



Bookcloth: an underrated material

Bookcloth is the name given to a wide range of non-leather fabrics that are used to cover books. It is the workhorse of bookbinding and has been the standard covering for hardback books for 200 years.

In this presentation I will look first at the history of bookcloth: how it was developed by bookbinders and textile manufacturers to become the versatile protective book covering that it is today. Along with the growth of literacy in the nineteenth century came mechanical inventions and scientific discoveries which all contributed to the technical development of bookcloth. Printing techniques, such as lithography and platemaking, were also advancing, allowing for more complex and varied book designs than had ever been possible with leather. In the second part of the talk, I will look at the variety of designs which owed their development to the flexibility and the possibilities of bookcloth.

There is a huge range of bookcloths, from fine, delicate synthetics to thick, tough double-warp buckrams. In the third part of this talk I will look at the different weights, weaves and textures of bookcloth and its manufacture. This starts with the cotton bale and goes through various processes, including cleaning, carding, spinning, singeing and scouring. Treatment of the woven cloth includes bleaching, dyeing, stentering, coating and calendering.

I hope to give listeners to this presentation a better appreciation of the processes that have produced this economical, versatile and exceptionally useful material.

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Angela first learnt bookbinding with Ian Ross at the Oxford Polytechnic (UK) while studying for a degree in Modern Languages and subsequently attended the course on Archive Preservation and Repair at the Camberwell School of Art and Crafts. Here there was a strong emphasis on a basic knowledge of printing, papermaking and bookbinding which were all taught by masters of their craft and where lecturers included such luminaries as Bernard Middleton and Sally Lou Smith. This course eventually became the MA in Conservation which ran until the closure of the Camberwell School a few years ago. For some years Angela ran her own printing press, first using hot-metal type and then turning to the early computer-printer, but she continued to bind books whenever possible.

On returning to the UK from some years in continental Europe and after a break for family responsibilities, she became the regular tutor in bookbinding at the Malvern Hills College where she taught the weekly recreational course for fifteen years, as well as the Access to Art course and other occasional workshops. She was the bookbinding tutor for the residential week-long courses at Urchfont Manor in Wiltshire set up by the late Maureen Duke until its closure in 2013. She was instrumental in setting up Urchfont's successor at Dillington House in Somerset and ran the residential bookbinding programme there until it in turn closed in 2023.

She has taught numerous workshops for local and regional groups at various levels. The experience of teaching adult learners enabled her to produce a beginners' textbook of basic traditional bookbinding techniques, *Bookbinding in Pictures*, which sells widely all over the world. She also practises as a repairer and restorer of books of all periods, laying particular emphasis on what is appropriate and how best to preserve the artefact for the future. Her website (www.angelasuttonbookbinding.uk) shows a number of YouTube videos on various traditional techniques.

She was Chairman of the Birmingham/West Midlands Region of the Society of Bookbinders for many years and is a former Conference Organiser and national Chairman of the SoB.