

The Mystery of the Wire Loop: A Query for Investigation

ABSTRACT

Over the last several years, several books with a small wire loop have been found in at least three libraries across the United States. The wire is threaded through a signature in the book and twisted on itself to form a loop, approximately five millimeters in diameter. So far, all the books have been printed in England in the first half of the twentieth century. Initial inquiries have found no satisfactory answer for its presence, but it is hoped as other book conservators see the loop, they will forward this information to the author.

THE CRIME

Over the last several years, books with a small wire loop have been found in at least three libraries across the United States. Initial inquiries found no satisfactory answer for their presence. Speculations ranged from some sort of security device (either to physically tie the book in place or as an early electronic detection system) or as a method of attaching a bookmark to the text block. None of these suggestions seem plausible given the nature of the device.

This is a query for more information about these devices. It is hoped that when other conservators have seen these loops or will in the future, they will forward me this information. This information will then be examined for an explanation and a catalog of books containing the loops will be created. A future report will hopefully reveal the solution to the mystery of the wire loop.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CULPRIT

All of the loops seen thus far are similar in size and design. Both ends of the wire are inserted into a signature

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of the text block near the head of the book (fig. 1). The wire is then twisted on itself for approximately two centimeters and ends in a small loop, approximately five millimeters in diameter (fig. 2). The top half of the loop barely shows above the text block, but it does not extend beyond the cover (fig. 3). The wire is medium gauge, about half a millimeter in diameter with no visible coatings. For more images of the loop, please visit the author's Webpage (address listed below).

THE VICTIMS . . . THUS FAR

Below is a list of confirmed sightings of the wire loop. If your library has a copy of any of the books, please check to see if it has the loop as well.

- Alexander Wicksteed. *Ten Years in Soviet Moscow*. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1933. Last sighted at: Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.
- Lord Edward Gleichen. *A Guardsman's Memories*. Edinburgh, London: W. Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1932. Last sighted at: Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire. Investigator's note: The same title at Yale University had not been looped.
- George E. Boxall. *History of the Australian Bushrangers*. London: T. Fisher, 1908. Last sighted at: Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

There has been at least one other sighting in Arizona, but the title was not recorded. At the 2005 AIC annual meeting, several people indicated they had seen the loop in their libraries, including Harvard, University of Texas, and Duke. Stay tuned for more information and sightings.

THE INVESTIGATION . . . PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

The books identified with these devices to date have been published in London by various firms between 1908

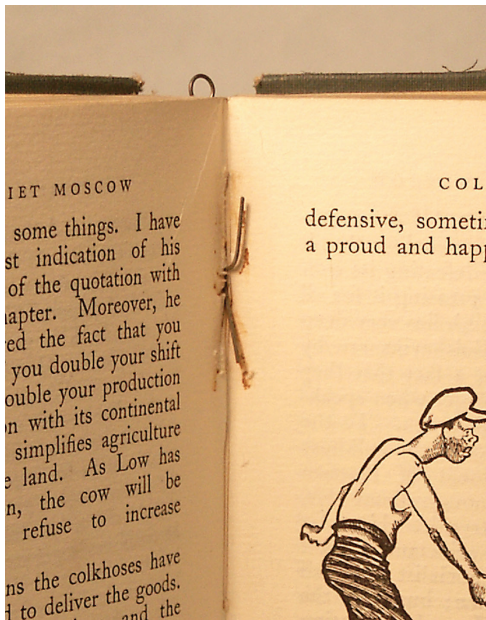


Fig. 1. Alexander Wicksteed. *Ten Years in Soviet Moscow*. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1933. Interior showing attachment of the loop through the signature.

and 1933. Other than that no definitive connections have been found. Further research needs to track such factors as printers, binders, and the provenance of each volume. In one case, two different copies of the same book in different libraries did not both have the loop. The copy without the loop also showed no signs of ever having had one.

Your help is needed to catch the wire loop. There is a web survey form to record detailed information.

HELP WITH THE INVESTIGATION

If you see the loop in your library or on any book, please let me know. Fill out the online survey www.lib.msu.edu/alstrom, or contact the author by email alstrom@msu.edu or phone 517-432-8828. Thank you for your help in solving "The Mystery of the Wire Loop."

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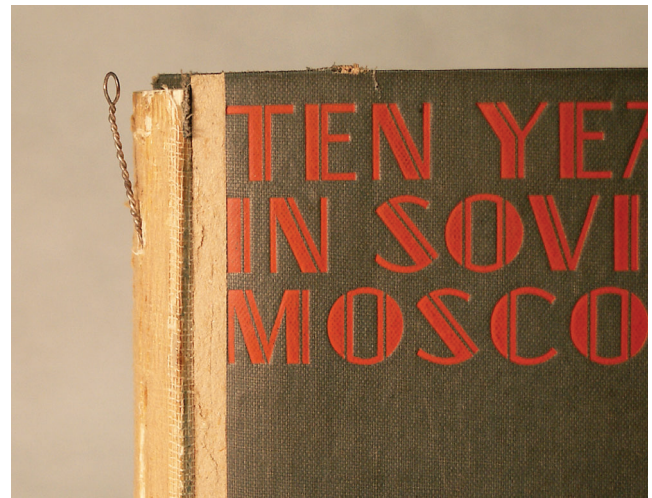


Fig. 2. *Ten Years in Soviet Moscow*. Exterior showing attachment of the loop through the spine.



Fig. 3. *Ten Years in Soviet Moscow*. Exterior side view of the wire loop.