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Bookplates in Poland: past, present and future

By Beata Joanna Przedpeńska, Warsaw, Poland

Once upon a time ... No, the history of bookplates in Poland is not a fairy tale but a real story about the progress of art, literature and printing techniques. The story begins in the 15th century. One of the oldest in Europe and the very first known Polish ex libris was designed for meritorious bishop Maciej Drzewiecki (1467–1535), primate of Poland, Great Royal Chancellor and diplomat. The ex libris dedicated to him is estimated to have been made in about 1516 so in 2016 we celebrated the jubilee: 500 years of Polish bookplate. The oldest Polish bookplates that are known are mostly heraldic: with coat of arms of people or of towns, with dates or inscriptions. Most were made as woodcuts.

In those days books were very rare and expensive; only the richest could afford to possess them. It was the privilege first of all of kings, princes, lords and churchmen. Of course they were very proud to have libraries, so they wanted to mark the books.

Later on, marking the books with an ex libris became more and more popular. And as greater numbers of books were printed, they became cheaper and more popular, approachable even for less wealthy readers. During the 17th and 18th centuries they became more widespread so a lot of libraries, — private, school, municipal and monastic — needed to have their own bookplates, too.

What is interesting is that ex libris began to progress then — both in an artistic and a technical sense. They have not only coats of arms and heraldic arms of towns but pictures of books collectors for instance. And as time went by not only woodcuts were used but the copperplate engraving and typographic design gained dominance; later etching appeared, too.

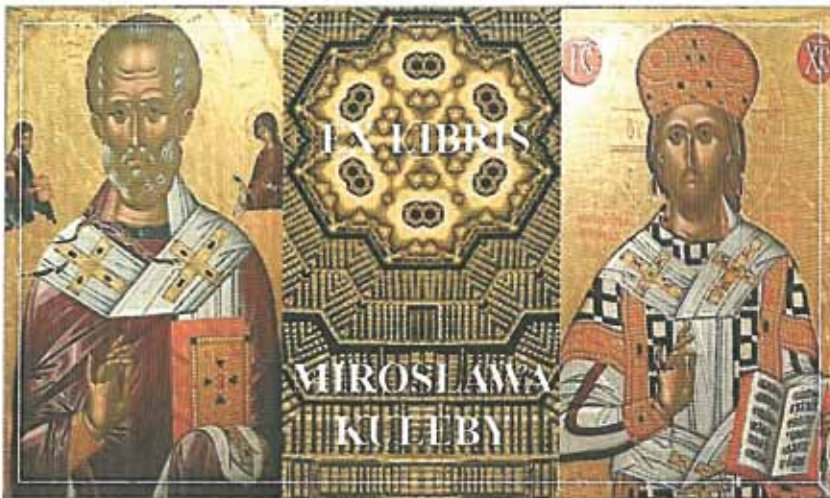
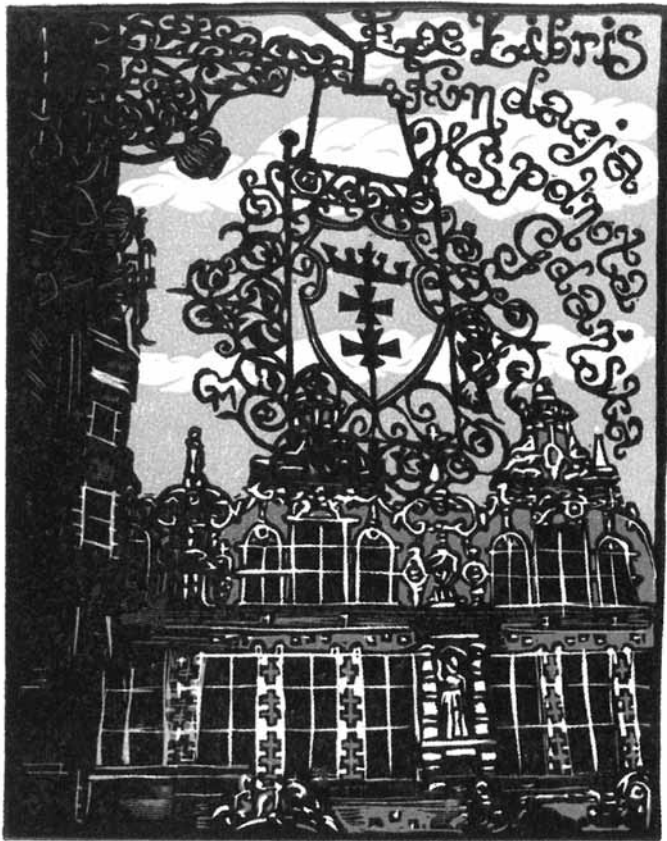
At the end of 18th century we begin to observe development of specialist book collections with

their own bookplates — for example medical, mathematical or astronomical. And not only did kings and bishops want to have their own bookplates but also writers, poets, scholars, noblemen and even rich craftsmen; secular and church institutions — everybody who had a library wanted to have an ex libris. It was in fashion!

On the bookplates from that period we can see library buildings, books, architectural



Bookplate (line block) by Rudolf Mękicki for Bibliotheca Arcis Pomorzansensis, 1928



Above left: Lithographic bookplate by Cristina Gladys Munoz (Argentina) for Wspólnota Gdańska, 2009. Award, International Ex Libris Competition 'The Spirit Of Gdańsk Architecture'.

Above: Bookplate (mixed media/computer reproduced design) by Beata Joanna Przedpełska for Il Bosco Stregato, 2014. Submitted to the International Ex Libris Competition 'The Enchanted World', Italy

Left: Bookplate (computer graphics design) by Rajmund Aszkowski for Mirosław Kuleba, 2019

details, landscapes and plants. Such old bookplates can be found in archive collections of the libraries in such towns like Kraków, Warsaw, Kórnik and Gniezno.

The 19th century was the golden era of ex libris in Poland. Bookplates acquired a new function and importance. They not only marked the collection of books but they were works of art, so they become objects of desire as beautiful, small pieces of art. The first known collector of bookplates in Poland was Kajetan Wincenty Kielisiński (1808–1849), an eminent graphic artist, draughtsman and librarian. In those days the idea to collect bookplates led to an improvement the quality of their design.

At the same time printing techniques evolved so that it became possible to make them more cheaply and this made them

more popular. The new techniques of lithography, zincotype and typography made it possible to reproduce a lot of reprints, a lot of art copies. What is more: ex libris became a new, quite independent academic domain of fine arts.

As ex libris began to be cheap and could be pressed in many editions, they have been created on commission. A lot of people wanted to mark and decorate their book — it was very positive snobbery! And for the first time in history some antique shops offered bookplates for sale — just to go into collections.

The 20th century not only continues but displays such tendencies. Bookplates became the objects of desire for book-lovers and collectors — with full rights of fine arts and a new specialization as well. The real boom of ex libris in Poland means an increase

in variety of styles and techniques, and further research into new means of expression.

The most popular and respected artists designed bookplates (Władysław Skoczylas, Tadeusz Przykowski, Paweł Steller, Stanisław Ostojka-Chrostowski among many others); and even continued during the Second World War (Tadeusz Cieślowski). Public interest in ex libris was so huge that the enthusiasts — artists, collectors, book-lovers and printers — founded Societies and groups all over Poland.

Nowadays ex libris is first of all the object of collecting and a small piece of art. We observe with great pleasure that every year a lot of school libraries, district and even provincial ones, and then great museums and departments organize competitions popularizing the art of the ex libris. For the artists it is a chance not only to design a great bookplate but to consolidate the circle of creators interested in this kind of art. It is very profitable especially during international contests when Polish artists compete with artists from other countries and continents.

Contemporary bookplates are seldom inserted in books; first of all they are collected and presented at various exhibitions organized all over Poland. They are often thematic ones: music, famous people, flowers, animals, erotica, trees, towns, landscapes, buildings ... we can find everything on bookplates. Since 1992 Warsaw's Gallery of Ex-libris has regularly mounted exhibitions of the most meritorious graphic designers, but this kind of art is presented in a lot of other big towns (like Kraków, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Malbork, Gliwice, Toruń) and even smaller villages (like Oleśnica, Sokołów Małopolski). Museums and libraries in these places not only exhibit bookplates but organise — sometimes every year! — competitions, popularising ex libris among adults and young readers or children.

In 2016 we celebrated 500 years of Polish ex libris. On this occasion, Polish Post issued a jubilee postage stamp depicting the oldest Polish bookplate. What will be the future be like? I sincerely hope that ex libris will survive not only as a return to tradition but it will expand as a domain of fine art and a wonderful object of desire for collectors. I think also that there will be more and more modern bookplates designed, thanks to computer techniques. There is no escape from new media!

Polish ex libris — with a long history, from heraldic coats of arms in ancient times to modern illustration nowadays. Probably the ex libris has a bright future as a small graphic art because ... small is beautiful!

Course report: 'Linocut Bookplates from Design to Edition', NSW Guild of Craft Bookbinders, 5–6 September 2020.

By Bronwyn Vost, Sydney
(a student)

In early September last year, I was extremely fortunate to attend a Linocut Bookplate course run by graphic artist and Society member Brigitta Summers.

Although I have been in love with bookplates all my life, and especially linocuts, this was the first time I had ever attempted to create one. It certainly increased my already massive respect for bookplate artists. Not only do they need an immensely steady hand but they have to keep their design in their head back to front and with black and white reversed! Nowhere does this show up more than in lettering. I discovered that writing backwards in an elegant hand is certainly a skill I have yet to perfect.

My classmates, mostly members of the NSW Guild of Craft Bookbinders, were more hands-on than me (or just more talented!) and produced some beautiful plates.

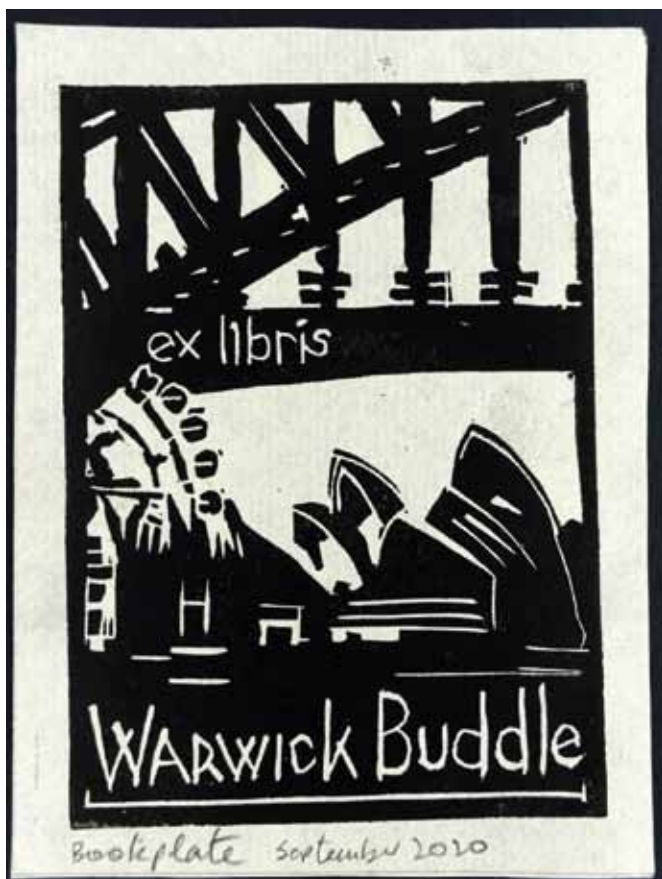
The workshop was run over two days in the Guild's beautiful premises in Callan Park, Rozelle. We were taken through designing, cutting and printing two bookplates. As was promised, we walked out the door at the end of the weekend with two new bookplates and the skills to make many more. All necessary materials were provided, including tools.

The whole experience was great fun, and Brigitta is a natural teacher. The notes she provides are comprehensive, and include such useful tips as sitting on your lino to warm it up before use on a cold day. She is patient and positive, and is calm in any crisis involving thick black ink. And the good news is that she is going to run another course this year!

I really encourage NABS members to extend their appreciation of bookplates in this practical way.



Linocut bookplate by Bronwyn Vost for herself, 2020



Linocut bookplate by Warwick Buddle for himself, 2020



Two-colour linocut by Brigitta Summers for herself, 2020

And by Brigitta Summers, Sydney
(the teacher)

The bookplate course I teach for the NSW Guild of Craft Bookbinders covers the basics of linocut, a graphic relief printmaking technique, in order to execute two individual bookplates. Linocut is a very versatile medium, with a range of styles possible, from highly detailed and intricate designs, to abstract pattern-making, to blocky graphics and text. This allows for a lot of personal expression, perfect for a bookplate which is meant to express something about both maker and owner.

My favourite thing about teaching the course was the variety of designs that the students came up with. No two designs were the same, and you could see the different aesthetics of each student coming through. It was really satisfying, as the teacher, to help each student see their initial vision through to the final design, cutting, printing and in some cases, hand colouring. I'm looking forward to teaching the course again this year, and would again love to see some members of the New Australian Bookplate Society there!

The next course that Brigitta is teaching at the NSW Guild of Craft Bookbinders will be held on 17–18 July 2021. In this two-day course participants will be introduced to the basics of linocut in order to execute two bookplate designs. These will be designed and cut on day 1 and printed on day 2. There will also be an introduction to bookplates and their history. All materials will be supplied. More information is at:

<https://www.nswbookbinders.org/product/linocut-bookplates-from-design-to-edition>

Two Soviet era books of miniature bookplates

By Jürgen Wegner, Sydney

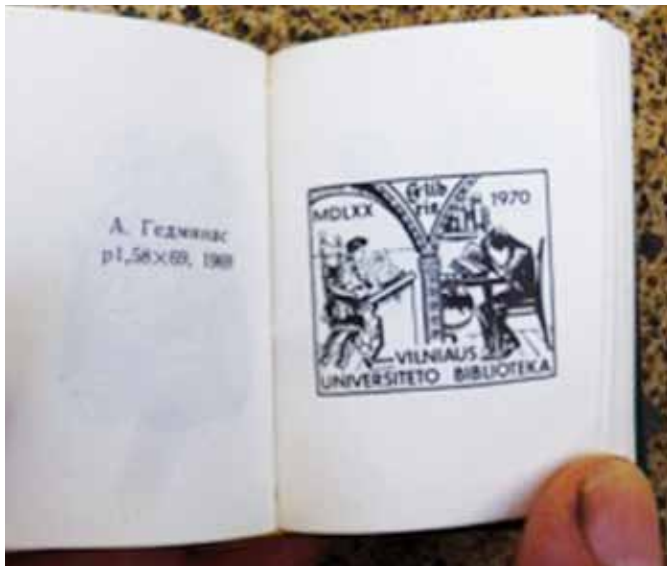
I am not a collector of miniature books. Nor even of bookplates, miniature or otherwise (unless they are on print related subjects). But these things accumulate. The collection of books about bookplates here is not large, however, and is more in the nature of a sampler collection. Not necessarily anything rare or important but something which documents the great variety and diversity of content of miniature books — and their design and production.

Miniature books require miniature bookplates. And the same is true for miniature bookplates as for other bookplates. Some are intended specifically for insertion into miniature books in collections of miniature books. Others are just produced as small works of graphic design and art. Prints, really, to be collected in their own right, and printed in limited numbers for exchange. I regard bookplates, miniature or otherwise, as part of my brief around preservation of printed ephemera. And do note that the term 'ephemera' is not a pejorative term, but merely a description of format. To have your bookplate called an ephemeron is in no way a criticism.

The wealth of the Capitalist West meant that there was an abundance of artists, practitioners, commissioners, printers, collectors. Really, anything was possible. But in Soviet era Eastern Europe, things were



Miniature books *USSR ex libris* (Moscow, 1975) and *Ex mini-libris* (Ljubljana, 1983) (l-r)



Wood-engraved miniature bookplate by A Gedminas for Vilnius University Library, 1969



Wood-engraved miniature bookplate by Károl Andruskó for Siegfried Hempel, c. 1983

quite different. For example, you would not have wanted a small printing press to be discovered under your bed or in your cupboard or garden shed. The consequences even for a Party member would have been unpleasant. But there were many ways around this. You joined art classes and so had access to all the materials required. In any case, wood was free. Printing can be improvised. And so, there was a real interest in the production and printing of such minor artworks. The Soviet Union as well as its satellite states had a significant culture of 'small printing' including bookplates.

This is documented here in the form of two books illustrating Communist era miniature bookplates. One is *Экслибрис СССР* (Rus., *USSR ex libris*) published in 1975 by Kniga, the Moscow publishing house specialising in books on books and printing. These books are chiefly of reproductions of bookplates and here we have about eighty presented with artist, size and date information on the facing page. There is all manner of themes represented and I have selected a bibliographic one (see illustration). The miniature bookplate of the University Library of Vilnius, Lithuanian SSR, with a scribe (1570) on the left and a modern reader (1970) on the right. Unusual is the one done by E Tikhanovich for the (?East) German collector Karl-Heinz Anger which features a portrait of Dürer. There are several other German names as well as one which could be American. A sign that miniature bookplates had an international context, even in the Soviet Union.

The second is far smaller in size. It came to me from Ljubljana in Yugoslavia. I had been in touch with them because Ljubljana is the place of birth of one of Sydney's — and Australia's — most famous nineteenth century printers: John Degotardi. The book is titled *Ex mini-libris* and contains the work of Károl Andruskó. It was published in 1983 for the International Miniature Book Exhibition held in Ljubljana. Again, a wide range of themes on these bookplates which measure only 16 x 26 mm. My favourite is one he did for Siegfried Hempel (again from the GDR?) featuring a printer printing on a wooden or common hand press.

Auckland report: History of New Zealand bookplates (part I)

By John Webster, Auckland Ex Libris Society

Many of us may assume there was not much going on before the advent of the Ex Libris societies in the 1930s and the emerging flag bearer, Hilda Wiseman. Although we have marvellous books on the history of our society, and the world-wide story of bookplates, we do not yet have a history of the New Zealand bookplate, which I categorize as one that had its plate designed and printed here for a local resident. Becoming involved with the making of the information folder for the Auckland Ex Libris Society meeting in Queen Street last year, and many conversations with Ian Thwaites regarding his forthcoming book on 90 years of the Society, I decided I needed to look backward from 1930 and try and find something to explain the interest in the past.

What I did find were numerous references about bookplates in New Zealand which were imported examples carried by the early settlers in their books. If there is an ‘oldest Bookplate in New Zealand’, I am fairly sure it will not be from our own crafts people. Pat Lawlor (also known as Shibli Bagarag) in 1958, published a monograph entitled *New Zealand book-plates: Illustrated history & bibliography*. He states that the earliest indication of ex libris in New Zealand appeared to date to 1911 when the Wellington Arts Club held a bookplate competition. On searching the Wellington newspapers of 1911 I could not find any reference to this event, although there were several reports about the Arts Club. So what is the first indication of a locally produced bookplate? I believe it dates to 1842.

On 25 September 1842 Bishop Selwyn ordained James Mason, for the Wellington area. To mark the occasion Selwyn gave out copies of the Gospel of St Matthew in Maori (a New Zealand printing). On the inside of the front cover he attached a small presentation bookplate — now recorded by the National Library/Turnbull Library as the earliest New Zealand example. Some bibliographies of New Zealand books, particularly Williams’ *Bibliography of printed Maori to 1900*, made direct reference to the plate. The National Library/Turnbull Library has what they consider to be the only known example out of a number printed for the ordination. By comparing the border decoration and the font it was determined that it had been produced by the ‘Office of the New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator’.

In the second part of this investigation I shall mention other highlights including one of selling bookplates at a draper’s shop in Auckland in 1868, and the *Auckland Star* printing within its pages a bookplate for children to cut out, colour in and paste in, well over a year before our founding.

Book review: On the art of the contemporary ex-libris

By William E. Butler, Newville, Pennsylvania, USA; sometime Executive Secretary, FISAE (1986–2016)

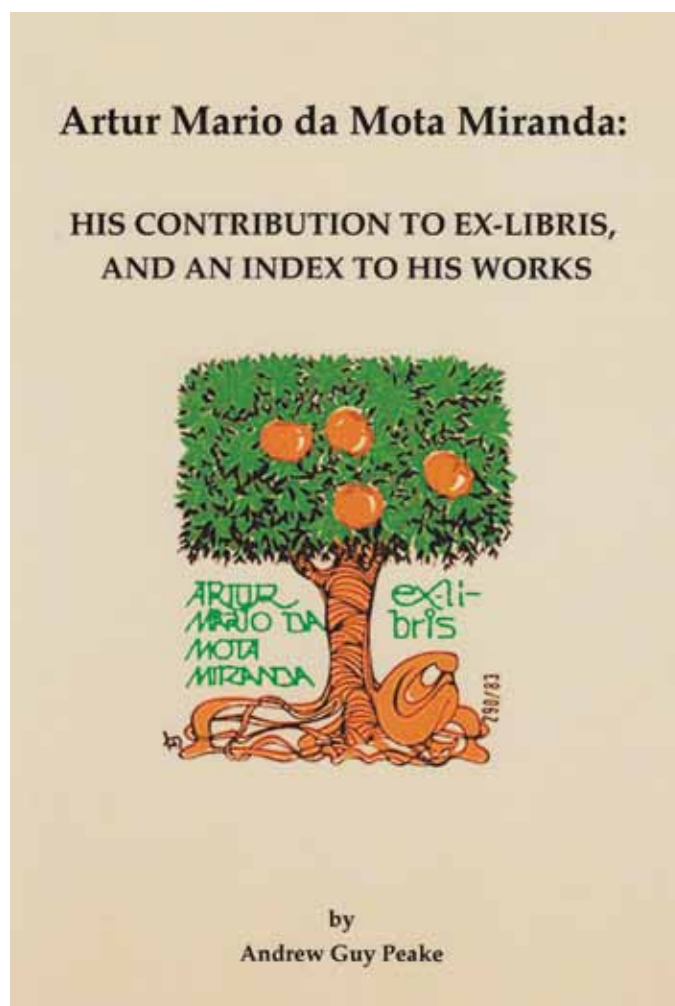
Peake, Andrew Guy. *Artur Mario da Mota Miranda: His Contribution to Ex-Libris, and an Index to His Works*. Adelaide: Tudor Australia Press, 2020. [ii], 82 p. Paperbound. ISBN 978-0-9873119-6-2.

The late Artur Mario da Mota Miranda (1928–2018) was among the generation of bookplate collectors, publishers, publicists, and enthusiasts whose interests and activities shaped the renaissance in postwar bookplate design and led to the formation of the International Federation of Ex Libris Societies (FISAE). The number of individuals who have left a mark of his kind is few — Klaus Rodel (1940–) comes to mind of roughly the same generation — but their success leaves a legacy that nurtures future generations for time immemorial.

Artur began collecting bookplates in 1950, was instrumental in founding a Portuguese society, the Oporto Association of Ex-Libris and its journal *The Art of Ex Libris*, and took part in the early steps which led to the first ex-libris Congress at Kufstein, Austria, in 1953. He had vision, a fine discerning eye for quality ex-libris design, a good command of editorial skills and publishing lore, the ability to mobilize talent among designers, an immense capacity for correspondence with, as it proved, thousands of designers, collectors, and subscribers.

I cannot recall at which FISAE Congress I met Artur, either Linz or Oxford, but I made it my aim to acquire a full set of his publications — a challenge which required several years to obtain those from his first venture. Our interpersonal exchanges were rudimentary — my conversational French versus his conversational English, but our correspondence was substantial. I edited the occasional entry from time to time at his request and contributed some artist biographies. Brian North Lee was of great assistance to Artur in editing, and when Brian passed away, I edited a large share, but I suspect that others unknown to me were involved.

His *Artisti dell’ Exlibris/Artistas de Ex-Libris* began with the 1968 FISAE Congress at Como, Italy — two years after FISAE was formally founded. It set the format to be followed more or less throughout his publishing: emphasis on the designers, concise biographical sketch (either in the first person by the designer or by a third-person volunteer), and copious illustrations, with tipped-in



original bookplates, usually at least one per artist and often more. This series enjoyed a measure of support from Congress organizers, who either incorporated the volume with the registration fee and all Congress participants received one or made it available on site at the Congress. Volumes I and II are particularly scarce on the market; a complete set of all seven is a considerable achievement. The Congress at Weimar, then in the German Democratic Republic, effectively put an end to the enterprise because importation and Congress subvention for a volume were inconceivable.

Plainly Artur's thinking had moved on, and he decided to bring the original project to an end and launch a fully-fledged encyclopedic project, now intended as a proper reference work: *Ex-Libris — Encyclopedia Bio-Bibliographical of the Art of the Contemporary Ex-Libris* (with parallel titles in French, German, and Spanish). Larger in format with greater and fully-exploited possibilities for illustration and/or tip-ins, biographical or auto-biographical essays more substantial in scope, a checklist of bookplate designs (almost always supplied by the designer and therefore reasonably complete), contact details (enabling readers to commission bookplates), and usually a photograph of the designer. Thirty volumes appeared between 1985 and 2003, some coinciding with congress and others appearing in the intervals between Congresses. The formal tie-in with Congresses and the FISAE connection were severed, although volumes appeared on sale at each Congress, including a lively second-hand trade for earlier volumes.

There was some talk of Artur retiring from his *Encyclopedia* following the death of his wife. That interval of retirement was not attractive, however, and he commenced publication of *Contemporary International Ex-Libris Artists*, 24 volumes in all produced as quickly as he could assemble the material. Volume 25 was advanced; the present reviewer wrote an Introduction for it, but the volume never appeared.

Andrew Peake has performed an immense service with this biographical appreciation and comprehensive Index, copiously illustrated by personal bookplates for Artur, of all three series of publications, plus three extra thematic volumes that Artur published in 2013–2014. For those collectors fortunate to have a complete run of all three, this Index completes the set, but for those who have a partial holding it is equally essential for what you have and a reference source to what else exists. Print runs of Artur's publications varied, from 500 downwards, reflecting demand and the fact that, but for the secondhand market, they could be obtained only from him. The Colophon states that 150 numbered copies were printed, those numbered 1 through 25 containing two etched bookplates by Marius Martinescu (Romania and France) and a wood engraving by Grigorii Babich, SWE; the last because of COVID-19 postal delays was substituted by an etched ex-libris design by Marina Terauds. In all a handsome production well worthy of the volumes indexed. Copies available from agpeake@gmail.com

Australian artists to appear in Contemporary international ex-libris artists are Archibald Peake (2006), David Frazer (2010), Mary Keep (2012) and Kathryn Lovejoy (2014) — Ed.

Ex Libris George Edward Farnhill

By Peter Thomas, NSW North Coast



The bookplate is designed along classical lines, with stylised 'muses' surrounding a central figure. The muse theme is not fully presented, as there are only eight instead of the traditional nine, and some are modern interpretations of 'science' and 'art'. The central figure seems to be the muse Erato. She is hovering above an island scene with a distant volcano, is strumming a lyre and has butterfly-like wings.

Farnhill is not a common name. An online search for the appropriate time period reveals only one George Edward Farnhill in Australia and another with Australian connections (possibly a relative in the United Kingdom) whose son Eric Farnhill (b. 1896 probably UK, d. 1989 Qld) migrated to Australia in 1912, lived on the Clarence River in northern NSW and served as a gunner in the Australian Army in World War I.

As I found the bookplate in a quality German dictionary published c. 1895 which I bought at a Sydney auction around 2015, it seems like this is the bookplate of the Australian Farnhill, and these are the details I can glean through TROVE and a family history database. He was born c. 1867 in the United Kingdom and had two marriages. The first, to Catherine Gibson, took place at St Peters Church, West Hackney, Middlesex on 25 December 1886 and produced one child, Roland, born on 4 February 1888. On

1 October 1911 at Holy Innocents Church, South Norwood, Surrey, he wedded Louise Alice Belissa (Molly) DeDohse (1885–1950), and their child, Edward Seymour, was born in London in 1912. A second child, Joy, followed.

By 1923 they had emigrated and were living in Neutral Bay, Sydney, and by 1937 their residence was in Lindfield on Sydney's North Shore. George, whose occupation was variously recorded as manager outfitting establishment (1911), company manager (1930), agent (1936) and retired commercial agent (1944), died at Neutral Bay on 27 April 1944; his estate was valued for probate at £7323.

Notes and happenings

Exhibition notice:

The happy wanderer. Victor Cobb 1876 –1945.

Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, Victoria. 13 March–2 May 2021

By Rodney Scherer, Guest Curator, 'The happy wanderer'

This exhibition examines the work of Victor Cobb, his early influences and his circle of printmakers in the early 20th Century, with a focus on his long association with the Gippsland Region. From his formative years living in the fledgling town of Warragul, Cobb formed lifelong friendships and returned on a regular basis. Among other associations, Cobb was a member of Melbourne's illustrious Bread and Cheese Club along with fellow artist John Shirlow and their champion, the eminent Robert Henderson Croll. Croll, a senior officer with the Victorian Department of Education, was prominent in the promotion of Australian art and printmaking, publishing works on Tom Roberts and Eric Thake. He was the Victorian Vice-President of the Australian Ex Libris Society and after its demise, the president of the short-lived Australian Bookplate Club (1941–1944), and he commissioned a number of Australian artists to produce bookplates.

The exhibition title is indicative of the time when many people did go a 'Wandering' over the countryside. Aside from his art writing, Croll published many articles on bushwalking which were compiled into guides, something akin to a Victorian 'Lonely planet guide' for weekend and extended walks. In fact, some of Cobb's etchings reflected locations in Croll's suggested walks. The exhibition includes bookplates by Lionel Lindsay, Gayfield Shaw and V E Cobb, the latter from the private collection of one of the Society's members.

I will be taking two exhibition floor talks, at 2pm on Friday, 19 March and at 2pm on Saturday, 24 April. Further details can be found at: www.gippslandartgallery.com/exhibition/victor-cobb-the-happy-wanderer/

Publications

VAL JOHNSON & VICTOR CRITTENDEN (EDS). *The library of John Oxley ESQ.* by Richard Johnson. Canberra: Mulini Press, 2005

Includes a reproduction of John Oxley's bookplate (p. vi)

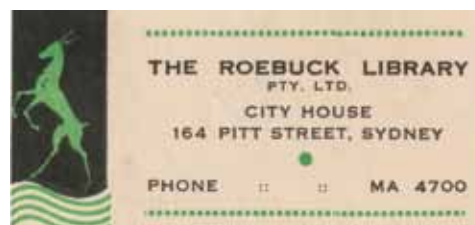
Editorial

Whilst I am still sending out renewal notices and reminders for existing members, it is very pleasing to note that the Society has attracted seven new members in recent weeks who have either heard by word of mouth or found our website or social media posts. From NSW we have Bob Cameron AO, Veronica Dimatulac and Peter Thomas; from Queensland, Brie Henri; from Victoria, Rodney Scherer; and from Poland, Beata Joanna Przedpelska, kindly introduced by Melbourne member Marzena Walicka.

An additional benefit of new members is the potential for expansion of the breadth of material that appears here in the *Newsletter*, and so I am grateful for Beata's knowledgeable overview of bookplates in Poland and for Peter's note on the unusual bookplate for George Edward Farnhill. I thank also Bronwyn Vost and Brigitta Summers for their joint article on Brigitta's linocut bookplate course held last September under the auspices of the NSW Guild of Craft Bookbinders, with some delightful designs as a result — and I wish to acknowledge Warwick Buddle, who took the course, for allowing us to reproduce his well designed and very 'Sydney' bookplate.

Jürgen Wegner has kindly provided an article on the unusual — miniature Russian bookplates, whilst Auckland Ex Libris Society president John Webster has allowed me to reproduce his note in the Society's newsletter on the beginnings of New Zealand bookplates which, it is hoped, will be continued in later issues. And finally, with a new Australian book on bookplates always a cause for celebration, we are very lucky to have a review of Andrew Peake's *Artur Mario da Mota Miranda: His contribution to ex-libris, and an index to his works* prepared by international bookplate identity Bill Butler; and we reap the benefit of Bill's friendship with da Mota Miranda to get a better understanding of the passion and commitment of the subject to global documentation and promotion of bookplates over almost five decades!

Finally, I draw to your attention — especially if you are in Victoria — to the notice of an exhibition being held at Gippsland Art Gallery until 2 May on the work of Victor Cobb, which through the good offices of one of our members includes some of Cobb's little-known bookplates. MF



Any bookplate designer wishing to be the subject of a Designer profile or to have work reproduced in the *Newsletter* should contact the Editor on 0401 141 890 or by email: m.ferson@unsw.edu.au

The Society's website may be found if you go to:

www.bookplatesociety.org.au
