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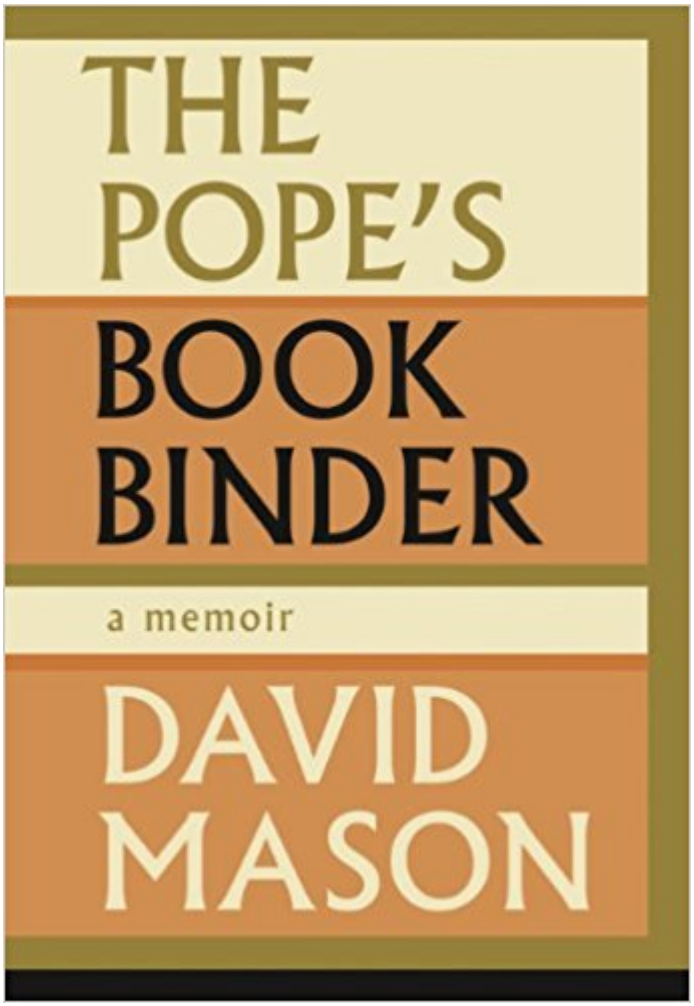
The Pope's Bookbinder: A Memoir



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Synopsis

"Entertaining, moving, informative, intelligently hopeful: I know of few other books like this one to warm the cockles of a booklover’s heart." —Alberto Manguel"For anyone who loves books too well—who lusts after them, lives in them, mainlines them—David Masonâ ™s memoir will be a fix from heaven. Heartful, cantankerous, droll, his tales of honour and obsession in the trade gratify the very book-love they portray. An irresistible read." —Dennis Lee"An atmospheric, informative memoir by a Canadian seller of used and rare books ... Gossipy, rambling and enchanting, alive with Masonâ ™s love for books of every variety."—Kirkus ReviewsFrom his drug-hazy, book-happy years near the Beat Hotel in Paris and throughout his career as antiquarian book dealer, David Mason brings us a storied life. He discovers his love of literature in a bathtub at age eleven, thumbing through stacks of lurid Signet paperbacks. At fifteen heâ ™s expelled from school. For the next decade and a half, he will work odd jobs, buck all authority, buy books more often than food, and float around Europe. Heâ ™ll help gild a volume in white morocco for Pope John XXIII. And then, at the age of 30, after returning home to Canada and apprenticing with Joseph Patrick Books, David Mason will find his calling.Over the course of what is now a legendary international career, Mason shows unerring instincts for the logic of the trade. He makes good money from Canadian editions, both legitimate and pirated (turns out Canadian piracies so incensed Mark Twain that he moved to Montreal for six months to gain copyright protection). He outfoxes the cousins of L.M. Montgomery at auction and blackmails the head of the Royal Ontario Museum. He excoriates the bureaucratic pettiness that obstructs public acquisitions, he trumpets the ingenuity of collectors and scouts, and in archives around the world he appraises history in its unsifted and most moving forms. Above all, however, David Mason boldly campaigns for what he feels is the moral duty of the antiquarian trade: to preserve the history and traditions of all nations, and to assert without compromise that such histories have value. Sly, sparkling, and endearingly gruff, The Pope’s Bookbinder is an engrossing memoir by a giant in the book trade—whose infectious enthusiasm, human insight, commercial shrewdness, and deadpan humour will delight bibliophiles for decades to come.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is my favorite book of the season. Funny thing is, I browsed and very occasionally bought books at The Village bookstore while I was a low-income student at U of T. Michael Dirda praised this memoir of a bookman in the Washington Post and it is every bit as good as the review promised. And more because Toronto is one of my hometowns.

This book is my first look into the business of selling books as a career and most notably as a passion. The author’s voice remains melancholy much of the time, but the reader is blessed with many insightful stories that range from the business itself to human psychology. At each moment the author’s voice sounds genuine and sincere, imparting many trade secrets about the business and what it all meant in his own life journey. The overall impression of this novel is like a nice glass of scotch and returning to each round is always welcomed.

Fantastic book about books...this looks at the highs and lows of the antiquarian book world in Canada. David Mason is a legend among booksellers. Highly recommend!

I was very happy that the book looked brand new. It was for a gift. Thank you

First of all, the Title is a scam. The author possibly worked on a book that was destined to the Pope while he (author) was working in a bookbindery in Spain.I know it is a ’memoir’ but author is too self-centered and he gives too much importance to the antiquarian book trade in Toronto as if Toronto were the antiquarian book Canadian capital. That great booksellers are just mentioned makes this book, and they don’t all are from Toronto.As far as I’m concerned this book is a missed opportunity to give a more complete view of the antiquarian book trade in Canada.A great opportunity was also missed to put a bit more meat on the ABAC

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