

BACG MEMBER PETER VERHEYEN REPORTS ON HIS BOOKBINDING APPRENTICESHIP IN GERMANY

On August 1, 1985, I began my 3-year apprenticeship in the bindery of D. Klein in Gelsenkirchen, West Germany. Being a "commercial" bindery, about 70% of the work involves binding magazines and professional journals for local libraries. These items must be collated, have their staples removed, endsheets made, etc., before being adhesive-bound. Subsequently, these items are trimmed, their edges colored, and their headbands glued on. This is followed by the making the covers, stamping titles, and, finally, the attaching the covers.

The remaining 30% of the work consists of repairing damaged books, rebinding, and special orders, such as making boxes and photo albums. Depending what the customer is willing to pay for a rebinding and the condition of the paper, the book will be either adhesive-bound or hand sewn. As a rule, sewn books are first sewn on tapes, which are then replaced with unraveled hemp cords. These are then either fanned out on the endsheet, which is most common, or pulled through the boards in what is called the "flexible" style. Because this is one of the most complicated binding styles, those books which are brought in to be bound in this manner are reserved for the binders with the most experience, usually the "Meister."

Sewn books are then rounded and backed by hand. Edges are decorated either with colors, which are sprinkled or painted on, graphite (which is a very elegant, but subtle technique), or gold (which is the most costly and time-consuming technique). For these last two techniques, the edges must first be sanded to a perfectly smooth finish. For most books, the headbands are hand sewn with silk threads. The boards are then covered with paper, cloth, leather, vellum, or a combination of these. The more valuable the binding, the more elaborate the decoration of the binding. For these, the "Meister" will call upon all his experience in the handling of fillets and various other methods, including onlay and relief. As an apprentice, I do not have the opportunity to carry out projects of this caliber, but through observing and practicing in my own time, I hope to learn at least the basics of tooling.

The nature of the apprentice-journeyman-master system, as it exists in Germany, is not conducive to providing apprentices with the opportunity to learn the more complex intricacies of the trade. The common philosophy is that there are very clearcut skill levels which individuals of lower levels should not achieve. In that respect, I am lucky, because I have the opportunity to learn by observation and practice. Just as there are distinct differences between the various levels of craftsmen, apprentices are taught a wide range of skills because binderies specialize in different types of work, e.g., binding journals, making brochures, framing pictures, or cutting paper products. Apprentices in each of these different types of binderies must eventually take the same examination. It is not unusual for an apprentice to perform the same activity for 2 1/2 years and then go through a crash course for the last 6 months prior to his examination in order to learn basics, such as hand sewing or working with leather.

Programs oriented toward book restoration are not common, and since such programs are state-funded, the programs available fluctuate with the economic situation. The best opportunities for learning bookbinding in Germany are in small, diverse binderies, in which one can learn all of the basic techniques, such as working with leather, different methods of sewing, etc. After completion of an apprenticeship, supplemental education can be obtained by volunteering in museum

libraries or by "wandering" from bindery to bindery throughout the country or abroad, to Italy or France, for example.

Upon successfully passing the apprenticeship examination, one must serve as a journeyman for at least two years before one can prepare to take the examination for "Meister." Part of this preparation includes taking courses in advanced techniques and business management basics. After successfully passing the examination, which requires the completion of various bindings plus an extensive written part, the new "Meister" is allowed to open his own bindery and train apprentices. This title also opens many doors in the field of restoration.

Currently, among the "Meister," there is a growing sentiment that only they should be allowed to perform restorations. This is in opposition to the trend toward university-trained conservators, who are also being allowed to carry the title "Meister." While the university trained conservators may be more scientifically aware, these conservators would almost certainly lack the technical skills of the traditionally trained "Meister." What is needed is cooperation between these two groups, but that may take a good deal of time. At this time, the only way to achieve change in this still relatively intransigent trade guild system is from within. Fortunately, the new generation appears more willing to push for the needed reforms.

Peter Verheyen

CENTER FOR OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

The Center for Occupational Hazards (COH), a national clearinghouse for research and education on hazards in the visual arts, performing arts, and museums, provides a number of services of interest to conservators. The COH has prepared a series of conservation data sheets, regarding chemicals commonly used in the conservation lab and health and safety programs. In addition, the COH offers both on-site and planning consultations; lectures and workshops; an art hazards information center, which responds to written and telephone inquiries; and Art Hazards News, a newsletter which is published 10 times per year.

For more information on the brochure, "Conservation Hazards Project," write: Center for Occupational Hazards, 5 Beekman St., New York, NY 10038. (212) 227-6220.

THOMPSON CONSERVATION LABORATORY PRODUCES TRANSLATION OF IMPORTANT 19TH CENTURY GERMAN ARTICLE ON HISTORY OF PAPERMAKING

"Microscopic Examination of the Faijum Papers" by Julius Wiesner, originally published in German in 1887, has been translated into English by Gudrun Aurand. The translation was sponsored by the Caber Press of Thompson Conservation Laboratory in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the laboratory.

Documenting Wiesner's own research on the Faijum Papers, the article records what was at that time, new insights into the fiber content and sizing of early paper. Copies of this translation may be obtained by sending a check for \$8.50 payable to Thompson Conservation Laboratory to Thompson Conservation Laboratory, 7549 North Fenwick, Portland, Oregon 97217. Telephone: 503-248-0046.