



FORTHCOMING FROM THE FLORIN PRESS:

MAKE - READY

An essential skill for
wood engravers and letterpress printers

GRAHAM WILLIAMS

Make-ready will be published on 14 November 2024 and be available direct from The Florin Press via their website, by calling 01233 712774 or by emailing info@florinpress.com

This book will not be available from Oak Knoll.

American friends should email us as we can provide favourable shipping terms.

The edition is 88 pages at A4 size, printed in full colour throughout with 102 illustrations. It is typeset in Joanna Nova and printed on 150gsm Matt Volume paper. The printing and binding is by Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion, Wales.

The publication will be in two editions:

STANDARD EDITION

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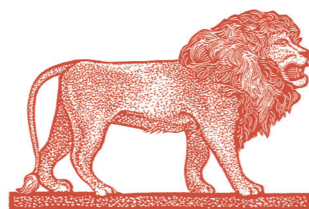
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Fig. 23 (above) and Fig. 24 (opposite page, left). From the tops of pages 80 and 81, Cranach Press Hamlet, 1595.

CHAPTER THREE: MINIMAL ENGRAVING – MAXIMUM EFFECT

'THE TRAGEDIE OF HAMLET PRINCE OF DENMARKE'
BY EDWARD GORDON CRAIG



Fig. 27. A figure reading in leaves, from the half-title, Cranach Press Hamlet, 1595.

Theatre was literally in Edward Gordon Craig's blood. His mother was Ellen Terry, the Shakespearean actress who, in 1888, famously wore the green beetle wing dress as Lady Macbeth in Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre in London.

In 1921, Edward Gordon Craig staged Constantin Stravinsky's *Hamlet* in Moscow. For a time he had carved wood to design figures and staging, and from them he developed his unique woodcuts and engravings as one of the ways he designed for the theatre.

No wonder then that Count Harry Kessler called on Craig in



Fig. 25. The Bird Dancer, from page 87 (reduced to 94%). Cranach Press Hamlet, 1595.

1922 for his Cranach Press edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The Great War intervened and it was not until 1928 that the German edition was published, with an English edition in 1929. English country and craftsmanship were a major part of the production. Craig cut the illustrations on wood, Eric Gill cut the title. Edward Johnston designed the type and a number of other English craftsmen worked on the book with Kessler and his team.

Some of the illustrations are partly 'burnished' darker. The mask of *The Bird Dancer* is a vital touch, this tiny detail brings the whole design into three dimensions. The skill of the pressman is obvious, and either he or Craig, or more probably both, created the make-ready that produced these dramatic effects. These tones can only have been created by overlays pressing more ink onto the paper accurately, underlays would not have worked.



Fig. 29. The engraving filled with chalk (below), Photo, Tony Doherty.

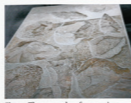


Fig. 72. The engraved surface seen in a raking light (below), Photo, Tony Doherty.

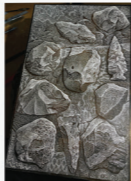


Fig. 73. The engraving filled with chalk (below), Photo, Tony Doherty.



Fig. 74. The underlay tipped onto an oily proof (reduced to 68%).

on. I wandered along the red rock background seeing the attention that Tony's graver had given to it, and the rock scratches became familiar. I needed to explore both the detail and the whole image before I put it into a press. Tony had forwarded me, 'the thickness of the block was a cause of some of my problem, it varies in different parts, one side thicker than the other'. This is a large block and that was no great surprise – a number of both old and contemporary blocks I have printed were similar. I measured all around the block and it did vary from 23.03mm at the lowest to 25.43mm at the highest, the left side of the block was lower than the right. I took the block to my largest Albion press, and made an underlay by tearing pieces from a series of proofs printed on dry paper. One corner needed more help than the rest. The underlay varied from 0.33mm to 0.46mm thick, seen in figure 74 where it is laid on top of an oily proof.

The moment came when I had to think how I might work with such fine detail to produce a make-ready. It was distinctly awkward to lean into the large



Fig. 75. A removable overlay. The rectangular hole at the top of the partially removed overlay, was located over a rectangle of thick card on the tympan to secure it.

Albion press to paste small patches onto the lay sheet on the tympan. I decided to take the make-ready sheet from the press to a bench and work on it there. I had an illuminating magnifying glass on a movable arm on the bench, so working on the sheet would be much easier. Whatever removable system I made had to be simple. It had to be easy to return the make-ready to the tympan several times and with absolute accuracy and no movement at all. I made a simple frame from thin card that I then fixed firmly in place on the tympan. This held the removable sheet with the overlays and could easily be slid in and out. Of course I could have used any number of methods including the simple registration pins available online that Tony later told me he used. I had no such pins and so instead made my own on Sunday afternoon.

Not sure how to tackle this block, I decided that I needed a learning exercise

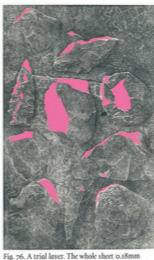


Fig. 76. A trial layer. The whole sheet is 68mm thick with the oil parts removed, was tipped onto the overlay (reduced to 57%).



Fig. 95. The principal overlay (reduced to 60%).



Fig. 96. The underlay (reduced to 60%).



Fig. 97. An additional overlay on the set-off impression under the corner of the make-ready (reduced to 60%).



Fig. 98. The print.

'SLATE ROCKS' BY MONICA POOLE

I had much more experience by the time I tackled this block and cut a latticework of overlays. I began with white paper, then pink, orange and lastly blue. In addition I tore two large underlay patches from proofs as the block was uneven in thickness. The broad torn edge of the orange paper can be seen clearly in figure 96.

This was a rare occasion when I found the need for more general overlays. I pasted them on the set-off impression on the underside of the card that covered the overlays. These overlays have thin white patches with pieces cut from them, another thicker white patch in the centre, two pale cream layers, and lastly a blue patch.

This was one of the most difficult of Monica's blocks to print, although it didn't appear so at first. The effect that she intended was quite clear when I examined the block in a raking light.

MAKE-READY

Printing is the essential final stage of creating images from woodblocks or linocuts. This book de-mystifies make-ready and shows clearly and simply how to prepare the blocks to print well. Cutting or tearing bits of paper is easy in itself, knowing what to cut and paste is what needs some guidance. Make-ready is normally quite straightforward once it is understood. This book begins with the simplest overlays and shows by example how every wood engraving can be printed excellently. Holding a new print should be a moment of fulfilment for every engraver and printer, and this book can help make that happen.



Fig. 58. The print.

'CUT STACK' BY GEORGE MACKLEY

I printed this for Remy Green as a souvenir of the seventeenth congress of the International Paper Historians in Hagen, 1984. It was also in memory of both his late father, John Barcham Green, who was a founder member of the IPH, and George Mackley who had died not long before. This was the year I finished printing a book of Monica Poole's engravings with George Mackley's text, Monica had been a good friend of George.

I felt the pressure of the occasion and the potential difficulty of printing the block on Chester, a laid handmade paper made by Barcham Green at Hayle Mill and supplied by Remy's son Simon, the last of the Green family to run the Barcham Green paper mill in Kent.

The paper received great variations of pressure from a multi-layered make-ready that was thicker for the solid areas than it would have been if printed on smoother paper. The challenge was to retain the delicate tones at the top and around the tree, which had no overlays, while ensuring the essential dark shadows printed as unbroken black. I began with a blue layer over most of the engraving, leaving out half the sky at the top of the engraving and a host of twigs around the top of the tree which being printed on the laysheet were on white paper. These can be seen more clearly in the detail.

The paper was dampened, but its surface texture could mar solid black printing. Despite this, I discovered that Chester was still easier to print wood engravings on than some of the other Barcham Green handmade papers. Fortunately I was helped by a brilliantly engraved woodblock.



Fig. 59a. The overlay in raking light.



Fig. 59b. Detail of the overlay (enlarged to 165%).