Early English Bindings.

At the Society of Antiquaries, on the 17th of May, the Winchester Domesday Book belonging to that learned body, and a collection of rubbings of bookbindings anterior to the fourteenth century, formed by Mr. Weale, were exhibited; the latter by the permission of the Director of the South Kensington Museum. The following is an abstract of the paper read by Mr. Weale on the subject of early bindings.

He began by remarking that in all books on the subject, foreign and English, the invention of printing was taken as a starting-point in the history of leather bookbinding, and the binder, previously to that time, was said to have been a common workman, whose business it was to arrange, in proper order, the quires of which a book was composed, sew them on to thongs of skin or bands of parchment, and by means of these fix the volume to the boards of oak, or other wood, of which the sides were made, and finally to cover these and the back with pigskin, deerskin, or calf, so that, if anything better was wanted, the boards had to be either covered with velvet or some other precious stuff, or the goldsmith called in to adorn them with plates of gold and silver set with jewels, or panels of carved ivory. Monopolies were further stated to have been so universal in the Middle Ages, that craftsmen were constantly hampered by all sorts of absurd regulations, and that as the goldsmith claimed the external ornamentation of books as his own, the miniaturist and illuminator the interior as theirs, there only remained to the poor binder the fastening of the leaves and the adjustment of the wooden covers.

It would hardly be possible, he observed, to convey a more thoroughly false idea of the status of the art-workman in the Middle Ages than by such statements as these, which were quite erroneous, the organization of art-industries in the Middle Ages having been far more intelligent, far juster, and, above all, productive of far better results than that now prevailing. And so far from no one being then allowed to exercise more than one craft, there never was a time when so many instances are known of several crafts being successfully exercised by individuals as in the Middle Ages, the real difference between the mediæval and modern organization being, that then no man could exercise a craft until he had proved that he knew it, whereas now any one, knowing a little, or even knowing nothing, could set up in any line of business, put a brass plate on his door, call himself an architect, or a sculptor, or a plumber, or a bookbinder, and wait for his victims.

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The main end of a binding should be the preservation of the book from injury; and no one could deny that the binders of the Middle Ages attained this end—they certainly did bind solidly. Indeed, it appeared to him doubtful whether, of all the bindings executed in the present century, there would in another six hundred years be a single one in as good condition as those of which rubbings were exhibited, these being from books on which little or no care had been bestowed during at least a century. Mediæval law took care on the one hand that the craftsman was properly paid, and, on the other, that the purchaser got what he paid for.

But why this outcry against mediæval craft organization? Had its abolition raised the status of the modern workman? Were there any binders, now that the restrictions complained of were removed, who knew two or three crafts? Was it not rather the case that very few know all the branches of their own?

In the Middle Ages the binder was often also a scribe or copyist, an illuminator, a bookseller, or a coffer-maker, occasionally a wood-cutter, or engraver on metal; some of them were even artists in the restricted modern false sense of the word. He mentioned two instances: Hugh, the goldsmith of Walcourt, in the thirteenth century, who was a scribe, an illuminator, a binder, a goldsmith, and a worker in niello; and Christopher Plantin, in the sixteenth, who was a coffer-maker, a bookbinder, a bookseller, dealer in works of art, and who acquired world-wide fame as a printer and publisher, founder of the Plantinian press, from which so many valuable works were issued during three centuries. But it might be objected that Hugh of Walcourt was a monk, which, to quote Fournier and the English writers who had copied his statements, would explain his being skilful in several arts, and also his being allowed to practise them, for, according to them, in any other position he would have been limited to one, whilst the monks were free to do whatever they liked. Unfortunately for the argument, there existed documentary evidence that Hugh had gained a very high reputation as the best goldsmith in all that part of the country before he sought admission to the Abbey of Oignies. Among the rubbings exhibited were six from bindings executed by professional binders of the cities of Winchester and London, which would bear comparison with those from books bound in the Abbeys of Hyde and Durham, two of the wealthiest and most important in the kingdom at that time.

Another statement, that should also be put aside as false, was the assertion that artistic leather binding, the work of the bookbinder, only came into existence in the sixteenth century, and that until then the binder in leather had attempted to do in the way of decoration was to rule lines across the covers, or impress them here and there with stamps. To Italy, moreover, was generally attributed the honour of having been the first to raise leather binding to the rank of an art-industry. The rubbings exhibited would suffice to prove that, so far from this being true, the art of ornamental leather binding had attained a very high degree of perfection in the middle of the twelfth century, and that the binders of this country were at that time considerably in advance of those on the Continent.

Of the twenty-eight rubbings exhibited, twenty were claimed by Mr. Weale as the work of English binders, though, as regards four, executed for Henry, son of Louis VII. of France, and given by him to the Abbey of Clairvaux in 1146, there is no positive proof, and the grounds on which he rested his claim were their similarity to undoubted English specimens, and the absence of anything like them which could be proved to be French.
INQUISITIO DE TERRARUM DONATORIBUS PER ANGLIAM.

Bound in oaken boards, covered with brown calf, blind-tooled.—About A.D. 1185.
Now in the Public Record Office.
In our present number we reproduce one of the English specimens, and we have selected for our illustration a volume which was certainly bound by a professional London binder, another specimen of whose work, formerly in the Library of St. Mary Overy, Southwark, is now in the British Museum.

The volume preserved in the Public Record Office is a register of the landed property of the Knights Templars in England, entitled *Inquisitio de terrarum donatoribus per Angliam*.

It was drawn up in 1185, and bound either immediately or shortly after that date, in oak boards covered with brown calf. Each side has a border formed by the repetition of stamps, the panel enclosed being divided into three by two narrow vertical bands; these bands, plain on one side, are on the other relieved by small circles and quatrefoils. 1st Side. The vertical portions of the border are formed by the repetition of two stamps, showing fourteen lions *passant* on one side facing as many dragons with tails terminating in foliage (a) on the other; these are connected at both head and foot by three floriated ornaments, each
composed of two impressions of the same stamp (d). The central division of the panel is occupied by seven impressions of a rectangular stamp, representing within a large quatrefoil, flanked by four smaller ones, David crowned, seated with his legs crossed, playing the harp (e); on each side of this figure is a small quatrefoil. The lateral divisions have each four circular and three triangular stamps, the former representing a gryphon (f), the latter a heron standing on the back of a pike (g); the intervening spaces being relieved by small circles and quatrefoils. 2nd Side. Vertical portions of the border: nine rectangular panels of interlaced work formed by two dragons with floriated tails, and ten containing a foliated cruciform ornament; these are connected at both head and foot by a row of five palmated leaves (f). Central division: eight impressions of a rectangular stamp representing a lion passant within a quatrefoil flanked by four trefoils. Lateral divisions: four eight-leaved rosettes (g), and three lobe-stamps with two dragons, from the union of whose tails springs a stem terminating in a fleur-de-lys, on which is perched a bird (h), the intervening spaces relieved by quatrefoils and small circles. The circular stamp (i), representing a dragon with a tail terminating in foliage, is from the binding in the British Museum referred to above.

**Technical Bookbinding.**

**Chapter I.—Introductory.**

We are assured by one writer on Bookbinding that the trade has been “ranked among the most difficult of the arts,” and that it is one “requiring much care, great neatness, correct taste, and attentive practice, to form a skilful workman.” By another author we are told that the art is “one which any intelligent and fairly handy man can practise at home.” The latter statement was made by a gentleman who addressed amateurs; it may, therefore, be taken merely for what it is worth.

The series of Papers of which this is the first, is intended for the guidance and instruction of those who are called upon to exercise the craft in order to gain a livelihood. It is therefore proposed to treat of each branch of the art in a thoroughly practical way, pointing out the difficulties which occasionally arise, and showing some of the means by which they may be overcome. Through these papers it is hoped to furnish such information as will teach the workman at all times to set about his work with a full knowledge of what should be done, and the best way to accomplish it.

Small bookbinders, whether in London or the provinces, who have not the appliances usually found in large binding works, will be especially considered. Country binders generally are taught and have to exercise each branch of the art, from the folding to the completion. A clear and concise description of the various operations will be given, combining many practical hints, receipts, and “wrinkles,” which will be found useful and labour-saving, not alone to small bookbinders, but to those employed in large firms who are desirous of advancing in the particular branch of the art in which they are engaged.

There are no fewer than sixty divisions and sub-divisions of the work of binding a book. It will be manifest that to gain a thorough knowledge of each of them is no very easy task. A clever forwarder may be an inferior finisher; a quick and even folder may prove a slow and slovenly sewer; a good strong case-maker may be useless at the blocking machine or