

**BOOKBINDING AT THE HARDCOURT BINDERY 2006 & NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOOKBINDING TECHNIQUES AT THE HARDCOURT BINDERY 2007  
BOTH DVDS PRESENTED BY SAM ELLENPORT**

The Harcourt Bindery was located in South Boston, USA and Sam Ellenport was its owner until the recent alliance with the Acme Bookbindery. Established in 1900 the Harcourt bindery practice has remained close to its original design in terms of its method of operation, division of labour and commercial approach. It relies heavily upon hand craft, using very little machinery, and seeks to produce bindings of high quality, cost effectively.

The DVD's set out to show how work was carried out in the bindery by explaining processes and giving sufficient information, that they can be understood and appreciated, but without necessarily showing a continuous and entire sequence. The *Bookbinding* disc gives a very clear outline of how books are put together, from sewing through to the 'finished' book. Cloth and leatherwork are shown in turn. The emphasis throughout is on working efficiently, at a comfortable speed, but as productively as possible. There is much incidental information offered suggesting maybe the morning's work of a forwarder or how many books might be worked in succession by perhaps thinning the glue-working on one book while the glue is going off on another while a third dries, and so on. This is all imparted in a wonderfully lucid and fluent manner. I frankly was amazed that I had watched continuously for over 90minutes without being conscious of having done so.

Much can similarly be said of the *Techniques* disc, except that here there are practices demonstrated which are unlikely to have been shown in a similar way before – silk end-papers and doublures, different methods of achieving leather jointed end-papers, for example – all done with the neatness and crispness to be expected of high quality binding of the period. There is, however, a huge amount of basic, good efficient practice that can be drawn from these discs and utilised.

The production values on both discs are high-they are well filmed and edited, making it easy to see clearly the steps shown and provide not only high quality, practical instruction but a permanent record of the working hub of the last 'for profit hand bindery in Boston' and are super value to boot!

*Editor's note: I hold just six of each of these two discs. Should anybody like a copy cost is £8 plus £1 p&p. Cheques payable to Gaynor Williams and sent to my home address (monies will be forwarded to Sam Ellenport).*

**AN ESSAY ON THE DEVELOPMENT & USAGE OF BRASS PLATE DIES – Including a Catalogue Raisone from The Harcourt Bindery by Samuel B Ellenport. The Harcourt Bindery, Boston, Mass. 1980. ISBN 0-936794-00-3.**

The essay, which introduces the examples of the brass plates, provides an historic context for their use, both in the wider sense of decorated bindings through time, and in the narrower one of their employment in the Harcourt Bindery. Sam Ellenport cites authority for the use of large central stamps on boards as early as the 13th century in Antwerp, although they did not reach the height of their popularity until the late 15th/early 16th century. They fell out of favour only to benefit from a revival in the 19th century, having both advantages of speed and design. Open patterns

allowed the incorporation of onlays, using matching punches or 'dinks', which could be used perhaps to demonstrate a higher level of competence than was actually required to carry out the work.

The book dovetails very neatly with the Techniques disc – where the gas powered 'arming' presses are shown, with the set-up required to achieve these blocks. Sam Ellenport demonstrates how pre-stamped spine designs could, with care, be worked on to the book.

The Harcourt Bindery has several hundred dies of various types and sizes- some with open sides to allow them to be used on books of different sizes, as well as corners, spine pieces and monograms. Sam Ellenport argues that innovation of this kind did not necessarily need to result in a sacrifice of quality and that the later use of the plate die was a 'legitimate extension of the finishers craft'.

The illustrations of the dies give an indication of the variety of finish that could be achieved using this method, from earlier period styles, such as the Grolier, to the more creative Art Nouveau. The versatility and economy in use of the plates combine to achieve books that are both striking in their finish, yet efficiently produced in terms of bench time –hallmarks of the Harcourt bindery itself.

The book is very handsomely produced – Sam Ellenport's knowledge and experience are as visible on the printed page as they are evident in his narration. The book includes two full page colour plates as well as countless large scale examples of blocks from the Harcourt collection. This book represents an important addition to the literature on the history of binding styles.