

What this represents in front of me, is a new way to talk about the Kelmscott Chaucer. It's a leaf book. And that in itself is an unusual way to talk about the book. And, this is also an unusual leaf book. Most books are very slender, two or three pages sometimes. And usually, it's one leaf. In this leaf book, the book is 75 pages long, so it's a substantial text. And there are not one, but 5 leaves; we've got a Kelmscott Chaucer leaf, and 4 others hiding underneath. I'm Phil Pirages, and I want to talk to you about the text, and I want to talk to you about the object, because I think it's a really wonderful achievement in terms of book arts, but first I want to talk about the background of the project, because it's an interesting story.

In November of 2012, we were lucky enough to buy a fragment, about 75% of the Kelmscott Chaucer. You just don't see Kelmscott Chaucer's coming up for sale that are imperfect. We sold a few leaves individually, and when we got down to 165 leaves, I said to myself, this would make a nice leaf book. But I didn't know what to say, I didn't know what to talk about, I didn't know what the topic should be. So, I did some research, and I found that the typeface of the Kelmscott Chaucer had some potential.

The more I studied the topic, the more I was heading towards a defensible hypothesis, that the Kelmscott typeface came from the German printers, the early German printers, and more specifically the German printers from the 1470s, and more specifically than that, 4 sort of all stars: Peter Schoeffer of Mainz, Johann Mentelin of Strassburg, Günter Zainer of Augsburg, and Anton Koberger of Nuremberg.

In the course of 6 years, by inexplicable good luck, we were able to put together leaves from all 4 of Morris' all star printers, and it was a stroke or a series of strokes of good luck that were so unexpected and so spectacular that I can hardly believe it, and I'd like to pass on that good luck to you.

When you get done with the text, I'm going to tell you that it really is the most thoroughgoing treatment of this particular topic. This particular topic is a little part of the world, but nobody has said as much about it and certainly not in the same way as we do in the text.

Now I want to talk about the object, because the people who have been working with me, the designer, the binder, the printer, are all people who have gifted hands and who have refined aesthetic sensibilities. And their work has produced what I think is just a sensational book arts object.

When you get done considering this, I want you to think about it in terms of 4 ways to collect. 4 points of interest. It's a book about the Arts & Crafts movement and the Kelmscott Press. It's a book about early printing, and the two related. It's a wonderful book arts, contemporary book arts production, and it's a collection of leaves.

So here are the 5 leaves. Now that they're pulled out of the case, and you can see, there's a resemblance, there's a clear resemblance. You can also see that they're beautifully printed, that they're stately, elegant, and they're worth having as individual aesthetically pleasing historical objects, not to mention being the works of important printers.

Next I want to show you the three versions of the leaf book. The least expensive copies are bound in the blue paper boards with linen spines which many of you will recognize as a kind of echo of the Kelmscott bindings. The most expensive and the most elegant and the most decorated leaves. Those copies have the flexible vellum, just like some of the nicer Kelmscott bindings did. And the ones that are in between, the ones with the larger initials but not the borders, we tried something slightly different. We didn't echo the Kelmscott bindings, but instead chose a cloth binding, but not just any cloth, this is ebony cray, which is a design that William Morris produced.