

THE NEW AUSTRALIAN BOOKPLATE SOCIETY

collectors, bibliophiles, artists and others dedicated to promoting bookplates

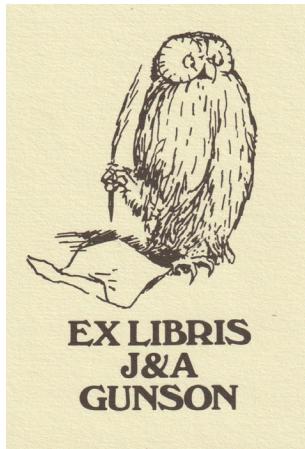
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From the W Niel Gunson
Collection

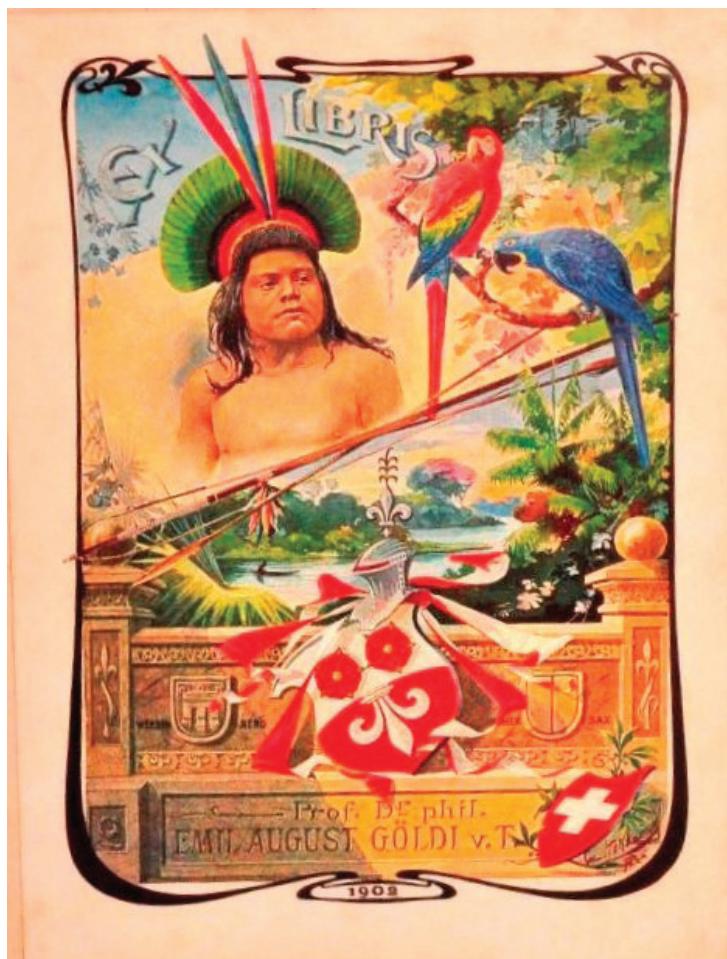
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Brazilian bookplates from the 'Cacadora de exlibris'

An edited version of 'Cacadora de exlibris' by Mary Komatsu, Rio de Janeiro, published in *FISAE Newsletter* no. 516, October 2025

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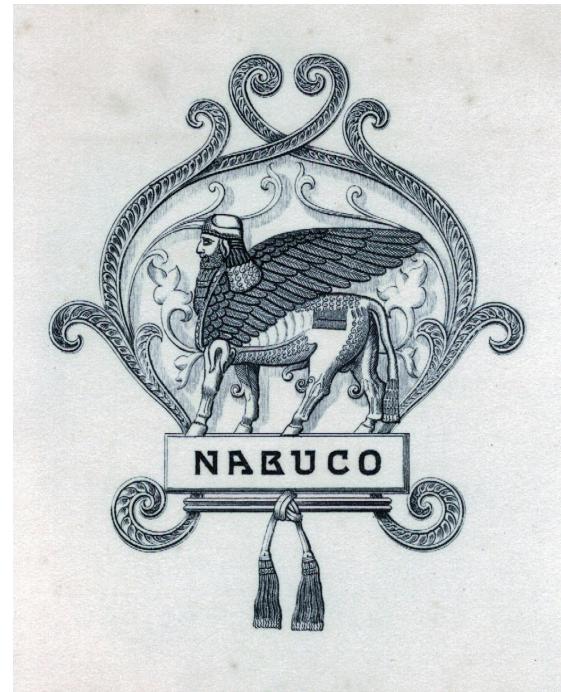
Bookplate by Ernst Lohse for Emil Göldi, Brazil, 1902.

The author is a retired librarian and the creator and administrator of the Caçadora de Exlibris (Ex libris hunter) channel, which comprises a website, blog, YouTube channel and Facebook and Instagram pages. Mary worked at the Library of the National Museum of Fine Arts (MNBA) in Rio de Janeiro from 1986 to 2019. In 2016, the MNBA was one of five Brazilian

museums selected to participate in the Google Arts Project, aimed at promoting national museums and democratising access to their collections through virtual exhibitions. One of these, dedicated to ex libris, 'From the Books: Ex-libris in MNBA Collections', was developed under Mary's direction. This work required cataloguing 16 ex libris from the book collection,



Baron José Smith de Vasconcellos, Brazil, 19th century



Joaquim Nabuco, Brazil, 19th century

conducting integrated research across museum, archival and library holdings, high-resolution digitisation, preparing texts in Portuguese and English, and organising metadata for the platform; it remains available as a virtual exhibition (see <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/from-the-books-exlibris-in-mnba-collections-museu-nacional-de-belas-arts/IgXRlgtJ2iR2JQ?hl=en>)

This experience sparked Mary's enduring fascination with ex libris, which has since become central to her professional and personal journey. In Brazil, the ex libris tradition is relatively recent compared to that of Europe. The earliest known Brazilian example, probably dating from the late eighteenth century, belonged to Manoel de Abreu Guimarães, a merchant and administrator of the Santa Casa de Sabará in Minas Gerais; his extensive library preserved this rare artifact, now held at the National Library. Bibliophile Rubens Borba de Moraes suggested that Father José Correia da Silva may have owned an earlier ex libris, a possibility discussed by librarian Thalles Siciliano in one of the Caçadora de Exlibris live sessions. The nineteenth century armorial bookplate is known for Viscount of Rio Branco (1819–

1880), an influential political figure of the Brazilian Empire, whose son, the Baron of Rio Branco (1845–1912), is considered the country's first prominent ex libris collector. The bookplates of prominent Brazilians are shown, including for Baron José Smith de Vasconcellos (1817–1903), writer and statesman, Joaquim Nabuco (1849–1910) and naturalist and zoologist Emil August Göldi (1859–1917).

Interest in Brazilian ex libris reached a peak in the 1940s and 1950s, a period marked by the activity of talented artists and collectors, the organising of exhibitions, and the creation of associations that promoted this miniature art. A landmark event was the 1st Brazilian Ex Libris Exhibition, held in 1942 at MNBA, which aligned Brazil with international movements recognising the value of ex libris. The exhibition showcased the richness and diversity of national production. Though the practice fell into relative obscurity in subsequent decades, it has experienced a revival since the 2000s, fuelled by academic research, specialised events, and thematic exhibitions. Today, ex libris continue to be found in books within libraries and private collections, but they are also valued as collectible objects and

displayed in museums and exhibitions worldwide.

Among the prominent figures in modern Brazilian ex libris are Alberto Lima (1898–1971), a military officer, poet, painter, and designer who created over 600 ex libris and is regarded as the 'poet of ex libris'; Stella Maris Bertinazzo (1946–2001), a visual arts professor and printmaker who founded the Xylography Atelier at the University of Brasília and published the influential book *Exlibris: object of desire*; Paulo Berger (1922–2003), a paediatrician and historian who collected over 800 ex libris and developed a virtual catalogue of Brazilian ex libris; and Jorge de Oliveira (1936–2018), a student of Alberto Lima, prolific ex libris creator, designer and heraldic artist.

It was in this context of rediscovery that Mary Komatsu emerged as the Caçadora de Exlibris, dedicating herself to the study, dissemination, and preservation of this cultural heritage. She participated in the academic project 'The Eloquence of Books: Bibliographic Provenance Marks' (Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, 2018–2020) and is a member of the Ex Libris Brazil Group (GELB), established during the pandemic. The inspiration for the channel's name came

from two sources: the Caçadores de Bibliotecas (Library Hunters) blog by librarian and writer Soraia Magalhães, with whom Mary has collaborated, and the sculpture Diana the Huntress, the Roman goddess of the hunt and the moon, a copy of which is in the MNBA collection.

The Caçadora de Exlibris channel seeks to explore, promote, collaborate, and share this universe of miniature artworks; support events and publications; preserve the history and personalities of Brazilian exlibrism; and inspire new generations to create their own ex libris and collections. Mary's presence on social media began in 2018 with an Instagram profile, expanded to Facebook, and in 2020 gained momentum with the launch of the YouTube channel. During the pandemic, she launched a weekly live series with guests from Brazil and abroad, including librarians, bibliophiles, artists, collectors, historians, restorers, and writers, establishing the channel as a space for exchange, research, and appreciation of this unique art form.

Today, the Caçadora de Exlibris remains active on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and its website, representing the continuation of the exlibris tradition in the digital era. Through her collection, research, and accessible content, Mary Komatsu fulfills her mission of bringing people closer to this fascinating universe of ownership marks, preserving and promoting this singular art, inspiring fresh perspectives, and motivating future generations of collectors and creators.

Donation of Ex Libris collection of Dr W Niel Gunson

Recently the Society received an unexpected communication from Scott Coleman of Canberra, an executor of the estate of the late Dr W Niel Gunson (1930–2023). Niel was an eminent historian of the Pacific with diverse interests in Aboriginal history, royalty,



Photo of Dr W Niel Gunson by Dr David Hilliard, 2018

heraldry and genealogy, the decorative arts and collecting (amongst many other fields). He was also a voracious bibliophile, assembling a library of around 100,000 books. Amongst all his other gatherings, he had an eclectic collection of bookplates and literature on the subject, which comprised bookplates and book labels dating from the early-18th century to the late-20th century, many armorial and some pictorial. Scott informed me that he would be pleased if the New Australian Bookplate Society would accept Niel's collection as a gift, and I promptly accepted.

In Scott's words, notable examples in Niel's collection include the ex libris of the good, the bad, and the ugly. My quick assessment of the bookplate portion of the collection is as follows:

- Album of 73 Australian, NZ and some foreign bookplates put together by Pat Lawlor, a NZ journalist and founder of the New Zealand Ex Libris Society who worked in Sydney
- Album of British origin, containing 80 armorial bookplates mounted using stamp hinges. Notable are those for Sir Robert Peel (British Prime Minister); John Percival, 1st Earl of Egmont (a founder of the Colony of Georgia); General George Harris, 1st Baron Harris (who stormed the stronghold of Seringapatam in Mysore

in 1799, where Tipu Sultan died in its defence); and Granville Leveson-Gower, 1st Earl Granville (Whig statesman and diplomat)

- Four modern folders containing about 150 loose bookplates collected by Dr Gunson, again mainly from Australia and NZ, but some foreign as well
- A few loose bookplates for Mussolini, Hitler and some others

Apart from the bookplates themselves, there are a small number of bookplate books spanning 1924 to 2024, including some of P Neville Barnett's and some from overseas, plus some copies of the (UK) Bookplate Society's *Journal* from the 1980s. Also, a crest album - which reflects the very Victorian-era pursuit of collecting crests of royalty and the aristocracy, landed families, clubs, societies, military units, naval vessels etc - dated from 1881 which has no bookplates in it.

After canvassing members of the Committee, my feeling is that we should focus on the bookplates themselves (including keeping the Pat Lawlor and British armorial albums intact) and over time organise the 140-150 loose bookplates in some sort of order and suitable storage. Over a period, we could digitise and upload to our Flickr page those not in the Irene Mort collection.

In relation to the armorial designs, I would like to propose that we work with the Heraldry Society on describing and cataloguing this subset.

We propose that some of the items would be offered for sale, initially to members and afterwards on the open market. This would raise a significant amount of money for the Society. Dr Gunson did not have his own bookplate, but I have commissioned a bookplate (at my own expense) to insert in the books and albums so that when some items are of necessity dispersed, their provenance will be clear and they will retain identification that they are 'From the Dr W Niel Gunson Bookplate Collection'.

Please keep an eye out for a list of the items to be offered for sale to members, as they will be priced at a significant discount from the current market value.

MIF

Princess Michael's bookplate – or is it?

By Bryan Welch, London

Many British bookplate collectors like to collect royal bookplates. They are scarce and expensive as they do not often come onto the market. This 'bookplate' is for Princess Michael (born Baroness Marie-Christine von Reibnitz, 1945-) who is married to Prince Michael of Kent (1942-) a grandson of King George V, nephew of George VI and cousin of the late Queen Elizabeth II. Wikipedia puts him as 53rd in line for the throne. The British popular press has long had it in for Princess Michael, and the account of her on Wikipedia is a catalogue of 'scandals'. It also notes that as an infant she was brought to Australia with her mother and elder brother and was educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Rose Bay, Sydney (now Kincoppal-Rose Bay).

When I saw a copy of *Crowned in a far country* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson,

1986) written by Princess Michael and advertised as having her bookplate I snapped it up. When it arrived the bookplate, however, looked odd. Why was there a big blank space at the bottom? It was some time before, as my father would have said, the penny dropped. The term bookplate has always meant different things to different people. Some book dealers when asked 'Do you have any bookplates?' will gesture towards a box of prints torn out of books. Online the term is found referring to the printed plates which are signed by authors en masse to be stuck into copies of their books which are then copies. I treasure Margaret's book of memoirs signed

The New Australian Bookplate Society was invited by the Print Council of Australia, which oversees the Works on Paper segment of the Art Fair, to give a bookplate demonstration on Friday 12 September at the cavernous and lively Carriageworks venue. In attendance to demonstrate their personal approaches to bookplate design and execution were Jessica Le and Brigitta Summers, both artist-members with a strong interest in and connection with bookplates. Visitors to the space stopped at our bench, attracted by both the visual impact of the posters and bookplates displayed on the table and by Jessica and Brigitta's bookplate production activities. Jessica created personalised complimentary calligraphic designs for passers-by, many of whom it seems had not been aware of bookplates up to that point. Brigitta printed off copies of her striking linocut bookplates and handed them to visitors, fascinated, as we all are, by the unexpected appearance of a crisp black and white print from an inky linoleum block. Our session was topped off by a

by her on the title page: I would not feel the same if it just had her autograph on a stuck in label (as was the case for her later books).

The Prince Michael ‘signature plate’ started off as a drawing of Princess Michaels’s arms by Archbishop Bruno Heim (1911–2003) which was made into a bookplate. Bruno Heim was the first ambassador from the Holy See to the Court of St James (to which ambassadors to the UK are accredited) since the Reformation. He was the leading ‘heraldist’ in the Catholic church designing arms for four popes. So that is what the Princess Michael bookplate is: the big blank space is for her signature. Perhaps I should prize it for *not* being signed!



Notes & happenings

The Society at Sydney Contemporary/ Paper 2025

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‘Bookplate’ by Bruno Heim for Princess Michael of Kent

sold as 'signed copies'. I treasure Margaret Thatcher's first book of memoirs signed



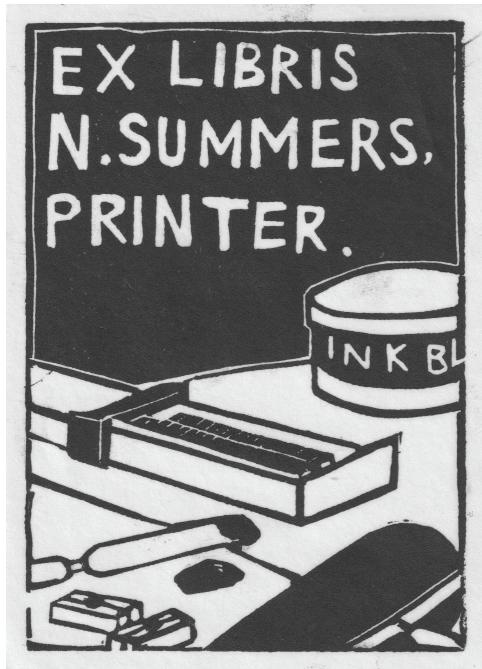
The Society's table at Sydney Contemporary, 12 Sept. 2025,
(l-r) Brigitta Summers, Jessica Le, Mark Ferson

visit from a party accompanying the Consul-General of the Netherlands. A thankyou is due to Akky Van Ogtrop, Print Council President and Society member, for the invitation to give demonstrations at the Fair and the opportunity to raise the profile of bookplates.

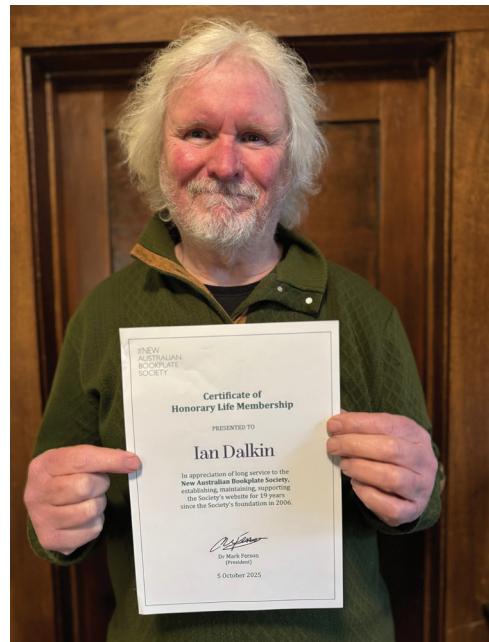
A thank you to Ian Dalkin for 19 years of amazing support

Members and other visitors to the New Australian Bookplate Society website at <https://www.bookplatesociety.org.au/> are unlikely to be aware that, until recently, it was created, structured, maintained and 'troubleshoot' without any payment by one person, Ian Dalkin. I met Ian through Elisabeth Bastian who co-founded the Society with me; Ian is Lis's partner and way back in 2006 volunteered to help out with the Society's proposed website. His Blue Mountains-based business Site Rescue specialises in web design, support and generally getting damaged web sites back up and running. Ian got our broken website up and running without complaint on more than one occasion, and he provides the same free web design and support service to a number of other volunteer-run organisations.

The Committee recently acknowledged Ian's massive volunteer contribution to the life of the Society by awarding him Honorary Life Membership 'In appreciation of long service to the New Australian Bookplate Society, establishing, maintaining, supporting the Society's website for 19 years since the Society's foundation in 2006.' Thank you, Ian!



Linocut bookplate by Brigitta Summers for Nick Summers, 2016



Ian Dalkin with his Honorary Life Membership award (photo: Lis Bastian)

Publications

Norman Lindsay. *Artful cats*. Bungendore, NSW: Odana Editions, 2001; p. [6]. Features Norman Lindsay's cat bookplate in pen-and-ink for Margaret Coen

Edwin Wilson. *Stardust painter-poet II. Edwin Wilson: paintings and poems*. Sydney: Artarmon Galleries & Woodbine Press, 2020; p. 50. Pen-and-ink bookplate design for Barry Richardson, 1969

Editorial

This number of the *Newsletter* shows how varied and eclectic is the subject of bookplates, ranging in time and place from early nineteenth century Brazil to demonstrations of modern bookplate production by Society members Jessica Le and Brigitta Summers at the Sydney Contemporary Art Fair 2025.

My thanks are extended to author Mary Komatsu for allowing me to reproduce her article on Brazilian bookplates which originally appeared in the *FISAE Newsletter*, and to our London member, Bryan Welch, for his note on the 'bookplate' of Princess Michael of Kent. Bryan is working on a book on famous and interesting people with bookplates; it has a British focus, but Bryan is also seeking suggestions for Australians who contributed to UK life and had bookplates. Please contact me if you have any ideas and I will put you in touch with Bryan, or you can find his email address in the *Directory of members 2023*.

Two more than pleasant recent happenings are worth reporting in this *Newsletter*. Somewhat out of the blue the Society received a gift of the Bookplate Collection of the late Dr W Niel Gunson. We are still assessing the collection, but it includes some valuable historic and modern bookplates as well as associated literature. In other glad tidings, the Committee has granted Honorary Life Membership to Ian Dalkin who quietly and without fuss created, maintained and

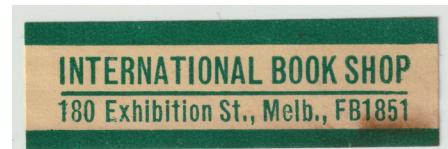
supported the Society's website from its foundation in 2006 up to mid-2025. A huge thank you to Ian for 19 years of voluntary support, and now also to Hon. Secretary and Social Media Secretary, Jessica Le, for taking on this big task! And this is a good time to acknowledge the great work of Dr Caren Florance who designs our *Newsletter* and other publications—thank you Caren!

It is wonderful to welcome new members: Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and Lisa Sherif (both Vic.); Aoife Keane, and Rare Books & Cultural Collections at University of Sydney Library (both NSW).

Another big anniversary is coming around: late 2026 will mark the 20th anniversary of the formal establishment

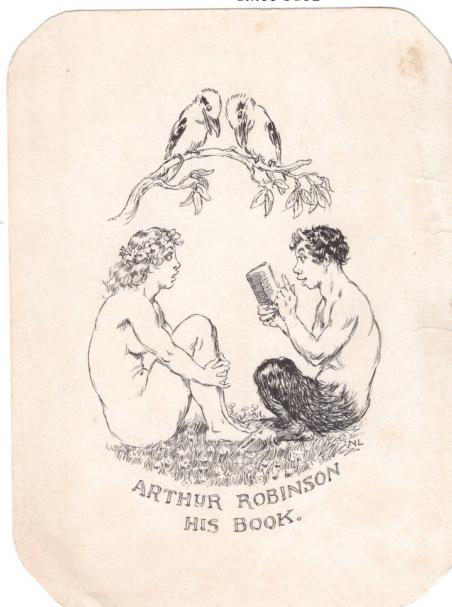
of the Society, so please get creative, put your thinking caps on, it would be terrific if events could be held by groups of members around the country!

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I wish all members and other readers compliments of the Season, and heartfelt hopes for less strife and conflict in the World in 2026.



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