

The Miscellany of Henry Oxinden:

how floss threaders, beading wire, and alligator forceps can reseat a book in situ

Ms. Adrienne Bell

INTRODUCTION

In November 2014, The Miscellany of Henry Oxinden, V.b.110, arrived in the Folger Conservation Lab as part of a slew of materials needing conservation prior to inclusion in an upcoming exhibition. During the condition reporting of the textblock and cover, the following issues were revealed:

- the spine of the stiff board vellum cover and the joints had previously been repaired via a heavy open weave fabric adhered to the interior of the cover's spine and between the vellum and the exterior of the boards.
- several signatures had begun to separate from the textblock and had been reattached using a long stitch that penetrated through the spine of the cover; this is most likely a later repair than the spine repair.
- the sewing had continued to deteriorate throughout the textblock and was broken in several different places along with the sewing supports.
- the interior of the boards were covered in manuscript, including the alum-tawed supports where they were laced through the boards.



When taken as a whole, the cover and textblock were fragile and badly in need of conservation prior to being on display for three months. When taken individually, the variety of repairs severely complicated the conservation treatment.

TREATMENT

Conversations with the Curator of Manuscripts at the Folger determined that there was too much provenance information contained in the current structure to allow for removing the textblock from the cover and pulling it; cutting through the remaining pieces of the structure to expedite the repair was not an option. Conservation treatment somehow needed to stabilize the existing sewing structure without removing it or exposing the spine of the textblock.

The decision was made to reseat the textblock in situ using floss threaders and bead wire to carry the sewing thread as an impromptu needle. The largest gap in between signatures was measured at 3mm. The alligator forceps were used to help move the "needle" back and forth within the signature and to access the needle within the limited confines of the space between the textblock and the cover at the spine.

The spine of the textblock was further reinforced by adhering pieces of Hanji paper to it using wheat starch paste. Due to the limited access, these were localized spine linings only. Tears in the vellum spine were repaired using a 10% concentration of isinglass and narrow strips of Japanese tissue;

SEWING TECHNIQUE

The resewing process was started at the largest gap between signatures, located just past the middle of the textblock, as the joints were still intact and did not offer good access to the exterior of the spine of the textblock. As the resewing started in the middle, the front half was reseed and then the back half.

Tools:

- GUM floss threaders
- 7 strand weight beading wire
- Alligator forceps



Sewing thread passed through loop of floss threader.



Inserting the floss threader and sewing thread into the space between the textblock and spine of cover in preparation to move the thread to the other side of the sew support.



Manipulating the floss threader to go behind the sewing support using the alligator forceps.



Pulling the thread from the space between the spine of the cover and the textblock after passing the thread behind the sewing support and in preparation for switching to the beading wire.



Using the alligator forceps to grasp the beading wire in the space between the textblock and the spine of the cover.



Using the beading wire as a needle tensioning the sewing thread inside the signature.



COMPLETED TREATMENT

It is important to note that resewing the textblock alone using this technique will not result in an evenly tensioned structure which in turn will not result in a full repositioning of signatures that have started or otherwise shifted from their original location. A combination of resewing and consolidate of the spine is necessary to achieve the most stable end product. All the same, the treated object remains fragile and should still be handled as such.

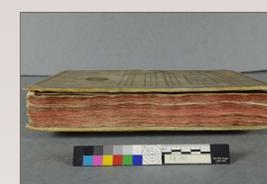
Spine of binding after treatment



Broken sewing supports after sewing



Fore-edge of textblock before (left) and after (right) resewing.



Tail of textblock before (left) and after (right) resewing.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following people:

- Ms. Renate Mesmer, Head of Conservation at the Folger Shakespeare Library for her deft guidance in the completion of this project.
- Dr. Heather Wolfe, Curator of Manuscripts, for her input into the treatment and her willingness to embrace new ideas.

Photo credits: all images showing the treatment in process are credited to Mr. Austin Plann Curley, Digitization/Exhibition Project Conservator at the Folger Shakespeare Library; all before and after documentation photos are credited to the author.

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