

David Pearson
B-65: English Bookbindings, 1450–1850: Identification & Interpretation
20–25 July, 2025, Charlottesville, Virginia

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. The pre-readings were very useful! Difficult, but they set you up to jump in with an understanding of the trade.
2. Yes. The recommended readings gave an excellent foundation for what we would be covering in class.
3. N/A
4. I found some of the information useful. I do not have any recommendations at this time.
5. Yes, absolutely. I would only encourage DP to make the language he uses to recommend the texts a bit stronger. I was a good boy and did all of the readings. But above all, reading Pearson's own book before class made things go much better for me. Since the class hews closely to Pearson's book, having read it made me feel prepared from day one of the class. I also thought the Margaret Lock book was worth reading.
6. We did not have pre-course reading assignments. It was helpful to flip through DP's book as a basic ground layer for the week, but it absolutely wasn't necessary. I don't think any readings needed to be added.
7. Yes, the instructor was accommodating and very well informed. DP is the EXPERT on English bookbindings. He literally wrote the book!
8. I did not, in the end, do any of the suggested course readings, though I recorded their names for future reference purposes. I found that a basic understanding of bookbinding terminology was sufficient to understand the contents of this course.
9. Readings were useful, and many images seemed promising at first, but then a lot of them were black and white photos in small size books and I couldn't really make out what to look for in the images.
10. Yes, extremely so. I was so relieved that the advance reading was suggested and not prescribed rigorously; I would love a list of books to avoid, but realize that might be misinterpreted as throwing unintentional shade; Really, there is so much bad, outdated, or misinformation on bookbindings out there, it makes sense to have a "do not read" list as well.
11. We did not have any pre-course readings. It might have been helpful to read something that gives a concise overview of the parts of bookbindings and the names of equipment and tools used to bind and decorate books. Everything went well without it, but if I were completely new to rare books I would have been a little lost at first.
12. Very useful! I read all of them.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. The course workbook was fantastic; I will continue to refer to it in the future.
2. Fantastic. Having the key points DP mentioned already written down allowed me to focus on what was being said and shown and allowed me to only have to take notes on extra things that were said (which was still plenty!). The extra course handouts were also very helpful.
3. I loved the workbook! They're incredibly helpful and mean that I can pay attention a lot better to class. It will be useful to my university book lab
4. I think that the content was both useful and appropriate to the topics we covered. I think it may very well be useful knowledge for me in my future library career.
5. Yes, it was perfect. DP gave us a small book on which his lectures were based. And then he provided a few extra handouts with full-color images. This made following along with his lectures much easier.
6. The course workbook was a lifesaver—I enjoyed taking supplementary notes in addition to DP's notes that really allowed me to pay closer attention to him speaking, rather than hurrying to capture everything he was saying. David also distributed color images with captions that will be incredibly valuable references for my future work.
7. Very informative and helpful. Yes, I plan to use it in future study of bookbindings, and it tied well into the RBS examples of rare books.
8. The course workbook was an extremely helpful jumping off point. The small informational handouts were also very handy bases for note taking and reference.
9. I'm sure the course materials will serve me well and a long way! I appreciate all the color images that came as examples of written descriptions.
10. I loved the quizzes. There could be an online book binding quiz using a quiz building app. I would have loved to have known about the option to discuss "home library" examples of bindings. I would have brought some on my phone, however, I didn't have any pictures handy, but I can think of several examples I would like help with, and am so grateful to DP for being willing to correspond with us even after the conclusion of the class.
11. I really like how detailed the notes are in the course workbook. I didn't feel pressured to take a ton of notes during class, and I know it will be a great resource for the future when I try to identify book bindings at my institution. I especially like the color handouts organized chronologically. Those were most helpful to use at a glance, and I think I will refer to them often. The content was immensely helpful and I know it will help me in my job. It will take more practice and hands-on experience, but I already feel much more confident in interpreting bindings than I did at the beginning of the week.
12. The workbook was perfect for me. I like to have everything laid out ahead of time, so I know what to expect. I appreciated that the professor specified that we didn't need to take notes because it was all in the workbook.

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. I was most interested in the temporary bindings; I'm looking forward to going back to work and raiding the vault to find examples for outreach events.
2. The basic idea of the course was the most important. I now have a foundation and resources with which to begin to identify binding styles, materials, and periods.
3. Handling things! I love hands-on work and being able to feel things.
4. I enjoyed learning about the materials used to make book covers and bindings, (ex. the differences between goatskin, sheepskin, and calfskin bindings), and marbled pages, and how to observe and analyze a physical book for information (ex. author, publisher, date, &c.).
5. I cannot really narrow down to a particular aspect I liked, since the course was really a cohesive whole: how do you date and identify English bindings? DP very wisely arranged his lectures into chronological periods, but we asked the same question of bindings from each period. Did I walk away with new insights? 100000%. I feel confident now that, using what I learned, coupled with my notes and DP's book, that I will be able to date and describe bindings.
6. All aspects of the course were relevant and intriguing to me! This class was based more on decorative features of bindings (as advertised), and I learned so much information about that in depth. I appreciated the brief talk about materials used, then the deep dives into each century of English bookbindings and how they differ, or are similar, to the last. I walked away with a brain full of information that is itching to reach my collections to apply what I learned.
7. Yes, lots of new ideas that challenge me to be better about identifying rare book bindings. I plan to make thorough use of the course materials and knowledge gained from my first RBS course.
8. I was most interested by the lessons in how to detect interventions in the binding over time. While I don't have any concrete plans at the moment, I anticipate that the knowledge I've gained here will sit in the back of my mind whenever I look at a historical binding in the future.
9. I like speculating on why people do things in certain ways, so it was intriguing to see and think about the binding and design choices made. I also enjoyed making some modern-day analogies, personally.
10. The identification, dating, and materiality of bindings by sight and knowledge of historical trends, fashion, and vagaries of the human condition was EXACTLY what I was hoping this class would provide and it WAS SO SO SO MUCH more than I ever could have imagined or dreamed. I had no idea how much I did not know about historical book bindings. I am forever grateful to DP, for his deep knowledge, incredibly kind delivery, and excellent sense of humor. What an incredibly wonderful human being.
11. Hearing the lecture with pictures then looking at examples was most helpful. I liked being able to handle the books and look at them closely to identify the elements from the lecture. The trip to the Folger was fun and interesting and a great way to see what we discussed in person and gain some practical experience in identifying them. I am walking away with a fresh perspective through which to view the rare books in our collection.

12. The demonstration of bookbinding and tooling was so valuable, but the conversations with the professor and the other students were by far the most enriching aspect.

4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. Yes! DP was great, I learned more than I thought was possible in this week.
2. Yes, absolutely. DP was so informative and engaging. I have learned all I hoped to.
3. Yes and more! He was a wonderful instructor
4. My instructor was very helpful and kind and did his best to convey information and encourage us to learn.
5. Yes, and yes.
6. Yes! We went into depth about the decorative elements of English bookbindings and that is exactly what I wanted to learn. DP was constantly emphasizing how these bindings were similar or different to European bindings of the time, and again, how one century often differed from the next.
7. Absolutely, DP was well informed, knowledgeable, and made the class feel welcome and appreciated. He also has an excellent sense of humor!
8. I did indeed, and thanks to DP for being so willing to tolerate slight diversions and delve deeper as he presented.
9. Yes. I didn't have a very specific objective or wanted an answer to a specific question coming into the class, so I'm more satisfied with the breadth of knowledge covered during the week and the attitude we should take about interpreting what lies before our eyes.
10. I learned way way way more than I had hoped to learn. The course far exceeded my expectations. Ultimately, I had no idea what the treat that I was in for. I hope to practice these skills for many years to come. I am so glad that I have come to this knowledge sooner (mid-career) than later, as I have so much more learning, practice, and competent binding description years ahead of me. Really, I can't say enough wonderful things about how practical this class was for the rare materials cataloger.
11. Yes, the class was exactly what I expected. I walked away with the skills I'd hoped to learn. Getting a few more examples and descriptions of non-English bindings for comparison may have been helpful but also might have made remembering everything more confusing. I'd like to know how applicable the binding conventions are to Europe at large, if they are roughly the same things happening at the same times. We did discuss this a little.
12. DP is a wonderful instructor! I felt very comfortable asking questions and he was so knowledgeable and curious. He made it feel like an exciting endeavor.

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. I plan to use it to catalog and understand collections more fully.
2. I will be using this information in my regular cataloging life to catalog my institution's rare books more accurately and in greater detail.
3. Applying it towards my M.A. research and personal bookbinding projects.
4. I plan to use this knowledge in my profession as a potential librarian/archivist, working with rare and aged materials that require care and considerable caution.
5. I am producing a catalogue of a set of medieval manuscripts, and one of the categories I describe is the binding of each manuscript. So, I will most definitely be using the skills I learned here when working on the catalogue.
6. I hope to take this information back to my collection and assist curators and catalogers in identification and description of English bindings.
7. Apply all aspects of the RBS course and program philosophy to my teaching related to rare book bibliographic instruction and helping students and faculty.
8. {no response}
9. {no response}
10. I plan to go back to my library, continue to catalog rare materials, practice the skills I have learned, and continue to keep describing historical bindings in cataloging notes, now with additional accuracy, confidence, knowledge, precision, and technical skill. Thank you, DP. I truly am a much MUCH better cataloger today than I was a week ago.
11. I'd like to go through and try to identify which books from our collection have been rebound and which are from around the same time as printing.
12. As an art library director, it is important that I can converse with authority on subjects of book history and bindings when in discussion with colleagues and vendors.

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. Anyone who has books of their own/at work with which to apply the lessons.
2. Catalogers, book trade professionals, and other librarians who work with special collections.
3. Anyone who has an interest in bindings or has to handle them
4. Archivists and special collections librarians.
5. Cataloguers, archivists, anyone working on medieval or early modern texts. I was the only non-librarian in the class, but I am certain this class benefited both myself, as a traditional academic, and the librarians.
6. Anyone who wants to learn to better identify, describe, and date English bookbindings—catalogers, curators, conservators, &c.
7. Anyone interested in learning more about English bookbindings, especially rare book librarians, archivists, catalogers, conservators, faculty and students of book history.
8. Anyone whose job or interest involves dating books or determining their provenance may find useful perspectives in this class. While we mostly covered the

changes in general structure and decorative styles, anecdotes were discussed relating to famous book collectors, binders, and distributors.

9. {no response}
 10. Other rare book catalogers or conservation staff that work with and describe historical bindings.
 11. Curators, librarians, catalogers, book sellers, students, teaching faculty in a field related to books or history.
 12. Special collections catalogers.
- 7) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*
1. Seeing the shift in binding styles lined up in presentations.
 2. Being able to discuss a period of binding styles and then go to the table and see examples laid out was extremely useful.
 3. The feeling of being able to point at a book and be able to say the exact time period it's from at a glance is super cool.
 4. When we went to the Folger library in DC, I was excited to have so many opportunities to learn how one of the most famous English writers I am familiar with can be applied to the field of library collections that I am studying.
 5. No "aha" moments—and that is a compliment to the course. We learned about this from the ground up, so everything scaffolded brilliantly. So, there was no single breakthrough moment. Instead, it was the slow and steady acquisition of knowledge.
 6. The whole class was a brain blast of information regarding decorative techniques. There were several exercises that really emphasized many of DP points, where the whole class had a collective "aha!" moment.
 7. Seeing the excellent examples from the RBS collection, what a treasure, and a one-day field trip to see the Folger. Keep this course in-person at UVA with the one-day trip to DC.
 8. {no response}
 9. {no response}
 10. My "AHA!" moment came pretty early on in the class, when DP mentioned that the interior decoration of the time or even understanding how the people of a certain time understood and used a particular book/object really helped me see them not as rare and historic items, but things that are representative of a time and place. For the first time, I saw the connection between fashion and taste of the day as being influential to the design of the book-as-an-object which has been passed down to us through time.
 11. I liked learning about the differences in marbled paper over time. That is a very helpful identification tool. I also liked how we learned that not just bindings, but endpapers, spines, labels, and edges can be equally useful. Being able to look for clues in order to make deductions and date, the binding was like putting the pieces of a puzzle together and felt like a big "aha" moment to me.

12. The routine daily tasks of handling real life examples of the binding types I had read about. There is no substitute for the real thing!

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. More handling guidelines at the beginning of the week; some attendees clearly didn't have the experience needed to carefully work with the materials.
2. I think I found the collective identification of book periods (listing in chronological order) not helpful, as I did not get a chance to think before other students had blurted out their answers. Perhaps writing our own ideas down and having a chance to think, followed by some discussion, would have been more useful.
3. Color photos in the workbook? More photos of the Folger bindings in the workbook alongside the descriptions.
4. None that I can think of.
5. In all honesty, I wouldn't change a thing.
6. {private response}
7. Leave it just the way it is, the perfect combination of RBS and Folger examples, but keep the course at UVA.
8. {no response}
9. {no response}
10. private response}
11. There was a lot of standing in one place to look at books as a group, which was very tiring. This was especially bad at the Folger when we spent most of the day standing in one place. My body ached at the end of the day, and it got so uncomfortable that I had to sit a few times. This was the experience of most people I talked to that day. It also would be helpful to know in advance that we will have the opportunity to show bindings from our own collection to share with the class for analysis. If I'd known that, I would have taken photos in advance.
12. It was genuinely perfect for my expectations.

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1-10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 10
2. 10
3. 10
4. 9
5. 10
6. 10

- 7. 10
- 8. 10
- 9. 8
- 10. 10
- 11. 10
- 12. 10

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhanced the course experience?*

- 1. The field trip/guest speaker were a lot but very useful: wouldn't recommend changes.
- 2. Yes, seeing all the books in chronological order all at once was very useful.
- 3. Yes! The demos and visit to the Folger were super insightful.
- 4. Yes, I believe they did.
- 5. We made a non-virtual field trip to the Folger, and it was perfectly timed. We did it on Thursday, after we had worked intensively on bindings for three days. Being able to see loads of examples at the Folger really helped concretize what we had learned.
- 6. Absolutely! The field trip to the Folger was an absolute highlight of the course—being later in the week, we had already covered the time period listed, and we saw bindings from all centuries and all the features DP had been discussing throughout the week.
- 7. All in-person, excellent opportunities for enrichment.
- 8. Very much so, yes. The bookbinding demonstration by Amanda Nelson was engaging and very informative. It was well placed to let us apply some of our recent learning and explain why some spines we had already seen looked the way they did. And then of course the field trip to the Folger was well worth the time and the van ride, though I personally would not want to spend the entire week in the building.
- 9. Guest speaker, maybe, but I don't think virtual field trip can do justice. Hands-on experience with the examples are really important.
- 10. {private response}
- 11. The bookbinding demonstration was fun even though the presenter seemed a little scatterbrained and forgot several tools. I thought that the demonstration might have been a little better organized. I liked the trip to the Folger even though it was a long day. As discussed in class, I felt surveillance was a bit high and they could have been more welcoming. It was still very worthwhile.
- 12. The demonstration of binding, tooling, &c, and the field trip to the Folger were both very valuable experiences.

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. No!
2. Definitely do the recommended readings, even though they aren't required. It gave me a solid foundation, and I think I may have been lost without them. At the very least, read DP's own book, as it does follow the basic template of the course.
3. The vocabulary is weird, the sooner you learn it and get used to it, the better for research and work it is.
4. I would advise them to relax and not stress over what to expect in this course, because the staff and faculty are all here to help you.
5. No.
6. I think the material moved along quite quickly (as do most RBS courses), which was absolutely fine by me, but not always for everyone! DP was always happy to clarify anything as we went, and I never felt rushed.
7. Be engaged and appreciate the expertise and comradery of your fellow students. An in-person course that used hands-on exercises and examples that were perfect for this class on the history of English bookbindings. The collection at the RBS is a perfect teaching tool.
8. {no response}
9. {no response}
10. The community at RBS is what keeps me coming back year after year. Stay on the Lawn for spontaneous acoustic guitar concerts, and riveting book-centered conversations with your colleagues into the wee hours of the night.
11. I would highly recommend it and would encourage them to look at as many bookbindings as they can in advance and take pictures to bring with them.
12. {no response}

12) If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?

1. Super fun, will be returning for more.
2. Always educational and community-building!
3. Totally worth it!
4. An experience that I may never have again and will always remember.
5. I was told I would learn about bindings, and boy did I ever.
6. Hooray!
7. No matter your experience or career goals, the RBS is great opportunity for students of book history, and creates a wonderful shared experience learning from the experts in the field.
8. Visions of bookbindings dance in my head.
9. {no response}
10. Small rustic Lawn room/Intimate with bookbindings/Awaken my brain
11. A viscount has more balls than a baronet.
12. DP brings his subject to life. His enthusiasm, warmth, and humor are infectious. I dare you to not enjoy this class!