

In December, the Women's Auxiliary of the Victoria Art Gallery put on another of its interesting shows—Artists At Work. All of the artists were so interesting and so much worth watching that it was difficult to make a choice. However one man stood out for the interest he created in me, and that was the bookbinder, known to many as

The Hermit of Black Creek

Father Charles Brandt, who was once an Anglican clergyman, is now a Catholic hermit, and has led a most interesting and full life. He was at Cornell University studying ornithology during the time of the Second World War. He joined the U.S. Air Force and became a navigator on overseas service. At the war's end, he returned to Cornell for his degree, but found all was not right with his world.

"I found," he says, "that the America I came back to was not the America I had left as a student. Perhaps it was not all that changed, but to me it seemed that materialism was rampant.

"I didn't like the tremendous stress on money values, and the lack of any time at all for thought and contemplation. Perhaps I was already beginning to feel the need of a contemplative life. On top of that also, there were many unhappy war memories which I wanted to put behind me. In America I couldn't seem to do these things."

As a result of all this perplexity the graduate ornithologist left his native land to search for what, to him, would prove a meaningful way of life. His wanderings took him to Yorkshire in England, where he studied for the ministry of the Anglican Church.

While there, he also entered an Anglican monastery and was ordained priest by the Bishop of Wakefield. From there he returned to the United States, moving from place to place, always searching, and never, for a long time, finding the way of life for which he searched.

He worked as a chaplain at an Episcopalian private boys' school, and joined an Episcopalian hermitage. Still on the move, he lived for a while at a Benedictine monastery in Oklahoma, and then at a Trappist monastery in Dubuque, Iowa, for by this time he had become a Roman Catholic monk.

From Dubuque, he came to Vancouver Island to join a group of hermits who had their headquarters on a tract of land north of Courtenay on the Tsolum River.

Interestingly enough, this hermit group is the first such group on the North American continent, and while there, Father Brandt was ordained priest by Bishop Remi de Roo at the Church of Canadian Martyrs, and was the first hermit priest to be so ordained in 400 years.

This is a very condensed version of the monk's life, but while travelling from place to place, and especially while acting as chaplain at the Kent Boys' School, the strong desire for a life of quiet and prayer grew for Father Brandt. So much was this so that he began to realize that a lifetime spent among the laity was just not the answer for him.

He worries sometimes when outsiders accuse him of retreating from the world at a time when so much good help is needed. His answer to this is that continual prayer does have its place in the world and can be of definite help to those who may not even know they need that help.

It was with this strong desire for prayer and contemplation and the hermit way of life that Father Brandt had joined the hermits of Tsolum

River, and there he built his own hermitage, a 20-foot by 20-foot little building of rough cedar.

While at the Benedictine Monastery at Shawnee, Oklahoma, Father Brandt has worked in the monastery's bindery and it was there that he made the beginnings of what has now become his lay occupation.

Though book binding is one of the oldest crafts, it might well have fallen into disuse had it not been for the hermit monks of old, and in particular, the Benedictines who have made themselves famous, not only for their incomparable liqueur, Benedictine Brandy, produced in their French monasteries, but also for their finely bound books.

The history of the art of book binding is an interesting one. Without giving it too much thought, it may well be supposed that book binding naturally came into being with the first printing press, or perhaps when Johannes Gutenberg invented his printing press using, for the first time, movable type in the 15th. century. This is very far from the case.

The earliest type of 'books' were the Babylonian and Assyrian which were originally drawn on clay tablets or squares, which were then left out in the sun to dry and harden. Following the use of clay came the scrolls which were made of papyrus.

The earliest of these scrolls may well have been in use in the neighborhood of 2000 B.C. or even earlier when *The Book of the Dead* came into being. Or again, and perhaps more important, the famous *Papyrus Prisse* which is said to be the oldest book still in existence.

Our present day books, however, have no real connection with those of Babylonian times, but come to us in a line of direct descent from the Egyptian *Maxims of Ptah-Hotep*, which is believed to date from about the time of 2500 B.C.

By MARGARET BELFORD

Papyrus, as the name implies, came from a perennial reed-like plant of the sedge family which grew to a height of between six and 10 feet tall, and the material itself was made by pulping and drying the pith of the plant. It was easy, cheap and always to hand.

However, time was to prove that it had one great drawback in that, while its hard smooth shiny surface leant itself beautifully as a base for paints and inks, yet it was very sensitive to any form of damp, which caused it to dissolve and crumble away within a generation or two.

Notwithstanding this, papyrus continued to be in popular use as a book material as late as the 10th century, by which time its popularity had spread to both Greece and Rome. The dryness of Egypt has proved a boon in that it is still possible to make valuable finds of papyrus scrolls in Egyptian tombs today.

Books produced lovingly and adorned with silver and gold and fine gems continued to be produced until the long slow dissolution of the Roman Empire, which event completely annihilated the book trade as it had been known up to that time.

However, it was at this point that the hermit monks link us up once again with Father Brandt, because for centuries the monk scribes were the only people who could combine the five most necessary attributes which were time, scholarship, skill, love and patience.

To produce a book at that time called for a lifetime of dedication and patience for not only were the books laboriously transcribed by the dedicated scribes in the scriptoria, a room given over for the purpose in nearly every monastery, but the monk scribe was also the illuminator and binder as well.

Nor did these scribemonks work in any degree of comfort for, in the main, most of their work was done standing up. A visit to the re-

mains of the old Battle Abbey in Sussex, England, will show one the scriptoria of that building still, to a great extent, intact, and there it will be seen that the very deep embrasures at the windows, and the gradual sloping of the stone would serve very well indeed as an easel on which to arrange their work. But just think of the cold and discomfort under which they must have worked!

As previously mentioned, Father Brandt had learned something about bookbinding while at Shawnee, and this knowledge he now proceeded to put to use as a means of earning his livelihood. He had always been good at working with his hands, and even as a Boy Scout all handicrafts had appealed to him.

He recalled what he had learned from the one monk who had some training in the art of bookbinding, and realized that these lessons were just the beginning, and that to make any headway at all in his work he would have to read and study the subject in depth, even as he was studying his religion.

Another very pressing need was tools and equipment — hard to come by, and expensive to buy.

After some thought on the matter, he wrote to the trappist monks at Lafayette, Oregon, and as a result they responded by sending him almost the complete contents of their bindery. Among the items received were a guillotine, which is used for trimming book edges; a backing machine, needed for holding books, and actually also a device for rounding the back of the book and putting on the hinge section of the book; parts of a hot stamping machine for applying titles; and lastly a sewing frame used for sewing the folded pages or signatures together.

With all these tools of the trade to hand, it was not long before Father Brandt got to work. As a priest, he tells me he quite frequently reads Mass or preaches for fellow priests, but, of course, his main occupation is naturally book binding and restoration work, since this is how he earns his living.

He works fairly closely with a number of universities, doing restoration work for specialty collections in both Canada and the U.S.A.

A lot of the work he does is pure restoration, though he also does fine bindings for new books as well. Just recently, he completed three volumes of Fenwick Lansdowne's *Birds Across Canada*, doing these in full leather with gilt.

Probably the oldest book he has restored to date is a Czechoslovakian Bible for Walter Koerner, dated 1450. This book, he tells me, originally had wooden boards. Whatever possible, bindings are kept as they have great value.

Father Brandt, however, does not pick and choose when work comes his way. Thus, when the federal fisheries at Nanaimo set up a hatchery and pier at Wolf Creek and were in need of a technician, since the hermit was right on the spot, he became that man, and this he managed to fit in with his bookbinding and his contemplation.

If a hermit may be called lonely this certainly couldn't apply to Charles Brandt who may have hardly a moment of the day to call his own!

In the summer of 1971, Father Brandt went to San Francisco for four months to learn more about paper restoration and the intricacies of gold tooling. While there, he studied under three outstanding bookbinders, all of them women. They were Stella Patri, a noted paper restorer who had taught at the biblioteca in Florence; Mrs. Peter Fahey, dean of west coast bookbinders; and Mrs. Barbara Hiller who studied gilt work in Paris.

He would still like to study further, either in Florence or at the Library of Congress. He tells me that Peter Waters, a noted bookbinder and restorer, who was the key figure in setting up library restoration in Florence after the Arno flood, is now Chief Conservator at the Library of Congress.

In restoring a leather-bound book Father Brandt tells me, he first removes the leather spine of the book to examine the cords and to