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Uncovering bookplates

By Monica Oppen, Sydney

I have only a few memories of my paternal grandmother, Margaret Oppen née Arnott (1890-1975). One is of her trying to teach me to knit when I was nine years old. We were in her large (to my child eyes), cluttered workroom. I remember there was not much space. Stuff was piled everywhere. The cramped space did not make me feel at ease. I was a bad student. As a nine-year-old I found my grandmother rather intimidating. She was a tall, solid, busy woman. On that first lesson – or was it the second? – she gave up trying to teach me to knit and said that it would best if my mother taught me.

What is significant in this memory is her workroom. My grandmother was an artist, who trained at Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School and then later in London at the Slade Art School and at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art. In 1957 she founded the NSW Embroiderers' Guild. This was her 'major work'. But before this change to embroidery she had been a paid-up member of the Australian Ex Libris Society, founded in 1923. She was definitely a member by 1925, remained a member while she was resident in England for about 10 years from c.1926, where she married my grandfather, Hans (von) Oppen (1880-1972), and had two sons: my uncle, Conrad (born 1929) and my father, Richard (born 1931); she returned to Sydney with the family in 1935.

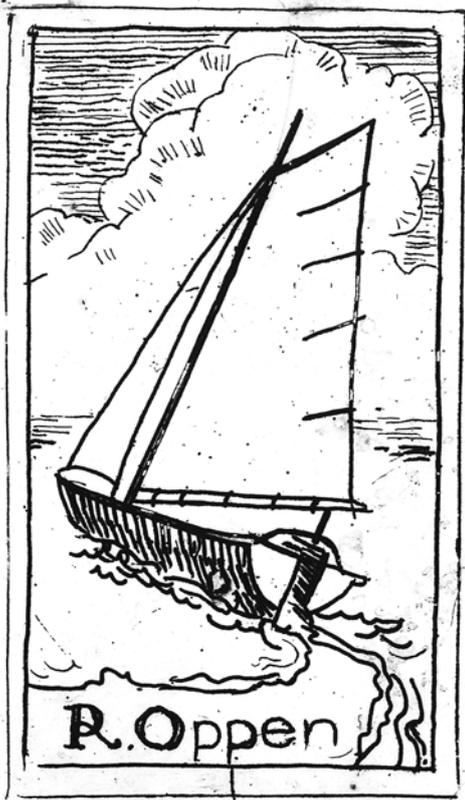
Her workroom was intriguing because it was cluttered, messy to a level that would not have been tolerated of our play room by my mother, and at the same time it was like a fortress because it was so cluttered. One did not dare to touch anything for fear that dislodging one small item might cause a major landslide off an overloaded table.

When my grandfather died, aged 92, my grandmother downsized and moved from St

Ives to Hunters Hill, near my uncle and his family. Much of what was in my grandparent's St Ives house was split between my father and uncle. When my father moved into a nursing home in 2014 and then died in 2016, my brothers and I were faced with the task of clearing the large family home, where my father had lived for 50 years. We began clearing bookcases and opening cupboards and pulling stuff out, finding things we had never seen or noticed before. Clearing my father's house has made me think that people's lives are like my grandmother's – a cluttered workroom, with lots of buried, covered, hidden layers. How well do we really know another person? I definitely didn't know that my grandmother had been so involved with the bookplate. And it was not just my grandmother's engagement with the bookplate that I uncovered.

Find no. 1: My grandmother's bookplate collection. The collection is a mixture of original prints and reproductions. With some it is difficult to discern whether they are originals or not. The print being signed outside the image is the best confirmation of its originality. In her album all the prints are well stuck down! The arrangement is vaguely in groups; plates by the same artist, or for the same person or of a particular genre, eg armorial. Many of my grandmother's plates are for family members. As well as the album, there was a large envelope of loose bookplates. When sorting these plates I realised the lack of dates is rather annoying. How would it be best to sort them and file them?

Find no. 2: Three copper plates for bookplate designs, of which there are no printed copies: two by my grandmother and one by my father. The plates have sustained a few dings and staining from age. I remember my father saying



Copper etching by Richard Oppen for himself

that he couldn't draw people which is why there is no sailor in the boat on the bookplate he made for himself. Also I hazard a guess that the clouds with their different quality of line were drawn by his mother. The plate for H D Arnott (my grandmother's brother, Henry Dixon) is monographed in the tassel 'M A' which means the plate was done before 1928, the year my grandmother married. Ida Doris Barnes was a family friend.

Find no. 3: Australian Ex Libris Society publications. Having looked through my grandmother's album I found it interesting to read in the July 1925 annual report the presidential address by John Lane Mullins, 'I believe every member of the Australian Ex Libris Society is a book-lover and that both in defence of his library and in gratification of his aesthetic sense he is the owner of a book-plate. In other countries these marks of ownership are employed rather for purposes of exchange than of possession, but in Australian no such practice exists.' By 1929 my grandmother is married and resident in Hove, Sussex, UK, and in the annual report, July 1929, this address is recorded in the list of members. Further to the theme of exchange, at the top of the list of members is the statement: 'The List of members who desire to Exchange Bookplates will be found in the Society's Journal.' Particularly nice in the *Annual Report, 1930* are the tipped-in, original plates. In the *Year Book, 1933*, my grandmother is still resident in the UK. The other UK-based member is Patrick White. The Australian Ex Libris Society Circular 2/35, 1935 (a single sheet) notes that an address was given by G D Perrottet on 'The Scope and Technique of the Linocut'.

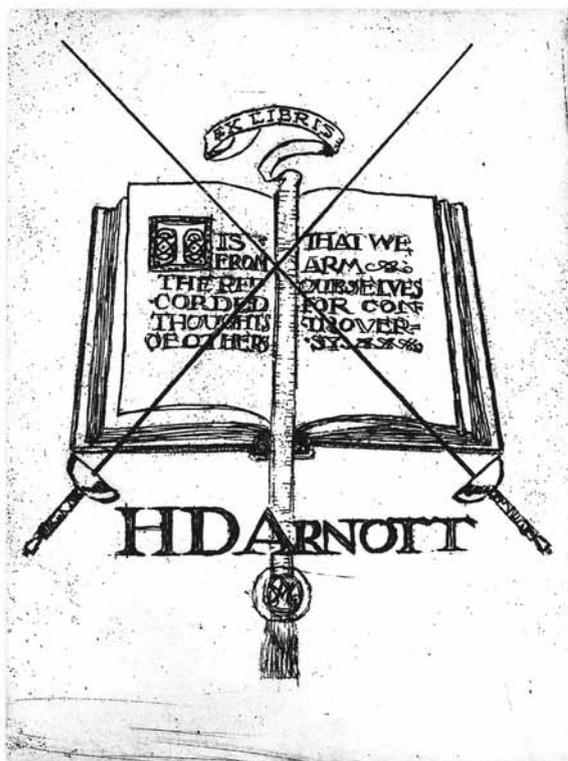
Find no. 4: Works by P Neville Barnett. *The Bookplate in Australia; its inspiration and development*, Tyrrell's Galleries, Sydney, 1930. Barnett begins this small volume discussing early (Australian) colonial bookplates: 'In contemplating them, one would find

little in the design or the engraving to please the eye and satisfy the aesthetic sense'. My favourite here is George Collingridge's wood-engraved design for Noel Pearson, depicting a faun, perhaps Pan himself, sitting on what would be Karraba Point as Fort Denison is behind him. Also *Armorial Book-plates; their romantic origin and artistic development* and *Souvenir of 'Armorial Book-plates'*, both published for Barnett by the Beacon Press, Sydney, 1932. Several of the bookplates are missing. I wonder how many of the bookplates in my grandmother's album have been taken from other books?

Find no. 5: A bookplate made by my mother, Brigitte Räber (c. 1955), before she was married, in a two-volume work, *Europäische Kunstgeschichte* [European art history], Zürich, 1948. Finding this plate in these two books was a happy surprise. My mother's family were book publishers in Luzern, Switzerland. My mother was particularly interested in art history as a young woman.

Find no. 6: School Ship Conway prize books with plates dedicated to my grandfather for proficiency in French, in the two-volume *Oeuvres de Moliere*, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1880. My paternal grandfather was in the merchant navy having gone to school on the School Ship Conway in Liverpool. The fine leather bindings on these French books were done in England.

Find no. 7: A bookplate made by me (with the help of my father) for my older brother, Felix Oppen, c. 1978, stuck in school text books. I had forgotten this bookplate. It was the cut through 'F' that jogged my memory. I remembered being upset at having slipped with the cutting and ruining the block, my parents convincing me that it was still okay. Then I remembered that my father drew the flag with its wobble. The coat of arms on the flag is that of my paternal grandfather's von Oppen family.



Copper etching by Margaret Arnott for Henry Dixon Arnott, c. 1920s

**The Society's 'Show and tell',
Sydney Rare Book Auctions,
Annandale, 2 May 2017**

Bronwyn Vost, Sydney

Paul Feain graciously opened his auction rooms on the evening of 2 May to a group of Sydney members for the informal Show and tell meeting. After a short welcome by the President and broaching of beverages, packets of cheese and biscuits and some other delicious items brought along by members, we took turns to describe and pass around our items of interest.

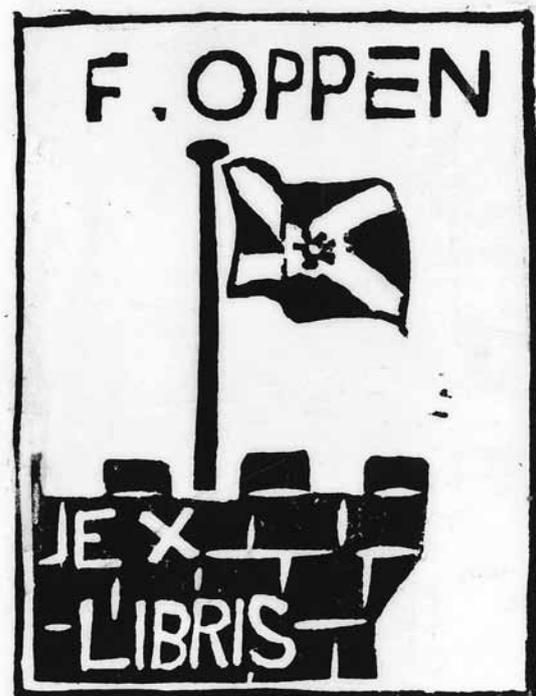
Ronald Cardwell made some introductory remarks about the auction of the Anne and Jeffrey Long bookplate collection held recently on the spot where we were assembled and observed that different people are interested in different aspects of bookplates. His copy of the booklet *John B Godson. Bookplates* published in 1933 by Lt G C Ingleton RAN and the NSW Bookplate Club, with original bookplates tipped in, was marked by the Perrottet bookplate for

E E Pescott, dated 1942. Brigitta Summers showed six linocuts produced by her for various friends and relatives, including one for her mother, Monica Oppen. These delightful artworks referenced the character or interests of the intended owners. Brigitta is keen to try woodcut and letterpress for future designs. Nick Ingleton had acquired some unusual bookplates at the recent auction of the Long collection, a wood engraving by Willi Knabe for Adolf Hitler, and one by Bruno da Osimo for Benito Mussolini. We speculated about how these bookplates had found their way to Australia, whether souvenired by soldiers returning after World War II, or the possibility that they were left over from Neville Barnett's bookplate books.

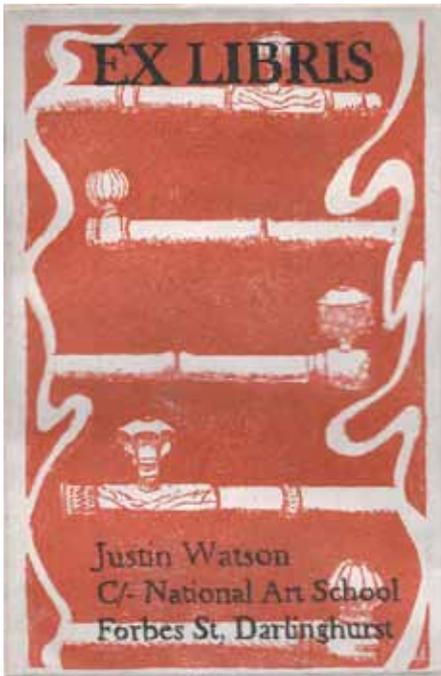
Monica Oppen showed a small booklet hand printed in 1924 in Hornsby (Sydney) by pioneer wood-engraving artist George Collingridge, entitled *IT is principally a collection of Wood Cuts* which combined the letterpress with some miniature wood engravings of landscapes and features of

the Hornsby area. Mark Ferson showed a bound set of the annual reports of the Australian Ex Libris Society from 1923-1929; coincidentally these had, like Ronald's item, belonged previously to E E Pescott. A delightful Feint wood engraving from 1930 featuring spaniel 'Dan' laid down inside the front cover of the album suggested that the original owner was Margaret Allen. Mark had bought this set in July 2016 from The Auction Rooms, Adelaide, when they were auctioning the collection of Edward (Ted) Edgar Pescott (1872-1954), horticulturalist, naturalist, author, bibliographer and bookplate collector. Mark also distributed some etched bookplates made and donated to the Society by Justin Watson, the winner of the Geoffrey C Ingleton Prize in our 2016 Bookplate Design Award.

Paul Feain passed around two boxes of assorted bookplates acquired over the years, and generously allowed those present to help themselves. Brenda Heagney showed one of her treasures, a miniature, leather-bound French book (27 x 22mm), *Extraits*



Above: Linocut design by Monica Oppen for Felix Oppen, c. 1978
Left: Copper etching by Margaret Arnott for Ida Doris Barnes

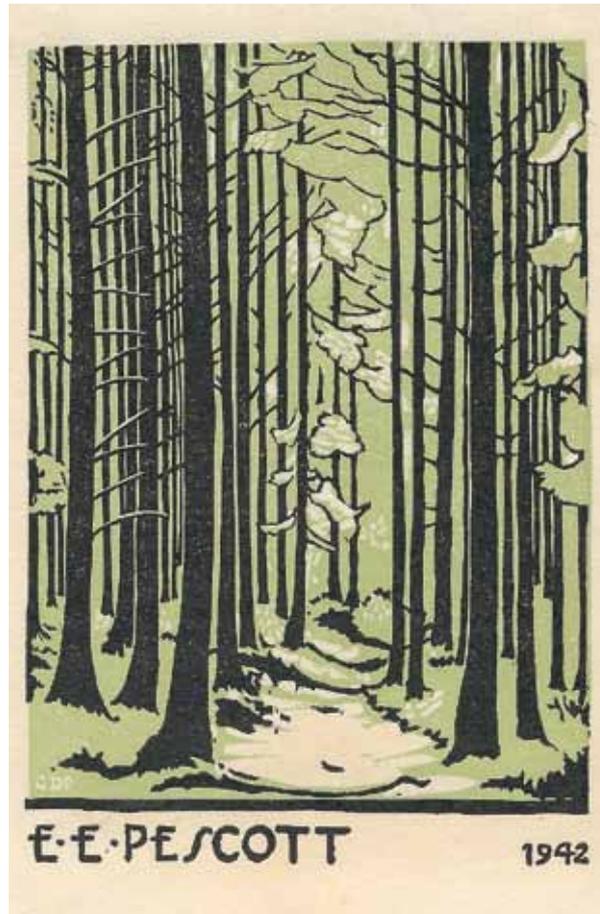


Etching by Justin Watson for himself



Extraits de la déclaration des droits de la femme, 1990 (photo: M J Ferson, courtesy B Heagney)

de la déclaration des droits de la femme (1990, original text published 1791), just crying out for a tiny bookplate! Bronwyn Vost handed around two books featuring bookplates by Eirene Mort: one for Nora Weston, the book inscribed to her by Mort's father for Christmas 1910; the other for Bronwyn's father David Rees, dated 1945. Bronwyn also gave those present advance notice of an exhibition to be held in Canberra in November 2017 on the artistic collaboration between Mort and Weston, to which Bronwyn's family would be contributing material, including some bookplates.



Linocut by G D Perrottet for E E Pescott, 1942

Exhibition reviews and notes

Faces in the Crowd:
Mosman's Famous Forgotten
(Heritage Festival exhibition).
Mosman Library (Sydney),
19 April to 22 May 2016
Review by Mark J Ferson, Sydney

Thanks to Ronald Cardwell's eagle-eyed detection of the word 'bookplates' in the NSW National Trust heritage week 2016 program, I found my way to Mosman Council's Barry O'Keefe Library on 15 May to see how our favourite subject might be depicted in this exhibition. The 'famous forgotten' of the exhibition's subtitle listed company directors and entrepreneurs as well as those once prominent in art and design in the first half of the twentieth century: Gracius Joseph Broinowski (1837-1913) famous for the book *Birds and mammals of Australia* (1885), jewellery designer Rhoda Wager (1875-1953), artist and bookplate

designer Karna Birmingham (1900-1987) and Australia's pre-eminent bookplate collector and promoter P Neville Barnett (1881-1953).

The exhibition's Barnett panel was dominated by a large photograph of the subject in his library, tipping a bookplate into one of his books, surrounded by shelves piled with multiple copies of his various works on bookplates and Japanese prints, with his adored mother gazing down from her childhood portrait by English artist George F Watts; also a biographical note, and (strangely enough) an unattributed quote from my essay on book design between the Wars published in issue 331 of *Biblioneus and Australian Notes & Queries* (2001).

Other display cases contained copies of some of Barnett's fine works, reproductions of Australian bookplates found in them, issues of *Art in Australia* featuring bookplates, as well as some bookplates of peculiarly Mosman interest: designs for The Childrens' Library (749 Military Road, Mosman) and

Balmoral Library (19 Esplanade), and one I had not seen previously for Laurie E Mullens, a pen and ink drawing by Tom Werry featuring a galleon in heavy seas against a dramatic sky. Miss Mullens was a local resident interviewed in 2002 as part of the oral history project and had donated to the Mosman Library her books, including a collection on Antarctica, some of which contained her bookplate. Sadly, Mosman Library does not have a specific bookplate collection but its association with sometime resident Neville Barnett means that they hold a number of his bookplate books and related works.

By the Book: an exhibition about anything Booky ... Books, illustrations, text, bookplates.
 Firestation Print Studio (Melbourne),
 8 to 26 February 2017
 By Edith May, Firestation Print Studio

At Firestation Print Studio in Armadale, a suburb of Melbourne, our association with books has been of recent origin. We started in 2013 with a bookplate exhibition which touched a nerve across Australia.

We had no idea what we were doing, nor that a 'bookplate' had rules! To our surprise we were inundated with people who were fascinated by the bookplate and that led to Robert Littlewood having an exhibition here of his collection of bookplates, and to our members learning more about the genre.

At the same time FPS was learning about making books ... artist's books, not ones made under the master bookbinder's arts. We had Adele Outteridge from Brisbane and Guy Begbie from Bath teach us techniques to use. And we were off! We now have a small but very passionate Book Arts Club which meets once a month. We have since sold two of our books to the State Library of Victoria.

So I thought it was time to find out what our members were doing with book-related themes and got a shock! This exhibition was amazing – in its content and its technical mastery. Artists are beaver away with their images and formats and producing really interesting works. We even had one bookplate; by Richard White, it's a green frog – a linocut – and was sold instantly!

This may be the first exhibition about books and booky things, but certainly won't be the last!



Pen and ink design by Tom Werry for Laurie E Mullens

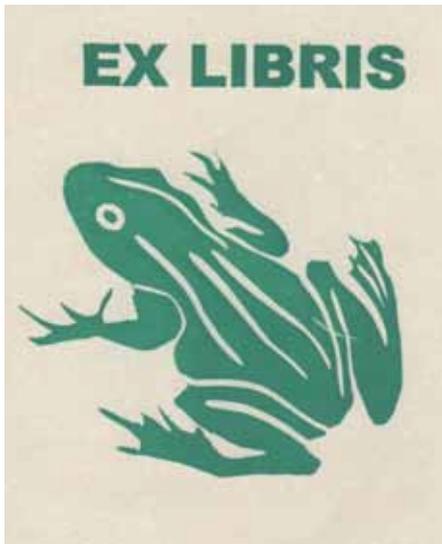
Robert Jacks: Printed Matter.
 New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM, Armidale),
 5 May to 2 July 2017
 By Robert Heather, Director, NERAM

While Melbourne artist Robert Jacks (1943-2014) was primarily recognised as a painter, he also worked in other media, from sculpture and printmaking to the artists' book. The title of this exhibition draws attention to the artists' book form, not only because books are often described in this way – they are, in essence, 'printed matter' – but also because this was the name of the New York based artists' book organisation through which Robert Jacks initially distributed his book works. Printed Matter Inc was set up in 1976 by a collective of New York based artists and curators, including Sol Le Witt and Lucy Lippard.

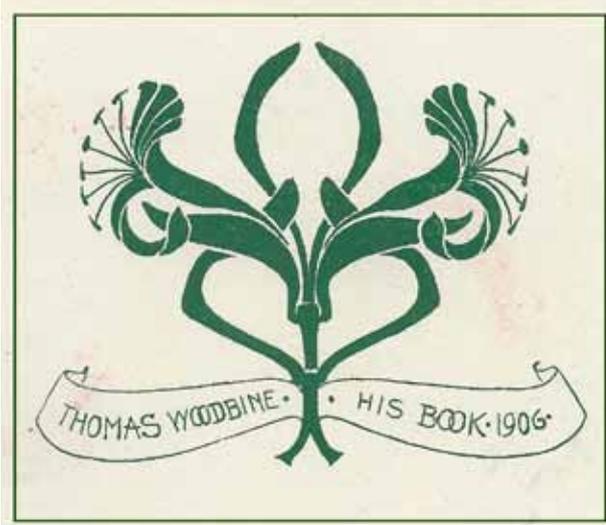
This exhibition brings together Jacks' work in the artists' book form with a selection of other works that highlight the connections between different areas of his practice, and the way some of his abiding concerns find expression in the book form. For Jacks, the artists' book not only offered an ideal site for the exploration of creative ideas, it was also a very economic and accessible form that allowed intimate



Photograph of P N Barnett in his library, c. 1950



Linocut bookplate by Richard White, 2017



Brushwork design by John Edwin Branch for 'Thomas Woodbine', 1906



Etching by Robert Jacks for Julienne Jacks, 2001

engagement. In his words, it was about making art 'available to everyone'.

The exhibition includes a series of six bookplates designed by Jacks for his family and friends which are in the New England Regional Art Museum collection. The designs include bookplates for himself, his wife Julienne, daughter Eliza, friend Anne Smith, printer Jenny Zimmer and Lyn Williams, wife of the artist Fred Williams.

With thanks to Julienne Jacks for permission to reproduce her bookplate, and to Jürgen Wegner for drawing my attention to the exhibition – Ed.

Editorial

Discoveries – those events that lend both excitement and motivation to the life of a collector – seem to be a strong thread through the contents of this issue of the *Newsletter*. In the feature article, Monica Oppen has kindly contributed a version of family history in bookplates, covering three generations (and continuing in the fourth as you can see from the 'Show and tell') of bookplate makers in both

hemispheres of the globe. One senses her excitement in these recent family discoveries and rediscoveries. In Bronwyn Vost's report of the Society's May 'Show and tell', the discoveries of unusual or previously unknown works are shared by the presenters and by those in the audience; examples include recent designs by fourth generation bookplate maker Brigitta Summers, and the complete coincidence of two presenters showing material originating in the one collection, that of E E Pescott of Adelaide.

Exhibitions including bookplates are sufficiently unusual, but that three exhibitions which include some bookplates have taken place around the country – Sydney, Melbourne and Armidale – over the past twelve months, is practically unheard of; their occurrence reflects current interest in the people for whom the art of bookplates is part of their cultural milieu or environment, and also the various networks which bring snippets of information to the *Newsletter* from far afield. With some degree of pride, your Editor can report that these networks also bring news of publications in the area of bookplates, listed in our 'Notes and happenings' department; one discovery brought to attention by bookseller Peter Thomas is a bookplate design in what seems to be the earliest Australian drawing manual for school art teachers. Finally, I would like to draw the attention of members and other readers to the Society's Facebook page – <https://www.facebook.com/NewAustralianBookplates/> – it is a really good place to find and post bookplate **discoveries!** **MF**

Notes and happenings

Publications

J E BRANCH. *Brushwork from nature with design.* Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1906; p. 50 and pl. IX

This appears to be the first Australian drawing instruction manual for art teachers, and the 'Thomas Woodbine' bookplate on plate IX a design exercise based on the woodbine flower [thanks to Peter Thomas for finding this one]

JAMES COCKINGTON. In the good books. *Highlife* vol. 21, no. 4, Apr.-May 2017; pp. 144-6

Article on the Adrian Feint bookplate collection of Garry Barnsley, with images of 11 bookplates and a portrait of the artist [thanks to Ron and Joan Lawrence for this tip]

DONALD J KERR. For the boys over there! The Churchill Auction of Books and Pictures in New Zealand, 1942. *Script & Print* vol. 40, no. 4, 2016; pp. 222-38, rear cover

Shows bookplate by Hilda Wiseman (NZ) for the Churchill Auction marking each auctioned volume

SUZANNE KORTLUCKE. From the library of P N Barnett. *Muse (University of Sydney)*, no. 17, June 2017; pp. 1, 26-7

Mentions the University's collections of bookplates and of Barnett's books; images of A Feint designs for Thea Proctor, C Nigel-Smith, S R Phippard and Dorothea Mackellar [thanks to Lee Sanders for drawing my attention to this]