

NEWS & NOTES

Richard Hopkins

A distressing piece of news came our way via **Geoff Spencer** who was in e-mail communication with Dr. Mary Garrison of York, England. Dr. Garrison informed Geoff and others, that “Last month the Canons of York Minster announced their intention to close their Cathedral Library [the Alcuin Library] and dispose of its collections.” Fortunately through a vigorous letter writing campaign (including a missive from Geoff to the Archbishop of York among others!) and a spirited student campaign which collected 2,300 signatures, the church officials responsible for the original decision subsequently “issued statements rescinding the intention to close the **York Minster Library**.” All is still not well, however, since the Dean and Chapter have stood by that part of their original plan which included the decision to stop circulating books from the library, forcing all library users to read any material they wanted in the library itself. Dr. Garrison points to “inadequate space for readers in the library” as only one potential problem area in the future. The Board will discuss writing a letter on behalf of the Alcuin Library at their September board meeting. In the meanwhile if any members want to join in the mail writing campaign they should contact either Dr. Mary Garrison at mdg2@york.ac.uk or Geoff Spencer at geoffrey_spencer@telus.net.

One of the most interesting recent bits of book news, locally at least, is the establishment of a used and rare book mall on East Hastings. Bookseller **Terry Stillman**, who has a section of the mall, sends along this report:

Online Booksellers Try the Personal Touch

On July 9, 2003, a new concept in bookselling for Greater Vancouver made its debut. There are several Antique Mall cooperatives in Vancouver and its environs, but, to my knowledge, there has never been a bookseller's mall.

The basic concept is the banding together of several booksellers and their respective inventories under one roof, for which they will share expenses. The people who are participating in this new enterprise are already booksellers, but booksellers of the virtual variety, meaning that they are selling books over the Internet and don't operate retail premises. This new concept will allow those booksellers closer contact with local customers and a significant optional outlet for selling books. It's an accepted fact that some books sell better off the shelf than off the computer screen. At the same time, the participating booksellers will be able to advertise their online businesses to local bookbuyers.

Hastings Street Bookdealers is located at 3740 East Hastings Street, just east of Boundary Road. As a matter of fact, it is right next door to Brown's House of Mystery Bookshop, and Roger Brown is administering the new cooperative enterprise. Entrance to the new business is through a doorway from Brown's shop into an adjacent space. Hours are: noon to 5pm on Sundays and Mondays; 10am to 5:30pm Tuesdays to Fridays, and 11am to 5pm on Saturdays.

Roger has been the main push behind this new concept and he's very enthusiastic about its success. Participating booksellers have access to a local retail environment at a minimal expense. Their

portion of the expenses will be in direct relation to the number of books they stock for sale. As Roger points out: "This concept allows the new store to have several speciality areas with top quality stock and consistent turnover, producing a better and more unique value to the used and rare book customer." Ten to fifteen booksellers, dealing in markedly different genres, are part of this enterprise. So, for all of you book buyers who have driven past Brown's Books on Hastings because you don't read or collect mysteries, there is now a very good reason to drop in. Participating booksellers will not as a general rule be on-site, but you may encounter them from time to time restocking their shelves, and you can probably make arrangements with most of the sellers to meet at the store.

Burnaby bookseller Charles Purpora has issued catalogues and sold books online for several years, specializing in modern first editions, detective fiction and Canadiana. He admits to being excited about the cooperative store and he plans to keep about a thousand books for sale there. He thinks there is a good mix of sellers and that "...the stock is an interesting one and one with appeal to a wide range of buyers."

From a personal perspective, I enjoy the opportunity to again present some of my book inventory for view and for sale. Having closed my Vancouver bookstore after more than twenty years of operation and adopting the Internet as my principal selling arena, I have discovered that the Internet definitely does have its drawbacks. I firmly believe that some sort of combination of online and off-line involvement is very necessary, and so I am heartily embracing this new enterprise.

Please drop in to the Hastings Street Bookdealers when you're in the area and check out the new and varied inventory you will find there!

Readers might want to consider taking in the **Haig-Brown Book Fair** in Campbell River on Sunday, September 28th from 10am to 4pm at The Campbellton Elementary School at 2175 Campbell River Road. The event promises that books will be appraised, will be assessed for restoration, and will be for sale. Phone 1-866-830-1113 for an information package or visit the festival website at www.hbfest.crcn.net.

I see that our friends at **(m)Other Tongue Press** on Salt Spring Island (featured in *Amphora* #127) have just produced another limited edition book. The title is *Yvonne - A Feminist Fable* and is written by novelist and children's writer Sandy Frances Duncan. For further details please contact (m)Other Tongue Press at (250) 537-4155.

Just a reminder about the **American Institute of Graphic Artists (AIGA) National Design Conference** which takes place in Vancouver on October 23-26, 2003. To find out more information or to register please visit www.aiga.org.

Some members may be interested in a **Lecture by Gerald Cinamon, "The Glasgow Style Bookbindings of Talwin Morris,"** which will be delivered on Thursday, September 18th at 7pm at the Good Shepard Center, 4649 Sunnyside Avenue N., Room 202 in Seattle. The event is co-sponsored by The Book Club of Washington and The

Book Arts Guild. Cost is \$10 to the general public. Talwin Morris (1865-1911) was an important figure in the formation of the Glasgow Style in the 1890s. As art director at the Glasgow publisher Blackie & Son, his book-cover designs were an important contribution to the movement. The major artists of the Glasgow Style were the designer and architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the sisters Frances and Margaret Macdonald, and Herbert McNair. With the waning of the style after 1910, and the rise of new art movements, the work of these artists was often neglected. Talwin Morris's work was largely ignored until Gerald Cinamon wrote a series of articles about the designer in newsletters of the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society in 1983. An extensive study appeared in the *Private Library Journal* in 1987.

This following item I received via the Ex Libris listserv:

Brutal Trade in Rare Books

'It's an antiquities market that, for some, has become more attractive than Wall Street,' Craig Copetas writes from Vatican City.

The boom of a solitary bell spills through an open window and into the office of Father Sergio Pagano inside the Secret Archives of the Vatican.

For an instant, the Italian priest charged with managing the 'paper assets' of the Roman Catholic Church turns his smile from the peals toward a sentinel tower of six closed-circuit television screens. The surveillance technology ensures the 85-kilometre stretch of historical documents buried in the labyrinth beneath Pagano's desk remains safe from looters and sheltered from the emerging

market for paleographic investments.

'I'm a buyer, not a seller, but it's always the Pope's call,' says Pagano, explaining the Vatican's rules for playing the market in rare correspondence, antediluvian books and illuminated manuscripts.

It's a quiet trade that has been conducted for millennia between popes and potentates. Modern pursuers of ancient tomes include such investors as British Land Company chairman and managing director John Ritblat and Jean Paul Getty II, the philanthropist and heir to the Getty oil fortune.

'The dealers and collectors frequently offer to sell us items,' says Pagano, arching his fingers into a spire. 'There's much foolery among them, but it's very difficult to fool the Vatican,' he cautions. 'It's rare we pay attention to market forces.'

Yet book brokers say Pagano, along with institutional buyers, find themselves on guard against thieves. They also have to rustle through rare-book bins in competition with private buyers as some investors increasingly see rare books as a haven from sliding stock and bond markets.

It's a blue-chip business driven by dealers who can spend years tracking down a clay tablet on which Mesopotamian grain prices were recorded by the priestesses of the Red Temple of Ianna in 3100 BC. Other singular investments include a 500-year-old copy of *Summa de Aritmetica, Geometria, Proportioni et Proportionalita*. Rare-book hunters such as Emidio d'Ainello at the Ex Libris bookshop in Rome say they have businessmen eager to find an original copy of the tome, written by Luca Pacioli.

'Pacioli's book is very important, the

first known text that incorporates accounting rules,' Ainello says.

'Ancient and medieval writings on business and economics are very rare, very difficult to obtain and very much in demand,' says Claudio Cascianelli, whose family has spent the past 70 years sleuthing for rare books on business and economics for U.S., Canadian and Italian executives. 'Passion moves this market,' the owner of the Antica Liberia bookshop insists. 'Money is not an issue.'

Ainello says an Italian businessman he declines to name has him on the hunt for a copy of *Mirabila*, a 15th-century guidebook for foreign merchants visiting Rome.

'It's 30 pages and fits in the palm of your hand,' Cascianelli marvels. 'There are perhaps no more than six copies – a lot by ancient standards. One of them is in the Vatican and they will not sell,' he says with a grin. 'I once had a copy, years and years ago. I sold it for \$11,000. Nothing.'

In New York, Mary Ann Folter, who has spent the past 40 years scouring private libraries for published arcana to tempt her clients at the H.P. Kraus Inc. rare-book store, says an increasing number of investors are cashing out of the stockmarket and plowing the money into books. 'There's no doubt people are leaving the market to find books,' Folter says. 'It's a safe-haven investment they can put their hands on.'

That's the dilemma for the chief executive of the British Library, Lynne Brindley. 'The past 10 years have seen a sharp increase in books as an investment,' she says. 'The prices become inflated and public institutions can't compete in the marketplace.'

The head of the British Library's Early Printed Collections unit, Kristian Jensen, says the rivalry is brisk. 'When the stockmarket slumps, the price of rare books jumps,' he says. 'I've seen prices go up about 30 per cent over the past five years.'

In 1997, for instance, Jensen says he went to an auction planning to bid on a 36-page, 15th century book titled *Properties and Medicines of Horse* [sic]. Jensen says the Kraus bookstore outbid the British Library and bought it for 200,000 pounds. The book remains locked in the Kraus vault, its approximately 400,000 pounds retail price tag beyond the acquisition budget of the library.

'For collectors, books are nothing like paintings,' Jensen explains. 'Most buyers of fine art like to say how much they paid and display the painting. Reading is a private affair. Being secretive about the price and what's in your collection is part of the book game.'

No matter the bankroll; tracking exotic investments like Sigismundo Scacciae's *Treatise on Trade and Exchange*, a 500-page essay on how to calculate 17th century interest rates, may take years and much intrigue.

Arturo Perez-Reverte, author of *The Club Dumas*, a novel on the rare-book trade that Roman Polanski used as the template for his 1999 film, *The Ninth Gate*, mocks the industry as populated by 'jackals, antique-fair sharks and auction-room leeches who would sell their grandmothers for a first edition.'

That sort of market activity has caught the attention of Interpol agent Viviana Padilla, who says the global police agency's statistics show that book

burglary is more widespread than fine-art theft.

'The underground trade in rare books and manuscripts is more prevalent than people will ever know and a huge problem,' says Padilla, a Washington-based art historian who manages Interpol's cultural-property program.

Padilla says Interpol detectives in 181 countries are currently seeking 1693 stolen or missing books, including *De Revolutionibus Orbitum Coelestium* by Nicolaus Copernicus (published in 1543); a first edition *Tres Epistolae de Maculis Solaribus* by Galileo Galilei (published in 1612) and a 1538 volume of *Aesop's Fables*.

And this item from the American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers should appeal to **bookplate enthusiasts**:

Since the fifteenth century, distinguished artists and their patrons have given serious attention to this art form. It represents a miniature art developed to adorn books and a convenient, individualized way for the book's owner to be identified. The bookplate, or *ex libris*, is a label placed on the inside of the front cover of a book.

Many techniques and mediums are used in their creation. Some include the woodcut, engraving on metal, silkscreen, etching or pen and ink. This, along with the fact that the work is all done in small scale, plays an important part in the execution of these works. Also, utilizing the finest in papers, with hand printing in many examples.

Bookplates have been designed by artists and engravers such as Albrecht Dürer, Thomas Bewick, Paul Revere,

Kate Greenaway, Aubrey Beardsley, Marc Chagall, M.C. Escher, Rockwell Kent, Leonard Baskin, Barry Moser, and others. Many are acknowledged for their work as book illustrators and designers. For example, Rockwell Kent made numerous contributions as book illustrator, designer and author. He was perhaps one of the most popular American bookplate artists of the century. Another important and prolific artist was Leonard Baskin, who was best known as a sculptor and printmaker. He illustrated many books and created bookplates.

Both institutions and individuals are patrons of this graphic art. For an institution, such as a public or private library, university, law firm or museum, the interest is in identifying a specific collection of books or multiple collections. The librarian may want to mark the time when a book was added to the collection or illustrate a special interest. For the individual the motivation for commissioning bookplates includes this reason, along with the desire to own beautiful pieces of art, and in many cases the development of an interest in collecting this art as a hobby.

Bookplate collecting began more than a century ago and has spread to most parts of the world. Idiosyncratic to this art form alone, most collections are built through the exchange of duplicate pieces. This is accomplished when collectors have one or several personal designs; in fact some collectors have hundreds specifically made for the purpose of trading with others. The goal is to increase the size and scope of their holdings. Most often these collections are organized according to artist, theme, technique, country and/or period. In an

exploration of the art one will learn of vast numbers of *ex libris* that have been amassed, even some collections numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

Ex libris enthusiasts have created an international network for the purposes of attaining designs by establishing societies in forty-one countries. Through participation in these societies worldwide friendships can grow. Every two years an International Ex Libris Congress is held in a different country inviting members of the world bookplate societies to attend. Under the auspices of the Federation Internationale des Societes d'Amateurs d'Ex Libris (fiSAE) one enjoys lectures, slide presentations, exhibitions, and sufficient time is allowed for socializing and trading bookplates. This provides endless opportunities for artists and collectors to acquaint themselves with the interest and enthusiasm for this art form in other countries.

In the United States, the American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers (ASBC&D) was organized in 1922 to further the study and collecting of bookplates. Today, the ASBC&D membership includes more than 150 individuals and 50 institutions. The purposes of the ASBC&D as stated in the first *Year Book* are: "To cultivate the spirit of friendship and mutual helpfulness among collectors and designers of bookplates; and to assist in the further development of the bookplate." This is accomplished by the publication of a *Year Book*, a quarterly newsletter and exchange lists. For further information please visit www.bookplate.org.



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