St Bride Library reopens

On Tuesday 20 November, St Bride Library opened its doors again. After six months of intensive work planning the project and finding temporary homes for thousands of books and artefacts, the space was cleared for contractors to move in and refurbish it in mid-October. They installed a partition between the new reading room and the machinery room, replaced services and redecorated a room which had gone without improvement for over thirty years. Shelving, including a nine-bay set of rolling shelves giving 508 metres of storage, has now been installed, and filled by a band of volunteers.

The new Reading Room is distinctly different from its predecessor. For the first time, some ten thousand books are within easy reach, either on open shelving or in stacks which are near at hand. The shelving is open, so it will be easier for visitors to use. Library opening times remain as they were before the temporary closure, that is: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:00 to 9:30 p.m., Wednesdays 12:00 to 9:00 p.m.

EVENTS

PHS Conference and AGM

From hot metal to hot keys. The Printing Historical Society will hold its 2008 two-day conference in the Bridewell Hall at St Bride Library, Bride Lane, Fleet Street, London EC4Y 8EE on 22 and 23 April 2008. Day one will cover the social, technical and commercial repercussions of the demise of letterpress and its resurrection as flexography; the maturing of lithography as a major process; web offset versus photo-gravure; and ‘electronics’, the new word that changed Fleet Street for ever. Day two will be a heady mix of film and fact. Speakers will focus on the change from manual typesetting to photo-composition and the problems of specification and design. Letraset, with a short but merry life, eased the work of graphic artists and played an important part in the period between manual setting and WYSIWYG. Talks will be interspersed with related films. Tickets are £50.00 per day or £90.00 for the full conference. The price for PHS members, and ‘early bird’ tickets paid for by 14 March, is £40.00 per day or £75.00 for both days. Students (limited availability) £35.00 per day or £65.00 for both days.

The Donald Milham Award will also be presented at the conference. The Annual General Meeting of the PHS will be held on the first day of the event, at 5:00 p.m. To book please contact Rob Clayton, at P.O. Box 4119, Wells, BA5 2UF. E-mail: frobson@nbzonline.net.

ST BRIDE EVENTS

The 2008 Justin Howes Memorial Lecture. Michelle P. Brown. Populating Paternoster Row: the Holkham Bible Picture Book and manuscript production in medieval London. Michelle Brown – Professor of Medieval Manuscript Studies and Course Tutor to the History of the Book MA at the Institute of English Studies, University of London – will focus on one of the British Library’s treasures, the ‘Holkham Bible Picture Book’, which was made in Paternoster Row, next to St Paul’s, in the 1350s on the eve of the Black Death. The manuscript offers a fascinating insight into the way a London artisan viewed the world and his place in it, and into the media that influenced him (street theatre, popular preaching, texts and images). Together these inspired him to make the first ‘poor man’s Bible’, conveyed through captioned images. The city space of Paternoster Square re-emerges as a radical publishing hub, peopled with colourful contributors to the early London book trade. The lecture will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday 26 February 2008, in the Bridewell Hall at St Bride. Admission is free.

Charles Mozley: artist and illustrator 1914–1991. Monday 7 to Thursday 31 January 2008 in the exhibition room at St Bride. This exhibition, put together by Charles Mozley’s daughter Elizabeth, will show work from the artist’s rich and varied career. Over five decades, Mozley worked as an illustrator and graphic designer. In his early career he worked for Shell and London Transport and produced camouflage posters during World War II. After the war he worked for a time with the performing arts, designing posters, programmes and brochures; from the late 1960s he worked extensively for the wine trade. Mozley also designed over 300 book-jackets and illustrated some forty books for adults and children. Admission is free.

Magazines are dead! Long live the magazine! A one-day conference on the thriving world of twenty-first-century magazine design, to be held on Friday 25 January 2008. Price £60.00 (£55.00 concessions) with a £5.00 discount for members of the Friends. Further details will shortly be mounted on the St Bride website (www.stbride.org).

A tribute to love: five centuries of heartfelt design. An illustrated talk by Nancy Rosin, to be held at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday 31 January 2008 at St Bride (drinks from 6:00 p.m. in the exhibition room). From the earliest tokens of affection – perhaps a feather, a flower, a shell or a fern frond – evolved the paper gifts we cherish today. As demand increased, allied printing and manufacturing industries developed, technical advances inspired new forms of accessible
A valentine from the Rosin collection

personal expression, and modern postal systems enabled them to be widely distributed. Each aspect of this history of personal communication is integral to a fascinating chronology.

Nancy Rosin has been a passionate collector of valentines and expressions of love for nearly forty years. Her collection of more than 10,000 items encompasses the full range of this theme – from birth, friendship, love and marriage, to mourning – and has become a formidable research archive. She is a Director of the Ephemera Society of America, and Vice-President of the National Valentine Collectors’ Association. Designers, printers and valentine enthusiasts will find that this passionate American collector shares their affection for the seductive charms of ‘the ephemera of love’. Admission £5.00 (£3.00 concessions).

DESIGNER BOOKBINDERS EVENTS 2008

The following events will be held at the Art Workers Guild, 6 Queen Square, London W1T. The nearest tube stations are Holborn and Russell Square. Admission is £6.00 for DB members, £7.00 for others, and £2.50 for students. Further details may be had from Julia Dummett or Rachel Ward-Sale on 01273 486718, lectures@designerbookbinders.org.uk, or at www.designerbookbinders.org.uk.

Lecture-day, Saturday 26 January.
10:30 a.m. David Penton, Mark Cockram and Midori Kunikata-Cockram. Beautiful British books: an account of the genesis, setting up and impact of the Designer Bookbinders exhibition held in Japan in 2006.
12:00 a.m. Elizabeth Sobczynska. Preserving the oldest monastic collection: the Deir al Surian Library. The most important Coptic Library in Egypt dates from the fifth century and houses the earliest biblical texts and works of Church Fathers. The collection represents a resource of inestimable scholarly value and an important example of a shared world heritage; the immense task of preserving it for the future is underway with the support of The Levantine Foundation.
2:00 p.m. Faith Shannon. Stone bound: how one commission became ten bindings and an exhibition. On binding George Mackay Brown’s poems, printed at the Officina Bodoni for Kulgin Duval and Colin Hamilton.
3:30 p.m. Sally Mae Joseph and Susan Hulton. Making a mighty manuscript book. Two of the scribes and artists who worked on the St John’s Bible tell the story of its making in the twenty-first century and of their experiences as members of the production team.

Lecture, Tuesday 5 February, 6:30 p.m. Bernard Middleton. The Middleton Lecture. How not to create a bindery. A light-hearted account of Middleton’s establishment, which is in marked contrast to the smart, clinical, efficiently-arranged binderies of many others.

Lecture, Tuesday 4 March, 6:30 p.m. Philip Smith. Constructing Tom Philips’ Dante’s Inferno ‘tower’: illustrating the process of designing and binding a three-volume book tower. The lecture celebrates Philip’s eightieth birthday; fifty-nine of those years were spent working as a book artist.

NPHT News and Notes
Derek Nuttall

Alan Dodson. It is with sadness that the National Printing Heritage Trust has to announce the death one of its stalwarts, Alan Dodson, who had been a Friend since the Trust’s inception. Alan was just a few days short of his eighty-third birthday when he died on 10 January this year.

Originally a student of architecture at Kingston College of Art, just prior to the outbreak of World War II, Alan became enthralled by letterpress printing and took a job at the Coombe Press, New Malden, before joining the RAF. On being demobbed in 1947, he went to work in Switzerland where he came under the influence of Swiss design and typography. Returning to England, he joined Percy Lund Elphingsloes Ltd, at their Bradford works.

An important part of Alan’s career was spent at the Stationery Office where, in 1954, he succeeded Harry Carter as Head of Layout. Later, he went to South Africa where he taught at Witwatersrand University and Johannesburg Technical College. Returning to England in 1985, he set up a small printing workshop at Malvern where his passion for William Caslon’s types was reflected in the beautiful work he printed there.

Friends of the NPHT who pay their annual subscriptions by cheque, are reminded that the Trust’s financial year ends on 31 December. Please send your renewal to the Hon. Treasurer, Mr E. C. James, The Pinfold, Church Road, Dudleston, Chester CH4 9NG by January 2008. This is also a suitable time to join for anyone interested in becoming a Friend. The minimum annual donation remains at £10.00.

News on historic printing equipment. Two disturbing pieces of information have recently been passed to me. The first is that the long-running attempt to preserve the premises of Gwasg Gee, the old-established printing firm in Denbigh, North Wales, seems to have come to nothing. It appears that there is now an application to convert the printing works to residential use. The second is that the long-running attempt to preserve the premises of Gwasg Gee, the old-established printing firm in Denbigh, North Wales, seems to have come to nothing. There had been high hopes that the extensive collection of printing and paper-making equipment, together with the unique Whittaker Collection of line-casting machines, might have been developed as a National Museum of Printing. Having been a member of the body that originated the first science and industrial museum in Manchester, along with Dr Richard Hills, who became its original Director, I can state that a great deal of effort was expended in finding, purchasing and transporting a range of early printing presses and other items for this museum. But it now looks highly
improbable that either England or Wales will have a national museum devoted to printing and its related crafts in the foreseeable future. What lost opportunities.

Reviewers sought

The Journal of the Printing Historical Society is seeking new book reviewers. The reviews editor, Catherine Armstrong, would especially welcome contributors interested in the fields of type design, typography, histories of particular presses or publishers, and nineteenth and twentieth century printing innovations, although those with expertise in other fields are also encouraged to get in touch. The deadlines and word limits for reviews are generous and flexible. If you would like to become a reviewer for JPHS please contact Catherine via e-mail on C.M.Armstrong@mmu.ac.uk or write to her c/o St Bride Library, Bride Lane, Fleet Street, London ec4y 8ee.

Bath Press Columbian

A Victorian handpress, used in Bath for letterpress printing for more than a century, has been presented to the University of Bath Library and Learning Centre. The 1839 Columbian press was used for fine letterpress printing at Bath’s Pitman Press (later Bath Press) until the 1970s, and now stands on public display in the Library entrance. Bath Press have preserved the machine and donated it to accompany the Pitman archives held within the Library’s collection. James Thomas, Operations Manager of Bath Press, presented the press to Howard Nicholson, University Librarian, in an official ceremony at the Library.

‘It is wonderful to receive this historic press, with its direct provenance back to Sir Isaac Pitman, one of Bath’s most famous entrepreneurs,’ said Mr Nicholson. ‘The Library holds Sir Isaac’s archive and indeed, some of his books in our Library were possibly printed on this very press. The press is in good condition and I have no doubt it could be used to demonstrate letterpress printing. We are grateful to Bath Press for donating this important object to the University’.

The cast iron press weighs three quarters of a ton and was expertly dismantled and re-assembled by Paul Stephens of Bath Press for its journey to the Claverton campus. The University of Bath Library includes the Pitman Collection of 7,500 books on the history of shorthand, writing systems and spelling reform, and the Pitman archives, which were donated to the University by its founding Pro-Chancellor, Sir James Pitman, in 1970.

TOP SECRET PRINTER

Russell Spencer

Having read the article on map printing in PHN 15, Russell Spencer was inspired to submit the following account of secret map printing in World War II, based on conversations with Norman Gray (1970–1997). The writer records that he was an LST crew member on 6 June 1944 and therefore has every reason to be thankful for the accuracy of the information obtained by Allied intelligence, and the charts subsequently produced from that source.

Countless stories have been written of enterprise and heroism during World War II, most of which, packed with action, make exciting reading. Less has been written of the achievements of units common to all branches of the armed forces without which a commanding officer could not contemplate moving in any direction. One such was the unit responsible for the printing of maps and charts, of which the late Norman Gray, FIOP, was second-in-command.

The Allies believed they would eventually have to fight their way back into Europe, so air cartographs and hydrographic surveys were stepped up, and maps were reproduced in unprecedented numbers. During 1942 the Director of Survey Royal Engineers was required to create four special companies, known as Map Reproduction Sections (MRSs).

With his printing background, Norman almost selected himself for a senior position in one such unit. In February 1943, at the Survey Training Centre in North Wales, he was to meet his commanding officer Captain (later Major) Harry Pickles, and two days later they were in London setting up their MRS in Lupus Street, Pimlico. The requirement was for these sections to be semi-mobile, so that when the occasion arose they could be quickly dismantled and transported nearer to the front line, together with technical stores and arms. Each would consist of three officers, a Company Sergeant Major, seven Sergeants, several Corporals plus Sappers (Privates), draughtsmen, cameramen, plate-makers, machine-minders, machine assistants, two cooks and six drivers, over eighty people in all. Within two months all the specialist personnel had been assembled, equipment acquired and a former garage had been converted into a very presentable printing works.

MRS No. 9 was now operational and with D-Day a bare fourteen months away a base map, known as the ‘Enemy Orders of Battle’, printed in pale blue and grey, was produced two or three times a week. This showed north-west France and the Normandy coastline at a scale of 1:500,000. It was then overprinted, as intelligence came to hand, with German defensive positions, army groups and Panzer Divisions (the latter always being on the move). The overprinting was in bold black, blue and red. To avoid any reference to the planning for Operation Overlord (D-Day) the code name ‘Benson’ was used, named after RAF Benson in Oxfordshire, whence the reconnaissance photographs were obtained. The cooperation with this unit was such that should an imperfect photograph be received, a telephone call to Benson would produce a replacement almost by return. The same could also be said of relationships with the Royal Navy, which had become adept at ascertaining the contours and composition of the enemy coastline and the positions of obstacles, observed from submarines and dinghies. The practical planning required that a 1:12,500 scale map be produced and each sheet printed on Medium paper, 17½ × 22½ inches (442 × 570 mm). One mile was about 1 cm on the map. To avoid any reference to the plan on Royal (called ‘Army Deny’ at the MRS), 19½ × 24½ inches (504 × 620 mm). There were two Crabtree offset machines, one a single-colour, the other a two-colour press; both accommodated the Army Deny paper, plates and paper being interchangeable between the two presses, with perfect register. Each sheet incorporated the kilometre square grid, with a comparative scale of kilometers/miles. This was necessary for the American forces who did not use the metric system. One mile was thus represented on the map by five inches, and each inch was approximately 347 yards. In addition to the usual features and legends, it was possible to show small buildings, command posts and woods in great detail. The sheets were designed so that secret information could be added last,
and the composite map displayed on an operations-room wall with the image on each sheet abutting perfectly. The size made up for briefing sessions was about 2.4 × 10 feet (roughly 7.3 × 3 metres).

A system of lettering was also devised using permutations of all the faces and weights of type available, to distinguish between place names, cartographic and hydrographic features and other military information. For the secret planning information, further passes through the machines were required. To identify its source, every sheet carried the imprint of its originating MRS. Rather surprisingly, MRS personnel were allowed to wear the SHAESF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) badge on their sleeves, and were proud of being the only complete British unit at Supreme Headquarters.

The original charts and maps for D-Day (6 June 1944) showed the proposed disposition of the Allied invasion force at set times before and after H-hour, each subsequent reprint being a snapshot in time, the intervals between each set recorded. Complete sets, comprising sixteen sheets, were demanded at the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower, with complete up-to-date amendments by 31 December 1943 at 24:00 hours. The diary records, with a display of brinkmanship characteristic of many printers, that these were handed over at 23:57. This was achieved by working up to eight-hour shifts during the summer months, increasing in the autumn up to twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week. This left little time for sleeping and recreation, and this pattern of work was carried on until well beyond D-Day.

The most impressive part of this entire operation was the high security maintained. There appear to have been no security leaks at all – no mean feat when one considers that the outline plans for the Normandy landings were known to so many people some fourteen months in advance.

In early July 1944 the combined attack from German V1s and V2s on London put the Lupus Street MRS out of action, and the operation was then transferred to Kingswood in Surrey. On 28 September 1944 Norman Gray was flown to Paris, newly-liberated, but still a war-zone. A place was soon found and commandeered for the printing plant and billets. The trucks carrying the presses and other equipment came by landing craft. Because there was a shortage of electricity in Paris, AC generators were included in the extensive ‘extras’. Once established, a message was sent to SHAESF and the unit took on the printing of the Enemy Orders of Battle on a daily basis. The demand for these rose as the Allies advanced, and set-backs like the hold-up at Caen and the German offensive in the Ardennes called for strategic re-planning. Another crisis arose when General Patton and the American Third Army made such rapid advances that they were continually running out of maps.

The war in Europe came to an end on 8 May 1945 and the MRS was returned to England for disbandment. Norman Gray was then sent to the Mapping and Survey SHAESF at Frankfurt as Staff Captain. Following demobilisation he joined the Field Survey Association, and became their Secretary for forty-seven years, a record unlikely to be surpassed.

PHS Journal

Members of the PHS will soon receive volume 11 of the new series of its Journal. It will contain Nigel Palmer’s article ‘Blockbooks: texts and illustrations printed from wood blocks’, with seven illustrations, Rob Banham’s ‘Nineteenth-century jobbing: the printing methods of Gye and Balne’, with twenty-one illustrations, and numerous book reviews. This will be the first issue published under the Journal’s new editor, John Trevitt.

The new series is now three issues behind-hand, but it is hoped that will be caught up by 2009. The 2009 volume will be edited by John Trevitt (Editor) and Catherine Armstrong (Reviews Editor). John can be contacted at jj@trevitt.freeserve.co.uk, and would be grateful to hear from those with ideas for future Journal articles.

ULTRABOLD

The third number of the St Bride magazine Ultrabold has just been printed, and will be distributed to Friends shortly. It contains articles by Nick Robertson of Wordsalad on the creative possibilities of client-rejected design ideas, and working with Brian Eno; Rob Banham on Whiting and Braiston’s compound-plate two-colour process of the 1820s; Tara Publishing’s hand-printed books; Max Gadney on the design of BBC news online; Peggy Smith on the ‘St Bride frisket’, a typographical love story set against the backdrop of London Fields; the impact of Alan Aldridge’s 1960s Beatles illustrations on an impressionable Geordie lad; plus the usual type bits and reviews.

SMALL ADS

Arab Press free to a good home. The press is believed to be in good condition. It has been disassembled, and is currently in Coggeshall, Essex. For more details please contact Mrs Firn on 07764 682269.

FOR SALE: a Cropper-type treadle press, made by F. M. Weiler around 1870 (in good condition, but needs new rollers), plus a large fount of 14-point Pastonchi, some 10-point Pastonchi, Perpetua titling and other faces, in cabinets. Offers around £500.00 for the lot, please. Transport to be negotiated. Please contact Angela Sutton, 30 Grundys Lane, Malvern Wells, Worcestershire WR14 4HS. Tel: 01684 575731. E-mail: acpsutton@rva-online.net.

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Please pass spare copies of Printing History News on to an interested friend.