LCCDG 2.0-New Directions: New and/or Adaptive Materials, Methods and
Technologies Used in the Conservation Treatment and Housing of Library Collections.
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The Use of Rubber Cement for Facing Leather Spines: A Viable Option?

This technique was developed by Per Cullhed in 1996 to treat fire damaged books in the city library of Linköping, Sweden. Approximately 100 tight back books were heavily fire damaged, rendering the spines brittle, inflexible, prone to cracking and loss. A facing method was needed that would cause the least possible damage to the spines (Many had retained their tooling). Various techniques were tested, including Japanese paper, heat-set and Archibond tissue, all requiring solvents to activate the adhesive layer. Rubber cement was added as an alternative method. After testing, it was determined that the rubber cement technique added flexibility, visibility and a weaker bond that allowed the facing to be removed mechanically.

This technique has been used both at the Folger Shakespeare Library and at the New York Academy of Medicine for the removal of tight back spines that would otherwise be too difficult to lift. It has proved to be a successful alternative to more traditional facing methods. As more members of the conservation community try this technique, we would love to get feedback from your results. Scientific testing results would be especially welcome.

Cullhed, Per. ***Facing Leather: A Description of a Facing Method for Fire Damaged Tight Back Leather Bindings.*** Paper Restaurierung Vol 4 (2003) No. 4.

Sequence:

1- Apply a layer of Micro-crystaline wax on the spine. This both establishes a barrier between the leather and the rubber cement and as a release layer allowing for easy removal of the adhesive.
2- Using a brush, apply a layer of rubber cement.
3- Place plastic wrap on top of the rubber cement and press with your fingers to ensure full adhesion. Pay particular attention to the sides of raised cords. (When facing a spine with raised cords you need to apply individual panels of plastic wrap instead of one single piece).
4- Remove spine piece (or label) with knife, as you would when using more traditional facing methods.
5- Once faced spine is removed, use either a spatula or a Dremmel to remove flesh layer in order to achieve the desired thickness. The plastic wrap provides support and flexibility sufficient to allow the creation of a very thin spine piece.
6- Reattach spine (or label) to new spine and let dry completely.
7- Gently remove plastic wrap, working slowly from one end to the other. Some rubber cement will lift up during this process. When the plastic wrap has been removed, peel or roll off any remaining rubber cement – it should come away easily. It is important to carry out this process within a three or four day period so that the rubber cement does not completely dry; it needs to remain somewhat gummy in order to facilitate easy removal.

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