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# Bound to succeed

Bookbinding has brought Marysa de Veer huge job satisfaction - and an encounter with the Queen. Philip Keeson meets a woman passionate about her ancient craft

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**A** DIMLY LIT, cluttered and pecky workshop, a cloud of fine dust floating in the sunlight from a small south window, the smell of leather and glue and musty old books being refixed. This was the vision floating around in my head while driving through the leafy lanes of Leam, but it was soon turned upside down.

In reality, a small, brightly lit studio with a large picture window, overlooking an orchard and small acre of tarmac just the window, is the real home for Otter Bookbinding and Master Bookbinder Marysa de Veer.

The history of bookbinding stretches back through time: the first true books we would recognise were oriental and made of narrow strips of palm leaves or bark, bound between two pieces of wood and stitched with a leather thong. As early as the sixth century AD, scrolls were binding books of vellum leaves and wooden boards.

This craft has evolved through the centuries and the traditions have been passed down and refined with modern materials, into the bound books we know today. And business is brisk. Marysa and her assistant Karen have thousands of pages of students' dissertations to be bound before the end of the day, and



Marysa de Veer at work on her latest project

each one is individually produced to suit the size of manuscript.

The pages are printed and holes drilled along the left-hand edge. These are then sewn together with linen thread, folded red cloth or gold on, and evasore ribbons cut and placed inside. Headbands are then glued on to the top and bottom of the spine, followed by a lining material.

At least two lines cloth is glued on to grey board, and specially cut manila spine pieces are placed

between the two boards as they wrap around the stack of pages.

The edges of the cover are turned in around the cover material and finished. Gold embossing is applied using a Marshall hand blocking press before the endpapers are pasted down. The result is a beautiful case-bound thesis.

Marysa admits to her early failed attempts at secretarial work, and then career advice directed her talents towards the craft industry. "I picked on bookbinding and

"It was really difficult juggling a young family and a new business but it was worth all the effort as the business is now approaching its 20th year" Marysa de Veer of Otter Bookbinding

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completed a two-year Diploma at Guildford College, which gave me enough knowledge to start a business on my own.

She started off working from home and, after her divorce, moved to the Old Post Office in Otterham and continued to build the business from there.

"It was really difficult juggling a young family and a new business," says Mayra, "but it was worth all the effort as the business is now approaching its 20th year."

Her assignments are many, varied and interesting. Mayra and her team of collaborative bookbinders, book restorers and gold leafers, have worked on some special projects in the past.

They bound books for Wimbledon winners, designed and bound a book for the Queen to celebrate a major centenary, and made custom fibre-style cloth bookends for a performance racing yacht that was built in Holland.

"I even spent time working in the royal libraries at Windsor Castle and was there helping to restore books on the day of the fire," recalls Mayra. "Oh, and I met the Queen and Queen Mum."



Mayra has developed a process for producing antique books, which she has been making in Paris for the past two years.

"Conservation work is fascinating and I have loved learning the various processes involved in restoring small and beautiful books."

A Christian Bible Bible is in the process of being restored, and it's an absorbing process.

Damaged pages are gently cleaned with a 'winko sponge', which removes dirt, like a gentle eraser will remove pencil marks, and the margins are cleaned with a light brushing.

"I love my work and look forward to every day. You cannot second-guess what will come next."

Damaged page edges are repaired using a Japanese long-fibered paper called 'Kuroishi'. This is laid on to the edge of the page to be repaired, and stretched to draw the edge of the two pages. The Kuroishi is then torn to shape, pasted with a wheat-free starch called 'Shojo' paste, and then laid between sheets of blotting paper and glass to fit the damaged area. When dry, the paper matches the torn edge of the original exactly and, because of the starch-free glue, the whole process is reversible in the future.

"I love my work and look forward to every day," says Mayra. "The work is varied and you cannot second-guess what is about to come through the door."

**Below:** Damaged pages have to be carefully restored



#### Find out more

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