

NEWS & NOTES

Richard Hopkins

We learned recently of the passing of yet another of the original founders of The Alcuin Society. Sam Fogel passed away at age 91 on December 31, 2002. He was one of seven founders and had a distinguished career in advertising and public relations. He is predeceased by three other founders, Bill Duthie, Sam Black and Bill McConnell. Of the original seven three are thankfully still alive and more or less kicking: Geoff Spencer, Basil Stuart-Stubbs and Wil Hudson. Long life to them all!

Many members may know already from other sources that typographer and printing historian John Dreyfus passed away in London on December 29th. Dreyfus was successor to Stanley Morrison at Cambridge University Press and later at Monotype, although those positions only hint at his importance to those who are interested in the history of printing. The January 4th *Independent* has an obituary written by Nicholas Barker which is available online at <http://www.independent.co.uk/story.jsp?story=366240>.

This sent in by one of our readers, Kay Coutts, a column by Pamela Klaffke from the *Calgary Herald*, picks up on a theme covered in our last issue:

Pages magazine has named Kinky Freidman's *Meanwhile Back at the Ranch* the book with the best cover art of 2002. The eye-catching cover features a young boy in a red retro-fabulous cowboy ensemble, a Lone Ranger-style mask, a cowboy hat and guns ablazing. It doesn't look like everything else on the shelves and that, as book addicts know, is a very good thing.

The old cliché, "don't judge a book by its cover," has been plowed into our brains since childhood, but even though we know we shouldn't, we do.

Judging a book by its cover can be advantageous, or it can be annoying.

For romance and fantasy fans, the covers of genre titles tend to be formulaic, almost interchangeable. The author's name is emblazoned in raised metallic gold type, large against a background of glassy-eyed lovers or dragons.

While these typical traits make it easy for a reader to identify and categorize such books, it can just as easily deter and confuse a reader not familiar with the genre or specific writers. When all the cover art is essentially the same, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between a good novel and a not-so-good one without a recommendation from a like-minded friend or savvy bookseller.

Romance and fantasy books like it or not have long been ghettoized, in part due to their covers, and now many mysteries, crime novels and Bridget Jones-style "chick lit" novels seem to be suffering the same fate.

Loud, graphic covers screaming the author's name (even if he is a first-timer) are par for the course for today's mystery novels. Crime novels are often similar in style, making it difficult to immediately discern between a crime book and a mystery. Chick lit covers typically feature whimsical illustrations, often with a touch of pink and 1950s girlishness.

There are so many books and such little distinction that choosing where to lay your 20, 30, 40 dollars can be a mind-boggling chore that can lead to either disappointment or pleasant surprise. But

with such stagnation in book design these days, every stroll through a bookstore results in an overwhelming game of chance.

What stands out on the shelves, however, is like Friedman's cover a book that looks fresh and is, above all, different from the pack. And while great, gorgeous cover art doesn't always mean the writing inside is as great or as gorgeous, its personality and distinction may give it an edge on the competition: someone may pick it up, read the back of the book and even buy it. Fancy that.

The members of the Independent Bookstores Association in the U.S. voted these ten books as their Top Ten Books of the Christmas season 2002:

1. Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress
by Sijie Dai
2. Population 485:
Meeting Your Neighbors
One Siren at a Time
by Michael Perry
3. How to Cook a Tart:
A Novel by Nina Kilham
4. Lydia Cassat Reading the Morning Paper
by Harriet Scott Chessman
5. Off to the Side: A Memoir
by Jim Harrison Grove
6. Ignorance
by Milan Kundera
7. The Little Friend
by Donna Tartt
8. A Parchment of Leaves
by Silas House
9. In Her Shoes
by Jennifer Weiner
10. The Last Noel
by Michael Malone.

My favourite news item for this issue: The Fourth International Edible Book Festival will occur throughout the world on any day from 1 to 5 April from 2-4p.m. (Depending upon the time zone). The edible books are exhibited and at 4 p.m., tea and/or coffee is served and the books are consumed. In 2002, the event was held throughout April due to various considerations of venues and audiences. This year 5 April seems to be a popular day, because it's on a weekend. It all depends on you and your location!

For this High/Low Tea, all works of art must be edible and have something to do with books! Each participating group or individual is responsible for its/his/her own audience and website. From 2-4 p.m., you sip High/Low Tea while viewing the edible exhibit. At 4 p.m., you photograph the work and eat it too!

All venues are requested to take photographs or record in video their event and displayed books. Please send two copies of menus and copies of photographs to Umbrella, P.O. Box 3640, Santa Monica, CA 90408. The documentation will be used for a potential (non-edible) book by Umbrella Editions. A description and links of all participants around the world will be available at <http://colophon.com/ediblebooks/books2eat2003.html>.

Tickets may be sold for the event, so that each venue can thus use Books2Eat as a fundraiser for book centers and organizations.

For documentation and images of the previous three International Edible Book Festivals, please visit the website.

For information, edification and moral support contact Books2Eat or umbrella@ix.netcom.com.

This bizarre item from a Berkeley, California newspaper:

A research scholar has been arrested for burning down the public library in order (he claims) to rid it of silverfish (see Amphora #126!) that were "eating the books" and which he apparently feared would come to his house and eat the books there too. The library authorities say that, following numerous complaints from the research scholar, the library was being thoroughly inspected for silverfish but none had so far been found. Following the blaze, which destroyed a large and valuable collection, the research scholar was found by police near the scene with a can of accelerant and an armful of rather valuable volumes he had liberated from Special Collections.

Staying with the theme of crime, libraries and books for a moment, this warning was sent out by Ken Sanders, Chair of the Security Committee of the Antiquarian Book Association of America:

The ABAA has succeeded in getting the FBI interested in re-opening an investigation into convicted book thief David Holt. Some years back the ABAA was instrumental in sending Mr. Holt to a federal prison here in the States after he had spent years in defrauding the bookselling community. Approximately three years ago he left the U.S. for New Zealand where it is believed he now resides. We are in urgent need of David Holt's current address and telephone number and any other current information regarding Mr. Holt. It would also be extremely useful in knowing Mr. Holt's current whereabouts.

Since his release from prison, Mr.

Holt has surfaced dozens of times under various names and organizations attempting to defraud booksellers around the world. His schemes usually have some sort of Russian connection. The ABAA has a file of these many and frequent fraud attempts and the various names and organizations that Mr. Holt has pretended to be. If you have been a victim of book fraud anytime in the past three years, particularly if you sent payment for merchandise to another country (other than your own) and never received the merchandise, please contact the ABAA Security Committee immediately with full details.

We are particularly interested in any names and addresses from Russia or other former Soviet bloc countries. Including details of Western Union or wire transfers to other banks or other financial institutions. Names of associates or colleagues, phone and fax numbers, what have you are all desired.

As you should know by now, David Holt has recently surfaced, pretending to be an elderly Swiss antiques dealer, Frederik Buwe. This is yet another attempt to defraud booksellers by David Holt. All of the items he is offering have been digitally pirated from the Bauman Book Company in New York. These new phone Holt/Buwe offerings began surfacing in Australia last week. Since this office exposed Mr. Holt and his Frederik Buwe fraud, myself and other members of the ABAA who have confronted Holt have been threatened by Mr. Holt both via email and the telephone. In my case, Mr. Holt left me a telephone message stating that he was coming to Salt Lake City to "cut your balls off."

More sinister is the disappearance in

New York City of ABAA member, Svetlana Aronov. Ms. Aronov disappeared from a busy Manhattan street at approximately 2:30 p.m. on Monday, March 3rd while walking her dog and has not been seen by her family since. There is no known connection between Ms. Aronov and David Holt but the police are investigating as to whether Holt had any contact with her. Ms. Aronov is Russian and David Holt is known to have spent time in Russia and to have many contacts there. The timing of Ms. Aronov's disappearance and Holt's Re-appearance is also disturbing.

Who said crime doesn't pay. Browsing through a recent Profiles in History autograph catalogue I noted that a Babe Ruth autograph was going for \$1,500, a Humphrey Bogart autograph for \$2,500, and a Walt Disney autograph for \$3,950. An Al Capone photograph inscribed to his mother, however, was listed at a whopping \$15,000!

On a happier note, for those of you who are interested in children's books, don't miss the wonderful new website on Canadian Children's Illustrated Books in English at <http://www.slais.ubc.ca/saltman/ccib/home.html>.

Another bit of good news: In 1999 the Benedictine monks of Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota commissioned Donald Jackson, scribe to Queen Elizabeth II, to create a Bible for the new millennium. As the first handwritten, illuminated monumental Bible in nearly 500 years, its making is an eight-year task employing one of the foremost calligra-

phers of the western world. Crafted from quill pen, vellum, and hand-made inks, the Saint John's Bible reflects the finest tradition of the medieval manuscript.

This amusing note about how one antiquarian bookdealer describes the condition of books comes from the Advanced Book Exchange (ABE):

The grade of condition accorded to any book is, of course, a matter of the cataloguer's opinion, but I will try here to give an idea of my methods.

"Fine," for instance, can be taken to mean that the book in question looks virtually as it did when first published (please note that the word "mint" is avoided, for reasons which once seemed compelling but are now forgotten). "Very good" is a notch down from "fine" and usually denotes that the book has been read by one careful owner over the age of fifty-five. "Good" means not very good. (Peter Ellis, bookseller in London, England).

Here is a fine book for sale some of our readers may find of interest: Eric Ravilious cut 42 wood engravings for the "Kynoch Press Notebook" of 1933, delightful vignettes that stand among the best of his engraved work. To celebrate the centenary of Ravilious' birth, the Friends of the St. Bride Printing Library have commissioned Incline Press to design and print a new edition of the engravings.

Dr. Caroline Archer, in writing her history of the Kynoch Press, had discovered the home of the original engraved blocks. Their owner was pleased to have them all used again for the first time since 1933. Ann Ullman, Ravilious's

BOOK REVIEW

Ralph Stanton

daughter, generously waived copyright on this use to aid the fund raising activities of the Friends of the St. Bride Printing Library.

There are two essays in the book. Caroline Archer has introduced the book with an account of the work done by Ravilious for Kynoch Press, who were one of the few printing firms in England considered responsible for innovative work in the 1920s and 1930s. She also begins a reappraisal of Ravilious' letterforms, engraved for Kynoch and other clients. The second essay is a reprint, specially edited for this celebratory book, of Robert Harling's introduction to *The Engravings of Eric Ravilious*, published by the Shenval Press in 1946 and quickly reprinted. This was the first critical appreciation of Ravilious' engraved work. We do not think it has been surpassed by any subsequent writing, and so are particularly pleased that the author has allowed us to include it here.

The "A" edition is issued without limitation, printed on acid-free paper in Bembo types. They are machine trimmed and bound, in full cloth over boards. Copies cost 48 pounds, and can be ordered from Barry McKay Rare Books, Kingstone House, Battlebarrow, Appleby-in-Westmoreland, Cumbria, CA16 6XT. The "B" edition is of 200 copies, numbered and signed by Caroline Archer. They are bound by hand with cloth spines and Ravilious patterned paper over boards, finished size about 9 x 6 inches. In a pocket at the back are proof pulls of the four engravings from the book. Copies are 75 pounds each including post. Cheques made payable to Incline Press should be sent with your order to 11a Printer Street, Oldham, England, OL1 1PN.

Five Hundred Years of Book Design. Alan Bartram. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. \$35.00 U.S.

In his new book, Alan Bartram wants to determine how early printed books stand up to today's modern standards of design. This is a different approach than similar books such as: Stanley Morison's *Four Centuries of Fine Printing*, 1924, Stanley Morison and Kenneth Day's *The Typographic Book 1450-1935*, 1963, Joseph Blumenthal's *Art of the Printed Book 1455-1955*, 1973, and Kelly Hutner's *A Century of the Century*, 1999. What these titles have in common is the display of sample pages from early printed books to illustrate the author's points.

Unlike the earlier books whose authors wanted to celebrate and learn from past masters, Bartram is primarily concerned with applying modern conventions and practices of book design to five and a half centuries of printed book production. Thereby he wants to discover how adequate older books are in terms of modern standards and ways. In the process the early "designers" are often found wanting or roundly criticized. Another point of difference is Bartram's preference for text pages rather than title-pages which are the preferred subjects of his predecessors.

Bartram states in his preface "...my main purpose is to look at classic books afresh, through the eyes of a twentieth/ twenty-first century designer." This he does, but he also says, "Of course, all artefacts should be judged on their own terms, bearing in mind the times and conditions in which they were created." This he fails to do in any adequate sense.