

World Book Day and its History in Bookmarks

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On 15 November 1995, following a proposal originating with the Catalan Book-Publishers' Guild, UNESCO declared 23 April to be World Book Day (WBD), to be more precise World Book and Copyright Day. One factor that contributed to acceptance of the proposal was that this was the date when two of the world's most famous authors died, namely, Shakespeare and Cervantes. Curiously enough, although the *date* of their death, and even the year (1616) coincided, the two writers did not die on the same *day*, since Spain was using the new Gregorian calendar whereas the old Julian calendar was still in use in England.

From 1996 onwards, therefore, WBD has been officially celebrated on 23 April to promote reading, writing and the protection of intellectual property. In a speech given on the 10th anniversary the UNESCO Director General said "As vectors of creation, information and education, [books] allow every culture to print their essential features and to see the identity of others. As windows in the diversity of cultures and bridges between civilizations, beyond time and space, books are a source of dialogue, a means of exchange and a source of development."

One may wonder why the WBD proposal came from Catalonia, a relatively small peripheral area of Europe. Yet it is not really surprising, as 23 April had been associated with books there for many years. This association came about as follows. In the early 1920s proposals were made by the Catalan book trade that there should be a national book day. A royal decree to that effect was eventually signed by King Alfonso XIII in 1926 and the day chosen was 7 October, the supposed date of Cervantes's birth. In 1930, however, after animated discussion, Book Day was transferred to the more convenient date of 23 April, the day of Cervantes's death. This coincided by chance with St George's Day, the feast day and festival of Catalonia's patron saint, when traditionally roses were given to the persons whom one held dear. Thus the combination of books and roses on 23 April came into being.

The 1930s were years of political upheaval in Spain. On 14 April 1931 a Spanish republic was declared and the king was forced into exile. Catalonia also declared itself a republic, later transformed into an autonomous region within the Spanish State. Fig. 1 reproduces a cardboard page-cutter/bookmark distributed by a patriotic Catalan bookseller on 23 April 1931 to celebrate the first Book Day to be held in Catalonia under the Republic. The front

design consists of the colours of the flag of Catalonia, those of the Spanish Republic, a portrait of the President of the (transitory) Catalan Republic and a reference to "triumphant Catalonia".

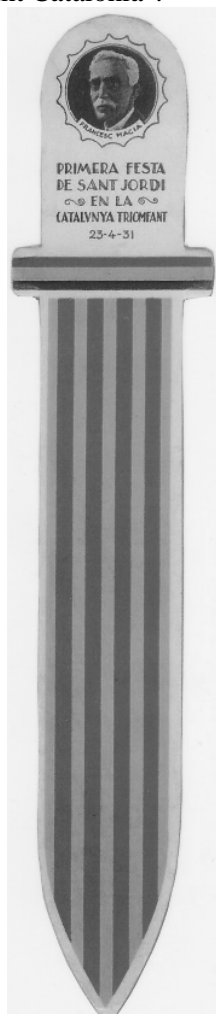


Fig. 1

Fig. 2 shows a more recent bookmark issued on the occasion of the 1971 book festival by the Sabadell Savings Bank. In 1996, as part of the campaign to promote UNESCO's adoption of the Catalan proposal, the Catalan regional government issued a bookmark which appeared in five different languages – Spanish, Catalan, English, French and German. The Spanish version refers also to collaboration with the Argentinian Chamber of the Book Trade. It featured red roses and was headed "The day of books and roses" (Fig. 3). It was to be distributed both at home and abroad. According to the explanatory text on the reverse, "the giving of such gifts [books and roses] represents beauty and culture, intelligence and love, that which is ephemeral and that which is permanent". In following years the Catalan government

made more multilingual issues (see Fig. 4), culminating in a series of bookmarks published in 1999 with the text in at least eleven different languages: Erse, Finnish, French, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese, Turkish and Welsh, as well as Catalan and Spanish. In this series the reverse proclaims "for love, for books and for you". Another large, and final, set of this nature appeared in 2000 and included bookmarks with the text translated into Basque, Galician, English, German, Polish and Japanese. This issue and the previous ones all feature a die-cut page clip.

I am dwelling at some length on Spanish WBD bookmarks since not only has Spain been the founder of WBD but is also probably the country that produces bookmarks in the greatest quantity. WBD in Spain is a feast for collectors, particularly in Barcelona. Several hundred stands selling books, their accessories and roses line the city streets. Many of them distribute free bookmarks and sometimes complimentary roses, as do other stands promoting charities, political parties and local government institutions. Madrid, for its part, instituted *Book Night* a few years ago. On 23 April bookshops may remain open until midnight and organize special activities (see Fig. 40 at the end of the paper).

St George inevitably features on many of the Catalan bookmarks, while the dragon and even the legendary princess rescued by St George have become popular motifs. Fig. 5 reproduces St George and the dragon on the two outer sides of a die-cut, folded bookmark which advertises 10 new publications inside. A dragon is also to be found on the magnetic bookmarks given to its customers on WBD by the M^cDonald hamburger chain (Fig. 6). Fig. 7 was issued in 2005, Gaudí year, so the dragon and his rose are illustrated in mosaic reminiscent of Gaudí's style of decoration (cf. BCN 45, p.5 and colour pp.1-2).

Nationally observed anniversaries provide a theme for WBD bookmarks both inside and outside Catalonia. Fig. 8, for example, celebrates Dalí (2004), Fig. 9 the publication of *Don Quixote* (2005; note that St George and the dragon appear on the left side mirrored by Don Quixote and the windmill on the right), and Fig. 10 Christopher Columbus (2006).



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig.5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 9



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

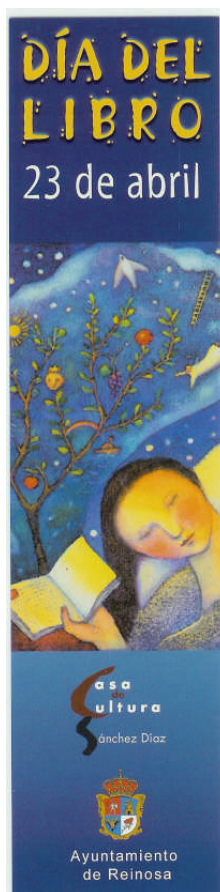


Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

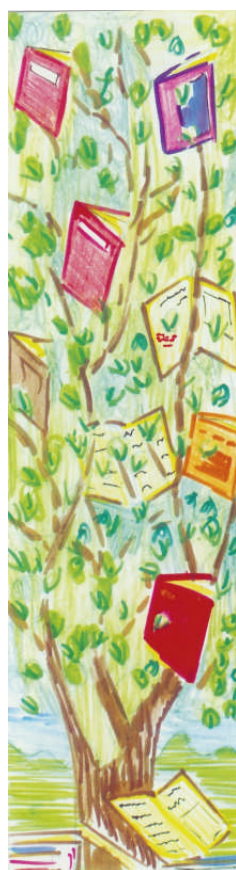


Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20a



Fig. 20b



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

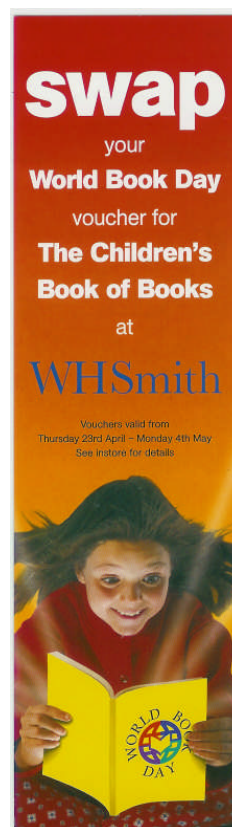


Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28

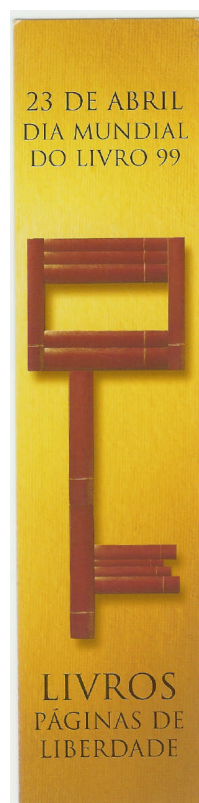


Fig. 29

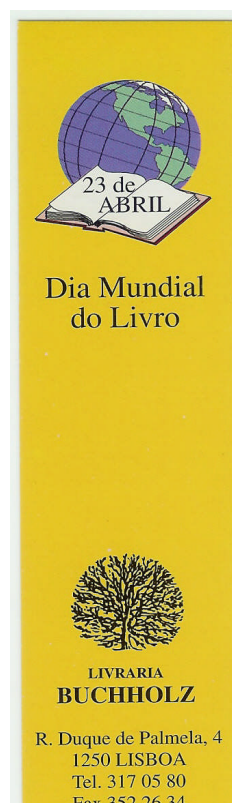


Fig. 30

Please note that the blue border around several bookmarks, eg figs. 21 and 22, is a photographic background and not part of the bookmark itself.



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33a



Fig. 33b



Fig. 34



Fig. 35

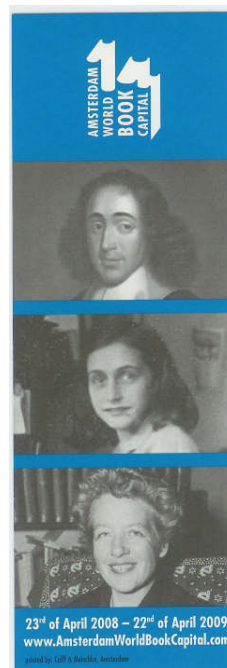


Fig. 37

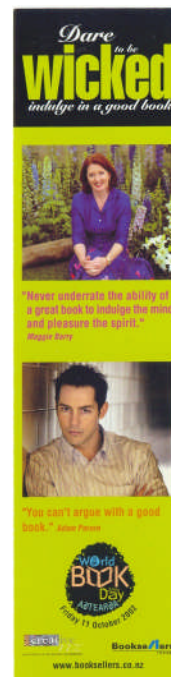


Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 36

WBD bookmarks from other regions of Spain tend to include books and/or roses in their designs, e.g. Fig. 11 from Burgos (Castile), Fig. 12 from Nijar in southern Spain, Fig. 13 from the Basque region, and Fig. 14 from Reinosa (Cantabria). The charming bookmark shown in Fig. 15 is from Valladolid (Castile). Fig. 16 was the result of a joint campaign by the Madrid florists and booksellers. It is both a bookmark and a gift tag to accompany a rose or a bunch of flowers. Competitions to design WBD bookmarks are widespread. Two winning examples are illustrated in Fig. 17 (drawn by a child) and Fig. 18 (produced by an adult). One of the purposes of UNESCO's WBD is to promote reading. In 1998 the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture together with CEGAL (the Spanish Confederation of Booksellers' Guilds and Associations) issued a double-sided bookmark (Fig. 19) with the text in Castilian (green background) and in Catalan (same picture but red background) that included the motto *Vive leyendo* (Live and read). Another double-sided bookmark (Figs. 20a and 20b) was designed to promote both reading and the use of public transport.

To close this rather long Spanish chapter I include a bookmark from 2003 (Fig. 21) which incorporates the slogan "No more wars" in protest against the Iraq war. This fine bookmark was designed and produced by the artist and printer of bibliophile editions, Miquel Plana. Each year for WBD he creates a striking lino-cut, depicting a rose, which he sends personally to friends and clients.

Among the first countries to react to UNESCO's declaration was Canada. The concluding paragraph of the text on the reverse of Figs. 22 and 23, two of its attractive WBD bookmarks, states in French that World Book and Copyright Day has been celebrated in Quebec since 1996. It is also pointed out that the date of 20 April, instead of 23 April, for 2000 was exceptional. It seems, however, that 23 April is also celebrated in Canada as Canada Book Day (Fig. 24). Perhaps this exemplifies the language dichotomy in Canada. Germany is another country that has observed WBD from its inception. The issue of tokens for a free book has featured among its activities.

The United Kingdom was slower to join in the movement. It was not until 1998 that the then prime minister, Tony Blair, launched WBD UK. A £1 WBD book token accepted by UK booksellers was distributed to schoolchildren and special children's books were published to be given in exchange for these tokens. One of the

earliest UK bookmarks, from 1998, is shown in Fig. 25. Since the year 2000 Book Day has been celebrated in the UK not on 23 April but on a date in early March, nevertheless preserving the now inaccurate title *World Book Day*. The reason given was a possible clash with Easter and school holidays, to be avoided since many of the WBD activities aimed at children were organized through the schools. Other countries, among them Sweden, follow the same practice.

1999 saw the appearance of a set of attractive bookmarks sponsored by newspapers and the BBC (Fig. 26). Even more striking are seven large, colourful, matching bookmarks issued in 2000: three have no text on the reverse (Fig. 27); three advertise book tokens; one advertises the transport firm Omega. Book Tokens has been a sponsor of WBD in the UK from the start and has also issued bookmarks in its traditional small formats, such as Fig. 28.

By the year 2000 several other European countries were producing WBD bookmarks, e.g. Portugal, France and Denmark. Fig. 29 reproduces a Portuguese WBD bookmark from 1999, while Fig. 30 shows a more recent one that was distributed by the world-famous Buchholz bookshop in Lisbon. This prestigious firm, originally founded in Berlin by Karl Buchholz in 1925 and later incorporating art galleries, had a chequered career. Buchholz opened branches in New York (1937), Bucharest (1940), Madrid (1945), Bogotá (1951) and Lisbon (1965). After changes in ownership and the deaths of both its founder and his son, the Buchholz firm, now a simple bookshop, is only to be encountered in Lisbon. Over the years Buchholz has distributed a variety of bookmarks, including one made of wood. It may be noted that *Buchholz* is to be translated as 'beechwood', although it was not actually beechwood that was used on that occasion. This year, 2009, on WBD the Portuguese airline TAP gave books to its passengers from Lisbon. In France the association of independent booksellers has celebrated the *Fête de la Librairie* (Bookshop Day) since 1998. It is usually held on the Saturday closest to 23 April and a bookmark for the "day of books and roses" is produced each year (Fig. 31). This is apart from other WBD events organised by chain bookstores, such as Maxi-Livres, and local governments.

Fig. 32 is one of the earliest German WBD bookmarks. The Austrian bookmark illustrated in Figs. 33a and 33b is interesting in that it can be converted into a "do not disturb I am reading" doorhanger by cutting away the red section of the reverse, which also includes space for a book list.

Double-purpose bookmarks/doorhangers, it may be noted, have become a not uncommon form of advertising by German-language publishers. Fig. 34 appeared in 2008 in both Germany and Austria. Figs. 35 – 37 show bookmarks from elsewhere in Europe. Fig. 35, with a text in French, was issued in Brussels and the Walloon area of Belgium. It carries a slogan encouraging the use of local libraries and mentions the distribution of 13,000 free book tokens for WBD.

Fig. 36 was issued in 2008 by the Association of Swiss Booksellers and Publishers. The reverse has the date 23 April printed in large type as well as WBD and UNESCO in smaller type. The text on the front reads "We wish you nice holiday reading". Its design of books converted into suitcases refers to the association's 2008 slogan "Reading is travelling". The slogan for 2007 had been "Switzerland reads" and that for 2006 "Books for passion".

Although WBD is not widely observed in the Netherlands, Fig. 37 from Amsterdam announces the city's appointment as the world book capital for the year beginning 23 April 2008, thus succeeding Bogotá and preceding Beirut. The three portraits correspond to Dutch writers. They

are (from top to bottom) the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, the young Nazi victim Anne Frank, and Annie M.G. Schmidt, a popular, 20th-century Dutch writer of plays, songs and children's books.

WBD is also celebrated in Russia. The 4th Saint Petersburg International Book Fair (2009), in which, incidentally, Elena Burkina's *Russian Bookmark* institution was represented, was opened on 23 April. Further afield, New Zealand observes WBD but has transferred it to October, as can be seen in the fine print (now too small to decipher) on Fig. 38, which was issued in October 2002.

Some countries give more support to their own book festivals, which may last several days, than to WBD. Nevertheless, more than 100 countries from all over the world - from South Africa to Norway, from India and China to Mexico (see Fig. 39) – currently celebrate WBD. Unfortunately in many cases their WBD bookmarks, if indeed any are produced, are hard to find abroad since they are not usually intended as tourist souvenirs or gift items. This overview, therefore, can inevitably deal with only a selection of the WBD bookmarks that have been issued, but may serve as an indication to the collector in this wide field.



Fig. 40

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