

Queen's University Library

Bookbindings in Paper and Cloth, 1800 - 1925

Library Exhibit, 3 March - 8 April 2004

With Slide Talk on Wednesday, March 31, 2004 at 1:30 pm

Graham George Seminar Room, Douglas Library
2nd Floor

As with last year's exhibition of leather and vellum bindings, this exhibition features both utilitarian and quality bindings. Most are publishers' bindings or edition bindings; that is, one of many copies of the same title given an identical binding by the publisher. Modern book buyers take this for granted but, in the early nineteenth century, only certain categories of books (such as those for children) were given permanent bindings before they were sold. Bookshops stocked many books in temporary bindings made of paper-covered boards; bookbuyers then ordered a leather binding of their choice. Until the 1840s, publishers' bindings were often dull, as publisher-booksellers wanted an inexpensive binding. Gradually, paper and cloth bindings were accepted by the public as a permanent binding and print runs (and immediate sales) were large enough to justify a well-designed and attractive cover.

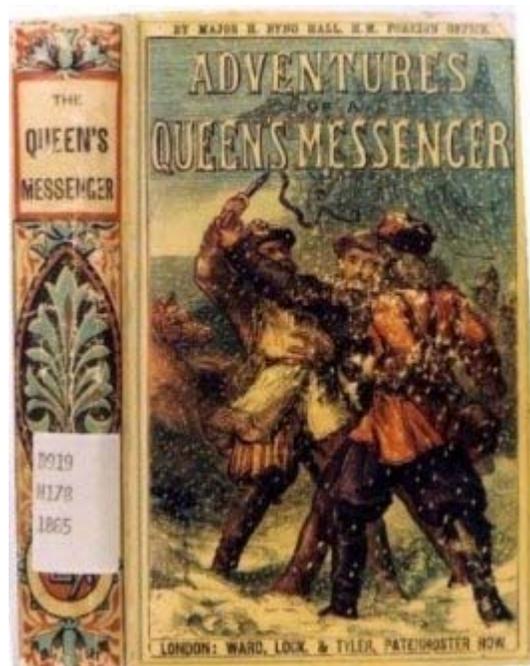


Photo courtesy of Margaret Lock

Books for children were sewn and protected by paper covers. School books continued to be bound in this type of simple typographic cover throughout the nineteenth century. Similar paper covers were used for pamphlets and for books sold in parts. Publishers issued some illustrated books in monthly parts costing a shilling each, spreading the cost of the book over two or three years so that more people could afford the book. Once the reader had bought all the parts, the reader was expected to take them to a binder.

Children's books were also bound inexpensively in bookcloth with printed paper labels, once bookcloth had been invented (around 1821). Ten years later, binderies began embossing bookcloth between heated rollers or plates to give the cloth a texture. Early patterns imitated more expensive covering materials, such as straight-grained morocco and silk, and by the 1840s, bookcloths were manufactured by specialist firms.

Printers could not get a solid inked impression on bookcloth. Also, the printed ink was easily abraded. In 1832, a London bindery began using a modified iron printing press to block book

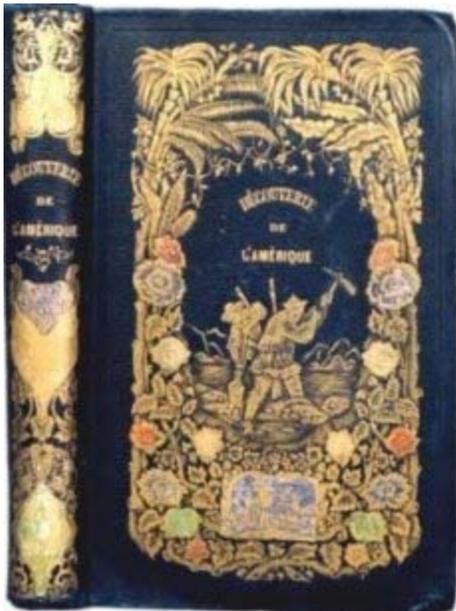


Photo courtesy of Margaret Lock

covers in gold. The covers (the boards and spine) were made as a separate unit so the spine could be blocked before the text block was glued into the case. On some gift books, coloured paper onlays were pasted to the cover before it was blocked. An example: *Histoire de la découverte et la conquête de l'Amérique*, by J-H [Joachim] Campe, illustrated by M. Bertrand and published in Paris by Lavigne in 1845.

Printed paper-covered boards were used on small-format books designed for leisure reading. They were sold at railway bookstalls, so needed eye-catching covers. One such example, from the Jordan Library's collection, is *Adventures of a Queen's Messenger* by Major H. Byng Hall, published by Ward, Lock & Tyler in 1873 (see illustration above). Such books -- the equivalent of today's paperbacks -- sold for one or two shillings. They were called railway novels or 'yellowbacks' as the cover was printed from wood engravings in black, blue and red on yellow paper.

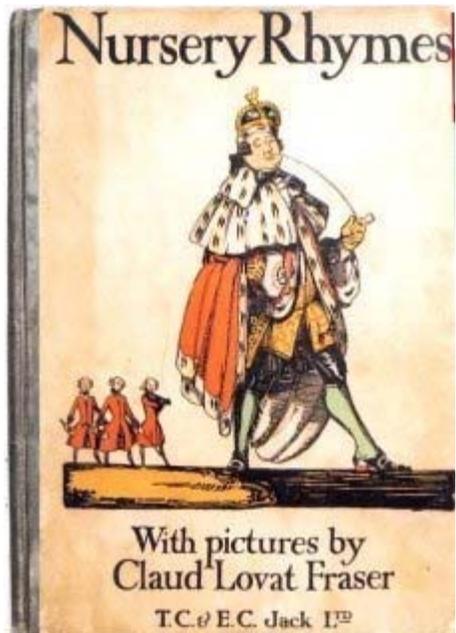


Photo courtesy of Margaret Lock

Printed paper covers or paper-covered boards remained a popular binding on children's books and schoolbooks, while "improving stories" were bound in attractive covers and given as school prizes. Some London printers specialized in colour printing and some firms, such as Edmund Evans', commissioned artists to illustrate books. After 1890, most colour printing was done from photographically produced zinc blocks (rather than wood engraved blocks) or from lithographic stones.

An example: *Nursery Rhymes, With pictures by Claud Lovat Fraser*, published by T.C. & E.C. Jack Ltd. in 1919.

The text and cover were printed by Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd.; the cover lithographs needed six runs through the press.

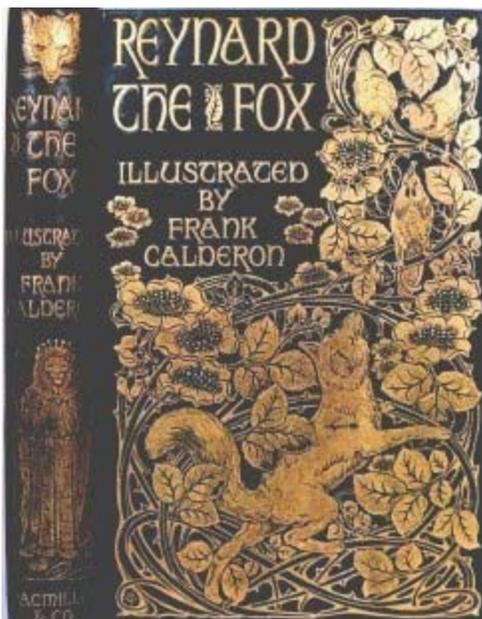


Photo courtesy of Margaret Lock

Some of the best gold-blocked covers were produced during the period 1890-1910. The art nouveau style encouraged designers to think in terms of asymmetrical designs, sinuous curves, and simplified shapes with minimal shading.

An example: *The most delectable history of Reynard the Fox*, edited by Joseph Jacobs, illustrated by William Frank Calderon and published by Macmillan in 1895.

The cover was designed by A. A. Turbayne.

The exhibit was curated by Margaret Lock, Lock's Press, Kingston, Ontario.

Margaret Lock is the author of *Bookbinding Materials and Techniques, 1700-1920* (Rev. ed., Toronto: Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild, 2003) as well as an illustrator and publisher (see list of works (<https://qcat.library.queensu.ca/vwebv/search?searchType=7&searchId=1500&maxResultsPerPage=25&recCount=25&recPointer=0&resultPointer=0>)) held in the Queen's University Library collections).

Last Updated: 14 March 2012