

Duthie's Bookmarks

A Designer Speaks

*Book of bookmarks takes artist back four decades and more,
to the days of the Paperback Cellar, Binky Marks and Letraset.*

By King Anderson



DUTHIE'S BOOKMARKS (ALCUIN SOCIETY, 2008) is a unique document in the world of book publishing. The reproductions of the bookmarks are excellent and show the high value of the production. It's amazing how much can be done these days with new printing technologies and small press runs compared to only a few decades ago. A designer of more than a few of the entries, I also enjoyed seeing so many familiar faces, as it were, and it's good to know that the bookmark designs are now out there where people can enjoy the variety of so many artists' and designers' work.

I had the good fortune of having a hand in creating the original scrapbook of Duthie's bookmarks that Robert Reid mentions in the introduction. Bill Duthie hired me in 1977 to create the collection, which included most of the bookmarks produced during the first 20 years that Bill ran the stores. He paid me \$600 to make a single, handmade leather-bound book, and I venture to say that 99 percent of the bookmarks from that era are in that book. As near as possible those bookmarks were arranged in chronological order.

Because I worked at the original 901 Robson Street location, with Binky Marks in the Paperback Cellar from 1961 to 1966, I was familiar with many of the bookmarks that were printed during those years. I certainly remember several small dusty cardboard boxes on the back storage room shelves containing samples of almost all of those early bookmarks. It was those dusty boxes that Bill gave me in 1977 to create that first book of bookmarks.

The book included samples of all the bookmarks I had made from 1968 to 1977. After I made the 20th-anniversary bookmarks and the

single copy of the book of bookmarks, Celia Duthie stepped into a managerial position and told me she wanted to give other artists in Vancouver a chance to contribute to what has turned out to be this unique art form. This was fine with me, as I had been doing the job for nine years and had many other art projects to pursue.

During the years I made bookmarks for Bill Duthie, he made only one suggestion to me as to his design preferences: he didn't particularly want any faces in the bookmark designs. Other than that, he said, I was the artist and had to take care of the designs. As long as the addresses and phone numbers were clear and readable, he was happy. Bill was supportive of my career as an artist and allowed me to work in the Paperback Cellar in and around the years I studied at the Vancouver School of Art, now Emily Carr University of Art and Design. He purchased a significant art piece from my first solo exhibition in 1965, and he commissioned me to do a mural for the stairwell that led to the Paperback Cellar at the new store when it opened at 919 Robson Street in 1970.

Duthie's Bookmarks also reminds me how many designers and artists had their own printing presses. When Bill Duthie handed me the job of making his bookmarks, the only real skill I had was the ability to draw everything by hand using a Rapidograph pen and ink. All of the text, the addresses and phone numbers were patiently set out using Letraset which, as those years went by, came out with more and more typefaces.

All the printing was done at Bell & Melville, a one-man shop in the basement of 319 West Pender Street in the Victory Block. (It was Mr. Melville that I dealt with. I'm not sure who Mr. Bell was,

maybe a former partner.) Mr. Melville printed close to two million bookmarks from 1968 to 1977 using photo-offset lithography and a small machine that printed eight bookmarks to the sheet. The part of the job he grumbled about was cutting the sheets into 50,000 individual bookmarks! I used to go to the shop the day he was cutting the bookmarks and help him band the bundles with paper strips and pack them into boxes. I believe Mr. Melville retired in the early 1980s and has since passed on.

The shop I used for the title page and credits of the book Bill Duthie commissioned me to prepare in 1977 was Cobblestone Press at 323 Cambie Street in Gastown. Gerald Giampa ran the old hand-set type press. It must have been an interesting project for Gerald, because after he had printed a proof sheet, I ordered one copy of each page. He was an amiable guy and I think was pleased to contribute to a one-of-a-kind project.

On looking through the *Duthie's Bookmarks* in detail, a number of points come to mind. On pages 92–93 there's a six-panel bookmark design that I remember distinctly from my days in the Paperback Cellar. This concept of one large design cut into six individual bookmarks was very influential when I started making bookmark designs for the store. For years I made drawings and designs that were cut into four bookmarks with variations created by printing them on five colours of paper.

Many of Bill's customers commented on the idea and collected them while buying books to see if they could get the complete design. Over the period of nine years I made about 20 of those overall drawing/designs that were cut into four bookmarks. I always felt those particular designs were some of my best work, though I don't see any representative pieces from those series in the collection. The two bookmark drawings on page 106—a tip of the hat to Edward Gorey—are a start, but they're identical. Where are the other three?

The bookmarks reproduced on pages 104–5 are not favourites. They were derived from a Dover copyright-free art source book, *The Styles of Ornament*, by Alexander Speltz. Artists could just take what they wanted from the book and do whatever. They're not my most original work!

I also notice the absence of the bookmark I created after the death of Binky Marks. It was

a bookmark as homage, with a strong design cut in half to form two bookmarks. Binky was an important person in the Vancouver book business and a pivotal character at Duthie Books on Robson Street, where he was manager of the Paperback Cellar until he died in 1975. He was almost as synonymous with Duthie's as was Bill and his brother David! Working with Binky Marks when I was in my 20s made a big impression and now contributes to one of those long-term memories that can make for good storytelling after a glass of wine or two.

Binky was apparently a great cook and every year on Boxing Day hosted a big feast and party at his house in Vancouver. For reasons I can't really remember I never went to his place on Boxing Day, but I'm sure there are people in the book business with great memories of Binky's get-togethers. Binky's love of food always seemed to include having half his meal dribbled down his tie and shirt front. He was famously messy and his handwriting was famously indecipherable. It took many months of working with him to learn to read his script on order forms and invoices.

Before my father died in 1995, he told me that when you die, you die twice. The first time is when you go physically and leave the planet; the second is when no one can remember any more who you were. I am pleased to be in the company of all these artists and designers and congratulate the Alcuin Society for producing *Duthie's Bookmarks*, a beautiful book that goes a long way to preserving their artwork and the times we had together.

~ King Anderson lives on Hornby Island, B.C.