

Binding a Limp-bound Book

which make great site tokens or personal largess

Bellwether
Arts Collegium II
July 9, 2016
hosted by
the Shires of
Blackwood
and
Loch Baïs



As presented by
THLady Jorhildr Hrafnkelsdottir
version 1.2



Larger books require some special equipment, but these tiny books can be managed with improvised (and smaller) substitutions. While the techniques are historically based, some modern material substitutions have been made for practicality. This process documents how the site tokens for Bellwether II were produced.

A book is made of two main components: the interior pages (text block) and the cover. We start with the text block.

First start by cutting the paper to the same size. In this case we're working with paper that has been pre-cut to 2"x1.5".

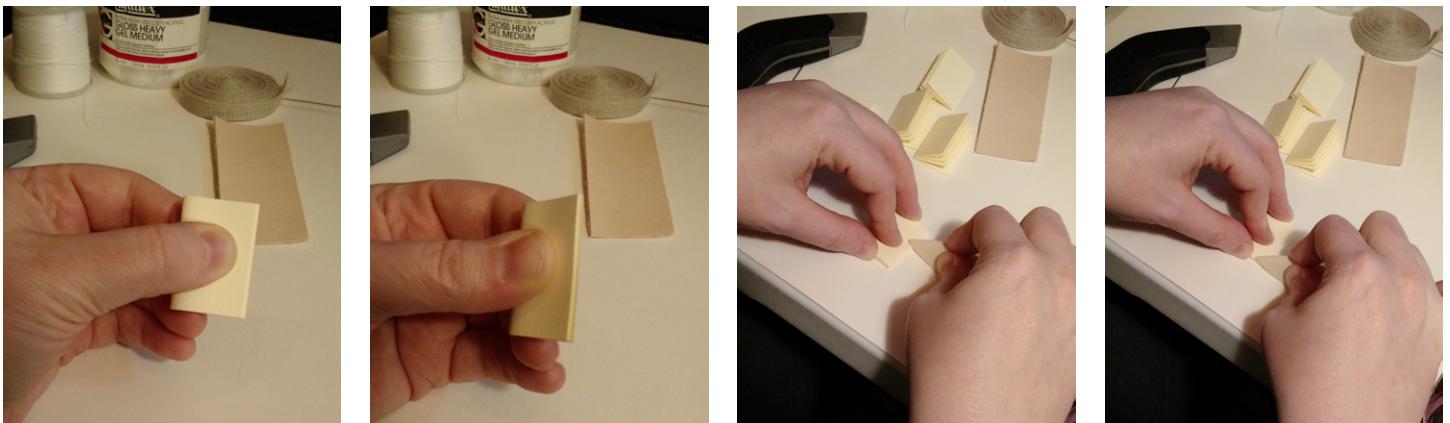
Materials:

- Paper of your choice
- Linen Thread
- Leather (for the cover)
- Beeswax
- Linen Tape or 1/4" Ribbon
- Super or Mull (a scrap of linen works too)
- Adhesive (Clear Acrylic Medium works well in place of period adhesives)

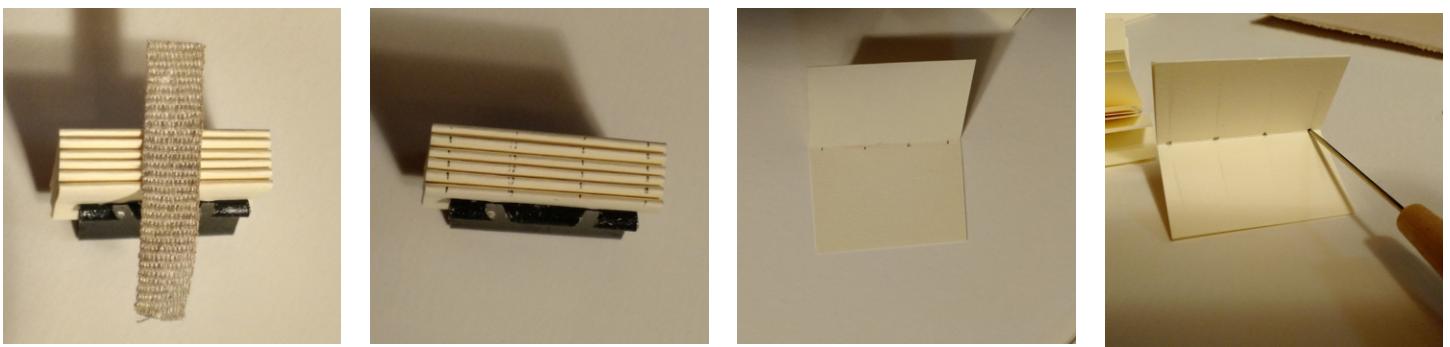
Tools:

- Utility knife with fresh blades
- Cutting Matte or cardboard
- Old paintbrush (for applying adhesive)
- Metal ruler
- Bone folder (not plastic)
- Bookbinding Awl
- Bookbinders Needles





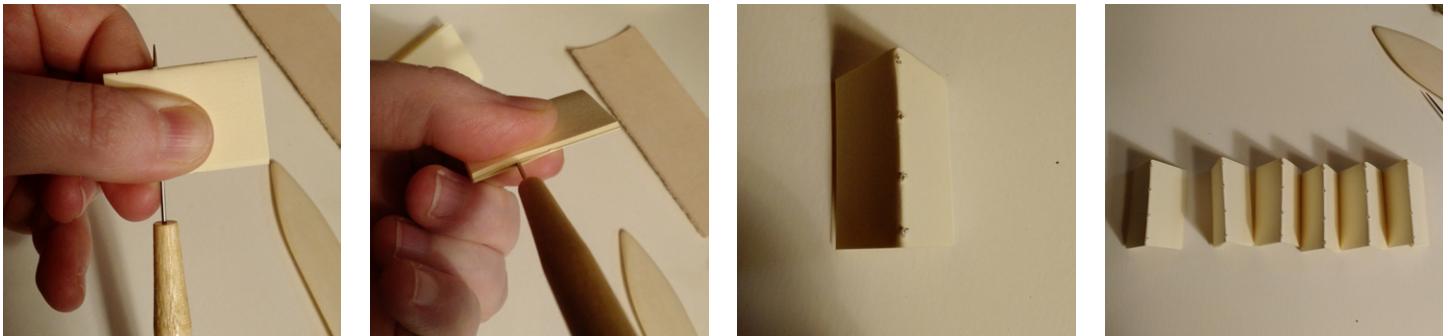
Fold your paper in sets of 4 sheets. When folding your pages over, you want to try to keep the sheets as centered to each other as possible. After finger-folding over your pages, lay the signature on your table and use a bone folder to set the crease in the pages. Real bone folders work better than plastic folders.



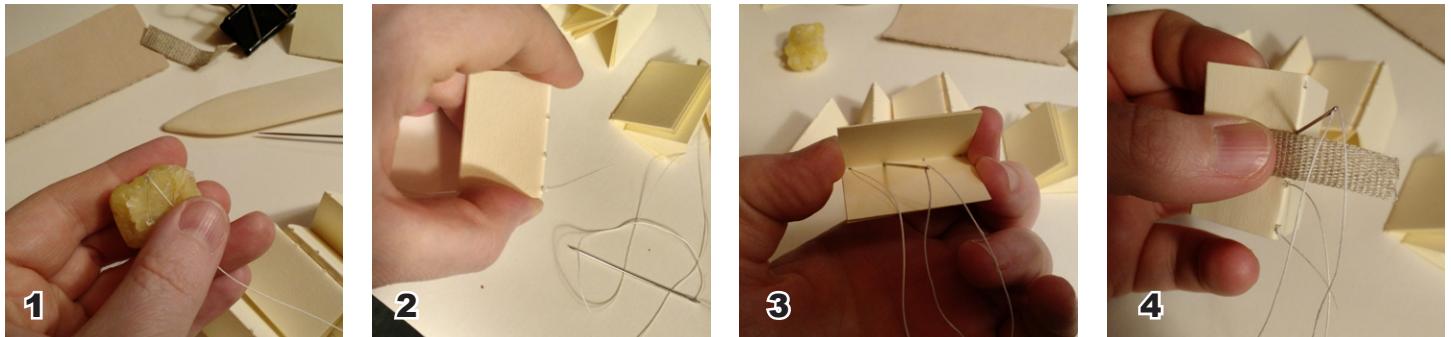
Once you have 7 signatures made, we need to make a template for punching the stitching holes. Take one signature and center your linen tape along the spine. Using a pencil, mark the edges of the tape. For books this small, I use the linen tape to measure against the existing marks to make another mark closer to the edge of the paper on each side. You'll have 4 marks total. The photo shows marks on all signatures, but you only need to mark one.

Take the marked page off the signature and turn it inside-out so your marks are folded in the center. Put your marked template into the signature and the center page. Line the awl up on the mark, then pinch the signature between your thumb and forefinger as shown. Gently twist and push the awl to punch the hole through, remembering to keep your hand and fingers clear of the point. Do this for each marked hole, being careful to keep the pages lined up. Use the originally marked page to line up and punch holes on your other 6 signatures. If your template tears or the holes become too loose, use one of the other pages for that "template" signature.

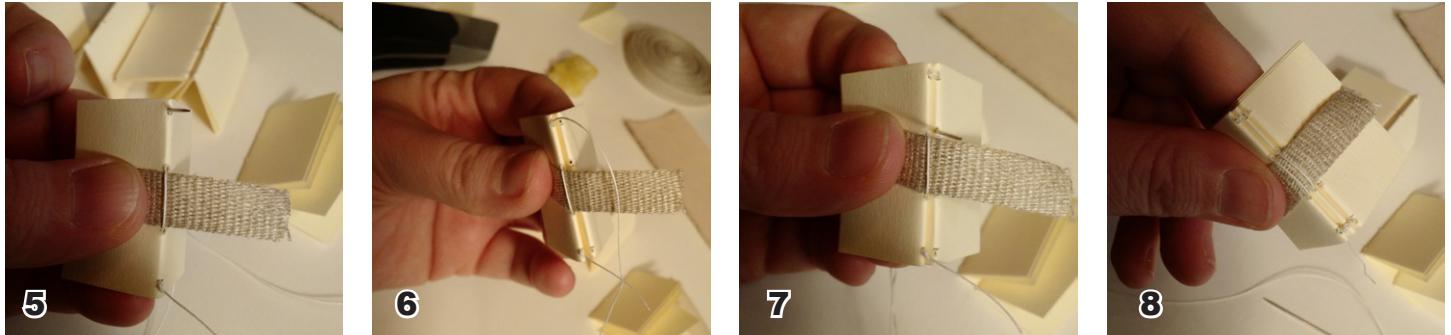
Discard your template (and spares) once you have your 6 signatures punched. These 6 signatures will be sewn together to form the text block for your book.



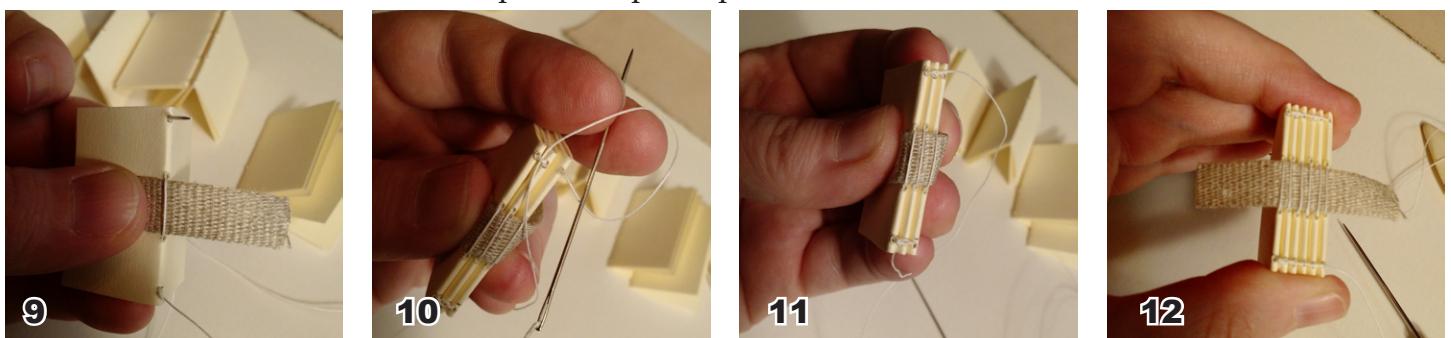
Next is to sew the signatures together with waxed linen thread. If you have unwaxed linen thread, simply pull the thread along your cake of beeswax to coat it (1). Thread your needle and tie a fat knot on the end of your thread. Thread your needle through the bottom hole of one of your signatures so that the knot holds against the outside (2). Move your needle out through the next hole and make sure your thread lays flat inside the fold (3). Lay your piece of linen tape against the center of the signature's spine. Sew over the tape so that it is held firmly in place when you pull your thread tight after passing through the next hole in the spine (4).



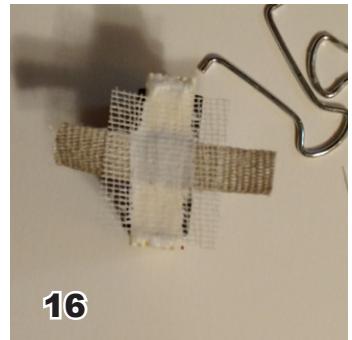
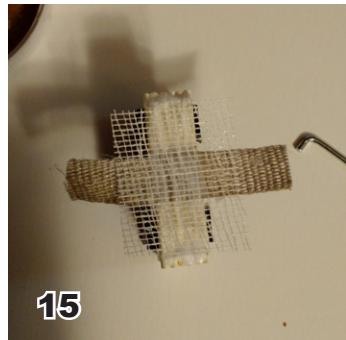
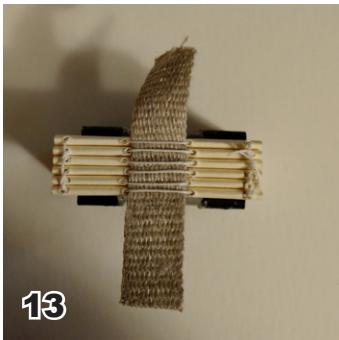
Pull the thread tight as you come out the top hole (5). Set a second signature on top of the one you are working with as shown (6). Sew into the top-hole of the new signature, then pull your string taught as you come out of the second hole (7). Once again, sew over the tape, then out the bottom hole. Make sure your thread is tight throughout the book, then tie the string's knotted "tail" and the base of your thread together to hold the two signatures together. You can do this with a loop if you are careful, however, as small as these books are, simply tying them together will work. Place a new signature against your stack and sew into the bottom hole (8).



Sew the signature to the existing text block just as you did the first two signatures. When you exit the last hole, we have to "tie" the thread into the previous signature. Do this by passing your needling under the connecting thread as shown below (9). Pull your needle through and under your thread to tie a loop around the thread (10). Pull this tight (11). This "chains" the signatures together. Repeat this process until all your signatures are sewn together (12). Make sure you always pass your needle in the same direction when looping the ends together. Don't worry if you have one going the wrong way. With a book this small, the next step will help compensate for minor errors.

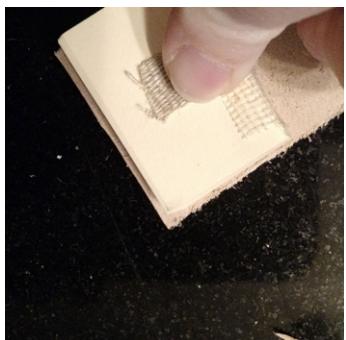
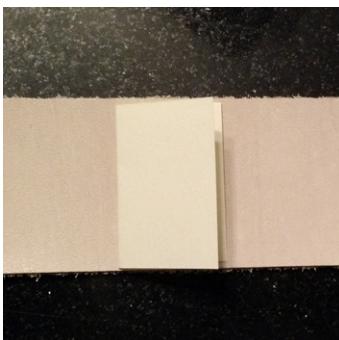


Clip your little book together with a bull-dog clip. If using the smaller clips, use one on each side of the text block to hold it evenly together (13). Using an old paint brush, apply acrylic gel medium or book binding paste to the spine of the book (14). Use your finder to push the paste around if needed. Just be careful not to get glue on the edges of the pages nor do you want to blue the sides of the tape to the paper. Cut a piece of mull or scrap linen slightly shorter than the spine of your text block and a bit wider than the spine. Press this into your still-wet spine and add a bit more glue on top (15). Use your finger to smooth the glue into the mull (16). Set the text block aside to dry.



Next you'll need to cut your leather cover for the book. You want your leather slightly taller than your text block and it needs to be long enough to wrap around the book and have overlap on the front. For mini-books, you can use a metal rule and a box cutter to cut your covers. Some leathers may be thin enough to cut with good scissors.

If you are dying your leather cover, do so before you glue your text block in. Make sure to use a sealer for your dye. If you don't want to dye your own, hobby stores often sell bags of scrap leather for reasonable prices. These pieces are usually adequate to cut covers for tiny books.

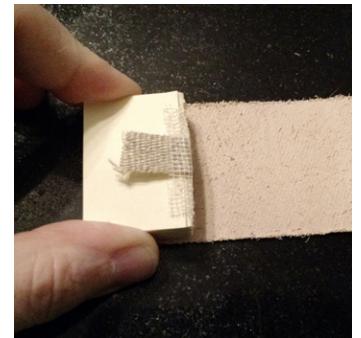
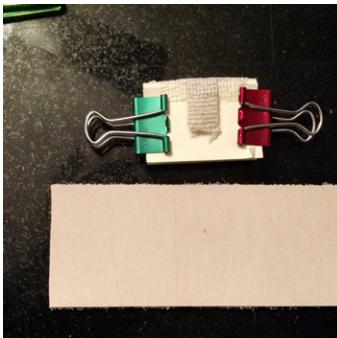


Fold in half two sheets of paper the same size as the paper you made your signatures from. This can be a decorative paper or the same paper as your other pages. These are the "end pages" which will actually attach your text block to the cover. Glue one side of end page to the outside page of your text block, but still below the mull & linen tape. Clean up any excess glue, then press your text block or clip it until the glue dries.

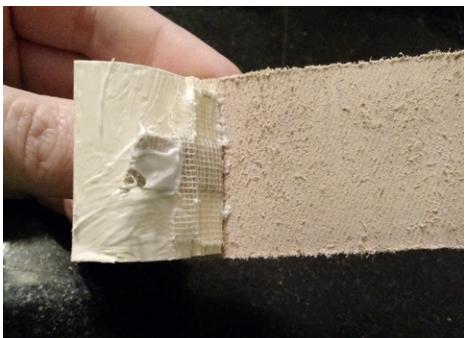


You will notice that the edges of the pages of your text block are not even. Normally the text block would be trimmed with a special tool called a book plane. Book planes are expensive. If you are binding a larger book, some printing shops have cutters that can trim the book for you. In the case of these wee little books, the variance doesn't really detract from the end product.

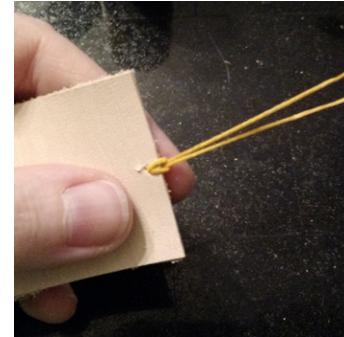
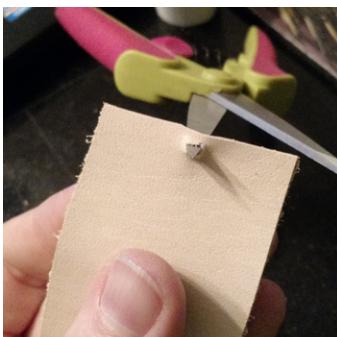
Once the end pages have dried, it's time to glue your text block to the cover. Coat one end page with glue, including the mull and linen tape on that side. Do not put glue on the spine. Press the end-page into position on the cover. Keep it as centered as you can and apply pressure to help it set.

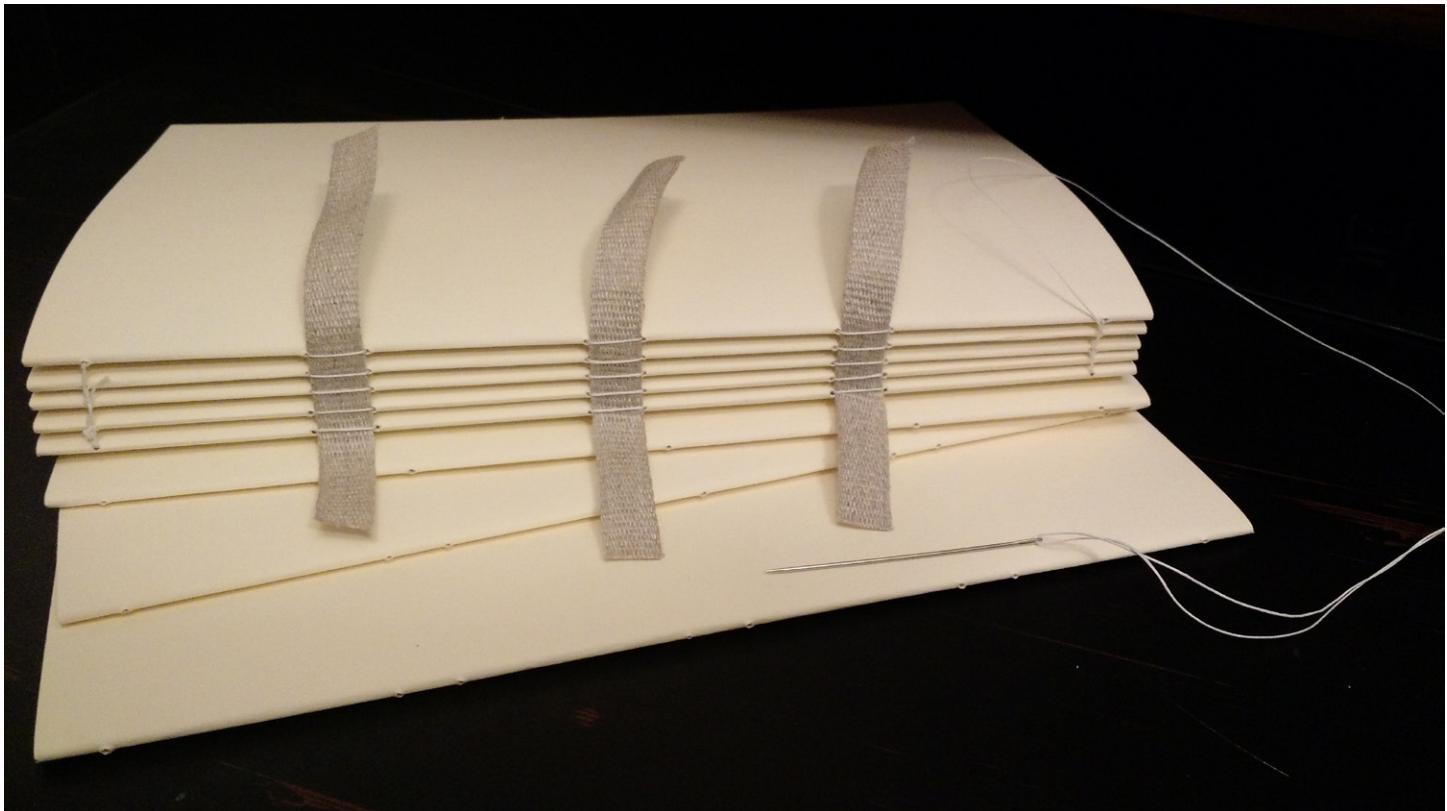


Apply glue to the other end page and close the cover around your text block. Keep the spine tight as you do this so your book will open properly later. Press the book under something heavy. I like to use a stack of gaming books for this. Larger books require a press.



Now for finishing touches. A limp-bound book usually has a wrap or tie to hold it shut. In this instance, I'm using waxed linen thread which is looped through a hole in the cover flap. You can use leather cord, braid, or just about any sort of string or cord for this.





When scaling to larger books, add extra rows of the linen tape as shown above.

Suppliers

www.johnnealbooks.com

The “bookbinding” section contains everything from awls, to real bone folders to binding needles.

www.hollanders.com

A wide range of bookbinding supplies and materials including leather for covers.



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