Limp Bindings
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“The simplest paper structure – paper wrappers could easily be placed around pamphlets or small books quickly, this satisfied the demands of those people who wanted their books immediately after publication.” (Cloonan, 1991)

Limp bindings refer to those bindings that did not use wooden boards to encase them, but rather instead we find paper or parchment being used as the covering material.

Paper as a binding material
A lot of book collectors, dealers and librarians have generally assumed that paper covers were intended to be temporary, the survival of paper covered books proves that they were on the contrary often remarkably sturdy and enduring (Cloonan, 1991 pg4).

Given paper was available as early as the late 12th century in western Europe, it offered a cheaper and more readily available alternative to parchment. Paper covered books history really only begins with the earliest known example dated 1482 (Needham, 1979, Twelve centuries of bookbinding: 400 – 1600, pg 117-19). Paper covers are most used for almanacs in this earlier period, where as after the 16th century when the production of books required quicker bindings, paper coverings were regularly used on children’s books.

1482: a paper woodcut wrapper from Augsburg, where at least five were made,
1490: more early paper woodcuts wrappers were produced at Ferrara.
16th century: Italian and German book trade continued to use paper woodcut wrappers which were also produced in France during this period until about mid-century. Note: so far no woodcut wrappers have been dated between the middle and the end of the 16th century, with very few 17th century examples either (so may be that just not survived rather than not made) Cloonan, 1991.
1579: The potential of paper as a binding material was promoted in a treatise on papermaking. Samuel Zimmermann recommended that paper replace “Piments (sic) oder Leders” for the binding of books.

Different styles

Wrappers (Paper): - commonly used for Single quire material
Were used on pamphlets a single sheet of paper wrapped around the text block and then sewn through the fold, either with a figure-eight stitch or stab stitched through the covers. More elaborate wrappers consisted of more than a single sheet of paper. Pamphlet stitch was very commonly used on this style for single quires (a single gathering of pages).
Pamphlet stitch
Very useful for sewing a couple of pages together, most commonly 3 hole or any number of uneven holes eg 5.

- Pre make you holes using an awl or pin.
- Use thread 2.5 times the height of the book, decide if you want the knot on the inside or outside, start there.

(Left) Image from Early bindings in Paper, Figure 1 Page 7.

Stab stitch or Japanese side stitch
Case: Referring to covers made separately from the text block - Two types

- Limp-paper Italian Structure (laced in) – sewn on thongs or sometimes cords, which were laced through the covers. The covers were made from heavy paper rather than pasteboard. Sometimes also referred to as laced paper cases. And more commonly also seen were limp vellum bindings.
- Rigid cases – more common latter in 18th century Germany where commonly used on periodicals.

1. Cases
Limp paper cases – very similar in structure to Limp vellum bindings (other than the obvious material difference). This style was used on multi quire books and had a lot of variation in the exact details.

(Left) Image from Early bindings in Paper, Figure 2 Page 8.
These covers were constructed from a single sheet of heavy paper which was creased and folded to the inside. The corners were mitred and folded, as shown in the right hand insets. Yapps were sometimes made along the fore-edges. The covers were often laced through with cords or with alum-tawed thongs (insets on left). The text blocks were rearly head banded.

(Right) Image 10.28 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding.
1557 Italian Limp parchment binding. A) primary endband with back beads, B) laced in single endband support of white leather – the main sewing supports have been cut off, their ends showing a slight protuberance only (arrow).

2. Rigid paper cases
- more common latter in the 18th century Germany where commonly used on periodicals. Method still regularly used today known as a case binding.

(Right) Image from Early bindings in Paper, Figure 3 Page 9.
Each cover was constructed from two pieces of pasteboard with a separate piece of heavy paper for the spine area. These components were lapped, and pasted or glued together. The boards were frequently covered with decorated papers. The insets show the relationship in the case construction between the text block and the cover.
Sewing techniques on Multi-quire bindings

(Left) Image 10.2 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. Details of the construction of the parchment covering of Basle UB MS F.V37 (written in 2nd half of 10th century but cover is titled in a 15th c hand writing. A) exterior support at the head, the first three quires attached with a single piece of lacing with several stitches, the last two quires with primary tacketing (cover omitted), B) folded parchment support at the tail, all five quires show primary quire tackets, attached to the covering by a single tacket.

(Right and above) Image 10.3 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. Parchment covering showing primary tachketing at the head, through a double-folded exterior support, diagram at right shows the structure exposed.

(Above) Image 10.10 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. An Italian stiff paper covering with turn-ins, staggered archival stewing on two parchment supports through the covering and the conjoint paper endleaves (shown the tail part with seven long stitches, corresponding to the seven quires); note the oblique change over spans (arrow). Approx 1500

(Left) Image 10.20 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. Rawhide block support with 11 pairs of holes though which 37 quires were sewn with independent long stitches (tail portion is shown). Arrow points to the tacket fragment which originally held the now lost cover. (1494 Nuremberg incunable)
(Left) Image 10.11 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. Limp parchment binding of a per manuscript dated c 1600. A) sewing holes and remnants of the thread on the back, b) parchment stay in the centerfolds, c) distortion of the spine, shown at the tail. 230x185x35mm

(Above) Image 10.8 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. A blind tooled limp binding of brown leather, attached by four independent long-stitch sewings, fully covered by coloured embroidery.

(Left) Image 10.24 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. Example of extreme concave distortion of the spine of a ledger binding from 1546 (430x300x230mm).

(Left) Image 10.12 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. Limp bindings with link stitch sewing. Back plates of horn, lead buttons, beech wood.

(Left) Image 10.14 from The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding. Limp bindings with various types of “Langstichheftung”, leather buttons for closing with cord ties.
Bibliography


