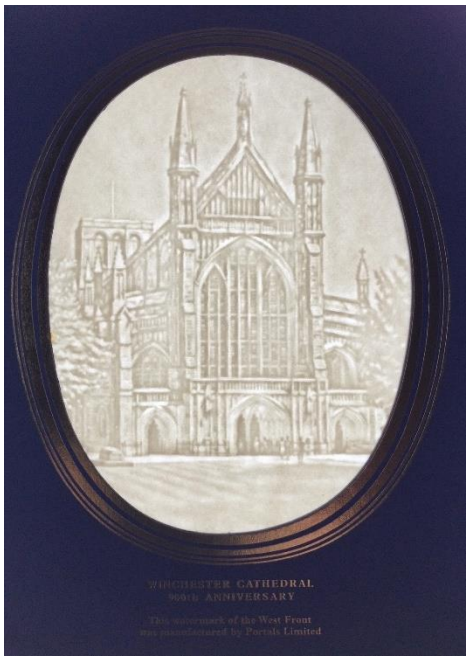
OVERTON SHEEPFAIR 2024 – PAPERMAKING DISPLAY

The Sheepfair focus was the Roaring Twenties. In 1922 Portals commissioned its Overton Mill by the railway station. After 100 years of successful operation as the world's largest manufacturer of banknote paper it ceased production in 2022.



The Sheepfair papermaking stand demonstrated a simplistic method of creating a watermark in a sheet of paper by hand. At Overton Mill paper was produced on machines. A watermark of Winchester Cathedral was used for the demonstration. The original dies were made to create the watermark of Winchester Cathedral on the machines at the mill. This was done in 1980 to produce a calendar celebrating the 900 years since the cathedral was completed.

Retired Mould Maker Derek Sheldon manufactured a new handmaking mould for the event. Made from a fine phosphor bronze wire mesh, the mould enables the papermaking pulp to drain, leaving fibres deposited on the surface. The varying thickness of fibres creates the watermark. Where it is darker there are more fibres, where it is lighter there are less fibres. The watermark is three dimensional with the tonal range determined by varying depths of fibres created by the embossing, in this case of Winchester Cathedral.

The removable frame around the mould is called the deckle. This determines the size of the sheet and controls the amount of fibres captured in the process. The mould is made in the mirror image of the finished sheet. When the sheet is removed from the mould it will be correct as the bottom surface in contact with the mould becomes its top side.

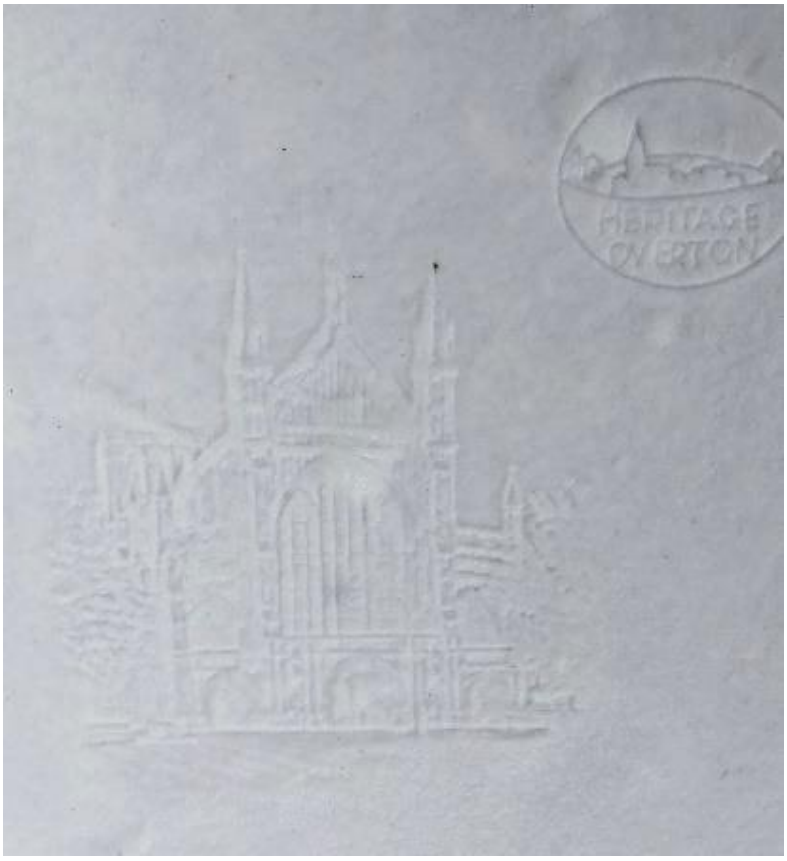
The papermaking stock, the pulp, in the case of the demonstration was cotton linters suspended in water. Linters is the fine fuzz of very short cotton fibres left on the cotton seed

after the longer fibres have been removed for spinning into a fabric. The pulp has to be continuosly agitated to prevent the fibres from flocking and settling to the bottom of the vat.

To create the sheet the mould is dipped into the stock at an angle and slowly leveled off to enable a consistent thickness of fibres to be deposited on its surface. As the mould is slowly raised up through the stock it is important for the papermaker to ensure an even distribution of fibres over the mould surface. This is often achieved by a very gentle shaking of the mould.

After the mould is lifted from the stock the deckle is removed and the sheet is ready to be transferred from the mould to a felt. This process is called couching (rhymes with cooching). It is important that this is achieved without damaging the very wet sheet. The couching method requires the papermaker to gently roll the wet sheet/mould onto the felt by placing one edge of the mould onto the felt and turning it over and up in one smooth action. This enables the wet sheet to stick to the felt and to leave the mould in one piece.

The wet sheet, now on the felt (see next picture), has to be pressed and dried so that it becomes a manageable sheet of paper that can be separated from the felt. However, in this state it is like a sheet of blotting paper and would need a further process of surface sealing, usuallly with an application of size. Traditionally this size would have been prepared from gelatine.



The resultant wet sheet.

Many thanks to Portals for providing the embossed wire mesh to make the mould, the cotton stock and the felts.