

## TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

## BOOKBINDING

**WHO WENT?** Lauris Morgan-Griffiths*Photographs Ben Anders***WHAT DID SHE LEARN?** How to make a little book**WHERE DID SHE GO?** Shetland

The world's least practical person has to be me – my fingers become sausages at the sight of any intricate task – and yet when I heard of artist and bookbinder Rachel Hazell's three-day bookmaking course in the remote setting of a lighthouse on one of the Shetland islands, I signed up voluntarily. I have long been an admirer of Rachel and her work, appreciating the perfection of her books, the tactility of the paper she uses and her intriguing, icy paper installations, so the thought of some of that creativity rubbing off on me was too good to resist.

When I arrive at my home for two days – a lighthouse, balanced precariously on the rocks at the end of the island of Bressay, a seven-mile ferry hop from Lerwick – people are already scurrying around, unloading paints, brushes, maps, cutting knives, scalpels, papers, threads and children's block-printing sets. There are nine women altogether from all over the UK: the Isle of Wight, Somerset, Cornwall, Scotland and two from Shetland itself.

For Rachel, this workshop is a labour of love. 'I was a bookworm as a child. Books are my whole life,' she says. This enthusiasm for her work has taken her to some wondrous, unexpected places: Antarctica, for example, where she taught bookmaking to passengers on an expedition ship. 'I see books



**BELOW Tutor Rachel Hazell's intricate hand-made books**  
**OPPOSITE Two workshoppers draw inspiration from the landscape**

in everything,' she says. In Antarctica, she saw them in the paperiness of the land; in the striations of icebergs and in the snow fields, which resembled blank paper. Last year, she got a job as assistant postmistress and penguin monitor there: 'For five months I watched the breeding cycle of penguins, the snow melt and the landscape change.'

## INSPIRATION ALL AROUND

Bressay is a very different landscape but one that Rachel enjoys as much. 'I love this island and being by the sea,' she says. 'I love the colours, the wave patterns and the





# COME ON, HAVE A GO...

## \* NEED TO KNOW

Rachel's next Bressay Lighthouse workshop is called 'Dictionaries and Definitions', and will be on 23-25 April 2010. She is also running a 'Maps, Charts and Other Discoveries' bookbinding course in St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, on 6-8 February 2010. For more information, visit [hazel.designsbooks.co.uk](http://hazel.designsbooks.co.uk). Her work is available by commission.

## \* WHERE TO STAY

Mucklehus B&B is 18 miles south of Lerwick and eight miles north of the airport at Sumburgh. It has just two



rooms but is extremely comfortable. Breakfasts are absolutely delicious.

Double room from £28 per person per night (01950 422370, [mucklehus.co.uk](http://mucklehus.co.uk)).

## \* HOW TO GET THERE

coast flew with British Airways from London Heathrow to Glasgow (and back from Edinburgh to Heathrow), then caught a Flybe flight operated by Loganair to Sumburgh, Shetland ([loganair.co.uk](http://loganair.co.uk)). For more details, see [visitsketland.com](http://visitsketland.com) and [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com).

## \* TAKE IT FURTHER

For an introduction and projects, see *Re-Bound* by Jeannine Stein (below, Quarry Books).



endlessness of it all. Inspiration can be found from every window of the lighthouse cottages and stimulates anyone to create a book.'

Our first task is to make badges describing how we came to be at Bressay and to reveal a little about ourselves. Mine is in the shape of a children's origami fortune teller, saying 'Creativity, Faith, Imagination, Hope' (all of which I need) – the fortune being 'Confidence, Success, Originality and Completion'. Rachel's motto is: 'Read Make Love Books' and says that she is found 'where

**ABOVE LEFT** More of Rachel's work **ABOVE RIGHT** Sketching ideas from the scenery **BELOW** Making the spine and cover of a book

there is water, paper, books, ice, words... islands'.

Then the bookmaking starts. Rachel maintains that, 'If you can sew on a button and fold a sheet of paper, you can make a book.' I can sew on a button, but my experience of paper began and ends with reading a newspaper. However, by lunchtime we have all made our first tiny, white book. Everyone else's is bound together by a neat chain stitch, while my line takes a more scenic journey down the spine.

## MAPS, CHARTS, DISCOVERIES

Things go slightly awry after lunch. Rachel has set us an ambitious binding method to learn: four lines of chain stitch across the spine. I am singled out as number one bungler and put on the simpler pamphlet stitch. Tension mounts and it's too much for one workshopper, who goes for a walk to let the elements calm her. But energy levels rise again when we complete our books and feel the pleasure of a job well done.

Next morning, the weather changes – skies are blue and the

sea glitters with sunlight. Some eager folk are up at six, stitching away. Ama Bolton, in her sixties, who has her own specialist publishing company, peers over her spectacles when I suggest she is showing great dedication. 'No, it's love. It really is,' she says.

Today's project is to make a book on the course topic 'Maps, Charts and Other Discoveries'. Some set to work, others wander outside, hoping that the sun, sea and wind will inspire. Some sketch, others collect things from around the lighthouse – sheep wool snagged on wire fencing, bits of lichen. I pick up a tangle of shredded newsprint, seed heads, tender white, downy bird feathers. Ama walks down to the little bay to collect stones. Seals bask on the jetty, then lumber into the sea to roll in the waves.

But when we return to the lighthouse, we find rumblings of anarchy. Shetlander Emma Gibson has mutinied. 'I just want to make books and leave the blank pages for others to fill later,' she says. Hazel Gray, the other Shetlander, is vehement that she is not good at

content. 'My book will be blank; I've nothing to say,' she says. Rachel knows Hazel from previous workshops. 'It's always the same with her,' she says. 'She will produce something amazing.' And Hazel does, charting her Shetland life.

Stress levels rise on Sunday as everyone scrambles to finish their books. My pages are illustrated, the binding started, but time runs out. All of a sudden, it is 4pm. Our work is laid out: books wrapped in maps and navigation charts, coloured threads trailing from the spine,

**ABOVE LEFT** The groups work hard to get their books finished in time **ABOVE RIGHT** Victorian Bressay Lighthouse, the setting for the workshop

amazing watercolours, snippets of poetry. Then, in a flurry of goodbyes, everyone rushes for the ferry.

The course has meant different things to different people: I enjoyed the camaraderie of the group and making my little books. Some simply enjoyed having time to themselves, others learning binding skills. But everyone agrees that it has been fun making things. 'It's being given permission to be a child again,' says one. That, plus our book creations and the experience of Bressay, are quite some gifts to take home.

Stress levels rise on Sunday as everyone scrambles to finish their books. OUR WORK is laid out: books wrapped in MAPS AND NAVIGATION CHARTS, coloured threads trailing from the spine, AMAZING WATERCOLOURS, snippets of poetry...