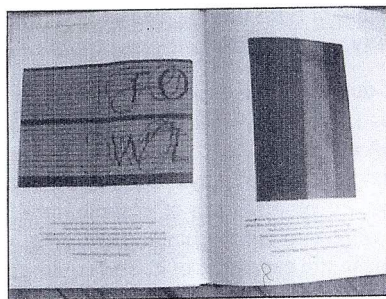
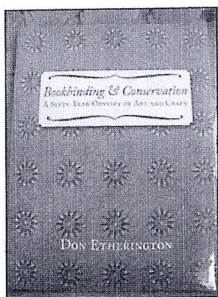


**DON ETHERINGTON – BOOKBINDING & CONSERVATION  
– A SIXTY YEAR ODYSSEY OF ART AND CRAFT**

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The sub-title of this book implies either a dramatic series of wanderings or a long adventurous journey, the latter necessarily with an end point in view.

There was certainly nothing portentous or suggestive of an odyssey in the writer's early years. Born to working parents in West London in 1935 and living in an 'apartment complex', [Brits.. can read here a block of Council flats] gave no hint of the life to come. Drawn by early influences, partly unconscious, he gravitated to the bookbinding course at the Central School, London, aged 13 years. What he records as being significant in his formative training, and this is developed by Bernard Middleton in a perceptive Foreword, is the minute attention to detail and the intense supervision of all aspects of work that the School imposed. The young Don was selected to train as a 'finisher' and moved on to an apprenticeship with Harrison & Co. in London.

What critically separates Don Etherington from the ranks of binders similarly prepared for a life at the bench was an open mind with a desire to learn, exceptional ability and an exemplary work ethic. These attributes, combined with a degree of good fortune, set his life on a continuing elevation. Favour came early, not undeserved, for he had won the Harrison Prize for a binding of which Edgar Mansfield would have been justly proud. The purchaser of that book was the British Museum in the guise of Howard Nixon, who clearly recognised a precocious talent and set out through judicious mentoring in book restoration, combined with appropriate trade introductions, to foster it. One such connection made, perhaps decisively altering the course of the young man's life, was that with Peter Waters and through him to Roger Powell.

## BOOK REVIEW

Although Don Etherington did not remain long working with Powell and Waters at Froxfield, he quickly came to appreciate through them the importance they placed upon the quality of materials and on book structure.

Don Etherington had a deeply ingrained appreciation of learning, in both its receipt and provision, so it was not perhaps surprising that he moved away from commercial book work at an early stage to teach, first at Camberwell and later at Southampton. However, a life changing event was to intervene in the form of the Florence flood in 1966, into which he was drawn by Waters (no pun intended). The cross cultural exchange which this generated, combined with the necessarily innovative approach to the disaster's aftermath led to the development of new approaches to work - recording, equipping and training of local staff and others. This undoubtedly took the writer to a new level both in his professional and personal life – opening up, not least a vista of travel and of new possibilities.

Following a fairly lengthy period directing education and training in binding –and also broadening his own knowledge of printing and typography – based at Southampton, Don Etherington again answered the call of Peter Waters, this time taking up a senior position at the Library of Congress in Washington. This proved to be an un-retraced step into the world of preservation of both volume and unique historic items of great rarity, initially as a commissioner, but latterly as an 'out sourced' provider, of preservation services.

Throughout his long career Don Etherington undertook design binding work. Not untypically in the period, this work went largely un-documented, necessarily causing this aspect of the book under review to be rather sketchy, but the range and variety of his work is hinted at by a short concluding section of large format coloured plates. Regrettably, none of these bindings are accompanied by any form of commentary by the binder as to why the particular book was chosen, what inspired the binding design or what technical issues, if any, were encountered and overcome in the execution of it. This could perhaps be considered in any new edition.

Another area of regret, and one which may be remedied elsewhere, is the absence of any consideration of the art of 'finishing'. For someone trained in that specialism one might have hoped that he would have views to express on his own relationship with it and on how he thought it had fared as an aspect of binding generally over the course of his working life. Further, although it is evident that Don Etherington worked both here and in the US on private work no reference is made as to how any form of domestic bindery was designed, equipped or indeed balanced with the demands of family life.

Despite these caveats this book remains a timely reminder of a life of rich endeavour and one in which a talent was used both purposefully and shared widely. It stands as a record – certainly where it recounts a method of training, which although not without short-comings, produced technically proficient and commercially competent binders –which justifies the writer's efforts. However, the later sections of the book, (with the exception of the chapter dealing with the Florence flood, which offers a new perspective and some fresh images), does rather too often become a slow parade of people, places and projects – lacking somewhat in depth and colour.

The wanderings have been varied, plentiful and many lives unquestionable greatly improved and enriched by the writer whose legacy, principally in the world of library archive preservation and teaching, will stand comparison with any in his chosen field.

Alan Isaac