



## The Newsletter of the North Wales & North West Region

### Looking forward . . . . *Booking Forward?*

Nearly half way through the year and our Kelsall workshop programme is buzzing! Full houses, and very few members languishing on the waiting list - if so, do come as an observer. However the NW2 programme is never workshops alone, and Sue is now taking bookings for our summer visit and for our Autumn Gathering. Our **Liverpool visit on Tuesday 4 August** (£10, lunch included) starts at [Liverpool Central Library](#), re-built behind its imposing facade to create an uplifting light and welcoming interior yet still retaining the historic Picton and Hornby libraries. We will have a tour of the whole library, concluding with a handling session exploring bindings, book arts and bookplates from their Special Collections. For lunch, and the afternoon, we are at the [Liverpool Athenaeum Library](#), founded in 1797 re-located in 1928 it is still a private membership library in the heart of the city.



Our flagship meeting of the year is our **Autumn Gathering on 12 September**, a snip at £10. A day for all to come together for demos and illustrated talks, plus trade stands from Hewit's and Harmatan, a bookbinding display of **Bookbinding books, hand bound**, a raffle and a silent auction. The day revolves around: Helen Golding-Miller's talk and demo on **Mauchline-style bindings** (right), and Richard Nichols' talk **Crafted in Stone** (left). Richard comments: *it was an enjoyable collaboration between two ancient crafts: bookbinding and stone masonry. I met with a young stone mason to establish what was technically possible, and what stone we should choose, etc, she then worked with my wooden templates to produce the stone boards for me to bind into the book. This talk is an illustrated examination of my journey, looking at all aspects from techniques and materials used, to lessons learnt and the final hand over and display.*



#### **SoB Webinar : 17 June at 7pm** **Edward Bayntun-Coward** **What is a Book?**

In this well-illustrated talk Edward Bayntun-Coward will discuss the changing forms and functions of books, particularly over the past 40 years - bindings will feature prominently. Free, but [click here](#) to book.

The Society now has a significant resource of past webinars available to members to view as they wish. To check out the full list [click here](#).

#### **It's still not too late to claim** **your NW2 Conference** **Travel Grant**

Thanks to a generous donation from a fellow member, this year the region is able to offer assistance with travel costs to the Conference in York. If you feel that your travel costs are onerous and would like some financial assistance please email our secretary ([jacq.payne@oakbankmill.com](mailto:jacq.payne@oakbankmill.com)) giving the cost of your travel to York; **by 15 June please**.

## Leather Dyeing and Decoration, with Tom McEwan



It was a pleasure to welcome Tom [2] back to Kelsall for this workshop on leather decoration, in particular dyeing techniques and onlays - with the focus on making leather more personal to our designs. Given the limited availability of leather colours the ability to decorate our own leather would enlarge our design options considerably. Tom shared some of his designs [1], with plenty of offcuts available for us to use later in the day.



We began with the decorative process of Cracquelle, a dyed texture created on natural leather by means of a paste resist - a technique well-suited to goat and calf skin. A thick layer of paste was applied with a wide brush onto the correct side of the leather. By masking off areas with paper cut into various shapes and placed over the top we could create areas to resist the paste. Tom then placed a silk screen over the leather and paper, applied paste to the top of the screen and used a squeegee to pull the paste down and over the design. The pasted leather requires a day or more to dry thoroughly. Fortunately, Tom provided some pre-prepared leather pieces for us. The dry pasted leather could be manipulated to induce cracks and fissures in the paste layer.

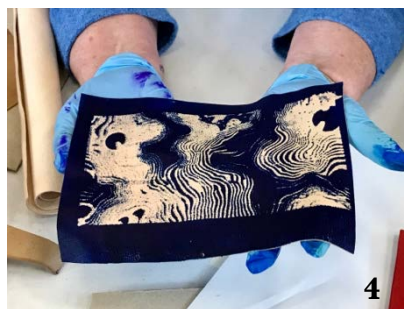


Others folded and creased the leather to create cracks in the paste. At this stage we were ready to apply dye to the surface and allow it to seep through the cracks creating distinctive patterns. There was a large selection of spirit-based dyes which we applied to the leather with large cotton wool swabs. (Most of us wore gloves however in the excitement to apply colour, one or two of us may have missed the gloves and enjoyed interestingly dyed hands for the rest of the day!) It was fabulous to see the designs revealed. We then washed the leather in water baths smoothing away the paste residue [3]. Hairdryers enabled us to dry and use these decorated leather pieces later in the day.



A 123 engineers block. Who knew how useful this little piece of equipment could be? I am sure that one or two of us have already purchased this little device.

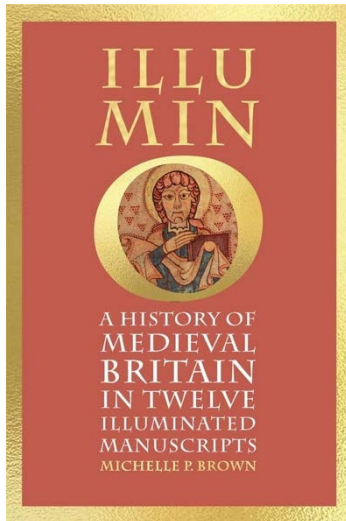
We moved on to screen printing. Tom had digitally prepared screen mesh sheets of images that three members had created, and these were kindly shared amongst the group. Tom demonstrated how to use the stencil on untreated leather by securing it on top of the leather with masking tape. Paste was applied to the top of the stencil and squeegeed down over the image. The image created on the leather was then dried and dyed creating exquisite images on the leather [4].



Later in the afternoon, Tom demonstrated how to join two pieces of leather seamlessly. He pared about 1 cm from the edge of each piece to reduce the thickness, pasted the edges, and applied even pressure by placing foam on top before pressing them. Using our original dyed leather, we then moved on to onlays. Using paring machines, we thinned our onlay pieces to around 0.2–0.3 mm. We pared from the upper side of the leather [5], which I found both exciting and slightly daunting. We were also shown how to achieve a smooth, even finish by using a spokeshave on the back of the leather to reduce the thickness. And finally a demonstration of a feathered onlay: pared to an extraordinary thinness of about 0.13 mm, and we had the chance to try this fine paring technique ourselves for an ultra-flush finish.

Throughout the day Tom gave us lots of advice, encouragement and guidance. It was a most enjoyable, informative and creative workshop.

*With thanks to Deb Matthews for this workshop review.*



**John Cooper-Poole writes:** Arthur Green's report of his interview with Professor Michelle Brown in Bookbinder #39 (2025) mentions Michelle Brown's recent book, *Illumin: A History of Medieval Britain in Twelve Illuminated Manuscripts*. My own very rudimentary interest in illuminated manuscripts was awakened by Christopher de Hamel's *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* which has enjoyed so much popular success. Of his several other books *Making Mediaeval Manuscripts* (Bodleian Library 2018) is likely to particularly appeal to binders.

I am not remotely qualified to review Michelle Brown's book, but several things about it are immediately appealing, even to an amateur.

One is the amount of intriguing information. For example, I cannot believe that I have passed my whole life hitherto without knowing what is a senmury. Nor, I must confess did I even know that mermaids were the mediaeval trade sign for prostitutes.

Another thing which I find particularly interesting is Prof Brown's interpretation of the marginal decorations which crop up in so many of the MSS which one might assume were the random and often whimsical amusements of the artist. But it turns out that these decorations often have serious meanings. For example, in the Luttrell Psalter, Sir Geoffrey Luttrell is shown as one of four men rowing a boat backwards. This indicates that he is being pulled backwards by his sins (his fellow oarsmen) while Truth and Mercy haul on ropes to pull the boat in the opposite direction. The decorations of the MSS is not only described and frequently attractively illustrated, but their meaning is developed. Fascinating.

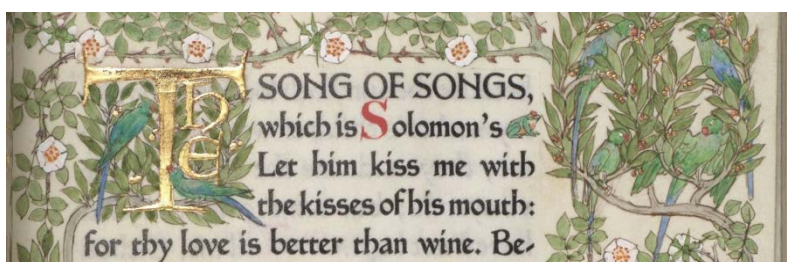
My only quibbles are with the actual design of the book. It is surprisingly heavy for its size. Art paper is always heavy, but this is ridiculous. The endpapers and section dividers are of a nasty brown colour which deadens the print. And there is no information about the actual size of the parts of MSS illustrated.

But all in all, it is one of those books which one will always enjoy coming back to. The Society of Bookbinders is very fortunate to have Michelle Brown as our Patron. For a calligrapher and illuminator's review of this book [click here](#).



**Outreach Lead Catherine**

**Garratt writes:** A non-bookbinding friend contacted me this week and sent me this photograph above. She had come across the poster when she was out and about in Lancaster. It's fantastic marketing from our Morecambe Bay Local Cluster who are hosting this event at Lancaster library. Good luck to all involved and we're looking forward to hearing more about the event - maybe a write up in the next newsletter? With all the events being undertaken by our Local Clusters updates will be a regular feature in the monthly newsletter. North Cheshire are the most recent to step forward to claim their £100 pump-priming grant. If you are planning a local SoB event, however big or small, please let me know so we can share the news of everyone's hard work and enthusiasm.



**Exhibition: *The Forgotten Library: Enriqueta Rylands and her books: 20 May - 31 October***

This exhibition explores the personal book collection of Enriqueta Rylands, founder of The John Rylands Library in Manchester. It reveals her life as a passionate reader and collector. Including decorated medieval manuscripts and fine bindings there is sure to be much to delight bookbinders. [Click here](#) for more information.

## Jill Setterington shares her *Bookbinding Beginnings*

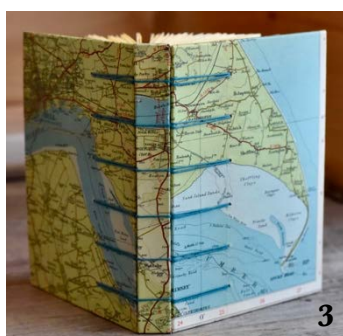
It all started in Manchester . . . I was at a Redeye the Photography Network [alas, no more] meet-up at Manchester Metropolitan University about 12 years ago. One of the tutors there offered to run a bookbinding workshop and, on the spur of the moment, I decided to attend. I have never looked back! We made a small concertina book (which I treasure and is now a photo album). I loved the hands-on practicality of it and remember wondering: what have I been doing all my life? I determined to learn more. My partner bought me a bookbinding kit from Ratchfords for Christmas and I was on my way.



I live in Leeds and soon after I booked onto the introduction to bookbinding programme at the [Leeds Print Workshop](#). I made a variety of pamphlet books, quarter-bound multi-sections and stab-stitch bindings [1], amongst others; it was a very good grounding. Suzy Rumsby was my teacher. I started using my photographs to make little stab-stitch bindings, thereby combining my two hobbies. I sold some at Art Fairs along with my photographs.

I also travelled to Masham where [Kate Bowles](#) taught a class on open-spine bindings. I am a big fan and was often tempted to buy her little books - being able to make one myself [2] was an ambition satisfied. Later, [Roger Grech](#) in Saltaire taught me how to make a very professional multi-section hardback book.

I've had several trips to the [Scrapstore in Hull](#) where I met the talented Glenn Malkin and learnt how to make Sewn Board and Bradel bindings. Ruth Brown taught us Secret Belgian Bindings [3] (one of my favourites - thank you Ruth). The Scrapstore shop is also a great place to buy more supplies at knock-down prices.



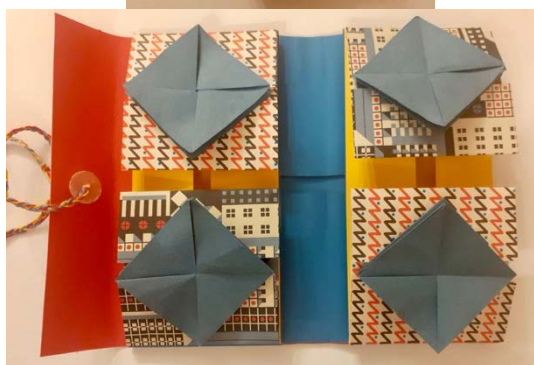
I taught myself how to make a Coptic stitch binding from You-Tube (still not sure I'm getting it right!) and last year I had a trip to the Portico Library in Manchester where I met Barry Clark. I learned how to make a Travel Journal under his expert tuition. I was already a member of the Society of Bookbinders and on his suggestion I switched to the NW2 region. Although I have not yet made the journey across the Pennines, I did join this year's recorded Zoom workshop, in which Mylyn taught us a lovely Bradel Cross Stitch binding - an intricate binding with lots of sewing, which I love.

I am fortunate to have a "shoffice" at the end of my garden [4] in Hyde Park, Leeds, which is now my bookbinding studio. I had it built shortly after I retired from being a Legal Executive in 2019. I moved all of my equipment from my front room into my new space. My brother-in-law made me a nipping press and I found a big extendable table on gumtree - once that was in place I felt ready to go. I have made hundreds of books in there, which I sell at Art Fairs in Leeds, Saltaire and Manchester. I am forever thankful for the opportunity I have been given, and love the creativity that is involved. (I hate doing anything remotely legal or administrative now, and IT is not my favourite thing!). I am so grateful too to all of the bookbinders who have shared their skills - I still have so much to learn and hopefully will be able to continue my journey for years to come. Recently, I am happy to say, I taught a class myself at [Left Bank, Leeds](#) - we made a concertina book! @jillsett17



## *The Chinese Thread Book: a North West Calligraphers' Workshop*

**Jane Sheppard writes:** thanks to a 'heads up' from Liz Kenny via our NW2 What's App group\* three SoB members booked onto this workshop, hot on the heels of Tom McEwan's workshop in Kelsall. You may already know of this binding as we were advised it was quite a trend in bookbinding circles some time ago. For those like me who were unaware of it, the style was developed long ago for the storage of non-bulky sewing materials, including threads. The version Jean Gray demonstrated provides 11 compartments of differing sizes in 4 layers of folding boxes. Jean also showed many variations, expertly executed in both paper and fabric.



Construction involved a lot of accurate measuring, cutting and folding of paper. Fortunately detailed instructions were on a handout! The early layers used heavier paper (130-180gsm) for strength, the later, smaller boxes were made from lighter paper (90-130gsm) to make folding easier. Concentration was essential to get the orientation of each part correct. Some thought as to which side of the paper to display was key in the design.

Adding a cover was optional, but most preferred this finish. Securing the cover could either be by a wrap-type fastening or a variety of folded bands. We all tried the 'Hedi Kyle' folded belt. This caused some head scratching at first, but becomes quite quick and easy after a few repetitions.

Overall it was a very satisfying day. We were made very welcome and the Lower Withington Village Hall was a good venue. We might even have recruited some new members for SoB - and if I thought I might ever have some calligraphy capability, I'd certainly join NWCA ([click here](#) for more about them). Many thanks to Liz, the NWCA members and especially to Jean Gray.

*\* Message Jacqueline Payne, 07810 837050, if you'd like to join the group.*

### **The Committee for 2026**

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

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

Treasurer: Jeanne Pennington ([jeannebpennington@gmail.com](mailto:jeannebpennington@gmail.com))

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

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



the Society  
of Bookbinders

