

Medical Bookplates in Australia: A History with Progress Notes

MARK J. FERSON

A bookplate is a label, usually pasted inside the cover of a book, which indicates ownership. It is also referred to by some as an *ex libris*. The introduction of bookplates coincided with the development in Germany in the fifteenth century of printing from moveable type. However, the need for a similar device to either celebrate completion and acquisition of an important manuscript or to warn off potential 'borrowers' began long before the appearance of the earliest printed books. The British Museum has a clay tablet, which functioned as a bookplate to a 3400-year-old papyrus belonging to Pharaoh Amenophis. On the other hand, the earliest recognised medical bookplate is one marking a gift of books by Dr John Collins, Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge, to St John's College in 1634.¹

Bookplates in Australia

In the early years of white settlement in Australia, heraldic or armorial bookplates were used by a small number of the free and

I would like to thank Donna Mendrawi and Brenda Heagney of the History of Medicine Library at the Royal Australasian College of Physicians for their assistance in locating medical biographical material.

1. George C. Peachey, 'Book-plates of Medical Men', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1929, vol. 23, pp. 493-5.

not-so-free settlers. William Redfern (1774?–1833), an Assistant Surgeon with the Royal Navy transported in 1801 for mutiny, acquired a bookplate some time after he was pardoned. It is of interest not because of its unimaginative armorial design, but because it is one of the earliest Australian bookplates. Indeed, many modern bookplates retain a heraldic motif. Bookplates featuring pictorial elements gained favour around the turn of the century and reached their greatest popularity as miniature works of art to be commissioned or designed, collected and swapped in the 1920s and 1930s.



Figure 1: Wood-engraved bookplate by Lionel Lindsay for the Mills collection of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians

The pictorial bookplate movement was fathered in this country by John Lane Mullins (1857–1939), a noted Sydney solicitor, Catholic layman, patron of the arts, and later Member of the Legislative Council. He was influenced by the bookplate renaissance in England in the 1890s, joining the (English) Ex Libris Society in 1905 and the American Bookplate Society in 1922. Lane Mullins gathered around him a dedicated core of collectors, and with the assistance of a few enthusiasts mounted the first Australian bookplate exhibition in 1923. Buoyed by its success they formed the Australian Ex Libris Society in the same year. In its fifteen years' existence, the society published a string of annual reports and other pamphlets, all profusely illustrated with mounted or reproduced bookplates. In 1932, a number of Sydney collectors established a rival association, which they christened the New South Wales Bookplate Club, but it only lasted one year. Although the Australian Ex Libris Society had faded by the start of World War II, following the death of Lane Mullins, the Victorian branch resurrected itself in 1942 as the Australian Bookplate Club. Based in Melbourne, the new club managed to publish several booklets and newsletters but survived only to the end of 1943.

Throughout this period as well, Percy Neville Barnett (1881–1953), one-time secretary of the Australian Ex Libris Society, promoted interest in bookplates. He did this through his numerous articles in newspapers, professional journals and popular magazines, and the production of beautiful hand-made books on various aspects of Australian and international bookplate design. His own swansong, and that of the movement as a whole, was his grand opus *Australian Book-plates and Book-plates of Interest to Australia*. This was privately published in 1951 after nine years' labour, which included the task of pasting 30,000 bookplates into some three hundred copies of the work. Since this time, the art of bookplate design and collecting has suffered a decline, although a small band has sought to promote this interest against all odds through collecting, writing and donating.²

2. Robert C. Littlewood, *The ex libris of Sir Lionel Lindsay 1874–1961*, Robert C. Littlewood, Melbourne, 1978; Robert C. Littlewood, *The Bookplates of Edward B. Heffernan*, The Jester Press, Melbourne, 1982; Mark J. Ferson, *Australian Literature on Bookplates: A Bibliography (1899–1988)*, Book Collectors' Society of Australia, Sydney, 1988; John Fletcher, *The Jane Windeyer Bookplate Collection in the University of Sydney Library: A Catalogue*, Book Collectors' Society of Australia, Sydney, 1990; Mark Ferson & Brenda Heagney, *Book-plates. A Short History of Bookplates with Examples from the Fellows of the Royal Australasian*

Bookplates between the wars

The heights of Australian bookplate design were reached in the inter-war period. At this time the traditional design methods of etching and engraving were somewhat overshadowed by relief printing techniques, largely introduced from Britain, which suited the new approach to graphic arts. Most influential in bookplate design was wood engraving. Without doubt the major Australian exponent of the wood-engraved bookplate was Adrian Feint (1894–1971), who designed more than two hundred bookplates in the period 1922 to 1945 and gained recognition in this field both at home and abroad.

Lionel Lindsay (1874–1961) also had an international reputation in the medium of wood engraving, and produced more than sixty *ex libris*. His output included a large, somewhat ugly example for the Mills endowment to the library of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (Figure 1), and five others for doctors.³ L. Roy Davies (1897–1979) began using this technique in the early 1920s at around the same time as Lindsay, with whom he was acquainted. His wood-engraved bookplate (Figure 2) is shown for Sir Herbert Schlink (1883–1962), a prominent Sydney obstetrician and hospital administrator. Schlink was instrumental in founding King George V Hospital and was the founding president of the Ski Club of Australia, a position he held for more than forty years. The design for Thomas Dixon Hughes (1898–1956) is a wood-engraving by John Barclay Godson (1882–1957). Hughes (Figure 3) was the first superintendent of Sydney's Crown Street Women's Hospital, and probably received the *ex libris* as a gift from a patient. Although Godson is not recognised today as a major artist, he was well regarded as a bookplate designer between the wars and in 1933 the NSW Bookplate Club published a booklet of his designs.⁴

Without the long tradition of the woodcut, the linocut was considered a lower form of art suitable only for children, until the

College of Physicians, RACP, Sydney, 1993; Jeff Bidgood & Mark Ferson, *Australian Bookplates: An Illustrated Collection from Members of the Book Collectors' Society of Australia*, Book Collectors' Society of Australia, Sydney, 1994; Stevan Miller, *The Art of the Bookplate: The Pat Corrigan Donation of Australian Artists' Bookplates*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1996.

3. Littlewood, *The ex libris of Sir Lionel Lindsay*.

4. NSW Bookplate Club, *John B. Godson. Bookplates*, GC Ingleton for the NSW Bookplate Club, Sydney, 1933.



Figure 2: Wood-engraved design by L Roy Davies for Herbert Schlunk.

Perrottet (1890–1971), who produced more than two hundred linocut bookplates from 1929 onwards. He exemplified the brilliant amateur who largely confined his work to bookplates and a small number of linocut prints, while employed variously as an accountant and theatre manager. Perrottet received awards for his designs both in Australia and at the International Bookplate Association, Los Angeles, three years' running, from 1934 to 1936.

Despite increasing interest in relief techniques, etching still remained a popular medium for bookplates. Important exponents, some of whom gained international recognition for their designs, included Ella Dwyer, Gayfield

establishment in 1925 of the Grosvenor School of Modern Art in London.⁵ The scope in this medium for flowing lines and colour suited it to Art Deco motifs. The influence of the Grosvenor School was probably introduced here via several returning Australian women artists who had studied under Claude Flight (1881–1955), the linocut teacher at Grosvenor, and through Flight's books on the linocut technique. In this country, the multi-colour linocut bookplate was the province of George D.



Figure 3: Wood-engraved bookplate for Thomas Dixon Hughes by John Barclay Godson.

5. Chris Deutsher & Roger Butler, *A Survey of Australian Relief Prints 1900/1950*, Deutsher Galleries, Armadale, Vic., 1978, pp. 73–6.

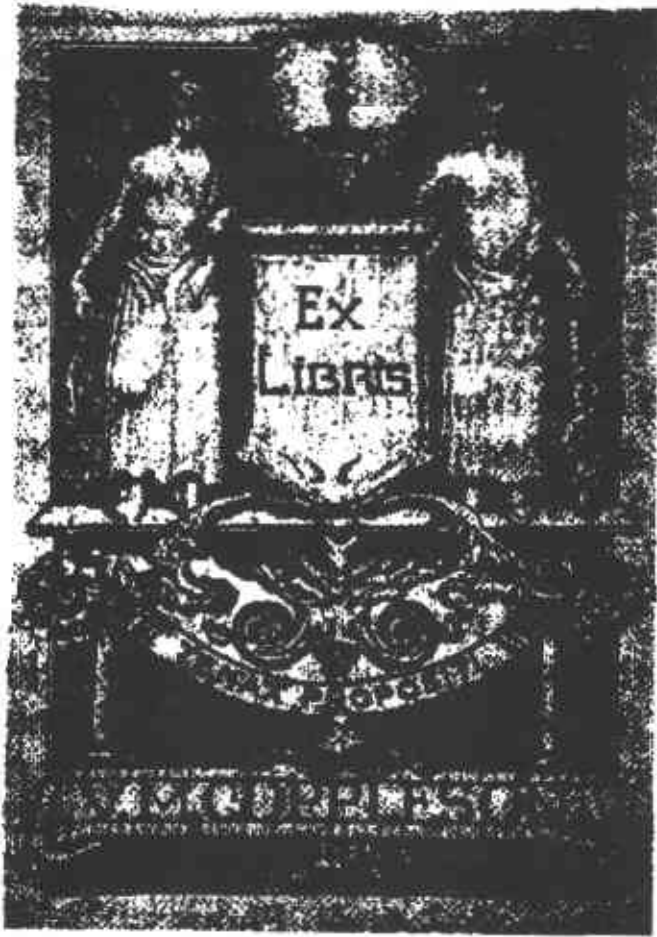


Figure 4: Etched design for Victor Coppelson by Harold Byrne.

Shaw and Harold Byrne. A medical example (Figure 4) is the 1934 design by the latter artist for the surgeon Sir Victor Coppelson (1893–1965), who was also a world authority on shark attacks and an outstanding promoter of postgraduate medical education. The Postgraduate Medical Foundation of the University of Sydney now bears his name. Byrne, on the other hand, remained a penniless artist, perhaps surviving on what he earned from his dreamy bookplate designs, of which there were more than one hundred.⁶

6. Terry Ingram, 'Harold Byrne Is Strictly for the Ladies' Boudoir', *The Australian Financial Review*, 24 November 1977, p. 22.

Pen and ink also has its place in bookplate design. Edward Heffernan (1912–92) was the son of a Melbourne doctor, who is said to have encouraged his son in his artistic pursuits.⁷ During the years 1929 to 1982, Heffernan designed sixteen bookplates as either linocuts or ink drawings. In the author's collection is a copy of Taylor Caldwell's *Dear and Glorious Physician* (1959), a novel about St Luke, with Heffernan's pen and ink bookplate executed in 1947 for Christine Rivett (Figure 5). The book is inscribed to Rivett on the occasion of her sixty-ninth birthday: 'To a beloved surgeon and wonderful woman, with my deep gratitude and love'. Amy Christine Rivett (1891–1962) moved to Brisbane after graduating in Medicine at the University of Sydney. An advocate of birth control, and for a period responsible for the health of licensed prostitutes, she later specialised in gynaecology before joining her brother's practice at a private hospital in Sydney.



Figure 5: Pen and ink drawing by Edward Heffernan for Christine Rivett.

7. Littlewood, *The Bookplates of Edward B. Heffernan*.

Bookplates and the medical profession

The medical profession, through its traditional and continuing association with learning and books, is disproportionately represented among book collectors and, consequently, among owners of bookplates. Perhaps not surprisingly, a vast literature of medical bookplates has appeared during the twentieth century. This applies to the United States⁸ and especially to Europe,⁹ where the bookplate tradition seems even stronger now than it was in past years.¹⁰ Moreover, learning about bookplates might be an integral and rewarding part of the study of the provenance of those books that have become landmarks in medicine.¹¹ A search of the Medline database for the period 1966–98 reveals sixteen articles concerning the bookplates of doctors (although there are a few more for dentists, pharmacists and nurses); of these, ten originated in Poland, Germany, or Czechoslovakia.

Australian writings about bookplates have appeared sporadically over the past one hundred years, coinciding with the peaks in general interest in the subject. Coincidentally, the first article devoted to bookplates published in Australia was written by J. S. C. Elkington (1871–1955) who, after over-



Figure 6: Wood by Norman Lindsay for Jack Elkington.

8. Samuel X. Radbill, *Bibliography of Medical ex libris Literature*, Hilprand Press, Los Angeles, 1951.

9. Gerhard Kreyenberg, *Ex libris für Ärzte*, Deutscher Ärzte-Verlag, Köln, 1983; Erik Skovenberg, *Ex libris medicinae*, Ferrosan, Aarhus, 1987.

10. Mark Severin & Anthony Reid, *Engraved Bookplates: European ex libris 1950–70*, Private Libraries Association, Pinner, 1972.

11. N. B. Eales, 'On the Provenance of Some Early Medical and Biological Books', *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 1969, vol. 24, pp. 183–92.

seeing the control of a small-pox epidemic in Launceston in 1903, was later invited to become the Chief Health Officer of Tasmania (Figure 6). Elkington's article in Melbourne University's *Alma Mater* concerned the bookplates of brother-in-law Norman Lindsay (1879–1969).¹² An artistic 'all-rounder', Lindsay produced a series of largely successful designs from 1897 to the 1940s, but complained that he could never satisfy an owner with the right balance of subjects on the bookplate.



Figure 7: Woodengraved/typographic bookplate for Geoffrey Cains by Mike Hudson.

Recent Australian medical bookplates

In 1993, the History of Medicine Library of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians mounted an exhibition of Fellows' bookplates to accompany the college's annual scientific meeting, and prepared an illustrated booklet on the subject.¹³ The exhibition referred mainly to bookplates designed in the first half of the twentieth century. However, the collecting, design and commissioning of bookplates still occurs, and it seems worthwhile to show some modern examples of medical bookplates, produced by printmaking techniques both old and new.

The bookplate for Geoffrey Cains (Figure 7), a consultant dermatologist, is a wood-engraving cut in 1994 by Mike Hudson, co-owner of the Wayzgoose Press, the pre-eminent private press operating in this country. The artist-typographer is primarily concerned with the production of small editions of hand-printed books and broadsides, which are invariably illustrated by his superb wood engravings or linocuts. He has produced a small number of wood-engraved bookplates, mainly as gifts for friends.

12. J. S. C. Elkington, 'Ex libris', *Alma Mater*, September 1990, V, pp. 275–6.

13. Ferson & Heagney, *Bookplates*.



Figure 8: Design after a linocut by Arthur Day for himself.

The bookplate 'From the Books of Dr Arthur Day of Manly: For the Children of Bear Cottage—with Love' was reproduced from a linocut made early in 1996 (Figure 8). The bookplate was designed by the owner and inserted into his collection of children's books, which formed his legacy to the New Children's Hospital, Sydney. Day (1951–96) had worked

at the hospital for a number of years as an epidemiologist and was a strong advocate for childhood injury prevention.



Figure 9: Linocut bookplate by Judith Roach for Mark Ferson.

The bookplate for the author is a hand-coloured linocut made in 1994 by Sydney artist Judith Roach. With extensive experience in modern linocut design, Roach conducts linoleum block printing workshops at colleges throughout New South Wales (Figure 9). The linocut, the artist's first

bookplate design, shows a stylised grevillea flower, which represents the author's interest in Australian native plants.

The design for Andrew Kemp, a paediatric immunologist now working at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, was printed from a linoleum block cut by the author in 1986 when they were working together at Sydney's Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children (Figure 10).

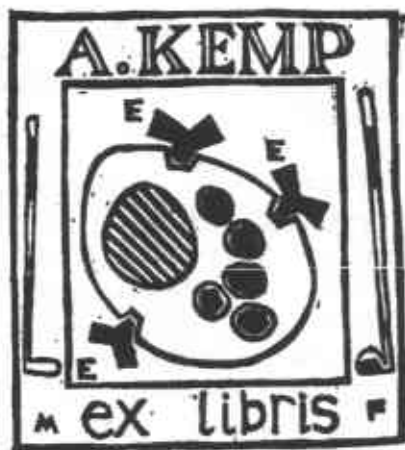


Figure 10: Linocut design by Mark Ferson for Andrew Kemp (original in maroon).

Conclusion

Despite a slackening in interest since World War II, bookplates remain a vital by-way in printmaking and the book arts. Artists can still be found who are willing to take up the challenge of incorporating both an owner's name and personality onto a 7cm by 10cm slip of paper. Doctors with a love of books and art will find that commissioning a bookplate is a unique and rewarding way to satisfy both interests.

South Eastern Sydney Public Health Unit,
University of New South Wales