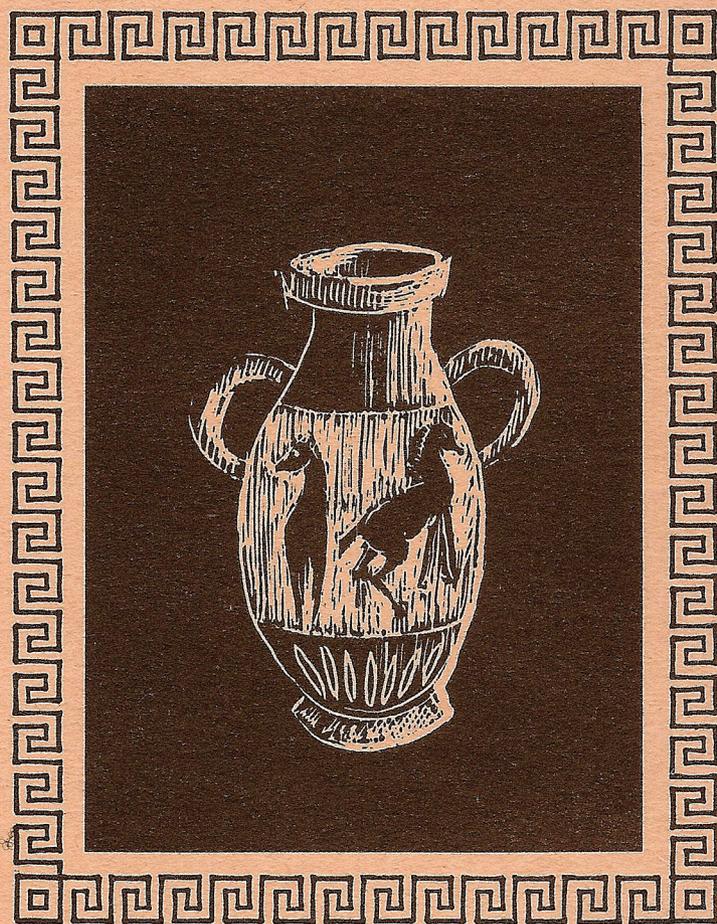


AMPHORA I



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IN RETROSPECT

*50 Years of Amphora*

THE ALCUIN SOCIETY

# In Retrospect: 50 Years of Amphora

THE VISION FOR the Alcuin Society when it came into being 50 years ago was to give those who loved the printed word—from collectors to readers, booksellers and publishers, librarians and book artists—a place to gather and enjoy their common love of print. While rooted in books and literature, the Society attracted people interested in everything from calligraphy to ephemera, ancient manuscripts to technology (even if it was often viewed with distrust). The breadth of interests was captured on the pages of the earliest issues of *Amphora*, which first appeared in spring 1967.

The first issues of the journal capture the ambitious spirit animating the Alcuin Society's founders. The earliest members were liberal in education and cosmopolitan in outlook. Vancouver might be distant from Canada's acknowledged cultural capitals, but as founder Geoff Spencer made clear, it had just as much to offer—as the pages of *Amphora*, filled by a dedicated team of volunteers, bear witness.

With articles reprinted from other publications, as well as contributions and correspondence from the likes of Lawrence Lande and Charles Roland, the early issues of *Amphora* are testimony to both the urbane and the inclusive tone of the Society. Articles reflected the breadth of members' interests, even as the Alcuin Society evolved to focus on book



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*George Kuthan's amphora from issue no. 6.*

design through its annual Awards for Excellence in Book Design in Canada.

The following compilation of selections from *Amphora* offers a sampling of history, phrases with a dash of spice, acknowledgments of current events from beyond the world of books, and a chronicle of anxieties around the future of the printed word as digital technology transformed communications through the latter 20th century.

Diligent readers will note how some topics recur, not to mention key names such

as Gerald Giampa, Jim Rimmer, Glenn Goluska, and Crispin and Jan Elsted. If these are the giants of Canada's book arts scene, Alcuin Society founder and long-time *Amphora* editor Geoff Spencer is to be credited for the zesty, opinionated tone that has characterized the journal.

This little anthology—with citations at the end arranged by issue number for those keen to read more—pays tribute to the successes of the past and gives cause for optimism regarding the future of the book arts in Canada. A great deal hasn't changed, despite shifts in technology; many concerns also remain the same, but the cosmopolitan outlook that characterized the Society in its early years remains strong, fostered through online exchanges that keep the Society's members thinking globally while pursuing their interests locally.

~ Peter Mitham, editor

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Compared with the capsule titles of our German friends, such as *Amtliches Mitteilungsblatt der Dinkelsbuehler Bibliophilengesellschaft*, *Amphora* doesn't sound too bad.

— 2 —

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A man who doesn't collect something, never mind what, is like the walking dead. I think it quite likely that civilization began when man filled his belly and idly picked up a coloured pebble, or made the first pleasing arrangement of his enemy's bones.

— 3 —

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We have, incidentally, also submitted books for the permanent exhibit of the Leipzig Book Fair. If we're not terribly careful Canada may yet become known for moderate literacy as well as Indians, cornflakes and swinging bachelor prime ministers.

— 4 —

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The core of Osler's bibliophilia was his personal library. He acquired widely and knowledgeably, while at the same time dispensing books to individuals and libraries with remarkable generosity. Yet withal there was a master plan, a plan to organize the works in his library in a unique pattern, to prepare a bibliographic guide, and to bequeath all to his alma mater.

— 6 —

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Bernard Amtmann, the *éminence grise* of Canadian rare book dealers, sends news from Montreal of the creation of an Eastern soulmate to Alcuin, which he has named The Erasmus Circle of Montreal. It is not clear yet what shape it will take.

— 7 —

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Since there's talk in this issue about the future of books *per se*, it may not come amiss to speculate about the future of those particular books which have meant much to us personally. Conceivably there are worse ways for a bookman of spending a winter evening than sitting before a blazing fire, making notes on what is to happen to those silent, lifelong friends after the drum roll. We owe it to them.

— 8 —

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The lesson to be learned is that it is entirely unrealistic—however laudably quixotic—to try and apply sixteenth-century notions in the era of Tricky Dicky and the bomb.

— 9 —

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As the collection grows, there may be problems of storage. And at this time, at least in some ill-managed households, the collector's wife begins to protest. "You are spending too much money on books. You are filling the house with dusty tomes. You never take me out to dinner anymore." The last problem is your own, but the first two face all collectors and some help is available.

— 10 —

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Calligraphy began as a scholastic attempt to restore the classical works of Greece and Rome, and then continued to develop its artistic quality in response to an increasingly general demand for creative excellence, an excellence which we see perfected in the hand of Antonio Sinibaldi. No sooner had the art attained this perfection than the crucial discovery of typography—a completely new dimension in reproduction—appeared to revolutionize man's potential for duplication.

— 12 —

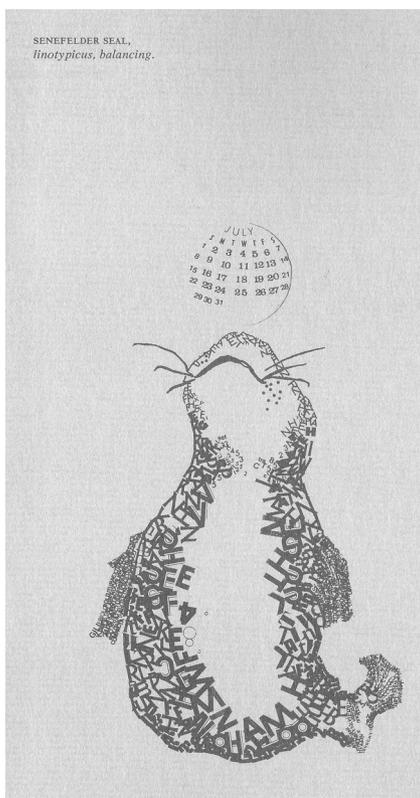
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Elbert Hubbard, who founded the Roycroft Press of East Aurora, Erie County, New York, in 1895, went into printing with the delicacy of a lumberjack.

— 13 —

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Why would Roger Asham write a lengthy manuscript in code? Try this for size. There were considerable fun and games at Elizabeth's court even if, according to history, she did not join in the general boudoir gymnastics. How about a risqué forerunner of "The Secret Life and Times of Edward VIII" or "I Was Hitler's Maid"? Roger Asham would have enjoyed a unique vantage point from which to chronicle the goings-on at court.



*Typographical beasts designed by Vancouver City College students for Amphora 11.*

— 14 —

How limited is a “limited edition”? Some advertisements clearly inform the prospective purchaser, others merely state that orders must be received by a certain date, and the size of the edition is never revealed. Again, is an edition of 1000 truly “limited”? Where should the line be drawn?

— 15 —

If money may soon, with perfect safety, be carted around in laundry baskets, a flight now into books and manuscripts makes sense. And it need not stop us from loving the things for their own sake.

— 17 —

It has taken many years for designers to break out of the largely self-imposed constraints of classical proportion. Perhaps the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction; certainly there is no merit in bizarre proportion adopted merely to avoid the taunt of being “old-fashioned.”

— 19 —

The pragmatic may protest that differences in design, particularly in typography, are unimportant. One has words, after all. But as one becomes sensitized to the beauties and subtleties of language, so one can become sensitized to the subtleties of typographic design.

— 20 —

“I am a bookseller,” I blurted. “I have come to Vancouver to open a bookshop.”

The lips scarcely moved but the voice was clear: “You have come to the wrong place.” He wasn’t advising me; he was telling me.

“Probably the best place in Canada,” I ventured.

“The best climate,” he said. “Canadians buy few good books. My business is by catalogue with a few hundred Americans and in the British Isles. Where are you from?”

“Montreal.”

“Quebeckers buy NO good books,” he snapped. “I have lived in your province.”

Binky [Marks] was no Adonis, and he failed to see why he should put himself out to embellish the handiwork of God in one of his off moments. Not to put too fine a point on it, he was invariably scruffy as all get out. The Green Revolution would have been given a lift from the mere boiling of his shirts. Inside—though in other circumstances I would shrink from using the words—he had a beautiful soul.

How often does one hear or read discussions relating to the printing of music as distinct from printing books? Yet the incunabular period of printing coincided with one of the most important eras in musical development.

Recently a proposal was put to members of the Society who are known to indulge in printing. The aim of the proposal was to ascertain whether they would care to produce a Keepsake for distribution among the members. The response was most enthusiastic.

About a quarter of my library seems to be made up of bantams. Perhaps this in itself is revealing. Why did I collect these small format editions? Perhaps it is because of a certain nomadic restlessness which tends to weigh possessions in terms of portability.

As a result of some fine articles in *Fine Print, Quill & Quire*, and the *Toronto Globe and Mail* the Society's membership has increased tremendously since the start of this year . . . . But a thrill equally heart-warming has been another type of writing, viz., a thesis on the Alcuin Society submitted to the School of Library and Information Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Library Science, University of Western Ontario.

H.R. MacMillan was a well-known figure in the world of lumber. Not so well known was his interest in books. He was one of the Society's sustaining members almost from inception, and his continuous support was deeply appreciated.

Considering the vast amount of poor literature that passes through the hands of printers, it is not surprising that printers themselves feel encouraged on occasion to try their hand at poetry.

"Why on earth do well brought-up people read such bad books, books of which they cannot even speak without blushing? I am sure that familiarity with bad books is often more dangerous than familiarity with bad people."

"Why?" replied the bookman, laughing.  
"Why? That is just the taste of our time."

The wraithly ranks are undiminished. Consider just a few of the ghostly cognomens that haunt that most inviolable of scholarly preserves—The Literature.

An entire family of ghosts named Phil occupies a place, formalized by all the cybernetic bits that now verify an author's existence. But the Phils mock this procedure, for they do *not* exist. The most prolific, indubitably, is D.Phil.

There is little hard evidence to show whether private book collectors are increasing or are following the dodo. However, where massive and specialized private collections are put up for auction following the death of a collector (whose progeny are usually unable to distinguish a Golden Cockerel from an Admiral's chamber pot), it has sometimes seemed that successful institutional bids have condemned the books to a fate somewhat like that of the unhappy wretch walled up in the vaults of Poe's "Cask of the Amontillado."

— 31 —

De-acidifying paper is a frequent job, and the Parliaments' method is to spray each page with an alkaline solution of methyl alcohol. To preserve groundwood pulp, lamination is usually done. This method is used for other fragile documents and papers as well.

— 32 —

From time to time rumour has indicated that paper manufacturers are strongly opposed to the introduction of the metric system. Whether this is so, or not, is not irrelevant when a layman attempts to make head or tail of paper descriptions in a catalogue. Weight, for instance, is based on points (thickness) and is predicated on a ream, that is, in non-metric countries. However, the colophon of "Flowers in Heraldry" describes the paper used as "Chromomat 300 gm<sup>2</sup>."

— 33 —

With surrealism, the latest brand of intellectual art, suggesting the use of fur-lined tea cups, it would hardly be out of step with our age to call attention to the most useful set of abstract designs ever conceived by man. I refer to our alphabet.

— 34 —

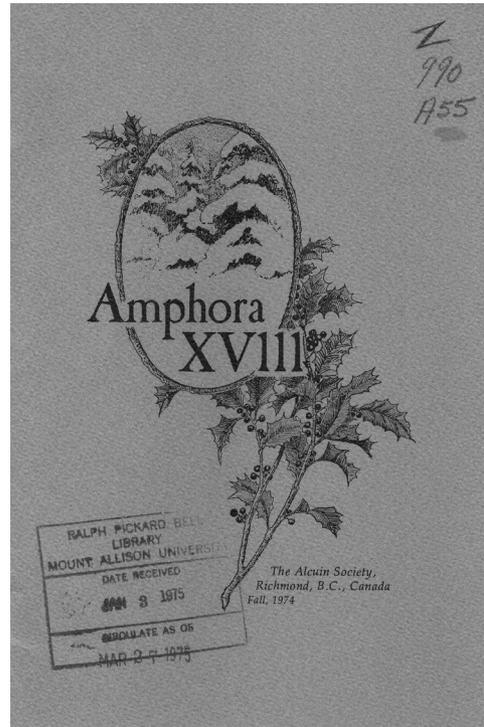
Like the clothes we wear and the food we eat, Christmas cards reflect changes in fashion and taste, as well as developments in printing.

— 35 —

Pursuing the notion, then, that there is no problem in the world of books that has not been with us at least for some centuries, I turn now to the problematic relationship between author and publisher. At issue in the following passage is of course money, the belief that the author should be the first person to gain from publication.

— 36 —

Barbarian Press is now established on five acres in Steelhead, near Mission, in an outbuilding which has been converted into a pressroom by agonizingly slow degrees. Our intention is to publish in three main areas: contemporary poetry, new translations, and Mediaeval and



Cover of Amphora 18.

Renaissance texts, especially early renderings of the Greek and Roman classics.

— 37 —

Mr. Zapf shows a keen understanding of the typographic needs of our fast-moving, highly technical age. He realized before most the role the computer would play in modern graphic production. He has not fought this trend or denigrated it. He has realized that the same artistry and skill he has brought to the design of typefaces for foundry casting and machine setting must now be placed at the service of the computer to make certain that the printing of the future can have the possibility of being as beautiful as the best of the past.

— 38 —

However harsh, though, the climate and the conditions of life, and however far the settlers were from centres of culture, the printed word flourished. It seems, indeed, that immigrants needed reading matter precisely because they were both physically and culturally isolated.

— 39 —

Though authors differ very much concerning the invention of letters, of which afterwards books were composed; yet we take it for granted, that they were invented by Adam, his sons, and grandsons, in the first age of the world, and were after preserved by Noah and his progeny, till they came to Abraham, and so to Moses.

— 40 —

I would advise anyone collecting manuscript material to make a serious study of old paper and water-marks, and to study the calligraphy, “au courant” of the different periods of history that interest him. Each age has its own tempo, pulse-beat, if you like, to which one can relate even to the paper and handwriting of the time.

— 41 —

Anyone with as little as \$5000 to spend can acquire a machine that takes up not much more than the corner of a desk but is capable of producing camera-ready copy for publication. This is not good news for all those small printers who have invested in photo-composers. Nor is it good news for the future of the art of typography. The increasing use of such relatively unsophisticated equipment for the production of camera-ready copy can only serve to reduce further the taste for fine typography. This is do-it-yourself equipment but of a kind quite different from the small handpress. This is technology, not art.

— 42 —

By prowling through antique markets, old stores, dusty attics, and basements, the avid collector salvages and preserves the commonplace items which so intimately reflect the lives of our predecessors.

— 43 —

A modern designer spreads out the book face down to expose the total design across both covers. The decision to put a title on the spine is then made only if it does not interfere with the overall design. So the pecking order is self-confessed: the design comes before the

book, which is tantamount to saying that the frame is more important than the picture.

— 44 —

It is a truism perhaps to state that today’s children might grow up never knowing the pleasure of holding and reading a book designed with meticulous concern for the integration of paper, typography, binding and text. If so, appreciating the art and craft of five hundred years of book making will be lost to them. *The Devil’s Artisan’s* concern for fine letterpress printing will help to keep a tradition alive.

— 45 —

The kind of people who wrote these works were the kind of people who later churned out hundreds of thousands or even millions of words per year for the magazines that took over where the chapbooks and penny dreadfuls left off.

— 46 —

A member living in Pine Point, N.W.T., has written to say that a recent issue of *Amphora* took one month to reach him. This would seem to confirm another member’s cynical view that the 17¢ increase in the Canadian domestic postal rate is intended to cover storage charges.

— 47 —

Is it enough to devote just three words—“Binding by Cockerell,” or Zaehnsdorf, or Kalthoeber—when the rest of the colophon spreads itself over possibly a hundred words naming the printer, illustrator, typesetter, typeface, paper, etc.?

— 48 —

Avid for information and entertainment, without today’s radio, TV, paperbacks and so forth, I was happy to retreat to my books.

— 49 —

Japanese ex-libris are very foreign. Even where the subject matter (as in a landscape or an erotic print) is immediately recognizable, the treatment is unusual; and often even the subject matter needs explanation. We are aware of lively minds in contact with a

different world, and with a view of the world which is fresh and frequently unexpected.

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— 50 —

Early printed Church music follows closely in style the manuscripts copied so carefully in the monasteries for centuries before.

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— 51 —

Libraries are useful today and, with some luck and proper care, they will be useful tomorrow and a century from now.

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— 52 —

As it is difficult to make a bread-&-butter living as a craft binder in circumstances where relatively few book collectors know what is involved in the commissioning of a fine binding, it is to be hoped that Alcuin members will support both Charlotte [Bagshawe] and Courtland [Benson] whenever they can.

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— 53 —

Mennonite calligraphy based on Fraktur starts, in my opinion, with a grave handicap—a most unlovely alphabet. It simply cannot stand in the same league as the elegant chancery italic alphabets of Arrighi or Tagliente, devised and written in the service of the Roman Church.

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— 54 —

Buying books in a remainder shop is no different from buying cans of peas in a cut-price food warehouse. Whatever else may be said for it, there's no magic in it.

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— 55 —

Now, for the first time in the several thousand years of writing and the five hundred-odd years of printing, we have in computers a device which no longer relies on paper as the recording medium. . . . And in place of the enduring printed word on paper we have an ephemeral pattern of electronic dots on a videoscreen.

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— 56 —

It is simply true that wherever one is one can participate in the life of the world, past, present and future, as it expresses itself in the books which are the least deceitful language it has.

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— 57 —

Sometimes the typographer, like the jazz musician, may bring a great deal of himself and his own inventiveness into the work at hand. More often, he must keep out of work's way. . . . The book is a domain in which the designer must be impeccably prepared, sumptuously talented, and yet modest enough not to overperform.

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— 58 —

If we accept that design can carry its own message, where does one draw the fine line distinguishing palatable display of information in consumable portions and needless and costly design aimed at clouding issues?

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— 59 —

It was a bankrupt town that I inherited when I began. If I had had the knowledge of it then I wouldn't have stayed; as it was I was just ignorant enough to be curious and just stubborn enough to be resentful. If I had known more or had been better motivated I would have moved to California or to England, but I was a Canadian, after all, and shared in the inadequacies of my countrymen.

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— 60 —

These books, even if I had never read them, or were never to read another, are as much a part of my attitude and the happiness of my bookish childhood as the cats, the battered old upright piano, my father's pipe, or the homemade bread on Sunday nights.

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— 61 —

The smell of a burned bookshop is unique in the world. Anyone who has smelled one will understand me. It is a sorrowful smell, a smell with dead passion at its bottom.

— 62 —

The work also represents Bringhurst's dedication to the belief that form and format must complement and enhance the substance of a fine poem.

— 63 —

The book arts have a long and healthy, if somewhat obscure, existence in British Columbia. More important, these arts are all thriving in the province today, and gradually they are gaining greater recognition.

— 64 —

Glenn [Goluska] is as rigorous an artist as I have ever met, and he has a deeply personal style. There is not a grain of page surface anywhere in his recent books which is not suffused with his individual intelligence.

— 65 —

Grace Melvin was the first craftsperson to bring the art of the broad-edged pen to Canada. There were commercial artists doing built-up lettering and sign painters facile with brush lettering. And there was that particular breed known as engrossers, who used the popular pointed steel

nib to outline letters, which would then be filled in with pen or brush, as well as achieving thick and thin strokes (as in the Copperplate Hand) through pressure and lift. But they all had one thing in common—they created the “printed look,” whether typeset or engraved, rather than naturally performed letter shapes from the basic study of early manuscripts.

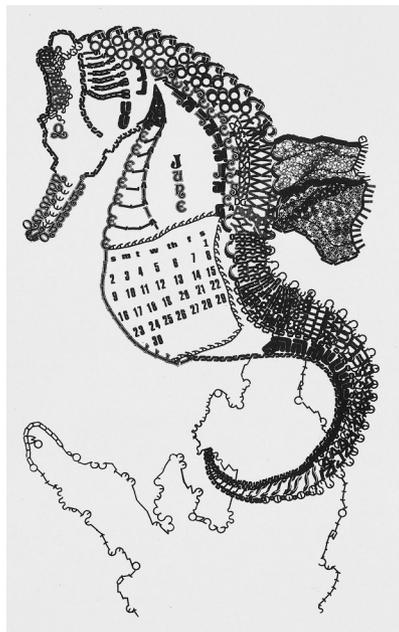
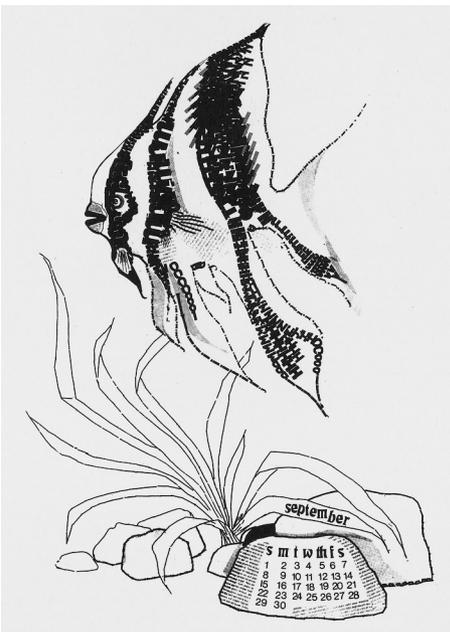
— 66 —

One can never be certain what sustains a bookshop, but the stock does reveal something of the bookseller and those who know how to read the signs can find entertainment in the most dismal shops. Driffield's reference to a shop “in which even the silverfish wear tuxedos” is a contribution to the notion.

— 67 —

It was under [Wil] Hudson's influence that [Gerald] Giampa developed a sense for type and ornamentation, though Hudson himself used ornamentation but sparingly. His time with Hudson afforded him the opportunity to see the work of Bruce Rogers and Frederic Warde and it was Warde's work that fired his imagination the most.

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*Typographical sea creatures designed by Vancouver City College students for Amphora 16.*



The predilection for female nudes on bookplates is by no means confined to men; about a third were commissioned by women. Most, while somewhat idealistic, are readily recognizable for what they are, but there were quite a few abstracts, though none, mercifully, three-breasted à la Picasso.

[Lucie Lambert] says she chose the *book* as the form for presentation of her work early on in her career because she wanted “a unity, a logic, an integration” of images. She felt that a “bound” collection would show a “rhythm of development . . . a sequence that ties together time and space.”

[Thomas] Mosher’s annual catalogues from 1891 to 1914 were about as different from the run-of-the-mill catalogues of the period as Mae West at a convention of Methodist missionaries. The catalogues were expressions of the man.

The essential fact which must be understood and accepted by the printer wishing to use a handpress is that it is not a machine, but a tool. That is to say that the work produced will bear the marks of the printer’s skill, not the sophistication of the machine.

A designer is somewhat like an actor, mediating between author and audience while losing himself in the role he creates; however, the best actors can manage to transform themselves almost completely into another and yet be subtly present.

It would seem that [Nicolette Gray] misses the whole point of the effect the Crusades had on parchment—or the lack thereof—throughout Europe. By the fourteenth century, books had become smaller in size. Consequently, the writing was smaller—the spacing inside letters, between letters, between words, between lines, became tighter and tighter.

To many of us Christmas is still synonymous with book-time. I can’t recall offhand any Christmas when I haven’t given, and received, at least half a dozen books.

Royal collectors were not above the immoral practices of today’s book collectors. Janus Pannonius complained in one of his letters that his mentor, János Vitéz, and the King’s librarian, Galeotto Marzio, were very absent minded when it came to returning borrowed books. The two of them had taken all his Latin books, but luckily for him neither of them spoke nor read Greek, therefore his Greek books were still in his possession.

Even though a finely printed and well crafted book is no guarantee of good literature, very frequently some of the finest books happen when people who are interested in the craft of printing get together with writers and with artists and together they create an integrated cultural expression of our times, and one that is valid for all times.

[William] Morris showed us that everything about book design, at whatever level or cost, is worthy of the attention not only of journeymen but of artists: he showed us that book design involves every single aspect of design for even the cheapest book, and also showed us that a well-designed book is a joy to everyone who comes in contact with it.

In the UK over the past decade or so, I’ve seen some pretty unusual stuff at the annual exhibition of Designer Bookbinders, but at least most of it was redeemed by the fact that there was at least a printed text to start with before they turned Frankenstein loose on the binding and embellishment.

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Jean MacDonald created a format and style guide for our personal computers, which means that even more of *Amphora* will be created by volunteers. This is one of our solutions and in fact is imperative if the Society is to sustain itself into the future. If you have ideas and energy to give to the Society, please step forward.

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The subjects of interest to the Society are so timeless that we think you'll agree the articles are rarely dated and that issue VII is as interesting and informative as issue 70.

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The technical aspects of production are also crucial: good or bad printing, colour separations, paper, etc. reinforce or destroy good design.

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A discussion with any artist working with colour illustration will inevitably focus on the frustrations of reproducing the original artwork on the printed page accurately, with the tonal gradations of hue intact, and in the same relationship envisioned by the artist. . . . The perfectionist illustrator can be driven nearly mad by the quest for fidelity to the original.

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Most of our own publications are printed on Zephyr [Antique Laid] for reasons of economy. We like the sheet, it is often appropriate, so we have it milled to our exact press size to save time in cutting and money by avoiding waste.

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If, as they have for some years now, booksellers and publishers can talk about “the shelf life of a book”; then, the time is long past for “consumers” to start worrying, much more than they seem to, about the quality of the “product” and the length of life of the book in their hands and on their shelves.

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In the late twentieth century the “secrets” of Prague began to seem less and less mysterious and more and more practical in nature. Even in a short visit, it is obvious that the Library is but one out of hundreds of hidden “cultural jewels” this country possesses; but, where is the money for their restoration and upkeep to come from?

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Does the public really care about reading Canadian books? Do they wish to be made aware of Canadian books? Do we really need to celebrate a national literature and a national industry that bespeaks a culture which we are having immeasurable difficulty either defining or retaining?

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The next morning was the start of my day as an 8th century monk. The thought of the the previous day's weather did nothing to encourage me. However, fortified by a hearty Scottish breakfast I set off, with my habit kilted to the knees, covered with a poncho (alas, not the traditional oiled sealskin), and made my way to the chapel of St Columba.

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When asked about the variety of material she is commissioned to restore she replies, “mostly post 1880s volumes, and many family Bibles.” A continuing source of frustration for the trained conservator is the reluctance of many customers to spend money on the restoration of paper, so that bindings receive attention at the expense of the contents.

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Among the children's books, . . . all of this year's winners were printed offshore, a regression from some recent years, showing that full-colour work throughout even a smaller book is still hard to justify at Canadian prices.

— 90 —

It seems reasonable to me to assume that printed forms of communication (books, newspapers, periodicals) will continue to exist beside the newer electronic forms that have already been developed and that will continue to be developed in the future (e.g., various forms of the “electronic book”).

— 91 —

An over-reliance on the wonders of computer technology, and a failure to communicate resulted in the [last] issue being typeset without any human intervention in its proofreading. Much to our chagrin, we have, as a result, discovered that the computer is an unreliable editor’s shortcut. It may be able to check simple spelling and grammar, but it is unable to determine that while words may be spelled correctly they are nonetheless quite wrong within the context of a passage of coherent prose.

— 92 —

Hard economic times and the effects of increased taxation and reduced grants are making themselves felt: as noted above, there have been fewer submissions in some categories. Yet with some ingenuity and with their priorities in the right place, publishers continue to ensure that the state-of-the-art in Canadian book design remains praiseworthy and highly competitive within the book world at large.

— 93 —

Opened, the book looks like two stacks of neatly turned manuscript. Closed, it looks like a block of kindling. Which is to say, like an ancient book: the Greek *déltoi* or *pinakes*, which the Romans called *puggilares*: bound wafers of cypress and beech, prepared for the stylus by brushing the inner surfaces with a slip of gesso or wax.

— 94 —

Paper made from hemp won’t crumble to dust in less than a century as do papers made from chemical-treated woodpulp.

An unmentioned possibility is that by boiling some unreadable book made from hemp paper

and drinking the fluid, one might conceivably get a lift far beyond the author’s dreams.

— 95 —

Dorbil’s books were nothing to write home about. The atmosphere of the shop made up for it. If it could only have been bottled and preserved! All Bill’s books must have originally been racked under some classification, but by the time I got there, they jostled each other on the shelves in classless egalitarianism, like a good party loosening up after midnight.

— 96 —

Books being the principal tools by which collective wisdom (and, alas, folly) is passed on, should an enlightened government not allow an appropriate rebate on the inheritance taxes of anyone who, during a lifetime, accumulates a personal library?

— 97 —

We have reached a point where, from now on, most of the images we see in our daily lives, and that form our understanding of the world, will have been digitally recorded, transmitted, and processed. What you are now reading has been digitally scanned and digitally printed from what, in the “old” litho technology, we used to call “camera-ready” pages. . . .

Where does this leave us? Increasingly skeptical of images, one hopes, and with renewed faith in the printed word.

— 98 —

I collect private press books because I have recently been exposed to them. Before, though I knew what they were, they always seemed too exotic and full of poems for my taste. But now that I have taken the time to investigate them, I find them to my liking.

— 99 —

If we don’t come up with better ways of teaching children to read, harnessed to the resolve to apply them firmly, our tomorrows won’t be worth having. We have to face the grim paradox that while communication technology

advances relentlessly, breeding its own élite in the process, there are going to be fewer and fewer people around capable of providing the electronic Molochs with intelligent input.

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— 100 —

If indeed the tide is on the turn and a growing number of people in Western society are re-discovering the joy of books and reading, how can these people be reached? That is the question that has faced all past presidents of the Alcuin Society, myself included.

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— 101 —

On May 8th, 1995, when opening the new home of Special Collections at Simon Fraser University, the President, John Stubbs, in a remarkably unbuttoned address, performed the equally remarkable feat of not once mentioning the Internet and made only passing reference to the alleged wonders of Cyberspace. He even conceded that the current fascination with things electronic need not signal the immediate demise of the book.

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— 102 —

What, you might well ask of a type designer, is my favourite alphabet? Should you be unwise enough to ask a father which of his daughters is the most beautiful he will, if he has any sense, say that they are all equally beautiful. That also applies to all the typefaces created by a designer.

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— 103 —

We make no apologies for continuing our campaign against certain book dealers who buy valuable illustrated books in order to sell the individual plates. . . .

It should be said, in fairness, that the practice appears to be increasingly on the part of art galleries rather than book dealers. But wherever it occurs, the remedy is not to buy individual plates, framed or unframed. If there's no profit in it, the ghouls will stop.

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— 104 —

When we fled from East Germany in 1952, among our few personal possessions were two

suitcases of books, an agonizing selection from the thousand-odd we had to leave behind. . . .

Years later, my wife ventured to return to East Germany, among other reasons anxious to see what happened to our books. She found them in dust-covered boxes, safely stored in an attic by relatives.

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— 105 —

The private library captures one's history, one's interests, and one's biases. In essence, the private library is a reflection of one's self. While I may sometimes miss the books I left in Montreal, it was worth the expense of moving half my collection across the country.

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— 106 —

Ranging my bookshelves, I find that I have unconsciously accumulated a nice little collection of books with allegorical animal illustrations. . . . Ignoring any deeper psychological significance of why we should have the audacity to think that any animal would wish to copy our human foibles, the pictures themselves I find intensely entertaining.

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— 107 —

One of the ironies of our high-tech age is that we tend to value things simply because they're old and gone or on the way out. In the field of books and fine printing, this is increasingly recognized by the astute hucksters. Fine, they say, if that's what they want we'll give it to them. What's more, we'll give it to them without the expense and tediousness of the old process.

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— 108 —

A third reason for collecting book trade labels is their beauty and skilful design. Simple type was used on the most common form of ticket, but often accentuated by distinctive paper or foil.

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— 109 —

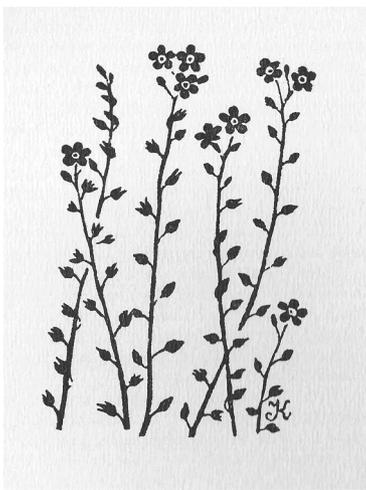
The nostalgia wave has hit printing: type museums are sprouting up all over. The common inspiration seems to be a desire to preserve rather than junk the tools and memorabilia of the traditional printing industry.

Books and the publishing of books has always struck me as the greatest market-driven free-for-all of the human spirit. Publishers through the ages have published what they think will sell. Readers read what they find interesting. And in whatever form, on paper or on screen, that is what they will go on doing.

Reading text in which one is interested exercises the imagination. It is active, not passive. The mind, in a word, is considered as a tool to be honed by regular exercise.

I like to think the method of Sir William Osler has a lot going for it. He read for fifteen minutes each night before going to sleep. Over a very long lifetime, he never broke this rule. He did it, one is told, as an antidote to the specialized reading in his profession.

For the early 16th century husband possessed of a strong-willed wife, the fledgling printing industry provided some useful counter measures, created, according to the anonymous author [of *Frawen Biechlin: zum rum und breyse allen Tugentsamen auch erbaren weybern* (Augsburg, 1522)], on the direct authority of God.



George Kuthan illustration from Amphora 5.

Lem Putt, a collector of press books with wood engravings, once told of asking in an antiquarian bookshop if they had any Golden Cockerels, to be told by a bored assistant minding the shop during the lunch break that “there might be some in the Poultry section.”

Technical terms of slide action, double and triple telescopic, twist action, barley twist, finial, hallmark differentiation, reverse and plug, chatelaine, had me gasping with confusion. It was easy to see Neil was passionate about pencils and obviously very knowledgeable.

I cannot recall deriving so much pleasure from the visual and tactile aspect of a pressbook for many years. For [*Shadow River*] is indeed a pressbook in the noblest tradition, as by far the greater part of the work must have been done in [Jim] Rimmer’s own printshop and studio. No student who took part is likely to forget or remain unaffected by the experience.

[Michael Wilcox] is a sharer. At the workshop he held on the Saturday morning, he willingly shared his knowledge. This is rare. My wife tells me that on occasional visits to some bookbinding studios, work in process was covered up until the visitor had passed. It takes a man on top of his powers to share without reservation. And a generous and modest one to boot.

This is not, by the way, a book for bedtime browsing. It weighs in at 3 kg, which is outside the comfort zone of a handheld book. And if you try to balance it on your navel, you are likely to finish up with a crater rather than a dimple.

Gregynog stands in beautiful grounds and visitors to the press are welcome. There is much to interest the binder and many volumes from the back list are still available, several in unbound sheets. In spite of the disgraceful

action of the Welsh Arts Council, the press is still surviving and will continue to uphold the highest standards of design, printing and binding.

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— 120 —

There are some book illustrators whose work in a given book sticks in memory like the Matterhorn would in the tulip fields of Holland. One such is Eric Gill, whose drawings for the Golden Cockerel edition of the *Four Gospels* are, in my opinion, at the top of the heap.

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— 121 —

As my knowledge (but alas, not my wisdom) grew with the years and I developed pointers to what I liked, I also came to rely increasingly on people whose judgment I had come to trust. This saved me from wasting endless hours in opening my mind to unsifted trash.

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— 122 —

The Harry Potter books don't even come close to the quality of Milne or Crompton or Graham, not to mention Carroll's incomparable *Alice*. But to light a fire you need kindling. The kindling may not be balsamic cedar, but if it burns and sets alight the greater fire, who knows what might happen?

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— 123 —

*Amphora 124* will be like Joseph's dream coat—a garment of colourful patches that happened to come together in the editor's ragbag.

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— 125 —

After the resignation of editor Geoff Spencer the Board was faced with a difficult transition time before a new editor and editorial team could be established and working. In order to get something into the hands of members quickly it was decided to issue the catalogue, handsomely designed by Roberto Dosil, for the 19th Annual Awards for Excellence in Book Design in Canada as *Amphora 124*.

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— 126 —

The presence of the Internet has not, and will not, spell the elimination of the traditional used and antiquarian bookstores. Many of my

colleagues have experienced steady growth in sales since the advent of the Internet. The Internet has changed the book business in a few ways, but mostly it is, in itself, a tool which can be used to the benefit of bookstores.

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— 127 —

A specialist in fiction and lifestyle, [Mary Trentadue] can get her hands on anything, and fast. *Mein Kampf* is on order for a customer, but Trentadue wouldn't stock it because "it's old, it's not well written and normally no one asks for it." She loves that in a tiny store this is considered discretion, not censorship.

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— 128 —

Helen believes Warren [Stannard], who died unexpectedly in the fall of 1996, was originally drawn to printing books by a desire to leave some physical legacy for his family. He never sold copies of his books, and as he'd hoped, they remain in the possession of his children and grandchildren.

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— 129 —

Most of the handmade paper which one sees in markets in Thailand is made into albums or umbrellas. The tourist literature we saw never mentioned handmade paper at all. Neither does the *Lonely Planet* or other guides to Thailand. Once we saw this paper in the market, though, we started to try to find the places where it was made.

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— 130 —

I still don't think too much of the audience because that would make me a graphic artist. Yet, I enjoy the fact that my works will be in the hands of people, such as myself, who would appreciate book arts and small engravings.

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— 131 —

For a real bibliomaniac, one has to turn to Jacob Püterich of Reicherthausen (near Munich), who died probably around 1469 and who was prepared to risk body and soul for books. In his poetic epistle to the Archduchess Mechthild in Heidelberg, written when he was sixty-two, he claims that his library of 164 works had "been brought together

by stealing, robbing, and also borrowing; donated, copied, bought, and also found.”

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— 132 —

Whatever topic strikes my fancy, I have books in my library that discuss, analyze and illustrate it. Thus owning a few thousand volumes is a convenience. You cannot point to my all-colour book of biker tattoos or my atlas of Mars and accuse me of impracticality.

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— 133 —

It is the visual impact of woodcuts that draws me to them. A few pieces on a wall can dominate a room. But it seems to me that the level of visual literacy required to appreciate them is gradually being crushed by the jackboot of photography and its version of pictorial space.

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— 134 —

Even in the face of an information technology revolution, and actually fostered by it, more books and periodicals are being produced, and Canadians are becoming more and more aware of their own publications and the environment in which they are produced.

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— 135 —

One of the last questions I put to the small press owners is, “What are the main distractions and detours you face as the owner of a small press?” The answers are so far similar: anything that compromises or threatens to compromise the creativity.

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— 136 —

Writers are a generally interesting and occasionally unruly lot, their attendants often less the former and more the latter.

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— 137 —

Brian [Murdoch] admits that the supply of good used books is challenge for him. Book scouts who used to buy books very cheaply at garage sales and thrift stores and sell them for a reasonable profit to him, now sell the books themselves online.

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— 138 —

Why do the seasons affect our reading? In part, because we need them to do so. We couldn’t survive without regular patterns in our lives.

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— 139 —

Although he accused the profession of having its head in the sand in the 1970s, ignoring the rapid approach of the paperless society, [F. Wilfrid] Lancaster saw librarians as likely to assume increased importance in the age of electronics. He predicted that librarians would become “deinstitutionalized,” freed from working within the four walls of a library to serve as information consultants.

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— 140-41 —

At various times the Society has been home to eccentric characters, dynamic movers and shakers, publishing powerhouses, and those just caught up in the momentum of it all.

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— 142 —

Many institutions regularly de-accession material as they run out of storage space. This gives collectors a chance to acquire material otherwise almost impossible to find, but the material seems to be as often thrown out as re-collected. It also provides no confidence that donated material will be kept, unless it is identified as being more valuable than other material.

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— 143 —

Artists often feel the need to make their own independent mark on a text, to make something a little different that’s exclusively ours. *Wind in the Willows* is no place to do this, because it is Moley and Ratty and Toad who dictate how they ought to look.

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— 144 —

I got into publishing because my appreciation for the art of book design and production was so great that I wasn’t appreciating the books I was collecting. . . . I felt that if I was going to collect certain authors, then I should design and publish them myself.

— 145 —

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When not guided by the artistic impulse, however, [Gaétan] Soucy believes the necessity to write too often results in something short of true literature. It's the difference between Britney Spears and Béla Bartók, he quipped.

— 146 —

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Early in my publishing career I was very naïve and lost a lot of money, and then made the mistake of publishing a book I thought was good enough, but not great, because it would sell well. After, I became so disillusioned that I took some time off to rethink my whole publishing program.

— 147 —

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It's an innocent game to wonder whether [Stanley] Morison, or [Arthur] Szyk, would have fretted about the legitimacy of digital printing as a means for reproducing the artist's delicate designs. One suspects the true connoisseur knows to focus on the result, rather than the method.

— 148 —

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A letterpress printer is dealing in reality. He can't fake it, he can't be phoney, it's for real. When you're setting a line of type you get it right or the line doesn't lock up. If you're making ready on the press, you do it right. You're dealing with reality, and when you're dealing with reality you become a real person yourself.

— 149 —

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The single most important part of book design is the interior. If the text is not set with readability in mind, with nice margins and colour, in a comfortably readable face, printed with adequate quality, the book is a useless object.

— 150 —

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Each of [Robert] Mathison's "fancy works" tells us about the daily lives of the earliest citizens of Vancouver. From the novelty of an ice cream shop to the celebration of a strawberry crop, from the sale of a city lot to the opening of a "white labor only" laundry, these bits of coloured paper have stories to tell about the hopes, prejudices and routine business of a bygone era.

— 151 —

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During our travels in India, we found the same generous, salt-of-the-earth kind of printer [Robert] Reid talked about, people who invite you into their shops and homes to share their work and lives regardless of the time of day, no matter what was happening.

— 152 —

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Being a good designer is more about the passion that you have for mastering things really well, and that takes time—that takes years. It's not a flash of passion, it's more like a consistent, low-burning flame.

— 153 —

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Books exist in history, and that means being read and used; well-made bindings, [Alex McGuckin] believes, are critical to the transmission and life of the texts they're designed to contain.

— 154 —

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Jim [Rimmer]'s enthusiasm for the printing craft and his persistence and determination spread to others. He loved helping people solve technical problems. He willingly helped move presses, cast sorts, and gave advice freely and joyfully.

— 155 —

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Most people living now have never seen or handled a real book. By real, I mean a book that is made to last—as all books were in 1500 and most still were in 1950. The printing and publishing industries have shifted, in the past 60 years, from making books to making simulacra: imitations of books, which are made to be consumed and thrown away.

— 156 —

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For a graffiti writer it's all about the letters. . . . It's all about that letter and the style and looking for the perfect style. So they really take pride in it even though it may not look like much.

— 157 —

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Make beautiful books. Make them at any cost. Sell them as objects of beauty. Make the experience of reading beautiful and profound. Your books are bomb shelters for

the ideas they contain, impervious to license restrictions, OS upgrades, system crashes and planned obsolescence. You are the new Irish monks, poised to save Western civilization.

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— 158 —

There is a legitimate concern for a collector of modern first editions that the supply of physical books may start to shrink. But then, looking at the stacks of remainders in bookstores, fewer new titles may be beneficial as long as the worthwhile books continue to appear.

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— 159 —

Jackets are to look at, while books are to be read. Glenn [Goluska]'s most important and most lasting work doesn't separate looking and reading in this way; it fuses the two activities.

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— 160 —

With all manner of information available at a keystroke, we easily forget the importance of sinking roots into our cultural inheritance and carving a life out of the wilderness of ideas, words and data surrounding us.

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— 161 —

The beauty of one book alone sparked my inner drive to become a book collector for life; an e-book, on the other hand, would simply be a compilation of two-dimensional pixelated data.

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— 162 —

Children's bookplates encourage children to connect to books, to claim books as their own, and to interact with them on a very fundamental level by literally adding something of themselves to their books.

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— 163 —

The discipline of making books allows me to identify with my press and the press has become the best part of myself, so from a very personal point of view it's a kind of salvation.

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— 164 —

The letterpress brings together what she loves most: the smell of ink, the imperfection and wear of wooden type, the sounds, the shapes,

the rhythms, the harmony, and the discord, the relief impression of the letter on paper.

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— 165 —

Top-of-the-market publishing, with agents demanding more and more money, and authors having every right to expect a real income, this all in a shrinking market, has dramatically transformed publishing as many of us knew it. There are niche players, the small, and the very large.

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— 166 —

As I look around today at the burgeoning book arts scene, I wonder, what are these folks going to do with all the things they're creating?

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— 167 —

Adolf [II von Nassau] is particularly notorious for having waged war against Mainz, which resulted in the deaths of 600 citizens and the exile of Gutenberg and other printers. Yet from such a horrific chapter in the city's history came good: by exiling the printers, Adolf spread printing to many other centres.

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— 168 —

We hope to encourage people to care about our books because they're a participant in the social life of the book; we want readers and buyers, not merely consumers of books.

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— 169 —

Printed in small runs, chapbooks are labours of love rather than money-making enterprises. Originally sparked by the spread of printing and literacy, the chapbook is now driven by artistic intentions and access to inexpensive technology.

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— 170 —

The whole readership of books has shifted, markedly, since 1977. Thirty-eight years ago you could pretty well expect that anyone who was even remotely interested in reading would be interested in reading books that were beautifully produced. Nobody ever said, "Why is this book beautiful?" But we've been asked that ourselves in recent years. "Why do you bother to make it so beautiful? All you need is a paperback."

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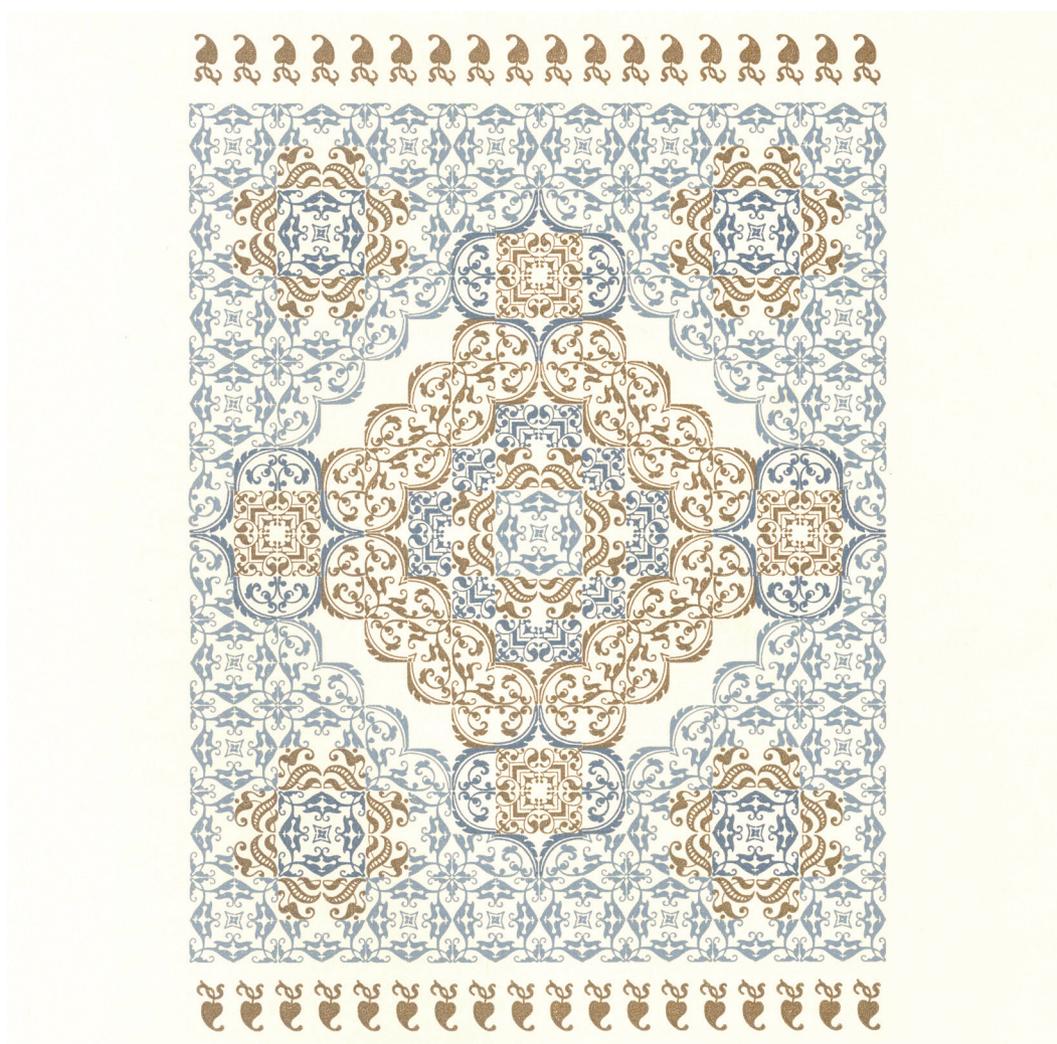
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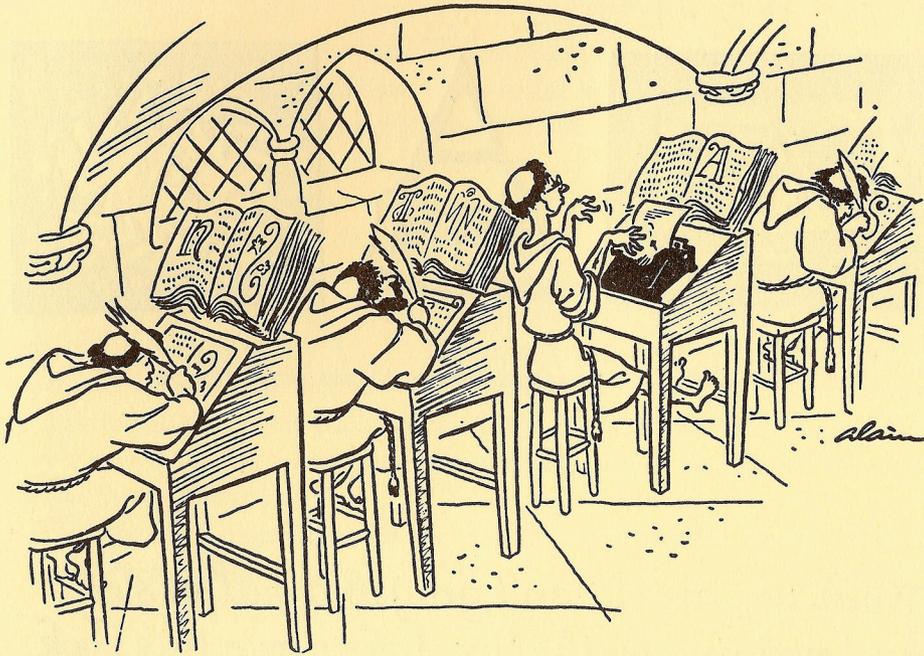
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A sample of the typography of Gerald Giampa, featured in *Amphora* 152.



## WHY ALCUIN?

THE SHORT ANSWER IS, of course, why not? But to avoid the necessity of Gamemanship with new members, the name of the Society was chosen to honour the memory of Alcuin of York (735 A.D. to 804 A.D.). Alcuin was a man who cared about books. He cared about other things too, including handwriting, which he rescued from the proliferation of bastard styles of the period. As Charlemagne's "Minister of Culture", Alcuin selected the most pleasing, and certainly the most legible, script of his day and gave it official blessing. Known as "Caroline Minuscule", it ultimately led to our modern lower case alphabet. In a real sense then Alcuin may be regarded as a Father of Printing. A quotation on the inside of our membership card catches the flavour of the man rather nicely:

LET no frivolous chatter cause to stumble the hands that write here. Let meaning be carefully defined by punctuation, lest the reader in church read wrongly to his brethren. It is a splendid work to write out sacred books; better this than to tend vines, to serve the spirit before the stomach.

*Alcuin of York at Tours, ca. 800*