



SOCIETY OF BOOKBINDERS. We turn now to our old friends the Society of Bookbinders; and we'll start with a sort of editorial that appeared in the June 1993 issue of their *NATIONAL NEWSLETTER* #9:

"A DYING CRAFT

I'm going to begin by being somewhat morbid. Within the next thirty years or so the last of the traditionally trade-trained binders will have gone; those who currently write our text-books and give us such illuminating demonstrations will be dead. A great body of knowledge and experience will go with them, because our craft is not learned only from the books. The seven-year term of training is already history, and very few apprenticeships are still available.

The passing of these people will be very significant because of the current training situation in this country. College-based courses are closing, none are opening; bookbinding - and more particularly book conservation - form a smaller and smaller part of such courses that exist. Bookbinders now generally emerge from two- or three-year courses into which a great many other related subjects are packed, and there is no possibility of acquiring the same facility with materials gained through an apprenticeship. At the moment, training has to be supplemented by whatever means possible, and since collectively we are handling historically vital material, this is clearly inadequate.

Until recently, Greg Harrowing was running excellent masterclasses at Soundwell College in Bristol. He brought in the likes of Bernard Middleton and Don Gubbins to give intensive courses in particular aspects and techniques, and it was possible to learn a lot very quickly. Greg has retired, the equipment is dispersed, and so passes this opportunity. There has always been the assistantship, whereby one works with an established binder for a period. This is available to very few since not every business can absorb the cost of training, which can be considerable, and for the trainee there is a small risk that what is really wanted from them is cheap labour.

Each generation always feels that standards are falling, and in some ways this is true; what this disguises is the fact that requirements change. Previously most bookbinding was by hand; this century has seen the rapid