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Designer profile: Rhyll Plant

By Rhyll Plant, Castlemaine, Victoria

As a youngster my natural curiosity was fueled by creative adults and in 1970, at the age of 16 years, my folio of nature drawings helped me secure a technician's job at the then National Museum of Victoria, where I stayed full-time for 20 years. I still keep in touch with the Museum in my capacity as an Honorary Associate.

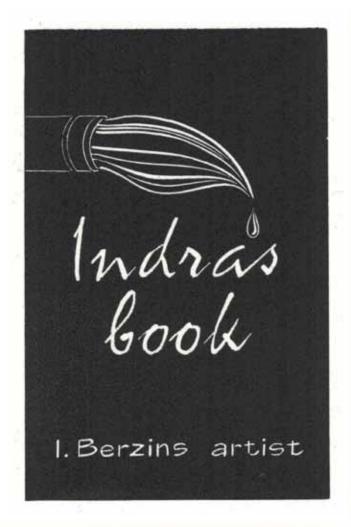
My observational skills improved at the National Museum as I illustrated specimens for various publications. Early on I used basic dip pens, then newly invented cartridge pens to form stipple and line in the atmospheric 'olde world museum dungeon' ambience, where the aroma of preservatives and the essence of traditional hands-on science were all pervasive. When we left on field trips I kept visual arts journals, thinking of the early artists such as J J Wild aboard the *Challenger* voyage of

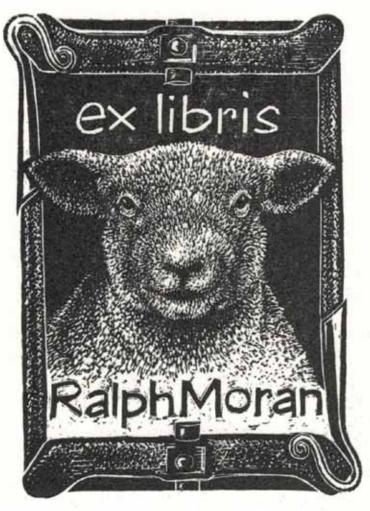
1872–1876, as my intended model would slide back and forth in a tray with the movement of the research ship. These journals are an important source of reference for me today. Of the original drawings I made for publication over the decades, few now exist as they were discarded once in print.

At the museum I met the inspirational artist George Browning who hand painted realistic dioramas in league with the expert model makers who sculpted intricate replicas of creatures to inhabit them. There was also natural history art to peruse such as the original hand-coloured plates (and lithographic stones) of artists such as A Bartholomew that adorned books like Frederick McCoy's *Prodromus of the zoology of Victoria* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1878).



Woodcut for Sarah Coller, 2005









Left above: Linocut for Indra Berzins, 2020 Left: Wood engraving on huon pine for Edwin Jewell, 2018

Above top: Wood engraving on huon pine for Ralph Moran, 2017

Above: Sketch for Ralph Moran 'ewe' bookplate

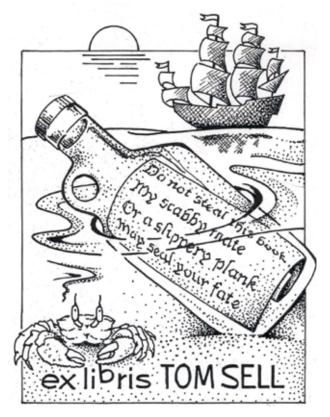
In contemporary circles I was also exposed to high quality art when in 1974 I was invited to assist in the founding of the Wildlife Artists Society along with skilled members such as Charles McCubbin and Richard Weatherley.

My love of graphic arts took me on yet another learning curve in the mid-1980s as, while still at the Museum, I undertook a course of 'finished art' where I absorbed the pre-computer methods of typography, layout, airbrush and perspective ... skills that I still use today.

In 1990, with a new family in tow, I moved to Central Victoria. After a few years I indulged in a Visual Arts degree at LaTrobe University, Bendigo where, fortunately (as it turned out) I realised that my contribution as a student of 'painting' was limited at best. Alternately, printmaking with its time-honoured technical processes resonated with me and became the focus of my creative passion.

Skilled generous teachers exposed us to the intricacies of intaglio, lithography, screen and relief printing. My 1997 university folio contains a set of 'ex libris' copper etchings that addressed an exercise in colour printing rather than the creation of bookplates for their own sake. I embraced wood engraving in particular for its tactile qualities and potential for fine linework as well as its convenience as a 'kitchen table craft', a term from the era of the 1920's that is still meaningful today when friends meet to enjoy making art that can be paused to deal with family concerns. I credit Tim Jones, my wood engraving instructor at the time, for my use of ex libris as text/image design. An original sample of his own bookplate for 'G Mark Grant' appears in my journal of the following year, and Tim no doubt lectured us on the topic. I also referenced the art of Lionel Lindsay and visited the bookplate collection held by my local gallery, now the Castlemaine Art Museum.

Some years later my exploration for a Masters thesis took me on an exciting journey into the historic role of Art in Science. I once again joyfully haunted old collections, now as a Research Associate of the relocated and renamed (and not so atmospheric) Museum Victoria. To my



Line art from pen-and-ink for Tom Sell, 2021

delight, thanks to Des Cowley, I was shown rarities of the State Library and even found some old engraved woodblocks of botanical images under the care of Helen Cohn in the depths of the 'never having moved and therefore full of good stuff' Herbarium.

After more than 50 years, I count myself fortunate to be still associated with what is now the Melbourne Museum, and honoured that John Kean chose to include my wood engravings Squid Row and Plaice Mat in the book The Art of science: Remarkable natural history illustrations from Museum

Victoria (Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2013), where my art rubs pages with that of my heros.

My earliest bookplate dates from about 1970, a linocut Banksia for my book- and natural history-loving mother, Joyce. I have created lots of bookplates since and am happiest smoothing a slice of Huon pine to a satin finish before gouging it to bits!

In 2002, my sister's fiftieth birthday inspired me to make her a gift of a boxed set of bookplates featuring a ladder shell, together with the engraved boxwood block.



Rhyll Plant with her press

Similar gifts for friends and family followed as wood engravings, linocuts or line work, each featuring a personalized icon.

If I'm lucky, a potential design may boast multiple hooks on which to hang ideas, such as nurse Jeannie (lady of the lamp) and rhyming genie (also of the lamp) humour plus wafting smoke to use as script! In contrast I was concerned that my deceased museum boss's specialist library would be dispersed *sans* provenance which led me to create a posthumous bookplate for his grateful partner to include in his books.

Completing commissions for bookplates can be a challenge; some are straightforward such as that from Margaret Blakers for her mother Catherine who liked native flowers; and some take time to research to be clear on the client's wishes.

I ask myself:

How clear is the brieftreference I've been provided?

Is the final image to be a costly engraving or economical line art?

How many rough-drawn versions should I offer the client?

Is there a time limit and should I expect payment for research time or just the final product?

Can I 'limit' copies of a digital version of my work?

Some years ago I was delighted to uncover the existence of the New Australian Bookplate Society. I appreciate the efforts of this team who take the trouble to research and offer interesting information about bookplates, provide samples and a fresh outlet for my own designs ... a good thing as I fear my own circle of recipients is rather saturated.

Is a digital copy less valuable than a

hard copy in future?

A comfortable blend of experience and opportunity informs my current art practice. My skills as a scientific illustrator and graphic artist (acquired pre-computers) endure and together with my indulgence to post graduate level in printmaking feed my creative spirit, with bookplates being the ideal outlet.

I am content to be traditional in my process, be it a detailed wood engraving, linocut, woodcut or line artwork. Each method has different qualities that influence my design, such as the potential for the

edgy expressive marks of woodcuts, suited in this case to the bookplate for Sarah and her rescue cats with their 'withstand what life throws at you' personalities.

I chose wood engraving for finer detail when sheep breeder Ralph Moran wanted his ovine interest portrayed as a bookplate to grace his professional library for eternity. (How hard can it be? Sheep all look the same, don't they?)

A steep learning curve saw me research further about Ralph's 'short on stature, big on personality' breed called Southdown, resulting in a portrait showing a pretty Southdown ewe smiling despite being surrounded by my rendering of Ralph's personal instruments of sheepish persuasion.

Design approved, I scratch-traced the image to acetate, filled the line with white chalk, turned it face down and transferred it in reverse to a level, end-grain fruit-wood block. Engraving complete, I arranged my small press and inked and printed lots of crisp original prints on Japanese paper. Lovely.

From sheep to sea for me; Ed Jewell's bookplate brief, 'something marine', led me to revisit the drawings from my many field notebooks (a valuable source of reference I have compiled since the 1970s). Wood engraving, this time into a Huon pine block, allowed me to render a variety of fine lines and sand-like stipple. In keeping with my using text as image, a sea snail wrote in the sand while a sea-pen was employed by the octopus scribe.

A linocut has the potential for stark contrast, both dramatic and calming.

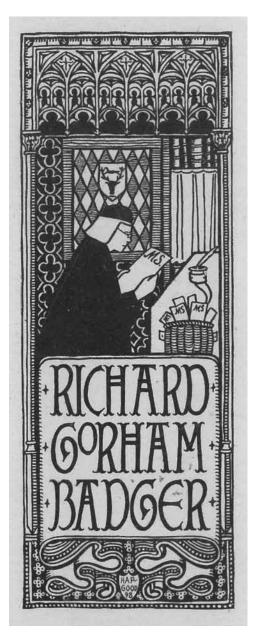
These qualities of deceptive simplicity suited the design I chose to create for my Sumi-painting friend Indra whose Zen brushstrokes speak volumes in their minimalism.

Though there is no woodblock to fondle, no ink aroma and the print quality depends on a machine, line artwork using pen-and-ink does suit some bookplates. I coax my old ink pens to render line and dot, describing shadows (the opposite of engraving where every mark is ultimately a white dot).

This time I am guided by Daryl (owner of my 2021 bookplate 'here be dragons') who gifts a bookplate to his grandson

Tom, admirer of sailing ships. We worked together on the verse and I chose a typeface in keeping with the theme, tweaked the spacing to my satisfaction, rolled it on a bottle, re-photographed and redrew it to appear 'on the round' — fiddly, but important to me. I deliberately kept the artwork sparse for the option of colouring by the young owner.

[Rhyll has made almost 40 named bookplates, some universals and numerous ex libris exercises and samples. On top of their originality, humour and scientific accuracy (where required), they demonstrate her great facility in relief printing in a range of materials: wood engraving using primarily boxwood and huon pine (but experimenting with other woods); vinyl and even rubber stamps. – Ed]



The rise of the book-plate, by W G Bowdoin (New York: A Wessels Co., 1901)

A modern review of a historical book, by Dr Gael Phillips, Brisbane

William Goodrich Bowdoin, who was an art critic for the New York Every World, wrote the Rise of the book-plate and subtitled it 'Being an exemplification of the art, signified by various bookplates, from its earliest to its most recent practice, illustrated by reproductions in miniature and otherwise'. He wished to provide a survey on the progress of the bookplate over the centuries, and to bring it up-to-date he included two bookplates by the American master of the bookplate, E D French, printed from the original engraved copper plates. The text was written by Bowdoin but there is also an introduction and a chapter on the study and arrangement of bookplates by Henry Blackwell. The book is dedicated to Hamilton Holt, one of the editors of The Independent, who had evidently been a patron of the author. (Bowdoin authored several books, including one on James McNeill Whistler.)

There is an interesting bibliography, mainly of books published in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, including one of Australian interest: J S C Elkington, Ex Libris. A Disquisition concerning Book Plates with a few remarks on the cult thereof. This was published in Melbourne in 1900 and reproduced examples of bookplates from the pen of the renowned Norman Lindsay.

Bowdoin's book measures 18 by 23 cm and comprises 207 pages, including 214 reproductions of bookplates and book labels from various eras but mainly from the late nineteenth century, with two bookplates printed from the original copper plates. It is bound in cloth over cardboard, quarter bound with imitation leather on the spine. The reproductions are all in black and white with many halftone reproductions of a quality typical of the time. Some of the plates are reproduced by photomechanical block printing and are of good contrast.

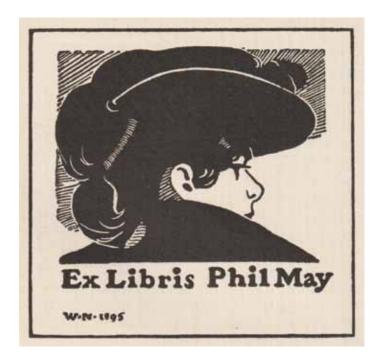
The frontispiece comprises the bookplate of the Mark Skinner Library in Manchester, Vermont, dated 1897, and printed from the original copper plate by E D French. Edwin Davis French (born in 1851) was a great bookplate engraver, who produced over 300

bookplates between 1893 and his death in 1906. The second illustration in the book is the bookplate of Edward Courtland Gale, also printed from the original copper plate, engraved by French in 1899. This is a typical armorial bookplate with a shield surmounted by a crest and mantling sitting on top of an open book with other books on either side, a lighted oil lamp, probably signifying the enlightenment and a sextant. The motto, 'Tiens ta Foy', translates as 'Hold your faith' or 'Keep your promise'.

The author includes a list of what he considered were some of the most important American engravers and designers of bookplates at that time. Apart from the abovementioned French, the names of Winslow Homer and Louis J Rhead are notable.

He also provides examples of suitable bookplate inscriptions, some of which are less useful for today. I rather like 'Cherish Virtue'.

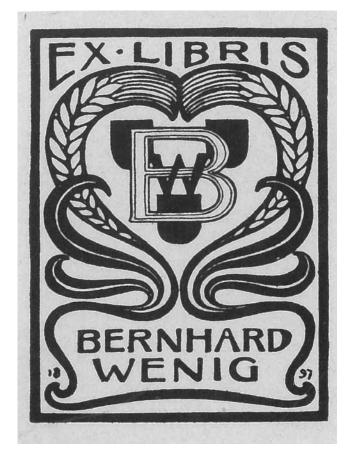
On page 49 is a reproduction of the bookplate of Hans Igler, c. 1450, which the author states 'has been considered as the earliest known bookplate'. The image is of a hedgehog with a banner scroll in German



Left: Pen-and-ink design by Theodore Brown Hapgood for Richard Gorham Badger, 1898

Above: Wood-engraved bookplate by W Nicholson for Phil May, 1895

Right: Pen-and-ink design by Bernhard Wenig for himself, 1897



black letter, bearing the owner's name. This is different from the bookplate considered by P Neville Barnett, and many scholars, to be the earliest printed bookplate, that of Hilprand Brandenburgh of Biberach, printed in 1480; this famous bookplate shows an angel holding a shield bearing an ox.

I have selected a few of the bookplates for comment. In the section devoted to Germany, the bookplate by Bernhard Wenig for his own use is a lovely design, with typical whiplash curves so characteristic of the Art Nouveau style, at its height at this period.

In the English section there is a famous bookplate designed by W P Nicholson in 1895 for Phil May. It also has features of Art Nouveau with a woman's face peeping out from a large hat, bedecked with ostrich plumes. Phil May (1864-1903) was an English artist and cartoonist who was one of those who helped to develop the modern cartoon. Sir William Prior Nicolson (1872-1949) was an English artist noted for portraiture, still-life painting, landscapes, engraving and graphic art. He is also notable as the father of Ben Nicholson, another great artist, who was at one time the husband of the great sculptor, Barbara Hepworth. For those who would like to



Engraved design by Paul Revere for himself, 18th century

know more, *Country Life* of 2 February 2022 published an interesting article on Sir William as their 'Artist of the week'.

The section on American bookplates follows. There is an engraved bookplate for George Washington. The artist is not stated. It depicts the arms of the Washington family, with three stars above several stripes, the ancestor of the 'Stars and Stripes' flag of the USA. In heraldic French the arms are blazoned as 'Argent two bars Gules, in chief three mullets of the second' or two red bars on a silver background with three red stars at the top, also on a silver background. The motto of the Washington family, 'Exitus Acta Probat', is translated as 'The outcome is the test of the act.'

The bookplate of Paul Revere, famous for his ride in April 1775 during the American War of Independence, is depicted. Revere was a silversmith and was able to engrave his own bookplate which is blazoned as 'Argent, three bars Gules, over all a bend sinister charged with three fleurs-de-lis (assumed to be azure) sinisterways'. The motto, 'Pugna pro patria' means 'Fight for your country'. There is some evidence that the original arms of the Rivere or Rivoire family had a dexter bend. The bend sinister of Paul Revere's arms, typically indicating an illegitimate birth, may have originally been dexter, but was reversed at some stage.

The bookplate of Richard Gorham Badger, by Theodore Brown Hapgood (1871-1938), an American artist, illustrator, sculptor, and designer, is dated 1898 and is an excellent example of Gothic Revival design, which was so popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, exemplified by Augustus Pugin with his ecclesiastical designs and architecture [including some important work carried out in Australia]. Gothic Revival was becoming less popular by 1898 but the use of Gothic architectural motifs in this interesting bookplate, combined with a hybrid Art Nouveau panel below is striking, as is the style of lettering, which draws on Lombardic and other Medieval models. The bookplate depicts a medieval scholar with his manuscripts in an interior with an heraldic window. Badger was the owner of the Gorham Press in Boston, which produced books which authors paid to have published. The press operated in the later nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, and the name is still being used by a press in the USA.

There are so many interesting thoughts and bookplates in *Rise of the book-plate* it deserves close study.

Bibliography 2021

By Mark J Ferson, Sydney

Ross Edmonds. Mrs Geddes goes to Hollywood — almost. *Biblionews and* Australian Notes & Queries, no. 409, Mar. 2021; pp. 12–4

Shows the pictorial design for Nora Austin Geddes signed BR (Norbertine Bresslern-Roth)

HELEN GRAHAM. The Fairy Queen: Ola Cohn. *Spirit of Progress*, vol. 22, no. 4, Spring 2021; pp. 28–32 Reproduces a bookplate (which appears to be a linocut) by Ola for her sister Ziska Cohn (p. 31)

NEIL WYNES MORSE AND IAN SHANLEY.

The Guyot bookplates, part 1. Freemason, vol. 54, no. 2, Jun. 2021; pp. 22–4
Reproduces and discusses the designer
Alexander Lyall Guyot and his masonic bookplate for G Chester Smith [thanks to Stephen Szabo for drawing this to my attention]

NEIL WYNES MORSE AND IAN SHANLEY.

The Guyot bookplates, part II. *Freemason*, vol. 54, no. 3, Sep. 2021; pp. 26–9
Reproduces the bookplate for the Royal Arch NSW Study Group by Alexander Lyall Guyot and discusses its symbolism [thanks to Neil Wynes Morse for this article]

SARINA NOORDHUIS-FAIRFAX. Spowers & Syme. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2021; pp. 11, 74
Catalogue of a touring NGA exhibtion.

Catalogue of a touring NGA exhibtion.

Depicts linocut designs by Ethel Spowers for E L Spowers and Everyman's Lending Library, Melbourne, and a design by Eveline Syme for herself, all from 1927. The exhibition was reviewed in the *Canberra Times*, 11 September 2021

BEATA JOANNA PRZEDPEŁSKA. Kolekcjoner ekslibrisów [Exlibris collector]. *Tygodnik Polski [Polish Weekly (Melbourne)]*, 15 Sep. 2021; p. 16

This is a review of Andrew Peake's 2020 publication, *Artur Mario da Mota Miranda:* his contribution to ex-libris, and an index to his works [thanks to Marzena Walicka for sending this in]

CHRIS PUPLICK. Royal and vice-regal heraldry at Government House, Hobart, Tasmania. *Heraldry in Australia*, no. 88, Nov. 2021; front cover, 3–26

The front cover reproduces the armorial bookplate for Sir Charles Gairdner, Governor of Tasmania from 1963–1968

REMNANT LIBRARIES. MIV Magazine, no. 54, Autumn 2021; p. 15
Shows the bookplate of Melbourne Mechanics Institute, dating prior to 1873, part of the Philip Candy Archive at MIV

REMNANT LIBRARIES ROUND-UP.

MIV Magazine, no. 55, Winter-Spring 2021; p. 13

In a book from the remnant library of the Walhalla Mechanics' Institute and Free Library, photo of the bookplate 'Notice' dated 1912

STEPHEN M SZABO. Not in Low: the arms of Sir Tannatt William Edgeworth David (1858–1934). *Heraldry in Australia*, no. 86, Mar. 2021; 22–36
Reproduces the unsigned first bookplate for Edgeworth David and his etched portrait bookplate by J B Godson

[Universal Bookplates]. Frankie no. 102, Jul./Aug. 2021; facing p. 48
Tear out sheet of 'peel and stick' universal bookplates: 'If found, please contact ...', 'This book belongs to ...' and 'From the library of ...'

GARY WERSKY. Picturing a nation: the art & life of A H Fullwood. Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2021; pp. 288–9
A paragraph referring to A H Fullwood's bookplate work illustrated by his etched design for son Geoffrey Barr Fulwood, 1929
[Thanks to Jürgen Wegner for this information]



Notes & happenings

Exhibition 'Bookplates from Ukraine' at Burgk Castle Museum

Taken from FISAE Newsletter no. 147a and 152, May 2022

On 15 May, the President of the German Federal Council and First Minister of the German state of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, in his capacity as patron of International Museum Day, opened the exhibition "When the guns speak, the muses are silent" Exlibris from Ukraine in the Burgk Castle collection'. The exhibition had been organised at short notice by museum director Sabine Schemmrich, as an opening event at Burgk Castle.

With 94,000 ex-libris, Museum Schloß Burgk houses the largest publicly owned collection of ex-libris in Europe, and from its 2500 Ukrainian ex-libris, Ms Schemmrich put together an exhibition of 120 ex-libris, mainly by contemporary Ukrainian artists. It is being shown in the wood-panelled ex-libris room in stylish wooden frames and a large display case in this very special space and setting until the beginning of September.

The title of the exhibition is taken from a sentence written by Kiev artist Sergiy Hrapov to German bookplate artist Utz Benkel two weeks after the Russian army invaded his homeland: 'I would like to sell my work to help the Army. But now nobody wants it. When the guns speak, the muses are silent.' This exhibition shows very impressively that art has never been silent and does not remain silent even during war.

Utz Benkel, who has been involved in a fundraising campaign for Ukrainian ex-libris artists since the first day of the war, presented First Minister Bodo Ramelow with a rich portfolio of ex-libris by Ukrainian artists on this occasion. Ms Schemmrich and Mr Benkel were able to report on the situation of Ukrainian ex-libris artists to Tina Beer, Thuringia's Secretary of State for Culture, and Elke Harjes-Ecker, Head of Department at the exhibition.

The exhibition will run until the beginning of September and will be seen by many visitors from Germany and abroad, as Burgk Castle is one of the most visited cultural sites in Thuringia.

After the opening of the conference, Mr Benkel auctioned off a number of works with the help of Wolfgang Fiedler, with the proceeds amounting to 1836 Euros. The next day Ulrike Ladnar sold works by Marie Plyatsko, Oleksandra Sysa, Anna Vojtiuk, Mariana Myroshnychenko and Mykhailo Drimaylo and raised a further 375 euros. Thus, a total of 2211 Euros was collected for the fundraising campaign. Since 24 February, Mr Benkel has collected a total of 22,416 Euros for the Ukrainian ex-libris artists and transferred it to them.

It is hoped that this exhibition will make the work of our artist colleagues from Ukraine visible and bring the beauty, diversity and significance of their art to the attention of many people.

Publications

Ross Edmonds. Barry Humphries: book collector extraordinaire. *Biblionews and Australian Notes & Queries*, no. 413, Mar. 2022; pp. 20–3

Shows two bookplates, one by van Dongen, and a book stamp for Barry Humphries are reproduced.

Bob Farrow. Doing the best things well. Brighton High School 1952–1989.

Adelaide: The School, 1989; p. 3

Shows and describes the symbolism of the bookplate, designed by the school's Senior Art Teacher, Mr L A Smith. [thanks to Andrew Peake for this citation]

MARK FERSON. Nora Geddes didn't get to Hollywood but her bookplate got to travel from Austria to Australia and back again. *Biblionews and Australian Notes & Queries*, no. 413, Mar. 2022; pp. 35–7

Describes and depicts bookplates by Austrian artist Norbertine Bresslern-Roth for Nora Austin Geddes and her brother Dr Harry Austin Brentnall

NOTICE OF MEETING

To be held on Saturday, 13 August 2022, 2pm by Zoom

The Society is calling a GENERAL MEETING in order to make some small additions to the Society's CONSTITUTION to allow it to comply with the requirements of the Australian Charities and Non-profits Commission (ACNC) register. Registration as a non-profit organisation allows us to keep our web domain name as www.bookplatesociety.org.au and may at a later date allow us to apply for deductible gift recipient status if members feel that it is desirable to do so. Honorary Secretary Bronwyn Vost will be in touch to invite members to a Zoom virtual meeting to allow a vote on the proposed changes to the CONSTITUTION; these changes have been reviewed by the ACNC and they are considered appropriate.

To make the MEETING a little less dry, we are proposing to add a short talk or other bookplate-related activity.

Members are invited to contact Mark at newaustralianbookplatesociety@gmail.com or Bronwyn at bronwynvost@bigpond.com for further details.

KIRSTEN MCKAY. Sybil Craig 1901–89 Modernist painter. Castlemaine:
Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum, 2006; pp. 29, 31
Shows linocut bookplate by Craig for her own use (p. 31); also asserts, presumably in the context of the early 1930s, that 'Her printmaking interests soon shifted towards producing bookplates depicting Australian flora and fauna, engendered by her mother's subscription to the [Australian] Ex Libris Society'.

WALTER STONE. Bookplate by
P M Litchfield for S S Blake. *Biblionews*and Australian Notes & Queries, no. 244,
Jun. 1979; p. 44
Shows bookplate for Blake 'who was well
known as a collector of fine books and erotica.
His books were auctioned after his death and interested many collectors — if only to inspect them.'

Editorial

Castlemaine, Victoria, printmaker Rhyll Plant designed her first bookplate in about 1970, a gift to her natural history-loving mother; in the present century Rhyll has designed almost 40 named bookplates and numerous others using a range of relief printing techniques. Following her mother's love of the subject, Rhyll has had a long career in natural history illustration and many of her designs are inspired by our wild creatures. We have pleasure in presenting some of Rhyll's work in our latest instalment of the 'Artist's profile' series and also thank Rhyll for providing copies of one of her many bookplates as a gift to members in the hard copy edition of *Newsletter* no. 65.

Dr Gael Phillips has contributed a fascinating review of an important American publication dating from 1901, W G Bowdoin's The rise of the book-plate, which was one of the earliest published overviews of bookplates with a United States focus. Whilst styles, fashions and preferred techniques have changed in the past century or more, there is an undoubted lineage identifiable over this period, underpinned by those elements essential to the bookplate as a label to identify a book's owner. Furthermore, some bookplates featured in the book still look modern to my eyes, and I agree with Gael that study of books such as this will continue to repay the modern bookplate lover.

I would like to thank contributors to this issue, and as well, express my gratitude to those members who email me from time to time regarding the *Newsletter* and the interest and joy it brings them.

Might I also take this opportunity to welcome 8 new members for 2022 to the Society: Corinne Braiding (NSW), Ben Clover (VIC), Vickie Hearnshaw (NZ), Sylvia Martin (NSW), Mosman Library (NSW), Erin Paczynski (SA), Dr Simon Pockley (VIC) and Bronte Thomas (VIC). As well, we are now exchanging electronic newsletters with the Deutsche Exlibris-Gesellschaft (German Ex Libris Society). Welcome all!