

Books and Boxes Visit

This year's annual field trip on Wednesday 11 May, was to Books and Boxes in Salisbury, owned and run by Daniel Ibbott, a long-time supporter of and trainer for the Guild. We had 17 attending – 14 QBG members and 3 invited guests. Daniel introduced Steve and between them, we were shown every step they follow from accepting job lots through guillotining, rounding, backing, cover construction, assembly and finishing.

Daniel started with a comprehensive discussion of how modern books are bound – whether in sections or loose-leaf, the selection of glues used, how they are sewn (by machine – not by hand), even the thread used which was of a poly-cotton construction and immensely strong. Books and Boxes do not use paste at all. This was explained as a commercial imperative. With hundreds of books being prepared quickly, and often with jobs to be turned around in a matter of days, Daniel cannot afford the drying times that a craft bookbinder can.

From sewing, all books need to be trimmed. The guillotine at Books and Boxes is extraordinary in its capabilities, safety inclusions and level of computerisation. Once set for a particular run, the guillotine will clamp and slice through 100 millimetres of text block like soft butter. It makes our Guild guillotine or a plough look very labour intensive in comparison. It also has numerous safety devices. Two hands must be used to initiate a cut, and any breaking of safety beams will cause an immediate stoppage of the blade.

One of the most evident aspects of Daniel's presentation was the need in business for efficient use of time and resources. This was clearly evident in seeing how many of the often older pieces of equipment deal effectively with jobs which we as craft bookbinders will toil over for hours. Many present were keen to take home the rounding and backing tools bar for the fact that it would have taken all 17 of us to lift them. These machines work on simple principles, but do the jobs so well when you have enough metal in the right place at the right time – and in expert hands.

The area set aside for making cases is well setup for runs, and some clever devices for applying glue and turning in make the task so simple. All books need a deal of finishing, and for this, Steve showed us the operation of the letter press and lead type setting area. We were all invited to have our initials set and used on a small notebook as a memento of the visit. The casing in process again showed the importance of speed and skills in a commercial operation.



Daniel at Rounding Machine



Steve preparing lead initials

Steve and Daniel also showed some of the many one-off jobs they do. A number of family bibles and repair jobs demonstrate their craft skills beyond the commercial. One special run being prepared required leather covers each and all pared by Daniel and Steve for a run of 1500 with a Solander Case for each. Daniel and Steve kindly stayed well after 10pm and very patiently answered any questions and demonstrated leather paring. The Guild would again like to thank Daniel and Steve for taking so much time and in being so prepared to demonstrate their business and art.

Ken McKeon