

Living National Treasure

Fore-edge painter

Photograph by
Richard Cannon

THERE'S a magic to the art of fore-edge painting; to the human eye, the gilded facet of a book is supernaturally transformed into idealised scenes, fictional characters and portraits that bring the contents alive as the pages are fanned. Like all the best magic tricks, it's startlingly simple: an image is painted on to the 'stepped' incline of the pages that disappears when it's flat.

Martin Frost is the last commercial fore-edge painter capable of this sorcery. Although the real magic lies in his ability to render his subjects in painstaking miniature. His roots are in working on a larger canvas—he was painting the scenery at Glyndebourne when he realised the possibilities of working on a smaller scale.

At his home in Worthing, West Sussex, Mr Frost painstakingly depicts everything from portraits of literary figures such as Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe to minute renderings of scenes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Frankenstein*. Work is either done on commission—many for museums and libraries in the USA—speculatively. Currently on sale is an edition of *Cricket* published by Longman in 1890, the fore edge of which bears a painting that mourns the infamous defeat of the English team by Australia in 1882 with W. G. Grace at the crease.

Sadly, the future of Mr Frost's craft is on a similarly sticky wicket and the search is on to find another sorcerer's apprentice to ensure that it survives into the 21st century. *GK*

www.foreedgefrost.co.uk

