

# BOOK REVIEW

*Keith Valentine*

*Bookbinding Materials and Techniques 1700-1920* by Margaret Lock  
The Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists' Guild, 2003.

Margaret Lock first wrote this book as a catalogue for an exhibition that she curated for the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists' Guild (CBBAG) in 1991. I came across it when looking for a book, available in sheets, suitable for a binding course. It worked well, though with only 69 pages the narrow spine gave me a challenge when I ambitiously tried to letter the title lengthwise! Others must have liked it too for it is now out of print. Consequently, CBBAG asked Lock to revise it for their Home Study Programme, thus providing both a background text and a book to bind (it is again available in sheets). In doing so the author has expanded it to more than

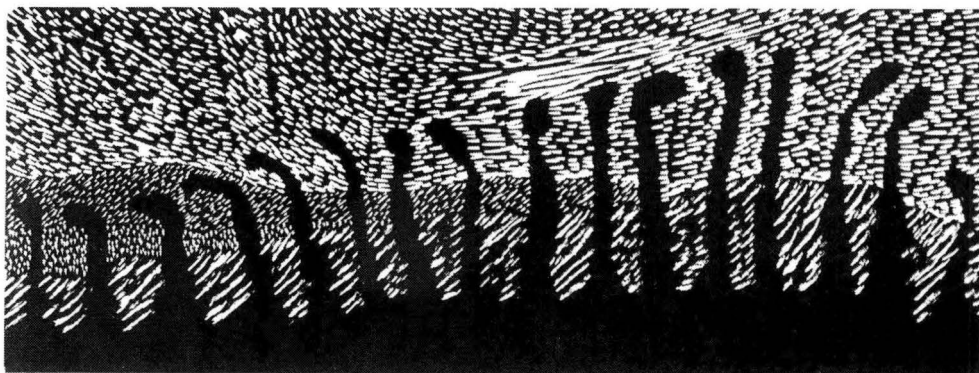
twice its original length with many new figures. In addition to bookbinders, it is also intended for students of bibliography and anyone interested in the history of the book.

The main layout remains the same. Two introductory chapters present a social history of printing, publishing and binding. The first covers materials, equipment, techniques and working conditions in hand binding through the eighteenth century. The second shows how operations expanded and were mechanized during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Together they give a clear and concise picture of the book trade in Europe and North America from 1700 to just after the First World War, placing it in the social, economic, and political context of the times. The author then describes, in some detail, the materials and methods that were used during that period in forwarding and finishing the more common types of leather bindings. Starting with preparing the text block and proceeding through sewing, rounding and backing, edge decoration, attaching the boards, lining the spine, covering, and blind and gold tooling, the main stages are given a short chapter each. Other important styles and techniques, such as case and vellum bindings, and gold blocking on bookcloth, are handled in final chapters. Copious Endnotes and a Bibliography complete the book.

Lock has aimed for a broad introduction to a wide field and has succeeded well. To attempt this breadth in 150 pages, using examples from Britain (mainly London), France, U.S.A., Canada and Germany as well as other European countries, is an ambitious



Tree, Mt Brunswick © 1982 Arnold Shives



Black Spruce Near the Arctic Circle © 1983 Arnold Shives

undertaking. I know of no other books that attempt the same geographical coverage of as wide a topic. The social history I found fascinating, and the Canadian references were especially welcome. Some production figures are astounding. For example, in 1855 Westleys bound Macaulay's *History* at the rate of 6,000 volumes per day, using hand labour and only a few hand operated machines. I was also struck by the number of machines that were first invented in North America, and only subsequently introduced into Europe. Inevitably the information is dense in places, but the author makes it readable by putting details and references in the Endnotes. Technical terms are italicised when first used and followed immediately by a brief definition in parentheses, thus avoiding the need for a glossary. This is adequate considering CBBAG has just issued a Lexicon. I would, however, have liked an index. In writing this review I tried to check the full treatment of a few topics, and sometimes had difficulty finding all the places they were mentioned in the text. The reader will have the same trouble, although dividing the book into many small chapters helps.

Bear in mind this is not an instruction manual. It was not intended to be. It describes what was done, not how to do it yourself, and it only goes to 1920. More recent developments are omitted. This

can become a little confusing when the author uses the present tense. For example, in the section on gold tooling, page 87, there are statements like, "The leather *is* lightly greased with tallow (or palm oil, lard or lard mixed with wax) to keep the gold in position." Not any more, I think. But in general the text is clear, and the diagrams particularly so. For example, Figures 3.1 to 3.4a use the recto and verso of the actual book pages to show outer and inner formes of folio, quarto and octavo printed sheets; something that is often difficult to explain to beginners. Photo figures are also good, though some are rather small to really show what is intended.

But my few reservations are minor. This book succeeds admirably in providing bookbinders, students of bibliography and the general reader with a clear and fascinating introduction to bookbinding and associated trades of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the modest price of Can\$20 (US\$17) it is a bargain. Some may query producing a book of this nature as a perfect binding, but they can always buy it in sheets and bind it themselves!

For information on ordering this book, please see the CBBAG website: <http://www.cbbag.ca/publi.html>

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*Keith Valentine is a book artist from Pender Island and a frequent contributor to Amphora.*