, tools and equipment - often at knock down prices.

And book now for our first workshop (online) of 2026: details below. The full 2026 line-up is on page 6.



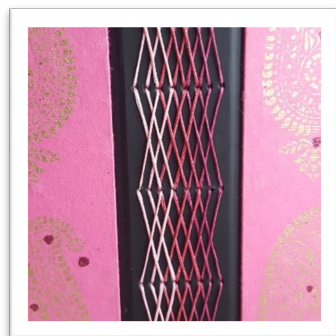
**Forty plus members at our
Autumn Gathering at Kelsall**

Whenever I come across binders who are not members of the SoB, I always tell them that they should join because it is a society of a very unusual kind, **writes Chris McNall**. Right from the very beginning of your bookbinding journey, you can rub shoulders not only with other amateurs but also with professionals at the very top of their game - and of course all and sundry in between. This provides a terrific opportunity to learn and to be inspired. Both learning and inspiration were very much in evidence at our September Autumn Gathering in Kelsall, both in terms of the demonstrations and the display of bindings created as part of our set book binding project.

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Saturday 10 January: Mylyn McColl: A Criss Cross Long Stitch Binding

***** This is an on-line workshop *****



In this fun workshop you will learn how to make a variation on a long stitch binding: preparing pages, creating a beautiful case using decorative papers and bookcloth and producing an intricate set of holes. Everything will be attached together with a highly decorative criss-cross stitch, using multiple-coloured threads. This wonderful book structure lays flat, making it great for sketching and writing. You will be guided through each process and shown how to use traditional tools of the trade. Given live and interactive step by step instruction through demonstration, at the end of the day you will have your own stylish notebook and the skills to make more.

NB: the workshop will be recorded and available, only to those who have paid, for the following four weeks

My Bookbinding Beginnings: Isobel Lewis

I studied graphic design and started my professional career at Longmans Educational Publisher followed by two and half years at Phaidon Press. In 1989 I travelled in India for 6 months and on my return decided to become a freelance book designer. For over 35 years I have been fortunate to work for various UK publishers including the BBC and the V&A. In the early days all the 'dummy' books to promote new titles were created by hand, but fast forward to today and everything is digital.



One of the many books that Isobel designed. For more, [click here](#).



I missed 'making' books and in 2017 I started learning how to make very basic bindings. At this time I was living in Maine USA (my husband was teaching at a Furniture School) and we lived very close to Maine Media Workshops and College ([MMW+C](#)) which has a book arts department. MMW+C have an artist in residence programme and I was persuaded by friends to apply. Surprisingly I got [the residency](#)!! The book I made was inspired by the UK Shipping Forecast - 2017 was the 150th anniversary. MMW+C has wonderful facilities including two Vandercook presses. Technically I was totally out of my depth but fortunately the studio manager was an excellent teacher and I became a fast learner. My book grew from a slim volume using a Japanese stab binding to an edition of 15 books featuring letterpress, linocut, and hand stitching, bound and housed in a clamshell box.

Since then I have taken various short courses both in person and online and have watched many YouTube videos. I am very much a novice and only have a basic knowledge of traditional book binding skills. However, I am keen to learn and look forward to taking part in workshops and learning from other bookbinders as part of the SoB. I call myself *The Kelpie Press* after our, now sadly departed, Jack Russell terrier.

I like making books that have interesting and unusual structures and some that can only loosely be described as books! There are examples of my work in both private and public collections and I am thrilled to say that a copy of *The Shipping Forecast* is now in the British Library.



For more of Isobel's book arts work, [click here](#).



Our first demonstration was **Glenn Malkin on 'craquelé'**: the pasteing and dyeing of leather to produce unique (and unpredictable) patterns: think spider webs or broken glass. 'Craquelé' is just a fancy French word for 'crackle'. This is the sound you are aiming for when, having pasted up your leather once or twice with nice thick paste and having let it dry, you roll it around and/or scrunch it up to (wait for it) ... put cracks in it. The paste acts as a resist (like batiq/batique). After the crackle phase, you paint on an aniline dye (or dyes) which gets into the cracks, and then some dye fixative (Hewit's sell it). After a wash [1], massage the paste off with warm water - and voila! - you have your pattern. Make a batch when you are pottering around one day, and then you have a supply [2] when something just that bit different is needed for covering boards, or even for a spine piece or some onlays.

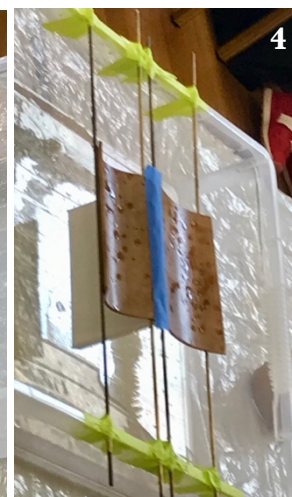


Next up was **Dominic Riley's demonstration of tree calf decoration**. I love tree calf; this is calf treated with chemicals to produce a branchy, swirly two-tone stain effect - sometimes like a tree, sometimes like old-fashioned walnut burr - found on many books between about 1770 and 1920. I had believed that the mysteries of this dark art had been lost, but I was wrong. Dominic gave us a potted history of this technique, together with his own experience of it. Tree calf is a high stakes activity because it is done on the book, with the text block capped and before the endpapers are down. The execution is not for the faint-hearted. Paste wash your calf (to fill in the pores) and allow it to dry; darken the boards with a salt of tartar solution; and then glaire the boards. Then bend - *really* bend - the boards, for this reason, they have to be on the thin side and not chunky, (in old money, "board" them) fore-edge to spine, so they end up with a nice curve.

I was inwardly shuddering; but this bending is vital. Tape over the spine (unless you want it patterned as well), then run drip and/or paint water down and across the boards, with the book suspended on rods over a tilted tray or in a finishing press [3&4]. That makes your pattern. The last step is sprinkling an acidic solution (copperas) - use only a besom of English birch twigs! - onto the boards and let it flow with the water. A few seconds, wash it off, and there you have it - tree calf. It works better on some calf than others; and does not work on some leathers at all. Dominic recommends vegetable-tanned kangaroo - if you can get it. You are then going to need plenty of paste-down draw-sheets to get the boards flat again: press hard between clean pressing boards. And good luck!!

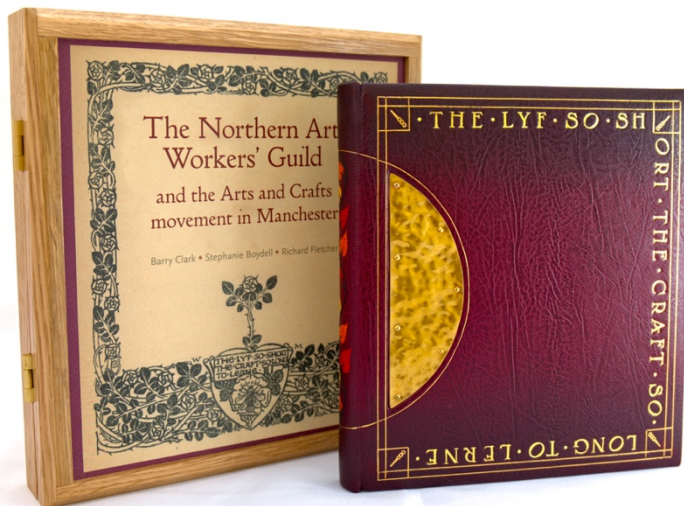


I had to shoot off early so I missed **Barry's talk on Publishers' Arts and Crafts book covers**. I'm told he set the scene by recalling the early use of book cloth, and Victorian machinery, that revolutionised book production in the C19th. However he focused on the 1860s onwards when these cloth-covered books often featured beautiful Arts and Crafts designs, stamped in gold leaf and colour. Images of covers by well-known designers, and almost unknown designers were shared. Well-researched, well-illustrated and engagingly told Barry showed how these publishers' everyday books made good design available to the many, and not just the few who could afford expensive hand-bound books. I did at least have time to view some of these covers in the display [5].



Our Autumn Gathering: The Display of Members' Bindings (1)

For family reasons I had to depart early but not before I had a good look at the *exhibition of bindings arising from our NW2025 Binding Project*. The entries were uniformly excellent. All so different and yet all reflective of the set book, and the skills which the society exists to foster. The learning and inspiration from Kelsall workshops were evident in the bindings of members who had: adopted the Malkin disappearing spine/three-piece binding; who created a stub binding as workshopped recently by Kathy Abbott; who had incorporated Tyvek and illuminated letters on their covers; and who had hand-sewn endbands. There was multi-media work highlighting the over-arching arts and crafts theme - from needlepoint embroidered covers, to a full leather and Gothic-inspired binding, to hefty slabs of repurposed oak as boards, to pattern paper, linocut and Gelli-print covers and endpapers. Many featured *The lyf so short the craft so long to lerne* motto.



Glenn and Dominic had already had enough of the limelight in the morning, but each brought forward a distinctive characterful offering: Dominic's a typically cool and elegant *library style* cloth binding (Manchester-made cloth, of course) with blind tooling using 6 of his tools (one inherited from his and Paul Delrue's teacher, John Vivien); and Glenn's (a commission by lead author Barry Clark) a glittering gilded binding, including splendid hammered brass half-moon breast plates (*opposite*). What a display!



Clockwise, from top left.

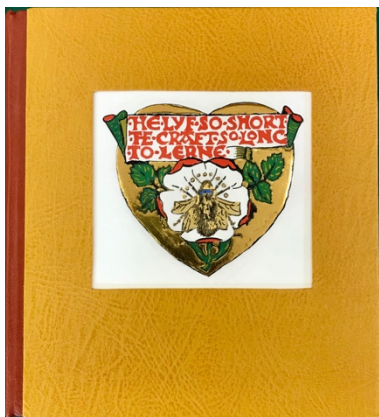
Tim Foster: recycled oak boards, ceramic inserts, marbled effect goatskin, beeswax and Danish oil finish; wooden box to both contain and display the book.

Magalie Briand: a limp binding with Kraft-tex cover, laminated with William Morris-inspired paper napkins. Sewn on hand-decorated Kraft-tex thongs, hand-sewn endbands, suede endpapers.

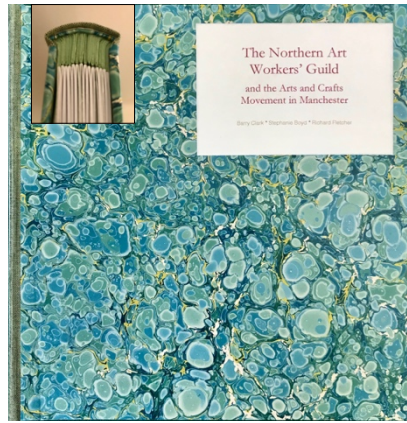
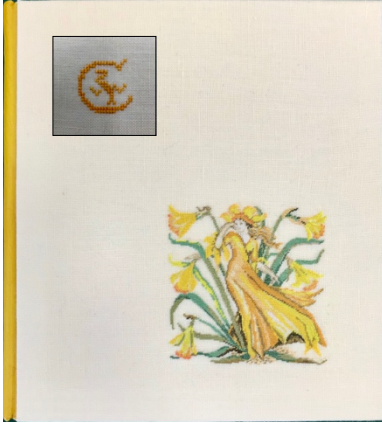


Mark Furness: a full leather binding, black goatskin with red goatskin straps dividing spine and boards, packed sewing around double cords, patterned endpapers.

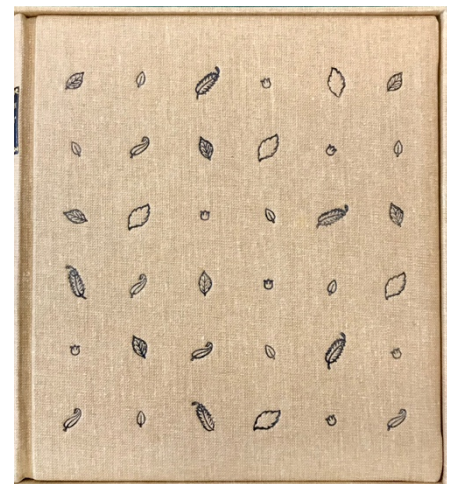
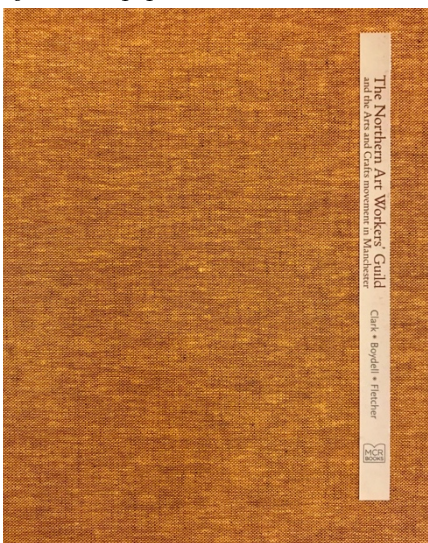
Catherine Garratt: a full leather three-part off boards binding; front cover decorative panel of the Guild's emblem created in colours and gold leaf.



Our Autumn Gathering: The Display of Members' Bindings (2)



From left to right, top down **Amanda Field**: Cover, an embroidered Walter Crane design [monogram on rear board, inset] using vintage Pearsalls stranded silks and newer Needlepoint Inc. stranded silks over one thread on Zweigart Vintage Newcastle Linen, backed using Wundaweb and chinese mulberry paper; same silks also for the endbands; Oasis leather spine; boxed. **Jacqueline Payne**: Bradel style binding; the text block is sewn on stubs [inset] to enable a full and flat opening; the case has a cloth spine and marbled paper sides. **Helen Golding Miller**: Leather spine, boards covered in bookcloth with a gelli print design in acrylic (using plants from the garden). **Jane Sheppard**: Front board covered with Tyvek, watercolour decoration; the rear board is covered with a reduced pattern piece of cloth of the Morris 'Loden' design; endpapers are a lino print and show the Doves typeface being dumped in the Thames. **Jeanne Pennington**: An off boards binding, grey linen cloth with inset detail design by CFA Voysey, faux leather spine, Walter Crane stencil design for endpapers. **Maurus O'Donnell**: Coptic sewn, cloth covers without turn ins, original covers and endpapers from the bound edition incorporated, an internally supported text block. **Val Corrigan**: Sewn boards with my own pattern paper printed onto Awagami ink jet Washi paper treated with PermaSeal UV Protective Spray. **Dominic Riley**: Split boards, library-style corners; sprinkled edges; Moss Glade linen cloth case, tooled with 6 'leaf' hand tools; boxed.



Our Autumn Gathering: a postscript

After a lovely day with over 40 members attending we are left with a nice problem! Booking fees (even though only £10), raffle and Silent Auction income easily exceeded expenses, leaving us with a surplus of £350 from the day. Regional funds are very healthy indeed. The committee are considering *how we might use this money to further promote our craft of hand bookbinding*. If you have any ideas do please contact any member of the committee (e-mail addresses on p7).

The display of members' bindings for our set book was a great success. Some members need more time to finish their binding, so *we will have another display at our AGM in February*. Hewit's will donate a copy of Jen Lindsay's *Fine Bookbinding*; all who display will have a chance of winning a copy of this must-have modern bookbinding manual.

Members' Programme 2026

Sue Wood has now finalised dates, topics and tutors, for your diary . . .

- 10 January: *A Criss Cross Long Stitch Binding* / Mylyn McColl
- 14 February: Springback to bookbinding: *AGM* plus talks and demos
- 14 March: *A Flexible Leather Binding* / Tanja Bolenz
- 11 April: *A Leather-covered Box* / Dominic Riley
- 9 May: *Leather Dyeing and Decoration* / Tom McEwan
- 13&14 June: *Limp Vellum Binding* / Glenn Malkin
- 11 July: *Surface pattern design* / Val Corrigan
- 29 July *or* 4 August (tbc): A visit to *Liverpool Libraries*
- 14/16 August: International SoB Gathering at York University
- 12 September: *Our Autumn Gathering* (talks/demos/displays)
- 10 October: *The Merry-Go-Round book* / Magalie Briand
- 14 November: *The Buttonhole Stitch Binding* / Dieter Rader
- 5 December: *Christmas Social*

And beyond the membership . . .

The region has had a busy September for Outreach activities. First up, *writes Outreach Lead Catherine Garratt*, was a trip to the Gladstone Library on the 6th to join their *Gladfest Literary Festival*. Although our region went to the library for a very successful visit in August, this was our first time working in collaboration with them and representing the society. A big thank you to Maurus, Jeanne, Julie, Jill and Helen [1] who all volunteered to demonstrate and support festival goers to make their own single section pamphlet, which they got to take home along with a North Wales and North West SoB bookmark of course. We had a steady stream of visitors to our room and over 50 books were made with much delight and pride. It was such a joyful day, celebrating the craft of hand bookbinding and spreading the word about the society and our region. As Louisa, one of the library organisers of Gladfest, commented in her email to me: *I could hear the excited buzz every time I came out of the Reading Rooms and I must have had twenty people excitedly show me the notebooks they'd made . . . A huge, huge thank you to you and all of your brilliant volunteers.*

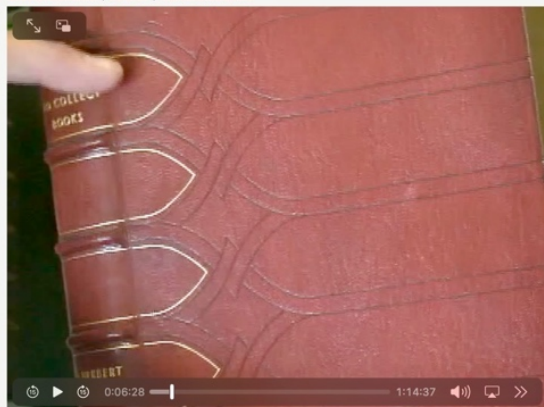
The day after our own Autumn Gathering, on the 14th Donna, Shirley and Barry made a return visit to the *Poynton Heritage Craft Fair* [2]. Not as busy as last year - the weather was truly dreadful - our volunteers nevertheless chatted away to visitors and helped many eager newcomers make a pamphlet to take home.

Barely catching their breath Barry and Donna were out again on Wednesday 17th, this time at the *Portico Library* tutoring our fourth beginners' workshop there this year: making a crossed structure notebook [3]. We had a full house of 12 participants, and an even mix of total beginners and some who are becoming regulars (and very competent binders in the process). Our final outreach event for the year will again be at the Portico in November, when we workshop the single section hardback structure; it's already fully booked.



Peter Waters: Master Bookbinder

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A specialist book auction at **Adam Partridge Auctioneers** & Valuers Cheshire Saleroom, Withyfold Drive, Macclesfield, SK10 2BD on Friday 10th October at 10am; viewing Wednesday and Thursday 8th & 9th October 10am-5pm. It's a mixed auction of 650 lots ([click here to view](#)) from the 16th century to the present day, including Lot 592 (*illustrated*), a three volume Kelmscott Press publication.

An excellent film about English-born bookbinder and conservator **Peter Waters** made by Randy Silverman, preservation librarian at the University of Utah, is now viewable for free, [click here](#). Silverman wrote: *Peter, who was born in 1930 in Woking, Surrey, began his formal education in 1945 at the Guildford College of Art where he studied bookbinding under the great bookbinder William Matthews. He earned his master's degree at the Royal College of Art (RCA) studying under Roger Powell, perhaps best remembered for his conservation treatment of 'The Book of Kells' in 1953. Peter also met his future wife, Sheila, at the RCA, who was herself to become a world-renowned calligrapher. Waters and Powell formed a professional partnership in 1957 that combined fine binding commissions for collectors with the conservation of rare books and manuscripts. In the aftermath of the Florence Flood in 1966, Waters was asked to direct the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze's (BNCF) effort to salvage and restore valuable books damaged by water, dirt and oil. Waters designed treatment protocols and workstations built for the recovery during the duration of his stay. These techniques became the basis of the US Library of Congress's conservation program which he directed as Chief of Conservation from 1971-1995. Peter died in 2003 at the age of 73. The film is narrated by Peter's wife Sheila who died in 2022 at the age of 93.*



The BBC website tells us: ***You're Dead To Me*** is the comedy podcast that takes history seriously. Greg Jenner is joined by Dr Isabella Rosner and comedian Cariad Lloyd to learn all about the ethos, practitioners and creations of the Arts and Crafts movement. Certainly not a presentation style I expected from BBC Radio 4! [Click here](#) to judge for yourself.

The Committee for 2025

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SOCIETY of BOOKBINDERS



FOUNDED in MANCHESTER



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