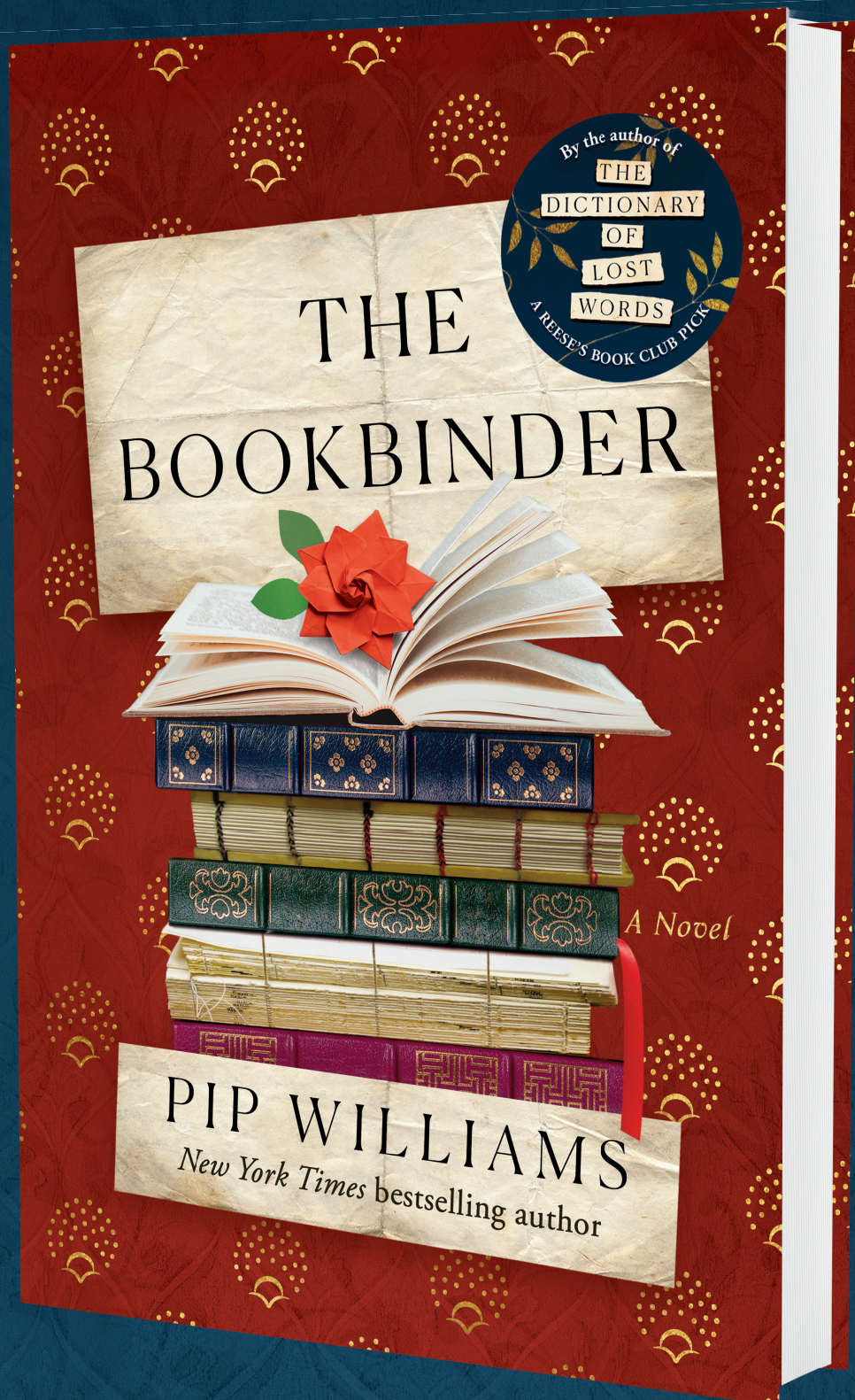


Book Club Kit



A Letter from the Author

The idea for this story came to me in the archives of Oxford University Press. I was searching for details that would lend truth to another novel I was writing, *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, about the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I found detail aplenty, in photographs and news clippings, administrative records, and in the *Clarendonian*, a wonderful in-house publication begun in 1919 and designed to give workers at the Press an opportunity to reconnect with their Press family after four years of war.

Within the pages of the *Clarendonian*, press staff remembered the fallen, and they were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of the war, though very few did—in 1919, it seemed, most people wanted to put the experience behind them. Instead, there were advertisements for performances by the press's dramatic society, band, and choir; reports about the success of their sporting teams; a notice about the upcoming flower and vegetable show, which would showcase produce grown at Port Meadow; and there were updates on the preparation of a war memorial for the forty-five press men who had fought and died for their country.

But most pages in the *Clarendonian* were dedicated to biographies of press staff, past and present. Apprentices and foremen from the composing room to the foundry penned funny, articulate, and compassionate anecdotes about themselves and others. This is what I love about archives—the voices of people whose names will never end up in a book of history, telling me what history felt like. I hit the jackpot with the *Clarendonian*, but something was missing; something is always missing.

I knew that dozens of women had worked on the “girls’ side” of the bindery during the Great War, but they were neither authors nor subjects of biographies in the *Clarendonian*. When I searched through the rest of the archives for their voices, I found very little. There were a couple of black-and-white images of women and girls sitting in neat rows along long benches, folding large sheets of printed pages. There was a silent film made in 1925 by the Federation of British Industries, about the making of a book at Oxford University Press—in it, a woman gathers sections with such rhythm and grace it seems like she’s dancing. And there was a farewell address to the press controller, Mr. Hart, on the occasion of his retirement.

When I turned the pages of this address, I came across the bindery girls—forty-seven of them, from Kathleen Ford to Hannah Dawson. They had signed their names, each in her own characteristic script. It was proof they existed. That was all I had, but it was enough. I started to imagine a woman dancing along the gathering bench. I wondered what book she was gathering onto her arm, and then I wondered if she’d stopped to read any of it. Suddenly, I had a character.

This story is fiction, and all its main characters have sprung from my imagination, but the places they live, work, volunteer, and study are real.

—Pip Williams

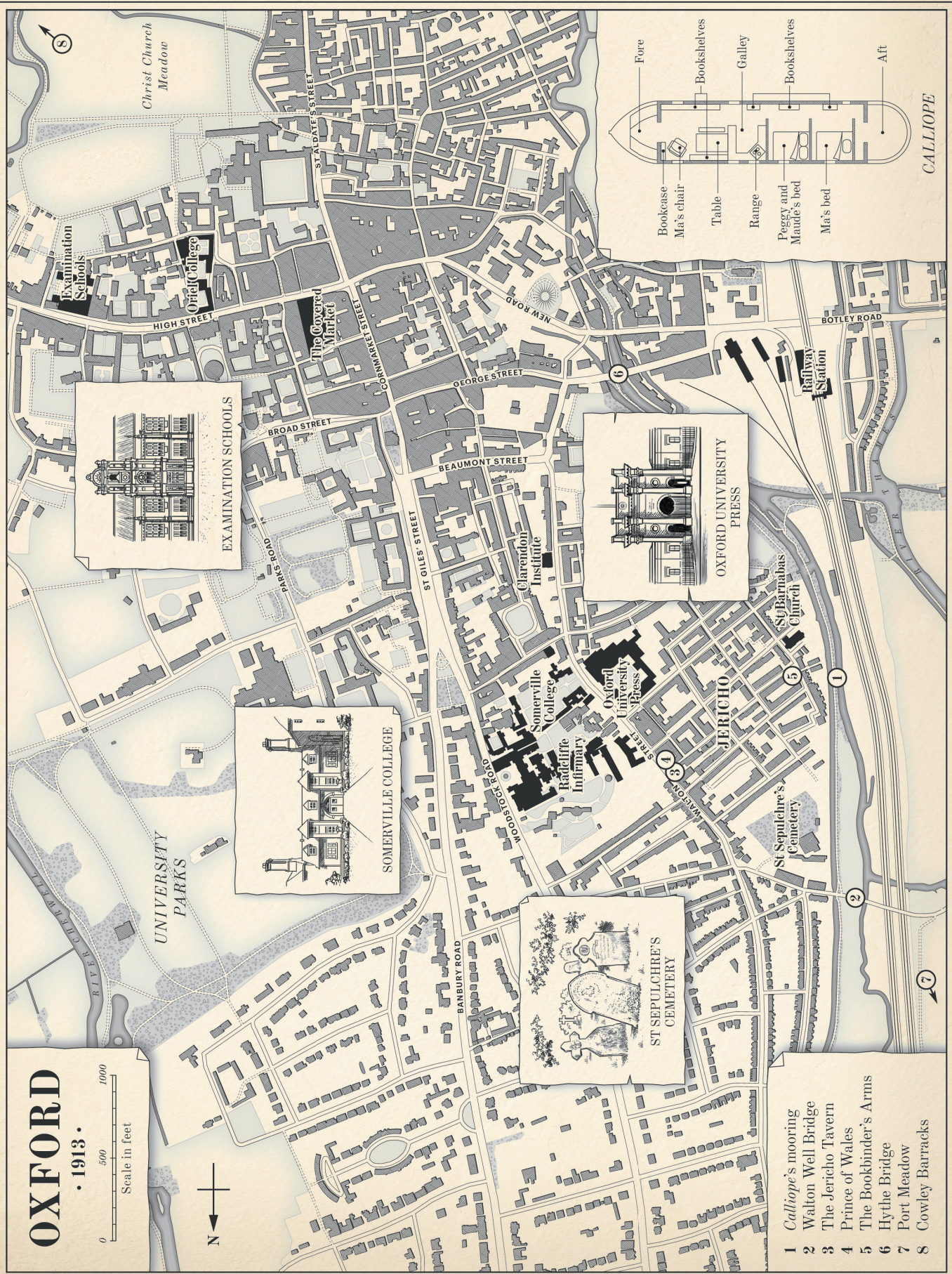
Discussion Questions

1. What are the themes of *The Bookbinder*? How would you describe this novel to a friend?
2. Consider the twin sisters Peggy and Maude. In what ways are they unique? How are they similar? How does the dynamic between the two inform the novel? What does their relationship reveal about sisterhood and family?
3. Aside from Peggy and Maude, which characters resonated with you most, and why?
4. The dialogue. The plot. The Oxford setting. What did you love most about the novel, and why?
5. Have you read other novels set during World War I, or any other conflicts? How is *The Bookbinder* different?
6. How did the arrival of refugees heighten the narrative? What did you think of the various reactions to the refugees?
7. Discuss the conflict between Peggy's desire to educate herself and her love for the Belgian soldier.
8. How did this novel make you think about the power of books and the written word? What books have you read that have transformed your life, and how?
9. Let's go deeper about the relationship between reading and power. Why do you think some governments ban books? What is it really about?
10. At its heart, *The Bookbinder* is a novel about knowledge—who creates it, who can access it, and what truths get lost in the process. What did you learn?
11. What did you discover about the process of book binding?
12. How did you feel when you finished the book?
13. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?

OXFORD

• 1913 •

Scale in feet
0 500 1000



- 1 Calliope's mooring
- 2 Walton Well Bridge
- 3 The Jericho Tavern
- 4 Prince of Wales
- 5 The Bookbinder's Arms
- 6 Hythe Bridge
- 7 Port Meadow
- 8 Cowley Barracks

The Craft of Bookbinding

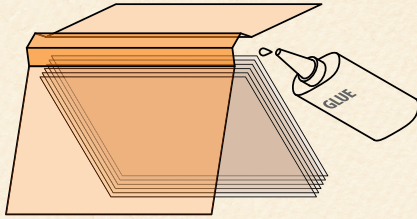
You will need paper, glue (Elmer's or rubber fabric adhesive), stiff cardboard (or corrugated), some fabric or leather (i.e., old jeans, old coats, or old curtains), a large binder clip, a box cutter, and a large eraser

The Pages of Your Book

STEP 1: Stack your paper neatly in at least 4 piles of 8 sheets.

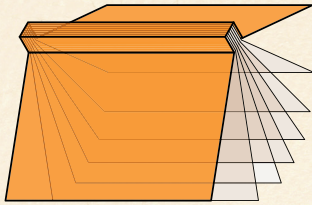
STEP 2: Fold each stack in half.

STEP 3: Unfold paper and flip over, so middle rises like a tent.



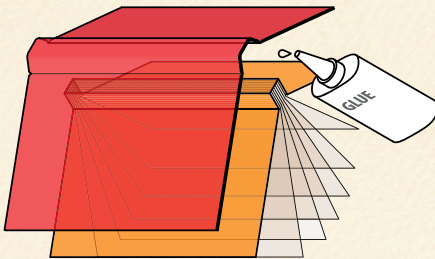
STEP 4: Staple the pages together at both ends of fold.

If you don't have a long stapler, place your stack on top of an eraser (under the crease where you want to staple) then open your stapler and push down firmly along crease. Turn pages over, pull off the eraser, and press down staple ends with blunt end of dinner knife. Repeat this step for other end.



STEP 5: Glue binding.

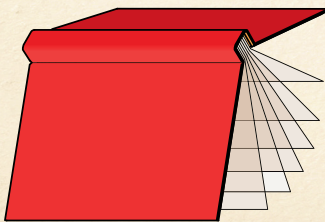
Cut a piece of fabric the same length as the four eight-sheet (32 pages) and about five times the thickness of all the stacks (folios) held together. (In other words: the bindings width leftover flaps, which will be used later to hold cover into place). Hold the folios tightly together, lining them up evenly, and clip folios together with binder clip. Apply glue to just the spines of the folios, but be careful not to let it drip down into the gaps between the folios. While glue is still wet, quickly flip the wad of folios and press them atop the piece of fabric. (Remember: some fabric should stick out both sides like flaps, which will eventually hold cover into place.)



The Covers of Your Book

STEP 6: Make the covers.

Place bound folios flat on your stiff or corrugated cardboard (so that bound edge lines up with straight edge of cardboard), and trace marker around remaining three edges, allowing for a quarter of an inch on each of the three sides. Cut the cardboard and then repeat the process for back cover.



STEP 7: Make the book spine.

Stack flat: back cover, folios, front cover. Press them together and measure their combined thickness. Cut spine from cardboard so that it is the same height as your folios and as wide as your "thickness" measurement.

The Craft of Bookbinding

STEP 8: Make and cut material.

Position your back cover / spine / front cover onto your fabric or leather in reverse order, so back cover is to left of spine, and spine is to left of front cover. NOTE: When positioning, leave some space between covers and spine, about one or two thicknesses of the cardboard. Mark border around these elements so that there is about an inch beyond their edges. Cut out material.

STEP 9: Glue covers and spine into place.

Lay out your fabric or leather. Apply glue or rubber cement on one side of the covers and spine, and place them aligned in a neat row glue-side down on the “wrong” side of material (i.e., the side you don’t normally see). NOTE: Between the spine and each of the cover boards, there must be a space of about one or two thicknesses of the cardboard. So: laying out the elements like you did in Step 8.

STEP 10: Finish edges of cover.

Apply glue or rubber cement around outer edges of covers and spine, then fold material over the covers and spine to cover edges. Work one edge at a time. Do top, then bottom, then sides of covers. Try to make a neat job of corners.

STEP 11: Glue folio into cover.

Apply glue or rubber cement down the middle edges of covers, being careful NOT to get any glue on the spine board. Place the bound folio onto spine board and make sure ONLY the “wings” (remember those!) are glued to the cover boards. Wait until glue dries before moving to next step. At this stage, the book needs dry in the same position you placed it in. Support the vertical folio by placing heavy cans of food (chopped tomatoes?!) on both sides.

STEP 12: Cut out your interior book lining (aka: end pages).

Traditionally marbled paper was used for end pages, but you can use wrapping paper or brown paper bag paper.

NOTE: you want the end pages to be a fraction smaller than the folio’s height so that you can line it up neatly and twice as long as the folio’s width so that it covers the inside of the hard cover. Once you have cut out your end pages (two each for front and back) fold each in half.

STEP 13: Glue end pages in place.

Apply glue or rubber cement to inside of front cover and the first page of folio, then carefully place one half of the folded end paper onto the glue-covered first page of folio so that it lines up neatly with edge of paper. Then slowly press end paper toward joint where book meets cover, which should align with the fold of end paper, and continue to the edge of inside cover, making sure end paper covers up the folded over material along edges and corners. Repeat process for back cover.

Congratulations, you bound a book!

Visit instructable.com/how-to-bind-your-own-hardback-book for more information.