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**Printmaking techniques in the production of bookplates**

Jennifer Rogers, Melbourne

Whilst looking at the beautiful bookplates recently published in the National Library of Australia's 'Little Treasures' series, I was struck by the lack of reference to particular techniques employed by the artists shown. The book offers a broad selection; however, in many instances, no hint of how the artists accomplished particular images is given.

If we consider each plate to be a miniature work of art, which undoubtedly many of them are, acknowledgement of individual techniques should accompany plates in all publications, and not simply be restricted to the coded references in specific bookplate publications. Not only does this give collectors particular information about the visual style of a print but also information about which technique best suits the personal profile artists are required to interpret.

The choice of a particular printmaking technique influences the appearance of the bookplate and imbues it with the characteristic of the medium, regardless of the design chosen. There are many to choose from and some of the following techniques may help identify preferred styles.

Leaving aside digital techniques, which many printmakers have incorporated into their work since the nineties, printmaking techniques fall into the four broad categories of Relief, Intaglio, Planographic and Stencil.

Relief is a method of printing from a raised surface. Linocuts, woodcuts and wood engravings are examples of this method. The non-printed areas are removed with cutters or gravers leaving the uncut surface to be inked and printed. Quite often they are referred to as white-line or black-line style.

Two artists who work at the Australian Print Workshop in Melbourne, using the relief technique, are Georgia Thorpe and Kate

Hudson. Thorpe is known for her bold and freely coloured woodcuts. Her interpretation of garden fragments and domestic still-life arrangements are cut from plywood, which she hand colours with water-soluble inks before printing directly onto dampened paper.

An example of a white-line woodcut is her 'Jeremy Alexander' bookplate. Cut from the plank side of the wood, this print features some of the texture of the grain and the hardness of the wood in its bold style. The form of the block itself is an integral part of the composition with the black background. A lovely example of a black-line wood cut was featured in *Newsletter* no. 13, with the 14th century Brandenburg bookplate.

Kate Hudson uses linocuts to interpret the patterns and forms of domestic subject matter as well as foliage and the birds of the bushland on the outskirts of Melbourne. Hudson's multicoloured reduction prints are technically meticulous, creating a riot of pattern and colour within formal and ordered compositions.

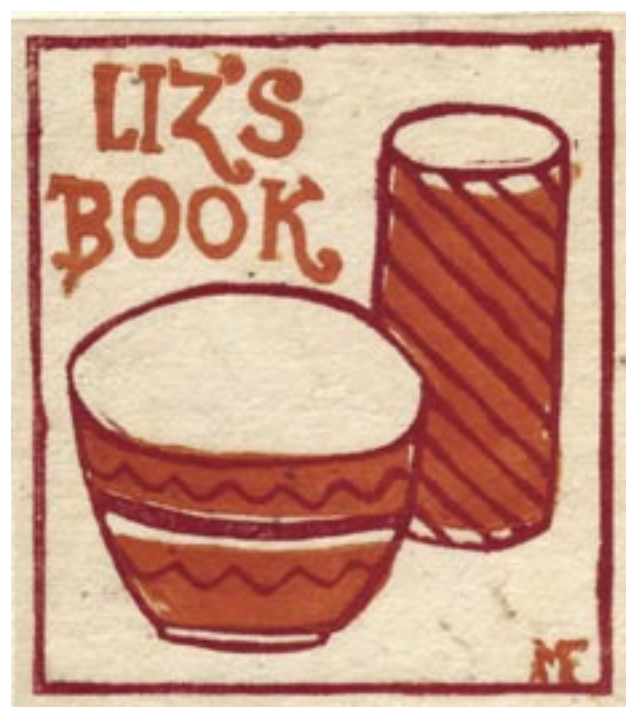
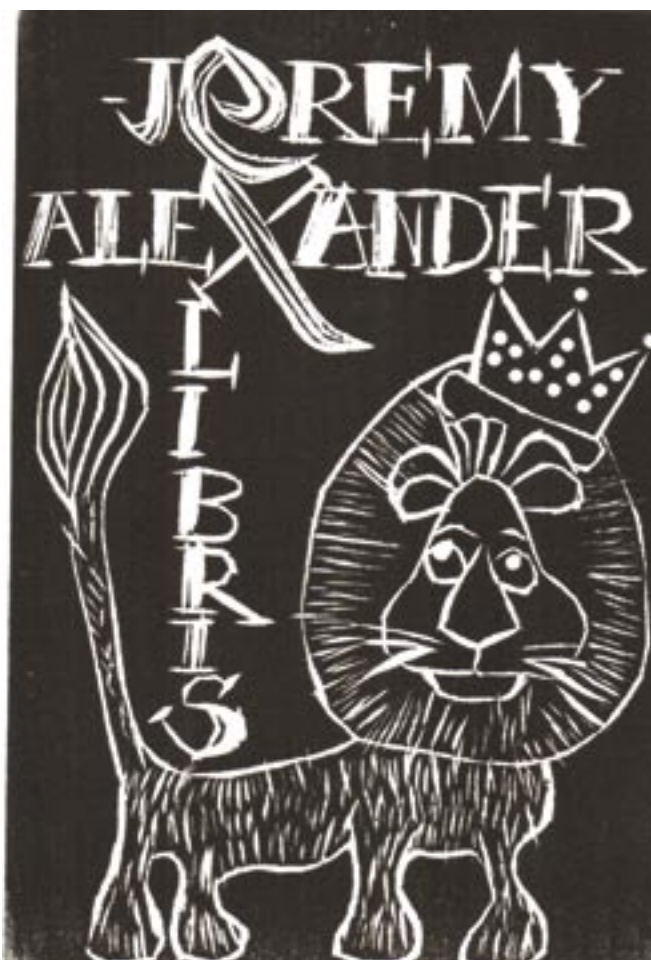
Her 'Naomi Good' bookplate displays the discipline of her style using the evenly printed characteristic of the slightly flexible lino block, with detailed texture and repeated pattern often a feature of this technique.

Mark Ferson's linocut bookplate for 'Liz', which is deceptively simple in style, has used two lino blocks. The first orange 'key' block defines the form of the composition of two pots and also defines the lettering. Using careful registration, he has overlaid the flat orange shapes with strong directional and linear pattern in dark red ink to give a three dimensional form to the pots. He uses a border to tie the composition together. The design is black-line in style, with the background cut away to reproduce a pen and ink drawn characteristic, similar in intent to the Brandenburg plate.

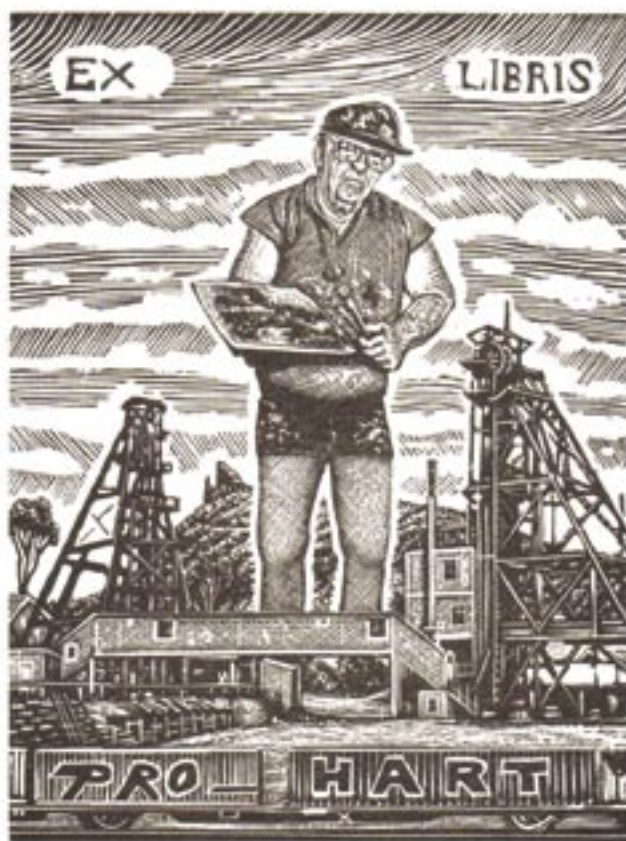


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Clockwise from left: woodcut by Georgia Thorpe for Jeremy Alexander; two-colour linocut design by Mark Ferson for Liz Cunningham, 1986; wood-engraved bookplate by David Frazer for Pro Hart; linocut bookplate by Kate Hudson for Naomi Good.





David Frazer is a painter and printmaker from Castlemaine in Victoria. His paintings and many of his wood engravings reflect country town themes, with the ubiquitous backyard caravan as well as the drover's dog regularly featuring in his imagery. His wood-engraved bookplate uses the end grain of wood such as English Box or Lemonwood. Becoming very rare, the wood in these blocks is often prepared in sections laminated together. Being densely grained, it allows the artist to cut very fine line and texture into the surface. Using tools that are quite a bit smaller than those for woodcuts and linocuts, the tiny chisels with names such

as graver, spitsticker, scorper and bullsticker reflect wood engraving's quirky English origins.

Frazer's bookplate for the late Pro Hart, part of a commission of thirty wood engraved bookplates for Robert Littlewood, exhibits all the characteristics of a wood engraving. It shows a wide variety of textures to emphasise the complex mining landscape with the burly King of Broken Hill himself, larger than life, surveying his domain. The figure of Hart is treated in a highly realistic way with the stance of an old miner, beer belly, singlet and cap, incongruously holding his tools of trade: brushes and palette. Because of the size of bookplates, it would be almost impossible to get the depth of detail that Frazer has achieved here using any other relief medium. More of David Frazer's bookplates from this commission are on public view at the State Library of Victoria.

Intaglio, meaning engraved or carved, is the term used for most etching techniques. Using either a copper or zinc plate, the artist can draw directly on to the plate in a technique known as drypoint. This creates a strong but sometimes slightly fuzzy line. Perspex plates can be similarly incised with a tool or needle to create a line. The area

that is printed lies below the surface of the plate with all Intaglio methods.

In etching, the surface of the metal plate is coated with a bitumen ground and drawn into, exposing the metal. It is then etched with acid. The plate is cleaned and inked after which the surface may be either polished or left with a light patina of ink by wiping by hand.

To fill areas delineated by line, or for subtle wash-like effects, artists often use a process known as aquatint. Aquatinting gives a softer and more even texture to the surface and is created by a fine powder of resin, which is adhered to the plate by heat before being etched. Inking and wiping follow.

In all Intaglio methods, because the ink lies below the surface of the plate, the plate, with the dampened paper is passed through the etching press under great pressure to transfer the image.

Ron McBurnie is a printmaker from Townsville, Queensland. His richly peopled suburban landscapes and more recent atmospheric 'Romantic' series of prints exhibit an enviable mastery of the intaglio process. His bookplate, made for the gallery director Noreen Grahame, employs both etched lines and aquatint techniques. The loose, flowing line is reflective of his drawing style and he uses aquatint on the limbs to give contrast and emphasis to those sections of the image. The black background has been etched where the bitumen ground has been densely crosshatched with a needle-like tool. McBurnie's bookplates are often very humorous and some of them can be found in *Ex Libris: Bookplates of North Queensland*, edited by Cheryl Wilson and published in an edition of 60 by Lyre Bird Press, 1996.

Planographic is the term used for lithographs, which is the technique where the artist draws directly on to the surface of a lithographic stone (limestone) or a metal lithographic plate. Using litho crayon or paint with a watercolour like wash called tusche, artists can create effects very close to soft charcoal drawing, watercolour, pastel or wax crayon. Briefly, after further processing, and a light acid etch, the stone or plate is dampened then inked. The ink clings to



Top: etched bookplate by Ron McBurnie for Noreen Grahame; middle: example of tusche wash and crayon line; bottom: detail of screenprint by the author.

the greasy crayon or tusche but not to the dampened areas and after the paper and stone have passed through the lithographic press, the artist's drawing appears in the finished print exactly as it has been drawn or painted. An example of tusche wash and crayon line is evident in the section of a print shown on the previous page.

The Screenprint or serigraph technique prints the open areas of a stencil through a mesh screen. Paper is placed under the framed screen and ink is forced through the open areas onto the paper. This technique produces clean crisp edges, and because of ease of registration, is easily adapted to multi-coloured images, shown in a section of a print by the author, also previous page.

Printmaking is a means of making multiple images. With a block, plate or stone and a press, a wondrous variety of images can be created. The first known etching that actually bears a date was made in 1513; woodcuts have a much longer history and thus artists have been creating multiple images for a very long time. In spite of that, there are many misconceptions about what a print really is, so it is important to understand that printmaking is an original art form used by artists to create limited edition prints. Once the entire edition is sold, the plate is made unprintable and no more prints can be produced.

This rule may be relaxed when it comes to bookplates, however. With an agreement between the artist and the commissioner the number of prints struck from a plate or block can be much more flexible with the block or plate available for printing when needed.

This article is intended to explain a few of the many techniques used in printmaking today and to help with the visual interpretation of printed bookplates. Many thanks to the artists who have lent and donated work for the sake of this article and whose generosity and expertise have helped shape it.

Artists can be contacted through their websites:

Georgia Thorpe: [georgiathorpe.com](http://georgiathorpe.com)

Kate Hudson: [katehudsonprintmaker.com](http://katehudsonprintmaker.com)

David Frazer: [dfrazer.com](http://dfrazer.com)

Ron Mc Burnie: [ronmcburnie.com](http://ronmcburnie.com)

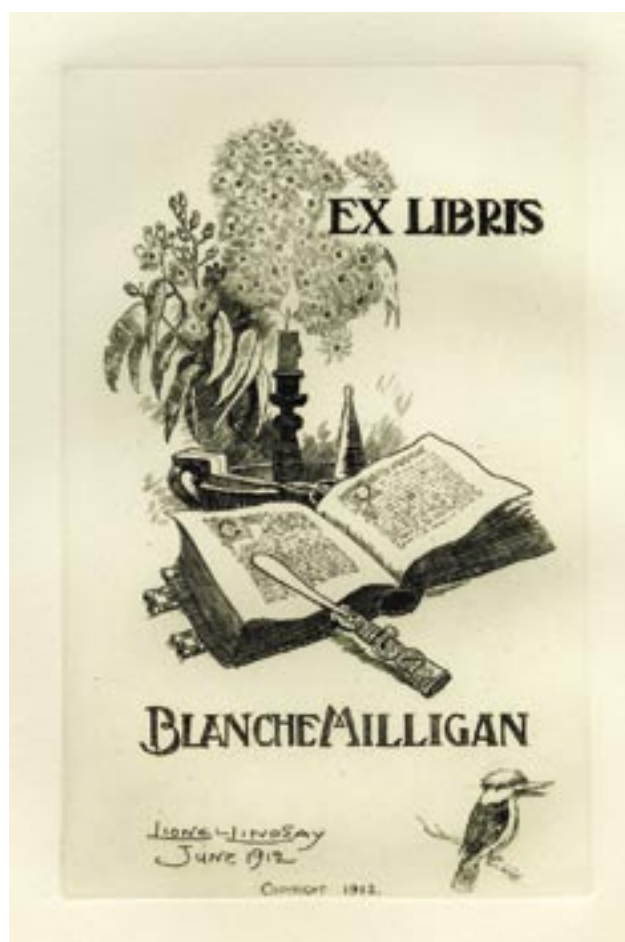
## Bookplate collections of the Fryer Library, University of Queensland

Penelope Whiteway, Brisbane

The Fryer Library, which is the special collections branch of the University of Queensland Library, acquired its first collection of bookplates in 1967 from Catholic priest Father Leo Hayes. Hayes was an inveterate collector, and the bookplates comprised just one small part of the material which the University received from him. The bookplates from his collection were mounted into 11 archival albums, with duplicates being housed in boxes. The albums are arranged into three series, one for Australian plates, one for international plates and one for miscellaneous and armorial plates. In addition to the bookplates, the Hayes collection also furnished the library with monographs and serials on bookplates, printing plates used to produce bookplates and some manuscript material, such as letters.

Long term readers of the *Newsletter* may recall that in the very first issue from June 2006 Mark Ferson wrote about the bookplates of collector Blanche Milligan, as illustrated by a collection of her correspondence which he had recently acquired. He noted "this ... must only have been a small fraction of Blanche's entire bookplate correspondence ..." Some of that remaining correspondence can be found in the manuscript material of the Hayes collection.

As with the correspondence held by Dr Ferson, the Blanche Milligan letters in the Hayes collection can be divided into correspondence with Australian collectors and artists, and with American collectors. Nearly all of the correspondence is from others to Blanche; however, there is one letter sent in March 1930 to a Miss Davies – Blanche writes saying she has found the address on the American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers list and has enclosed a copy of her Barrett



Etched bookplate with remarque by Lionel Lindsay for Blanche Milligan, 1912.

plate. Blanche also mentions that, beside the Barrett, she has “an etched [plate] by Lionel Lindsay, a wood engraved by Geo Collingridge & a process by DH Souter, all well known Australian artists” which she would be “pleased to exchange for [plates] of equal value.” Further evidence of Blanche’s collecting interests can be found in an undated “List of Subscribers to The Ex Libran desiring Exchange of bookplates” which states “[Miss Milligan] will exchange her engraved plate by WP Barrett for plates by Messrs. Sherborn, French, Smith, Spenceley, Eve, and Barrett.” [The Ex Libran appeared only in 1912 – *Ed.*]

The library is fortunate to have in the Hayes collection a letter from Lionel Lindsay to Blanche (undated but written in mid-1912) regarding the bookplate he is designing for her, several copies of the finished bookplate (including a ‘proof before letters’, signed copies of both the proofs and the finished design, and *remarqué* proofs) and the printing plate itself. There are also two letters from George Collingridge to Blanche, dated March and April 1928, which mention a bookplate he has designed for her, once again accompanied by the

printing plate. Also in the collection is the printing plate of the design for Blanche by London’s WP Barrett, which illustrated Dr Ferson’s article, along with a *remarqué* proof and a first proof of the incomplete design, and the printing block of the DH Souter design for Blanche.

What remains a mystery is how so much of Blanche’s material ended up in the Hayes collection. Other correspondence indicates that Hayes purchased bookplate collections from other collectors, though there is no evidence that this is the case with Blanche’s material. It is a question which further examination of the vast quantity of correspondence in the Hayes collection may well answer.

Further collections of bookplates have been acquired since 1967. Another significant collection of plates, along with other art related materials, has been acquired over several years from Pat Corrigan. Once again, both Australian and international artists are represented – for example, there is one delightful album of American college library bookplates, which displays a full range of styles from simple to beautifully illustrated. Smaller but no less valuable collections in the Fryer Library include one of 30 plates by Australian artist David Frazer and one of 35 bookplates acquired from enthusiast Edwin Jewell. Information on all of these collections can be located using the library’s catalogue at [www.library.uq.edu.au](http://www.library.uq.edu.au)

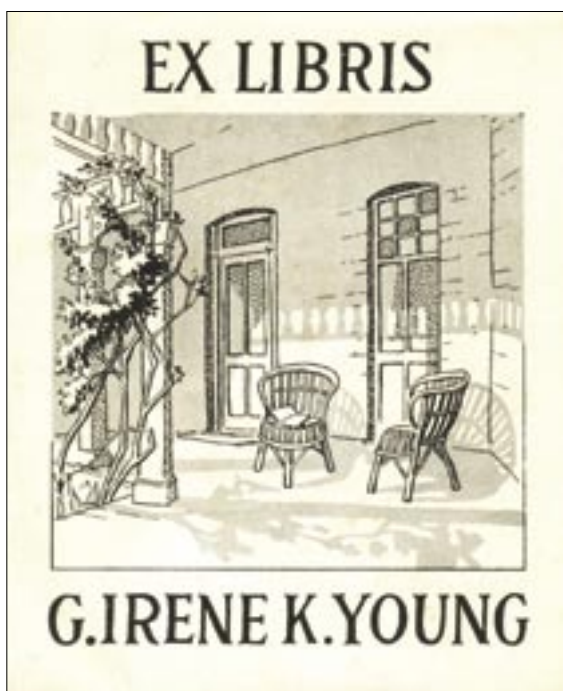
For further information on the collections of bookplates in the Fryer Library, email [fryer@library.uq.edu.au](mailto:fryer@library.uq.edu.au) or telephone 07 3365 6276. General information about the Fryer Library can be found at [www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer)

### Bookplate stories: Irene Young Stuart Braga, Sydney

This bookplate was drawn by the book illustrator Mary Gillham and with some degree of accuracy and a certain rustic charm, depicts the verandah of ‘Westland’ the Young family home at Forbes, NSW. Dr Geoffrey Young, following service from 1940 to 1944 with the RAAF, was a flying doctor based at Forbes from 1944 to 1952. In this period, his wife Irene, née Gladys Irene Kennen Petter (1910-96), was most active in local community affairs, especially the Country Women’s Association. Later, whilst the Youngs were at Cheltenham (Sydney), Irene pioneered social work with Colombo Plan students from South-east Asia. She was eventually awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for her many years of sterling work in building bridges between Australians and newly arrived Asian students at a time when few people were comfortable with foreigners from Asia with little English.



Left: pen and ink design by Jack Gadsdon for Tom Mathieson, 1980.  
Above: pen and ink design by Jack Gadsdon for David McPhee, 1973.



Pen and ink design by Mary Gillham for Irene Young, c. 1940s.

The design suggests repose – how Irene found time to sit and read I shall never know, but she did. While she was at Forbes, her father and sister in England wrote to her weekly. No matter what she was doing, when their letters arrived, she made herself a cup of tea and sat down on one of those chairs and read them. Irene (my mother-in-law) kept herself well informed about all manner of current issues, and valued books greatly – sufficiently to have this pleasant bookplate drawn by a recognised artist. Mary Gillham stayed with the Youngs and this was her thank-you present.

## Notes and happenings

Auction of Tom Mathieson's collection of Norman Lindsay books

On 16 November, Bay East Auctions in Waterloo (Sydney) mounted its regular auction of books, maps and prints, including items owned by gallery owner Tom Mathieson as well as books from the library of herpetologist David McPhee. It can only have been a coincidence which linked these two collections, for both owners had bookplates designed by Jack Gadsdon.

Some years ago, a bookplate collector suggested I write to David McPhee asking for a copy of his bookplate, which indeed David kindly supplied. I was not previously aware of the Mathieson design. So I left some bids and was happily rewarded with two gems, both embellished by Gadsdon's 1980 bookplate for Mathieson: Jack Donne, *A defence of women for their inconstancy & their paintings*, London, Fanfrolico Press, 1930; and FCV Lane, *The bookplates of Norman Lindsay*, Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 1944.

Sydney bookplate artist John B (Jack) Gadsdon should, I feel, be more widely known; Peake

records 46 designs by him. Gadsdon also wrote – nine articles published between 1973 and 1989 in serials including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *BibliNews* and *Australian Notes & Queries* and *Australian Collectors' Quarterly*.

Bookplate talk at Australian Society of Miniature Art, NSW

At the general meeting held in Laurelbank, Willoughby, on 9 October, your President/Editor addressed members of the Australian Society of Miniature Art (ASMA) on the topic of 'Bookplates'. My talk was a gallop through the world history of bookplates, but focussed on interest in pictorial bookplates from the 1890s onward with particular reference to the Australian scene. I passed around examples of bookplate books and those present asked a variety of questions, both during and after the talk. I am grateful to our Vice President Mike Carter, who is also a member of ASMA, for his kind intervention in arranging my attendance, and for the supporting presence of my wife Sheree and of Pam Horsnell, who is a member of both Societies. I left application forms with President Di Sincock, and an illustrated article subsequently appeared in November 2009 issue of the ASMA (NSW) Inc *Newsletter*.

## Editorial

May I take this opportunity to wish Society members and other readers a happy new year and the best for 2010. Jennifer Rogers, Melbourne artist and printmaker whose designs we featured in a recent issue, has taken up the topic of bookplate techniques with enthusiasm and travelled around the countryside to speak with colleagues and collect representative examples of their work. I am grateful to Jennifer for so strongly pursuing this interest and bringing the fruits of her work to our attention. My thanks are also due to Penelope Whiteway of the Fryer Library, Brisbane for providing a fascinating article on the Fryer in our series on bookplate collections in Australian institutions. Penelope also had the grace and intelligence to tie in her piece by reference to an article written by your Editor in the very first issue of the *Newsletter*. Stuart Braga continues to send in tantalising notes concerning his own brushes with bookplates, and a further example, a design previously unknown to collectors, appears in this issue under 'Bookplate stories'. As this issue will appear not long after Australia Day, I have used the excuse to include on the front page a charming prize plate printed by Waite & Bull, Sydney, around 1950 and featuring a border of Australian wildflowers. MF

## New publication

A new book on bookplates just published by the Book Collectors' Society of Australia

*Mark Ferson: Bookplate artist,* by Jeff Bidgood

A5 paperback, 70 pages

Signed number edition of 50 copies

\$25 per copy to New Australian Bookplate Society members including postage within Australia

To order a copy, please contact Jeff Bidgood on 02 9807 5489 or email him at bidgood@tpg.com.au