

Board Reattachment and the Context of Use in Book Conservation: A Decision-Making Case Study

ABSTRACT

There are many alternatives to traditional rebacking when reattaching boards to books. Japanese paper hinge repair, joint tacketing, inside cloth hinges, split-linen flanges, and board slotting are some just some of the techniques available. This treatment talk discussed variations and combinations of published board attachment methods considered while treating a two-volume set of tight-back, tight-joint, eighteenth-century folios with heavy, detached boards. The books, first editions of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), had been well used in the past and were expected to receive use in the future. They were in previously repaired bindings contemporary with the text. The dictionaries were not housed in a special collection and there were no rare-material specialists at the institution where the books would be kept. The treatment for these dictionaries involved balancing strength and future-use issues with aesthetics while honoring the ethical goal of minimal intervention.

The talk particularly referenced the recent AIC "Board Reattachment Discussion" found in the *Book and Paper Group Annual* (2001). In addition, the writings of a variety of book conservators were touched on, with an emphasis on the published board attachment and text block consolidation ideas of David Brock, Nicholas Pickwood, Christopher Clarkson, Tony Cains, and Don Etherington. Techniques covered in the presentation included facing and mechanical lifting of tight-back leather at the head and tail only; consolidating the text block both adhesively and mechanically using new spine linings and sewing; adhering new leather directly on the spine as loss compensation at the head and tail areas; and, finally, adhering Japanese paper and linen flanges to both reinforce the inner hinge

and outer joint and improve the visual integration of the treated book.

While alternatives to traditional restoration techniques in book conservation are needed and welcome, conservators cannot afford to discard any useful ideas as they adapt past and current treatment options to solve problems. An open-minded approach to decision-making is particularly important for books whose meaning may reside in their usability.

REFERENCE

Fredericks, Maria, and Ethel Hellman. 2001. Board reattachment discussion. *Book and Paper Group Annual* 20:63-86.

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