

## BOOK REVIEWS

prices are similar to those charged in London.

Chapter 10 is headed 'Stationery Binding', but deals with blank-book bindings more generally. The University Library, Colleges and Parishes needed registers and account books; students and dons needed notebooks, and such blank books were made by most binders. Blank books were made in different formats and different shapes according to their intended use. Some confused terminology in this chapter could have been avoided.

I would have been happier if several of the illustrations in the text had been sharper (those in the appendix of tools are excellent), if more spines had been illustrated, and if the format or the size of the bindings illustrated had been given. But these are niggles in an otherwise well-researched, solid and useful book. No one interested in the history of the book should be without this very detailed reference work.

David Pearson

### **GROLIER CLUB BOOKPLATES PAST & PRESENT**

*By Alexander Lawrence Ames and Mark Samuels Lasner*

(New York: Grolier Club 2023. 159 pp., many illus.)

Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, \$85)

This book has its genesis in an exhibition of bookplates displayed at the Grolier Club in Winter 2016–17, whose intended catalogue was held up by editorial commitments and then Covid. The delay has been a positive one, as it allowed what was originally envisaged as a simple record of the show to incorporate papers from an associated symposium, as well as a section of bookplates of current Club members. The first third of the book comprises useful essays on various aspects of bookplate history and culture, while the remainder is an illustrated directory of bookplates and labels of Grolier Club members from the time of its foundation in 1894 to the present day.

As the editors note in their Preface, bookplates are more than just functional pieces of paper for marking book ownership; they reflect the interests and personalities of their commissioners, they manifest relationships between collectors and artists, and they preserve legacies of book

ownership to be seen and interpreted by later researchers. Alexander Lawrence Ames explores these themes further in his piece on the place of the bookplate in book history, with a brief overview of their evolution, and positive answers to his question, 'of what use are bookplates to the historian or literary scholar?' He concludes with two case studies, around the plates of Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Elkins Widener, showing how they can be better understood in the context of their personal histories. William E. Butler then contributes an article on 'Bookplate collecting and commissioning: an introduction', with advice on both those topics as well as a survey of the history of American bookplate societies. Molly E. Dotson rounds off the introductory section with another study of a particular bookplate owner and collector, Irene Pace (or Mrs Edmund Andrews, 1893–1962), who not only commissioned nearly 300 ex-libris from around 100 artists, but also built a collection of 150,000 plates, all now at Yale.

The rest of the book contains a comprehensively illustrated gazetteer of the plates and labels of a hundred Club members, past and present, with brief biographies and information about their creation and design. They are very varied in their size, typography and ornamental themes, and certainly enable reflection on the point made in the Preface about bookplates as visual testaments to the personalities and passions of their owners.

Alexander Ames notes, with regret, that 'ex-libris studies have lacked a strong academic, theoretical framework to guide their incorporation into the wider world of book history and material texts.' This is a fair observation, unfortunate given our growing appreciation of the material book, and the value which both researchers and collectors find in the historical ownership and use of books. Bookplates are an important kind of provenance evidence and anyone working in that field needs to know how to recognise and interpret them. Part of the problem lies perhaps in the hobbyist overtones of bookplate collecting (although most of the useful and serious literature on ex-libris has been written by collectors), and also in its implicit vandalism. There is an obvious tension between the formation of albums of bookplates and provenance research, if the albums are full of plates taken out of books (a point which William Butler might more explicitly bring out in his guidance on forming a collection), though bookplate enthusiasts assure me that this doesn't happen anymore. This book is a welcome addition to that serious literature, handsomely pro-

BOOK REVIEWS

duced, and one which should be found on any shelves where bookplate research is supported. I hope it will help to embed bookplate study more firmly in that book-historical framework, where it so clearly belongs.



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