

## GUILD OF WOMEN BINDERS - TRANSCRIPT

When I first was introduced to the wonderful world of antiquarian books, I embraced the same stereotype that most people did about the typical book collector and that was a man, a smoking jacket, a glass of port, and a cigar. There was never any women involved, but over the years I've discovered that that was a very narrow kind of understanding of bibliophiles because women have been collecting books with energy, aggressiveness, and intelligence all along. In my experience, the thing that interests them the most, or one of the things that interests them the most, are bindings. So I want to spend this little segment here talking about the Guild of Women Binders because what we have here are three examples of very fine work done by women. 1897, a man named Frank Carslake goes to the Diamond Jubilee celebrating 60 years of Victoria on the throne.

He sees an exhibition of bindings many of which were done by Annie McDonald or her pupils. Books that looked like this, modeled, molded, sculpted leather. He was so impressed by this group of bindings that were exhibited for this Diamond Jubilee that he invited these various women who were binding books basically on their own in a kind of loosely knit organization, but usually at home. He invited them to exhibit at his book selling premises in Charing Cross Road. He became their agent and this group took on the identity of the Guild of Women Binders. Like Cobden Sanderson, they didn't pay much attention to all to the kind of binding styles that have preceded them. They tried new avenues of design.

Some of them I think turned out to be pretty dreadful and some of them are absolutely wonderful. Here is a typical Guild of Women Binders binding. Everything is attenuated, blunted, curved, ovoid. Nothing jagged. Nothing rigorous. No paneling. No diapering. It's soft in its design. This is a song of Solomon 1890's illustrated by Granville Fell and it's a beautiful piece of work. We don't know who did it, but Frank Carslake's daughter did one very much like it so she might have been the designer.

We know who did this one because she was very proud of it. She has put her initials. Annie S. McDonald. ASM and the date, 1897, in these two circles. This is the molded leather I was talking about. It's all done with a simple tool without any padding, without any cutting. It's a very nice piece of work. Very nice piece of work. The book it covers is almost as interesting as the binding. It's a book by a person said to be Michael Field. Michael Field is a pseudonym of two people. A woman named Bradley and her niece named Cooper. There may be other places where you've got a pseudonym for two people I don't know, but the goofiness doesn't end there. We've got this crazy pseudonym Michael Field and the book is about, it's a verse tragedy about Oso the Third, Holy Roman Emperor who is poisoned by his concubine.

I don't think the contents of the book would sell today and I'm not even sure they sold in 1897, but the binding is I think irresistible. It's in beautiful condition. I said that the Guild of Women Binders members were not afraid to try something different, that they were innovative in a similar way to Cobden Sanderson. But admittedly, they didn't do work as good. They weren't as good with their hands. They in a way weren't really professional. Those are semi-professional, but this binding oh my god. This is one of the most arresting bindings we've ever had. Now this is not on a silly book, but on a good book. Samuel Rogers's Italy. Samuel Rogers was one of these guys who famous for a while and important as a friend to people who were famous for a long time. He went to Italy, met Shelly, met Keeds, wrote about his experiences, wrote poetry, got it published, it all flopped, then he published it again with illustrations.

Some of them by Turner and these Turner illustrations are really lovely. Especially when they're in large paper format so that you see much more margin than you see engraving, but anyway apart from the fact that the book is worth having as a text, it's simply a riot of decoration. All these inlays, all this glitter,

all this color, all this animation, it's almost unrestrained vigor and yet at the same time it's controlled. It's simply a dazzling binding and the story here doesn't go much beyond that. I mean have a look at that and why would you not want to own it? The only other thing to say about it is there are notes made by somebody who bought this book in 1923.

He said that it had been sold in 1904 when the Guild of Women Binders disbanded. Sotheby's sold it and then it was sold again and he bought it in 1923. He says it was done by a woman named Helene Cox, C-O-X. There's nothing on it that says who did it. We know from a book also written by Marianne Tidcombe about women binders that she did some of the more ornate bindings for the Guild of Women Binders. You would be hard pressed to find a binding for the Guild of Women Binders that is more ornate and that is more irresistible.