

13 Years Later: Looking Back at a Bound Pamphlet Conservation and Cataloging Project

INTRODUCTION

Groups of individual pamphlets bound as books have often been later broken apart in the name of conservation, cataloging, access, or the ability to sell duplicates. Between 1994 and 1996 I worked as grant funded project conservator on a collection of over 300 damaged bound pamphlet volumes. The grant specified treating the bound pamphlets as books, and rejected the option of disbinding. This paper will assess the observed functionality of these treatments after twelve years, including information about the actual use each volume has received since treatment. Observed natural aging of long fiber paper board-reattachments, and traditional leather re-backs will be discussed. Beyond the technical treatment observations, the overall question of disbinding bound-pamphlet volumes will be examined, using casual comments from historians, special-collections librarians, conservators and rare book dealers.

USE BEFORE 1996

The Huntington Library purchased the collection Bridgewater bound pamphlet collection in 1917. In the 79 years between 1917 and 1996, each book of pamphlets was used a median of 36 times, or .45 times per year. This use included microfilming, and the removal of duplicate pamphlets for sale. The highest use for a single volume in the collection between 1917 and 1996 was 180 times.

USE BETWEEN 1996 AND 2009

After 1999, with the advent of full text access to the contents of many of these bound pamphlets through the Early English Books Online, there was speculation that use would diminish. This was not the case at the Huntington Library with these bound pamphlets. Between 1996 and 2009 when

the NEH funded treated bound pamphlets were examined for this research, the median use was 6.5 over the 13 years, or .5 times per year. The highest use for a single volume in the collection between 1996 and 2009 was 35 times. There has been a slight increase in both the median and highest use figures for the bound pamphlet collection since the collection was treated in 1996.

TREATMENT FAILURES

Out of the 134 long fiber board attachments from the project examined in 2009, 3 had a board completely detached, for a 2% failure rate. Out of the 73 textblock consolidations/leather rebacks examined in 2009, none had failed. This confirms the general conclusion that long fiber paper board hinging is adequate to the task of board re-attachment for special collection materials, especially given its speed and minimal intervention into the original book structure. Leather rebacking here had no failure rate after 13 years, though it will be important to examine its failure rate after a longer period of time has passed.

COLLECTED PAMPHLETS BOUND AS BOOKS: DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

A call for responses from the library, book history, and conservation community on the topic of special collections pamphlets collected into groups and bound and was issued in the Conservation Distribution List and the SHARP (Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing) List serve. Several responses were summarized in this talk. Logistically, some institutions favored leaving the bound pamphlets intact until special circumstances of use required disbinding. Some discussed the shelving problems presented by disbound pamphlets kept in slender, easy to lose pamphlet binders, and problems with older, acidic pamphlet binders proving more damaging to the pamphlet pages than the binding structure they had been removed from. A general sensitivity to the material culture tradition of putting collected pamphlets into bindings was found in many

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responses from book historians, librarians and conservators. The importance of saving the original contents list, notes on the endpapers and binders tickets was emphasized. The ethical problem of disbinding bound pamphlets was central to responses from rare book dealers influenced by John Carter in his *ABC for Book Collectors*. Some libraries are using digital tools to reunite collected pamphlets routinely disbound for cataloging many years before.

CONCLUSION

After 13 years of natural aging and use in a special collection setting, the examined bound pamphlet volumes from this NEH project show standard long fiber paper board attachment and rebacking as a textblock consolidation techniques are both working as expected. Despite speculation to the contrary, in this Huntington collection the availability of digital tools for researchers has not yet diminished physical use. Responses to the problems of bound pamphlets, shared in this talk by librarians, book historians, and conservators working with special collections, emphasized bound pamphlets as complex entities. Disbinding was to be considered as a option resulting in practical and ethical problems, as well as an option sometimes affording enhanced access to the contents of the pamphlets.

CONSUELA G. METZGER
Lecturer, University of Texas at Austin
School of Information
Austin, TX
chela@ischool.utexas.edu