

Halton firm in a bind

The art of hand binding books flourishing in Georgetown

BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

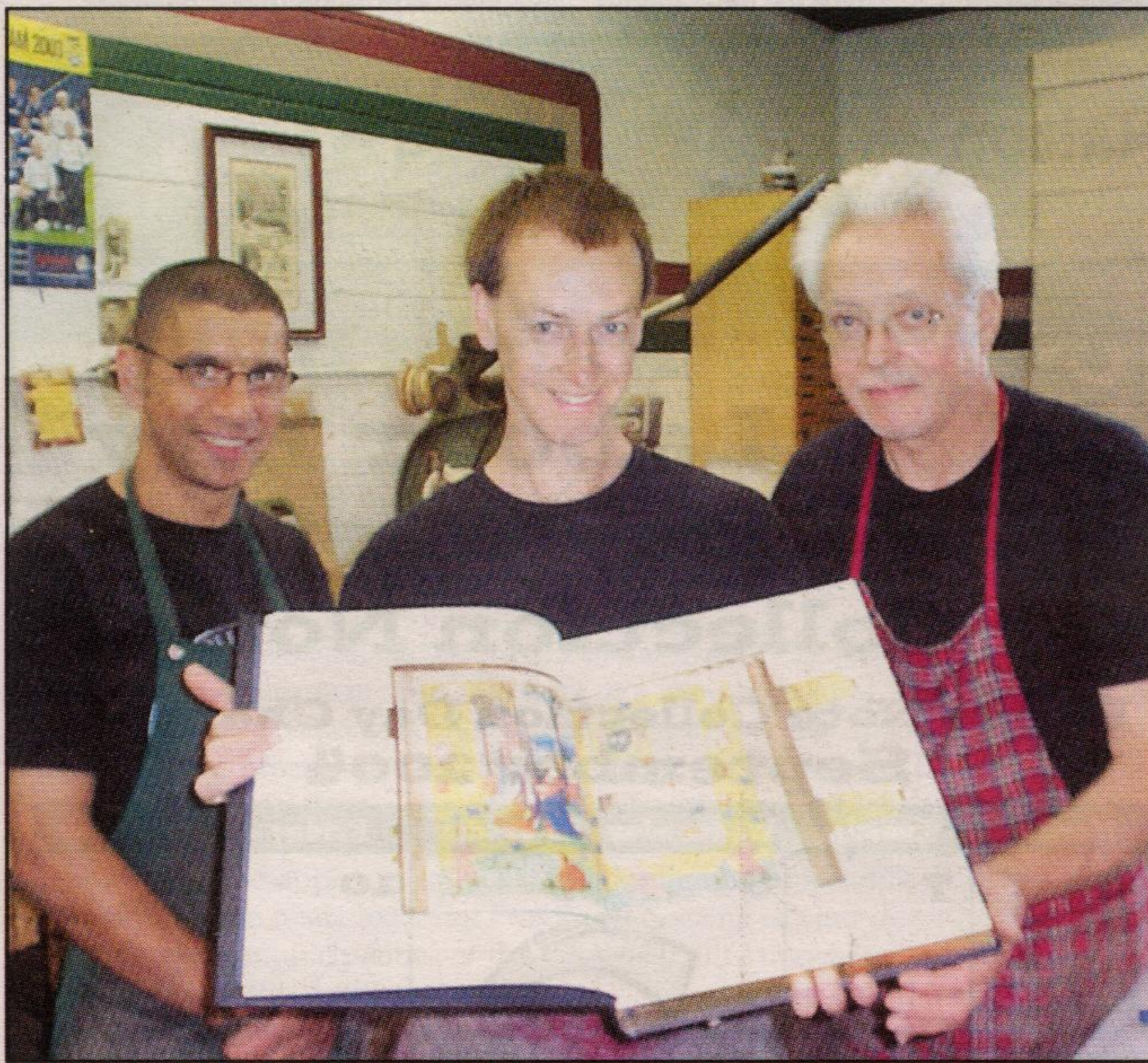


PHOTO BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Chris Narayan (left), Keith Felton (center) and Wilhelm Albiez, all bookbinders by trade, display the result of their efforts, a handbound limited edition of a book entitled *Golf through the Ages*. Absent from the picture are fellow bookbinder Dean Wright and two sewers employed by the company, Joan Gaffey and Jackie Willows.

In an age when books are mass produced to satisfy large markets, the time consuming task of binding a book by hand stands out as something rather unique.

Felton Bookbinding Ltd., a company in Georgetown, has made a name for itself creating bindings for large collectible editions as well as restoring antique books, heirlooms and family Bibles. It's not easy, at least in North America, to find people schooled in the time honoured art of bookbinding or a business that specializes in this old art form.

LARGEST PURE HAND BINDERY IN THE COUNTRY

There aren't a lot of companies around like the one in Georgetown. The business, which is tucked away at the back end of a plaza at 348 Guelph Street, is something of a rarity. "What we have here is the largest pure hand bindery in the country," says company owner Keith Felton.

Felton Bookbinding, which first opened in 1982, received a lot of media coverage recently when the company produced the bindings for a work entitled *Antarctica*, an impressive tome weighing in excess of 19 pounds. The large photographic art book, which features the work of photographers Pat and Rosemarie Keough, sells for US \$3,000.

A year ago, the company added another work to its list of projects, this

one a large collectible golfing book published by Golf Links Press of Fairfield, Iowa. Entitled *Golf through the Ages*, the book is co-written by Michael Flannery and Richard Leech and it details 600 years of golf history. For a true Scot, the subject matter may be hard to swallow as the authors cast doubts on the suggestion that golf originated in Scotland. "Everybody just thinks that golf came from Scotland," says Mr. Felton. "Judging from art, the game in slightly earlier form was played much earlier in (other parts of) Europe."

Golf Links Press turned to Felton Bookbinding to provide the binding for the work, but also to produce a specialized book in a limited edition. "These people have asked us to produce something unique and special. The publisher's aim is to produce a cornerstone golf book for collectors."

The process of binding the book involves several stages. A sewing frame is used to sew four linen tapes around the book so they can support the spine. Then the edges of the pages are carefully trimmed so they lie flush using an electric guillotine, the only machine used in the process of binding the book. Once the pages are aligned, the edge of each page is gilded with gold foil. Then the book is bound in leather and placed in a clamshell box, which completely houses the book to preserve it.

WE ARE CREATING PIECES OF ART

Artwork is not limited to the inside pages of the book. Designs appear on the front of the book's cover and there is a painting hidden along the outside edges of pages in some editions. One edition, worth US \$3000, features a painting of *St. Andrews by the Sea in Scotland*, a watercolour produced by Erin artist Linda Weir. The Canadian artist had to learn the art of fore-edge painting – a term which refers to the front edge of the book – to complete the artwork. Working in watercolours, she paints the book's edges while it's being fanned using a special clamp that holds the book in a fanned position.

The whole process is time consuming, but Mr. Felton feels some satisfaction in what he is doing. Aside from himself and Ms. Weir, he works closely with three other bookbinders and two sewers.

At the end of the day, he says he has produced something that will stand the test of time. "It's gratifying for sure. We are creating pieces of art in a way."

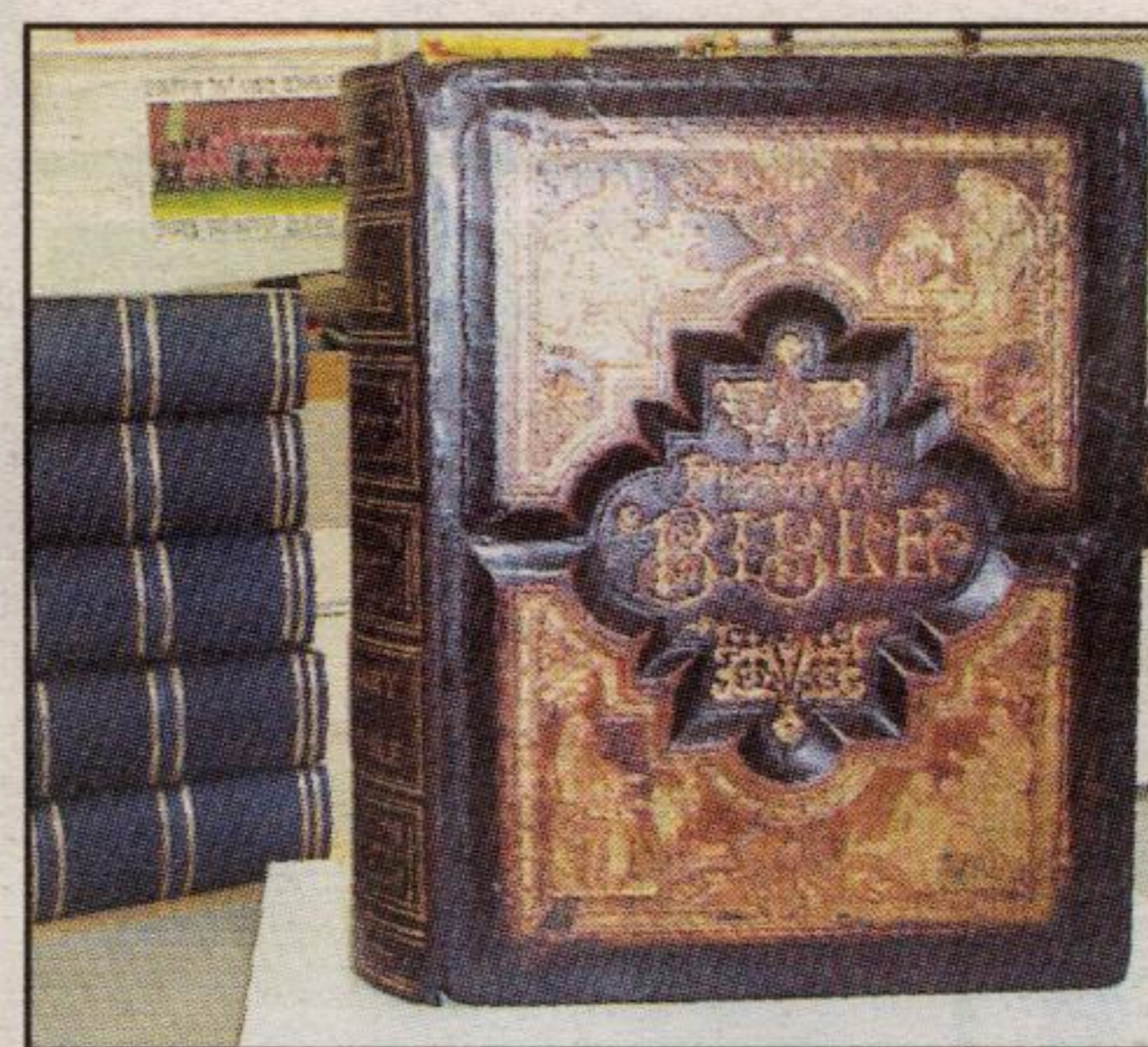


PHOTO BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Felton Bookbinding Ltd. of Georgetown produces bindings for limited edition books such as the ones shown in the picture. The company also does historic restorations of old books, including the family Bible shown in the foreground. Keith Felton, the owner of Felton Bookbinding, says 60 to 70 per cent of his company's work is for export, with many books going to buyers in the United States and Europe.

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