

Cloth Rebacking Using a Modified Bradel Binding Technique

The cloth used on publisher's bindings of the nineteenth century was usually heavily embossed. Additionally, that cloth may also have been stamped with lines or other decoration right up to the edge of the boards. Rebacking of these books can be very difficult without damaging the embossed cloth and/or the stamping. I was faced with two of these nineteenth-century books that had detached boards. Upon closer inspection, I found that the very thin boards (approximately 40 pt. or less than 1 mm thick) were made from a dense rope. My immediate reaction was that no matter how skillfully I tried to lift the cloth, I would not be able to hide the repair. Since the boards were so thin, I realized that I might be able to join the boards on the inside by adhering the new covering material under the pastedown. This technique could be considered as a modification of the Bradel style of binding. The more that I have used this technique, the more I am convinced of the major benefits it offers.

The primary benefit is that it eliminates any intrusion into a possibly delicate portion of the board. Fragile covering materials, finely embossed cloths, and crisp stampings are no longer subject to the damage that can be caused by the lifting knife. A side benefit is the reduction in the amount of time that is needed to reback a book. This time savings happens because only the paste-down is lifted along the hinge area; both the new spine piece and the mull are then inserted into that one opening.

PROCEDURE

After the spine is cleaned and relined with Japanese paper and mull (unbleached cotton muslin cut on the bias for additional strength), the boards are prepared for rejoining. The first step is to clean the edges of the boards and then lift the pastedowns in the usual manner. The edges of the boards can now be covered with a strip of water-torn, colored Japanese paper that matches the original cloth. Moriki, a colored Japanese paper, or one of the 100% kozo

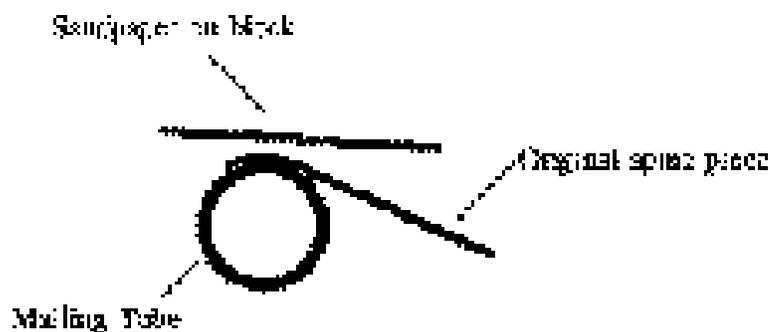
fiber colored papers can be used. I brush wheat starch paste along the edge of the board, as well as onto the narrow strip of paper. Since the paper is water-torn, only the long "fingers" of the paper are actually adhered to the original cloth allowing for minimal intrusion. After the edge is covered, a small portion can be turned in under the original pastedown.

The new spine piece, or "joiner strip," is made of unbleached cotton muslin (cut on the bias) and is faced with a piece of the same Japanese paper that was chosen to cover the board edges. The adhesive I use is a mixture of 50% PVA, 25% methylcellulose (Methocel A4M), and 25% wheat starch paste. Acrylic color can also be applied to the paper to obtain a better match. In fact, I prefer to color the paper with acrylics because they are more permanent than the dyes used in the paper.

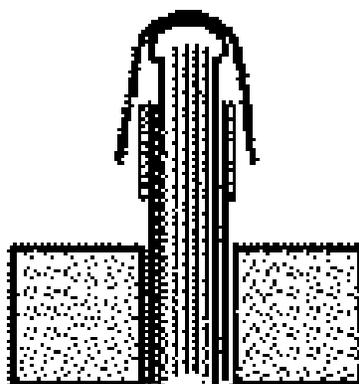
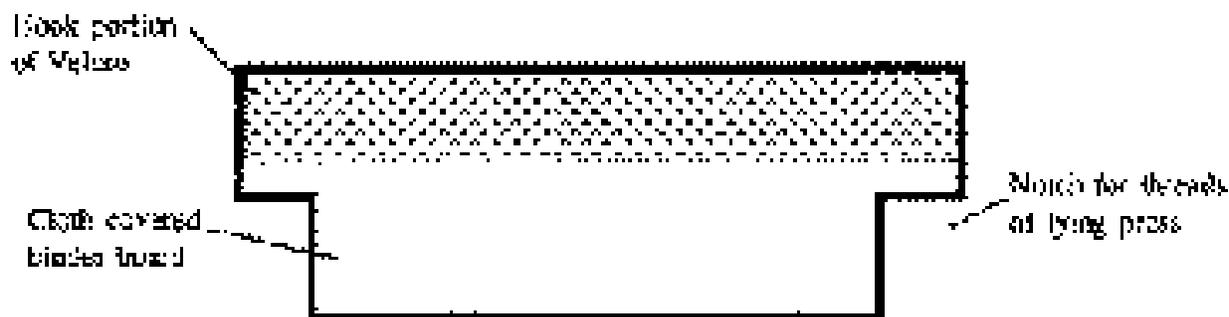
After the colored laminate has dried, it can be sized with methylcellulose, such as Methocel A4C. While the new spine piece is still damp from the sizing, it can be embossed with a variety of materials to obtain an even better match with the original book cloth. One material that is very helpful is window screen or similar mesh. By pressing the new, damp spine piece with the screen in a nipping press, a pattern is imparted; the screen can then be rotated forty-five degrees and nipped again to create a pebble grain effect. Other materials can be used to create other effects, such as straight grain.

After pressing, a spine stiffener can now be attached to the inner surface and the head and tail turn-ins can be made. I also insert a piece of cord to add bulk and strengthen the headcaps. The original boards can now be reassembled using the new spine piece (the joiner strip). To help reduce the bulk of the joiner strip under the pastedown, the original boards can be thinned by using a strip of masking tape to pull up a small amount of the board. With the joiner strip in place, the boards can then be nipped in a press. I place a piece of blotter next to the original cloth and a sheet of stainless steel or Formica-covered

ORIGINAL SPINE PIECE SAWING THE INNER SURFACE



VELCRO TYING-UP BOARDS



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pressboard next to the pastedown. The ends of the joiner strip will be compressed into the board when pressed.

The text block can now be inserted into the case. I like to “hang” the text block in the case with a small line of adhesive along the very edge of the shoulder. After the adhesive has set, the covers can be opened and the inner hinge can be adhered and the pastedown reattached.

ALTERNATIVE STYLE

Since some people may not approve of the sharp groove created by this method of rebacking, there is a way to soften it. A cord can be attached along the edge of the boards to produce a more rounded groove. The cord can be attached either before or after joining the boards by laying a cord along the edge of the board before covering it with the Japanese paper.

SPINE PIECE

The original spine piece may have a paper stiffener that needs to be removed. However, if the paper is removed with water, there is a good possibility that the embossing will be damaged. Therefore, I like to remove most of the paper by sanding off the high spots and other loose paper. This allows the paper to remain in the voids, thus protecting the original embossing. A mailing tube is very handy, as it will support the spine in only the area that needs to be sanded. A thin layer of PVA can be applied to the paper area and allowed to dry before attaching the spine piece to the new spine.

ATTACHING THE SPINE PIECE

After the spine piece has been attached, the common practice is to “mummify” the book by wrapping the book with an Ace bandage. This technique, however, is a problem because the spine piece may shift while being wrapped. I prefer to use special Velcro tying-up boards. These are made of standard binder’s board that is covered with book cloth. The boards are notched to allow the boards to hang on the threads of the lying press. The “hook” portion of the Velcro is adhered to the boards with double-sided tape. With the book in between the boards in the lying press, the “fuzzy” portion of the Velcro can be used to provide sufficient pressure while the spine piece is being attached.

CONCLUSION

This method of rebacking helps preserve the original appearance of the embossed and stamped area of a book cover. This technique is also easy to communicate to students and volunteers who assist with this type of repair

because there is no fear of damaging the original cover decoration. In fact, where the book has a plain paper pastedown, there may be no need or desire to lift the pastedown—the repair can simply be adhered to the inner board.

One of the true joys of our work is that all of us are willing to share our experiences and ideas with one another. This is contrary to the secrecy that existed in this field many years ago. It is a pleasure to share this idea with you.

BILL MINTER

William Minter Bookbinding & Conservation, Inc.
Woodbury, Pennsylvania

REBACKING OF CLOTH BINDINGS ESPECIALLY 19TH CENTURY PUBLISHER'S CLASH

TYPICAL CLOTH CASE and REBACKING

NEW BINDING

Boards are joined during covering; groove formed afterwards.

Note the shape of the groove.



CONVENTIONAL CLOTH REBACK

Embossed/stamped area may be damaged during rebacking.



GERMAN BRADEL STYLE BINDING and REBACKING

NEW BINDING

Boards are joined with paper in mind before covering; covering material adheres to the edge of the boards to form groove.

Note the shape of the groove.



USING BRADEL FOR REBACKING

Outer bookcloth not filled; boards joined under the original pulled down.

Colored Japanese paper hides the exposed edge of the board before the covers are joined. Embossed/stamped area is not damaged.

Alternative style to soften slope of groove. Boards are joined, sized, inserted as center, then covered with colored Japanese paper. Embossed/stamped area is not damaged.

