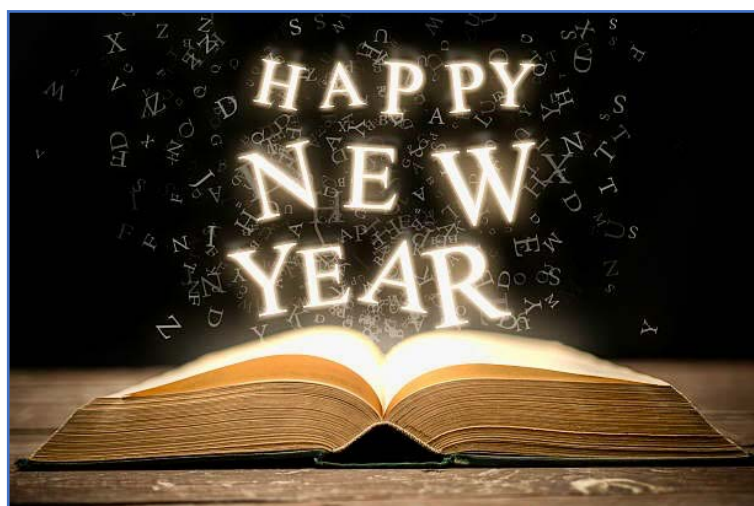




the Society
of Bookbinders



The Newsletter of the North Wales & North West Region



It's a new year, it's a new NW2 programme. We had a huge response when the 2026 programme went live in early December, with Programme Organiser Sue Wood inundated with bookings. For many workshops - *not all* - bookings are overflowing on to Sue's waiting lists. It's still worth booking as it is rare for those on the waiting list not to get a place; people's circumstances change during the year and have to amend their bookings.

We continue with our established payment system - no payments please until Sue requests (about four weeks before the event), and then prompt payment preferably by bank transfer (if you are claiming your free one-day workshop let Sue know then so that you can have your place confirmed). Unpaid, unconfirmed places are then offered to those on the waiting list. No place? No worries! Come along, for free, as an observer - there will still be much to learn, and it could be that a very late cancellation creates a spare place on the day.

Our first workshop of the year is on-line, next Saturday, with Mylyn McColl and her **Criss Cross Long Stitch Binding**.

Mylyn prefers to work on-line with a maximum of 8 participants on the day, but materials packs have been sent out to over 20 members: those not attending live will be able to do the workshop from the recording in their own time.



The 2026 programme however is not just about workshops - important as they are to many NW2 members. We have two days of illustrated talks, demos and bookbinding displays.

First up is our *AGM on 14 February* with a demo and two talks, three displays of our work created in 2025, and a raffle. No charge, and no need to book, just show up. *Our Autumn Gathering returns on 12 September*. The line up so far includes Helen Golding Miller's talk and demo on *Mauchline-style bindings*, Richard Nichols' illustrated talk *Binding in Stone*, and Barry Clark's intro to his display of *Bookbinding books, hand bound*; plus fringe attractions of a raffle, a silent auction and trade stands. Booking needed, but it's a snip at £10!

This year *our summer visit, on Tuesday 4 August, takes us to Liverpool* and two little known collections, even to Liverpooldians. The city council's Central Library is of course well known - but maybe not its impressive special collections including fine bindings, book arts and bookplates. We also visit, for lunch and a tour, the independent private, subscription Liverpool Athenaeum Library (below). All in for £10, including lunch.



As ever our year will conclude with our *Kelsall Christmas Social, on Saturday 5 December*.

We wish all members an exciting and developmental bookbinding year!

Our Christmas Social is a time to relax together, make a few fun bookbinding items, and enjoy the festivities. This year we had a big turnout of thirty members - many new members, as well as lots of regulars. Sheila and Barry Phillips joined the SoB in the summer, Sheila came to her first workshop with us in October, and both joined us for the Christmas Social. Here's their report:



As newcomers I suppose we should start with our first impressions. The Community Centre is a good meeting place, light, adequate parking, plenty of tables and chairs. Mind you, the first time we came we struggled to find the way in!



The morning workshop went well once *this* Barry learned not to jump every time *the other* Barry's name was called! The Turkish map fold in particular was fascinating with its unclear historical origin; it clearly lends itself to future projects like layering up to make an artists' book. The 5-pointed star seemed quite difficult to us. However, this Barry, with plenty of help from Sheila, managed to do it despite his lack of skill even if he admits that - when at the end it did fall into place - he still wasn't sure how. Not sure that we would make a whole tree's worth, even with the handout as a memory jogger! The pop-out card was probably the highlight. It's very clever and we can think of many uses to which it could be adapted. Barry's demonstration and assistance were clear and concise, so the end result was achievable by all. Thanks to Jacqueline and Barry for their tuition and materials preparation.



Kal Corrigan's delightful image used for the Turkish fold



Jacqueline's magical stars

The size of the hall meant that there was space for the workshop and also plenty of room for lunch tables without being crowded. Thanks to those who provided the festive sparkly lights and table runners which looked just the job for festive celebrations. The lunch was excellent. It was a real treat to have proper food rather than the standard caterer's turkey and stuffing often provided at this time of year. The choice of main, meat fish or veggie and all good quality was splendid. The salads provided were fresh and imaginative with plenty of potatoes and bread. Though neither of us has a sweet tooth we couldn't resist trying the puds. The caterers themselves were great, helpful, nothing too much trouble. We usually recoil from being "Sir & Madam" but the caterers were polite and friendly without being obsequious. Many thanks to them and to Jeannie, Catherine and Jacqueline for providing drinks and refreshments through the whole day [*Jacqueline's irresistible mince pies and brandy butter above right*].

We thoroughly enjoyed the quiz. It's amazing how old adverts really stick in the mind. Also how hard it can be to remember all the words of *The 12 Days of Christmas*! The *Only Connect* round was clever and the pictorial rounds made us laugh. We are still kicking ourselves that of all the towns in Cheshire somehow we missed Marple when we should have known because of the Agatha Christie connection! Our table thought we had done OK so we finished somewhat in awe of those who beat us. Thanks to Jeannie for all the work that went into it. I hope she got something nicer than a 1950s Hoover for Christmas!

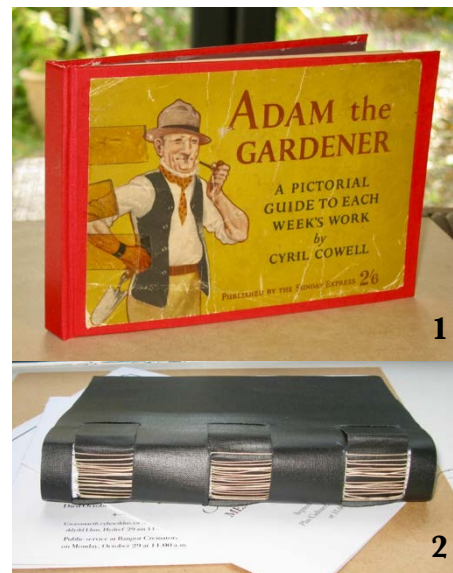
A great many thanks to everyone who organised the day. Our overall impression was of a day spent profitably among a group of friendly and knowledgeable people. Here's to many more.

With thanks to Sheila and Barry Phillips

This month we are treated to not just one but two **My Bookbinding Beginnings**. Both are longstanding amateur members. First off is David Hirst who fondly recalls meetings at The Morris Dancer in Kelsall, our venue before we moved to Kelsall Community Centre. David intended to join us for our Autumn Gathering in September, and to show his completed binding for our 2025 Binding Project (car problems put paid to that). However we feature his binding below, and we may well see it, and David again, in person at our AGM next month.

David muses: when do bookbinding journeys begin? As all the bookshelves in my home testify, I've always liked books. In working life I was a lecturer at Bangor University, and later a judicial tribunal member also. This meant an office also full of books, journals, research notes and photocopied records which accumulated over many years. I occupied the largest office in the building because of the size of my personal library - when I retired it was shared between three colleagues.

My work meant vacations were filled with trips to archives and libraries all over the country, and beyond. It was on one of these trips, in the mid-1980s, that my journey from being just a book user to a bookbinder started. Appropriately enough it was in the British Library, at that time located within the British Museum. A full day working in the Reading Room required a break or two, so I would relax by walking round the Museum at large. One day I came across a display of fine bindings, some of them French. The design and execution of the bindings captivated me. I wondered if a working knowledge of bookbinding would be an advantage, both helping me to organise my records and also a rewarding leisure interest where I could see how high a standard I could achieve.

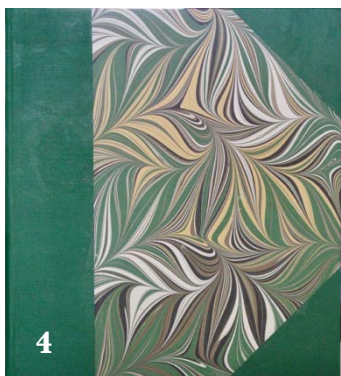


[1] a repair/rebinding of a gardening handbook used by my grandfather, originally a paperback; covers were detached and torn, rebound in Bradel style.

[2] an experimental use of an *Expander Crossed Structure* binding to organise items [funeral cards in this instance] which are of different sizes, single leaf or multiple pages, and not in alphabetical order.

[3] a case binding of *Two Points East* (2018), an SoB bookbinding challenge with results displayed at the Chester Seminar; my cover is a Victoria Hall paste paper.

[4] my binding of our 2025 binding project. A case binding, cover marbled paper is by Antonio Vélez Celemin, a marbler from Spain - I bought it from him at an SoB Conference, one of the benefits of attending Conference, discovering new products!



I began by buying a couple of books on bookbinding from Falkiner Fine Papers [now part of Shepherds] regretting that I had only now visited this shop when, as an undergraduate, I had walked past it from my Hall to the LSE on an almost daily basis. Since then, of course, my bookbinding library has grown extensively.

I searched for bookbinding tuition near Bangor. I found it in Ruthin Craft Centre, with one of Paul Delrue's former apprentices (possibly Simon McClelland I think). From him I learned of bookbinding groups and the NW & NW branch of the Society of Bookbinders. Soon after, I ascended the stairs at the Morris Dancer (for more recent members, then the venue for NW2 workshops) for the first time. From then on, by being a regular attender of the monthly meetings and at national events, I learned new and varied skills and techniques, received helpful advice, accessed suppliers and, particularly when Paul Delrue was talking, was entertained.

So how has my journey progressed? Most of my bookbinding activity was at first linked to my work, binding together journals and other material, or binding archival photocopies in a 'perfect' binding for convenience. Pressure of work meant I never cleared the backlog. More recently I still do a lot of journal binding, of journals related to my interests outside of work. I've carried out some repair and re-casing of books with family associations, and for friends, and experimented with different book structures such as a crossed-structure expander binding for cards. I've also bound sets of sheets, such as for the recent NW2 regional binding project, where I love using marbled and paste papers.

While a display of fine bindings was the stimulus to begin my journey I still doubt, after all these years, whether my overall skill level allows me to contemplate making one. My copy of Jen Lindsay's book [first edition] has been much perused, but so far not much used. However, now fully retired from both academia and tribunals, and with a new house extension with space for my equipment, perhaps it is time to try . . .

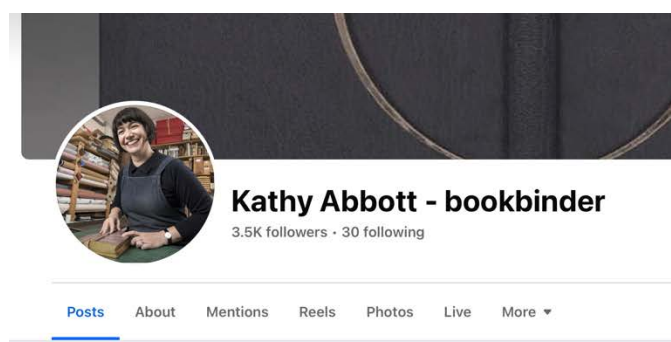
Stub Binding: Revisited!

Our January 2025 on-line workshop with Kathy Abbott was so over-subscribed that Kathy offered to repeat it for us. Once regional members had re-booked we offered the workshop further afield, and are delighted to report that many non-NW2 binders joined us: including **Rochelle Duhaime** who logged in from Montreal very early one morning in late November. Here's Rochelle's report of her experience with us.



I'm a beginner bookbinder, a member of the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild, with a special interest in repair and restoration of old books - because I love old books, how they look and smell, how they feel, and how they carry so much silent secret history. One particular recurring issue intrigued me: how to rebind a book of single sheets without perfect binding.

I learned of *stub binding*, and thought it a possible binding that might work, without much available information on how to actually do it. In North America, at least in traditional bookbinding circles, I discovered that stub binding is largely ignored as being unwieldy and complex.



In March of this year, I found Kathy Abbott's Facebook page and that she teaches stub binding, but in the UK. Not to be discouraged, I reached out to her and she quickly responded with the co-ordinates of the North Wales and North West Region (NW2), of the Society of Bookbinders. They graciously agreed to have me attend Kathy's online workshop as a guest, scheduled for 29 November, at 5.30am Montreal time. With a few emails, and great organisation from the NW2 team, in spite of a Canadian postal strike, I was all set for the big day.



It worked like a charm. Kathy (and Sue) had sent all the material ahead, I needed only my basic tools. I was able to follow Kathy's work-pace, her instructions were clear, she answered all of our questions. She passed on some bonus binding tips too: how to fold signatures (sections), punch (prick) using darning needles, how to find the thread grain, and where to source materials used, and my favorite, an easy tied weavers' knot.

I was able to complete my book block in the time allotted. Full disclosure: picking up after the workshop, I found an orphan sewn stub-signature on the kitchen chair. As Kathy repeatedly coached us that (re)sewing was the most important element of binding, I blithely un-picked some bits and glued and set the signature in place.

I have taken many online binding courses, but rarely have I participated in one that I felt was the equal to any in-person version. In my opinion, Kathy Abbott is a 5-star instructor. My thanks to her and to the NW2 for including me in the roster. Oh, and I have bought Kathy's book!

Jenny Glover's Bookbinding Beginnings go back nearly twenty five years, and she recalls that: it all began when my great friend B told me of a fantastic course she'd happened upon at our local arts centre, Brewery Arts in Kendal. *You'd love it!* she told me. And indeed I did. The course was Bookbinding run by the incomparable Dominic Riley and Michael Burke. Talk about falling lucky!

Off I went to my first class: you know, that one common to all beginners' craft classes, where you're told that you won't need any specialist equipment... In this case all that was required was a pair of knitting needles and a household knife. You can guess how that panned out. These weekly classes were a joy and a perfect start for me. Not only one of the most entertaining and expert teachers on the planet, but two! Often the class would collect around Dominic's table while he niftily showed us some magical skill to work around a potential problem ... *because there's nothing worse than...* to which the class would respond in unison *except the war in Iraq!* Yes, it was that long ago! The weekly pressure - and desire - to get something done before the next class giving enough time to practice and not enough to 'put it off' ensured enthusiasm was maintained and queries rapidly resolved. As I struggle to throw things away I practised with ever smaller and smaller books [1] from the offcuts (and not just my own), easy with sections already folded and to size.



These classes were also great for meeting a fascinating and wide range of people; bookbinding has so many facets, and thus intrigues many and varied people. Some I learned with that spring to mind: engineer, art student, paper maker, poet, doctor, photographer, artisan baker, teacher, bookshop owner... all bringing different perspectives and ideas. At this time I worked in the local library and took on some work repairing library books as well as repairs for friends [2]. B and I took on some commissions together for a few years until she moved away. I miss our convivial and creative bookbinding days together, now a happy memory - however bookbinding ideas and news are still exchanged and regularly discussed.



My wee lockdown project [3]- no instructions! A first for me; spot the not-so-deliberate error! (The mistake was not covering the middle board with decorative paper, in this case the blue paper. I didn't notice until the whole book was cased in and completed. I don't think the structure has a future these days as I understand the main driving force was the cost of the materials to make the case; so one end board saved between two books...)

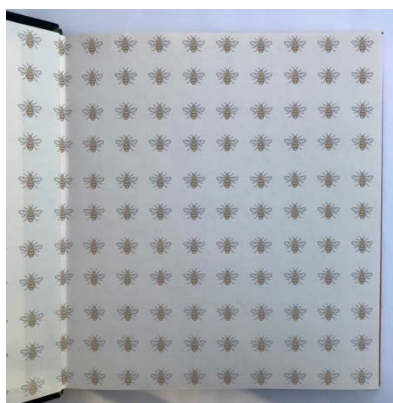
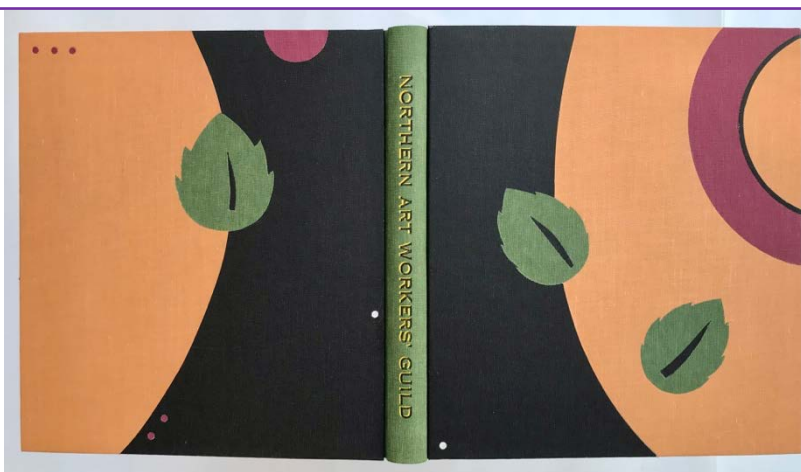
After several years the evening and weekend classes at Brewery Arts ended, the OFSTED bureaucracy having defeated even Dominic. I've since been to several wonderful courses offered all over the country, however I think, for me, the weekly courses were key to my getting totally absorbed. I still only play with simple structures but somehow my pair of knitting needles and a household knife has morphed into a whole room[4]. However I still use that old household knife...



Midlands Region show off their set book bindings

Our colleagues in the Midlands have an annual set book binding project for their members, culminating in a display and judging at their Christmas Social. This year they had chosen my recent book on the Arts and Crafts movement in Manchester, and I was delighted when they invited me to join them - to give a talk about the making of the book, and to select an *Author's Choice* binding. Members themselves always have a blind judging by all those present. The same binding, by Rachel Lyner, was selected by all: an unusual design in cloth, superbly executed. Rachel gained a BA in Graphic Design from Kent Institute of Art and Design and spent nearly twelve years with Derry Paper and Book Conservation before joining Sycamore Bookbinding in Nottingham in 2012.

Rachel comments: my first thought for the design of the binding had been to incorporate the Manchester bee so I was happy to open the first page and see the emblem of the Northern Art Workers' Guild was largely based around said bee. Rather than reproduce the emblem directly on the cover I wanted the design to reference it so the colour choices, the curves from the red typeface, the leaves etc are influenced by it. In design work I enjoy the graphic impact of bold shapes but also the effect and aesthetic of a repeating pattern - which in this case seemed apt for a worker bee - so for the endpapers I duplicated the bee in a grid pattern until it spread over a double page. The typeface on the spine was chosen as it has an interesting kick rather than a refined serif and I doubled the impression to give it depth. I wish I could say the design was intricately planned down to every last detail but in truth I approached each different aspect as it arose, breaking down the parts and hoping it would all come together as a coherent whole in the final book design.



The Committee for 2025

Chair & Newsletter Editor: Barry Clark (barry@chorlton21.co.uk)

Secretary: Jacqueline Payne (jacq.payne@oakbankmill.com)

Treasurer: Jeanne Pennington (jeannebpennington@gmail.com)

Programme Organiser: Sue Wood (swoosal@btinternet.com)

Outreach Lead: Catherine Garratt (cgarrratt2@googlemail.com)



the Society
of Bookbinders

