The Use of Cloth in Bookbinding and its Introduction to the Netherlands

'The design of the publishers was to issue it in a form and at a price which would recommend it to the taste of the rich, without placing it beyond the means of the poor.'


The booktrade at the beginning of the nineteenth century

Nowadays books are generally produced by a printing company and a bookbinding company under contract to a publisher. The finished products are then distributed by the publisher—often through some form of wholesale organization—to the retail book trade.

In about 1800 the picture was completely different. There were no publishers, for example, who confined themselves exclusively to the publication of books: any bookseller who had a grain of self-respect would occasionally publish a book. If he also ran a printing-shop, he would print his publications himself; if not, he would have them printed elsewhere. The printed sheets were folded and simply stitched together, and it was in this form that he sold his publications in his own bookshop and delivered them to his colleagues. There was as yet no question of binding complete editions or parts of them. The bookseller provided his customer with simply sewn books which the latter could then have bound by his own binder. Virtually every bookseller developed a binding side to his own business for the convenience of his clientele. A good bookseller, in other words, was expected to have bookbinding skills as well.

How these different aspects of the book trade—publishing, printing, distribution and bookbinding—could be combined in one business may be seen in the lives of famous booksellers of the time. C. H. Bohn, G. B. van Goor, Adriaan Loosjes and H. Frijlink, to name but a few, were publishers, booksellers and bookbinders rolled into one.¹ The combination of

1. The bookshop of Herman de Wit at Amsterdam, an engraving by Reinier Vinkeles of 1763, showing a bookbinder at work (Historisch Topografische Atlas, Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst, Amsterdam)