Care and conservation of manuscripts 13
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The conservation of two composite Anselm manuscripts from the twelfth century: Two contrasting approaches?

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This paper describes a recent project to conserve two Anselm manuscripts carried out at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The ‘Anselm’ project began in April 2009 when a one-day colloquium on the production and early circulation of manuscripts of St. Anselm’s works was held at the Bodleian to mark the 900th anniversary of his death. The colloquium brought together a number of scholars and Anselm manuscripts from the libraries of Trinity College, Cambridge, Lambeth Palace and the Bodleian. It became clear that two of the three Bodleian manuscripts were in a condition that made handling difficult and that they were at risk. Following the colloquium detailed treatment proposals were written for the two manuscripts. The proposals sought to halt further damage to both manuscripts whilst enabling them to be safely consulted by readers. The colloquium also led to separate approaches by two groups of scholars who offered to fund the necessary conservation treatment.

The manuscripts, their condition and conservation needs

Both volumes are medieval illuminated parchment manuscripts; they are both composite manuscripts and both have lost their earliest bindings. The manuscripts are of very different sizes, and one has been rebound and then repaired for the Bodleian, while the other survives in an important late medieval binding.

MS. Auct. D. 2. 6 is a composite volume, containing three separate twelfth-century illuminated texts: a liturgical calendar thought to be from St. Albans (text A), a Psalter thought to be from Winchester (text B) and
a copy of Anselm’s *Prayers and Meditations* with an important series of illustrations thought to be from Dorchester (text C). The three parts seem to have been combined by the time the manuscript belonged to the Benedictine nunnery of Littlemore in the later Middle Ages. The manuscript was given to the Bodleian in about 1672. The earlier binding history of the three texts, and in particular the question of when they were brought together, is of significant scholarly interest. The manuscript was bound in an early eighteenth-century blind-tooled inboard binding for the Bodleian Library; brown-tanned calf over pulp boards. This work was done quickly and cheaply and the binding was re-backed in the early twentieth century. In 2009 the binding and its previous repair were broken down. The sewing had two major breaks which made safe consultation very difficult and which placed the illumination at particular risk of abrasion (Fig. 214).

MS. Bodl. 271 is another composite manuscript. The first part is an important early copy of Anselm’s collected works probably compiled shortly after his death and known to have been kept at Christ Church, Canterbury. The second part, also Anselmian, was added in the fifteenth century, again at Christ Church, when the manuscript was given its current blind-tooled binding. The manuscript was given to the Bodleian in 1616.

The manuscript has a fifteenth-century blind-tooled Canterbury inboard binding; brown-tanned calf over wooden boards. The manuscript and its binding have not been previously repaired, but at some point in the 1950s or 1960s seven fourteenth-century parchment music fragments were removed from the binding. The original positions of the removed fragments were not recorded, and other fragments remained as spine linings. In 2009 the condition of the text block was good, but the condition of the binding made the manuscript very difficult to handle safely. Both boards of the binding were almost detached and the endband cores and over half of the sewing supports were broken at the joints. The covering leather had broken down at both joints and was largely missing at the spine. The right board sheet had been lifted from the board and the left board-sheet had been lifted at the spine edge, probably to allow access to the music fragments. The secondary chevron endbands were breaking down towards the joints and unravelling (Fig. 215). The two manuscript texts, the blind-tooled Canterbury binding, the early institutional history of the manuscript and the music fragments are all of scholarly interest.
Fig. 215. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 271. Before treatment: head edge and spine.
Digitisation and access

Digitisation of manuscripts provides an excellent opportunity to enhance access to collections. Unfortunately, our library does not have a digitisation budget, and so all such work is carried out using external or project funding, and no such funding was available for this project.

Restriction of access to manuscripts for the purposes of conservation is also an important aspect in protecting our collections. All readers of manuscripts at the Bodleian Library must demonstrate their genuine need to see original material as part of their research, and unless the Library is satisfied of a reader’s need for this, access is restricted to facsimiles, microfilms and digital copies. For those readers who do meet the Library’s access criteria, however, the Bodleian prides itself on making its wealth of collections available in the original. This access is central to the role of the Library as a leading centre of manuscript research, and though digitisation may make materials accessible to a wider audience, for many scholars of medieval manuscripts access to the physical item is still essential. The conservation of these two Anselm manuscripts will enable such access to continue without compromising the safety of the books.

The conservation treatments

The two manuscripts initially appeared to have very different conservation needs but both required treatments which would halt further damage and restore functionality, allowing them to be safely consulted by readers. This requirement called for different approaches to the conservation of the two manuscripts. MS. Auct. D. 2. 6 required the removal of two heavy glue layers from the spine for any treatment, and the poor underlying structure meant that in-situ repair would not be sufficient to return functionality to the volume. At this point it was judged that the volume would need to be pulled, repaired and rebound. The largely intact sewing and good quality of materials used for the binding of MS. Bodl. 271, on the other hand, presented the possibility of in-situ repair. The need for conservation also offered the opportunity to investigate the binding histories of these manuscripts and to present this evidence to readers.
The boards and spine covering were entirely detached allowing easy access to the spine for cleaning. Glue and paper linings were removed mechanically and the heavy layers of glue were removed using a paste poultice. After cleaning, it became clear that there was an earlier set of sewing holes that appeared to include text B but not text C (it was impossible to comment on previous holes in text A at this stage as the spine fold was obscured by a leaf hooked around the quire). In consultation with curatorial staff the decision to pull the manuscript, repair the leaves and provide a new binding was confirmed. This also allowed for a fuller investigation of its binding history.

On removal of the eighteenth-century sewing, and with further examination of the spine folds, it became clear that there had only been one previous sewing, which had been used for all three texts (Fig. 216). In addition, coloured (green, purple, yellow and red) threads from endband tiedowns were found throughout all three texts. These are likely to be associated with the remains of a similarly coloured textile covering which is visible on the recto of the first parchment leaf of the manuscript (fol. 1). This is now a single leaf which has marks and stains indicating that it was once a board-sheet. The conjoint leaf has been cut away and the single remaining leaf was refolded and hooked around the first quire for the eighteenth-century binding. The leaf is short at the fore-edge and was held in place, hooked around the first quire, with a thread tacket (Fig. 217). Remains of textile covering turn-ins and a mark from a single fore-edge fastening are clearly visible on the recto of this leaf. Once the
Fig. 217. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Auct. D. 2. 6. The early boardsheet with remains of textile turn-ins hooked around quire 1 for the eighteenth-century binding (fol. 1).
glue deposits were cleaned from the spine the earlier spine fold could be seen with sewing holes matching the earlier positions found in the other quires.

Further evidence of the earlier sewing positions was found in the form of a fragment of earlier thread entangled in the eighteenth-century sewing (fols. 188–9, text C). This thread confirmed the position of the older sewing holes. Quire 21 (fols 153–4, text B) provides strong evidence that the manuscript has been sewn only twice, the eighteenth-century sewing missed the inner bifolium of the quire passing instead through the spine folds of the outer bifolia. The spinefold of the inner bifolium shows only one set of sewing stations, those associated with the coloured endband tiedowns (Fig. 218). The earlier sewing holes were almost certainly the ones used for the first binding of all three texts of this manuscript. Because they had only been used once, and in some cases had undisturbed threads remaining within them, it was decided that repairing and reusing the eighteenth-century holes would cause less disturbance to the earlier sewing evidence.

To provide a structural binding to support the repaired quires, the manuscript was sewn on double supports of linen cords using linen thread and a concertina guard of Japanese paper. New parchment endleaves were sewn with the manuscript. The sewing support slips were laced into new quarter-sawn oak boards and secured with alum-tawed wedges. After attaching the boards the volume was closed, drawing the spine into a gentle natural round. To control the opening of the manuscript the sewing supports were then pack-sewn (Fig. 219). Primary endbands were sewn on double linen cores, tied down at the centre of each quire, and the cores were laced into the boards. Secondary endbands of dark natural and grey linen thread were sewn over the primary cores. Japanese paper patch linings adhered with wheat starch paste were used to protect the backs of the quires during pack sewing but no other linings were used. The manuscript was covered in full with alum-tawed calf skin leaving the spine itself free of paste. The conserved volume is housed in a tailored double-walled cloth box incorporating a portfolio to hold the eighteenth-century boards and other fragments.
Fig. 218. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Auct. D. 2. 6. Spinefolds: Quire 21, fols. 153–4 (text B) missed by the eighteenth-century sewing (left); fols. 188–9 (text C) with a fragment of earlier thread entangled in the eighteenth-century sewing (right).
MS. Bodl. 271

Although by 2009 the manuscript was in a very fragile state, it is a nevertheless a remarkable survival. The conservation needs of the manuscript had resulted from mechanical breakdown of the binding exacerbated by the past attempts to remove the music fragments. This had compromised the structure of the binding, leading to almost-detached boards, loose sewing at the beginning and end of the volume, and a fragmentary spine and endbands.

Although the binding needed stabilisation, the sewing was for the most part sound. Initially the possibility of repairing the binding whilst keeping all elements together was investigated. However, the equal interest in the texts, the music fragments, and the binding seemed to call for a different approach. A desire by musicologists to uncover all the fragments meant that the damaged endbands would also need to be at least partially removed if the fragments were to be released. The decision to remove and retain both the fragments, and therefore also the endbands, resulted in the treatment resembling a kind of archaeological dig (Fig. 220). This would allow both the fragments and the endbands to be recorded and presented to the reader without further repair and would give greater access the structure of the binding.

Treatment began by mechanically releasing the partially lifted left boardsheet. This, in conjunction with the now lifted spine lining fragments, allowed the original positions of all the fragments to be recorded and their relationship to each other noted.

Work to stabilise the binding began by pasting and whip-stitching linen braids to either side of the supports. The first and final six quires, with the repaired endleaves and preliminaries, were then resewn alongside the original sewing. This ensured that the text block quires were firmly attached to the sewing supports and braids away from breaks in the supports at the joints. The new sewing followed the original herringbone pattern and incorporated parchment strips placed over the supports (Fig. 221). The braids were then fed through the first lacing hole and secured with alum-tawed wedges. They were securely attached to the boards but on opening still peaked at the breaks in the supports. To counteract this, the parchment bridges were bound to the supports, braids and sewing (Fig. 221[inset]). This enabled them to act once more as a single unit and allowed board leverage to be returned to the repaired volume.
Fig. 220. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 271. Lifting the music manuscript waste spine lining and head endband.
A barrier of Japanese paper and a slotted lining spine lining were then pasted to the spine and outer face of the boards.

To further enhance the board attachment and control the opening of the manuscript new structural endbands were sewn over linen cores in a figure of eight tied down at the centre of each quire. The cores were laced into the boards at the original lacing point and secured with alum-tawed wedges. The volume was then rebacked with surface-stained alum-tawed calf skin and tied up following the pattern that could be observed at the spine edges of the boards. From the remains of the original endbands and small areas of covering leather that survived it could be seen that the original covering had been trimmed to the height of the primary endband at the spine. The cut edge was then bound by a secondary chevron endband sewn through the covering. The same method for covering was used, and secondary endbands were sewn in indigo and natural linen thread using the original as a model (Fig. 222). The repaired volume is now housed in a tailor-made double-walled cloth box which incorporates a portfolio to
Fig. 222. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 271. Working the secondary chevron endband over the primary endband and through the reback.
Fig. 223. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 271. Left board-sheet after treatment with inset of original position of Bodleian chain staple holes.
hold the original endbands, the music manuscript waste and other fragments.

Contrasting approaches?

As we came to write this paper we have realised that although there are dramatic contrasts between details of the two treatments, the approach was consistent for both. For both manuscripts the overriding goal was to halt damage and to enable future readers to consult the manuscripts safely by restoring functionality to their bindings. Each of the treatments has allowed the binding history, which is significant to the history of each of the manuscripts, to be investigated and for this to be recorded and presented to future readers.

We will use the remainder of this paper to explore how our approach led to differences in treatment by reviewing the choices made in three areas: the treatment of the earlier sewing evidence, endleaves and endbands.

Earlier sewing evidence

At the start of the project it was thought that the earlier sewing history of the twelfth-century section of MS. Bodl. 271 would not require investigation. When the parchment spine linings and endbands were lifted from the spine, however, a number of intact thread quire tackets were revealed. These predate the text's first binding and had been used to keep individual quires together in the scriptorium. They had survived two bindings, being hidden and protected under the endband tiedowns. When the endbands and their tiedowns were removed, holes from tacket stations were found and recorded in all twenty of the twelfth-century manuscript quires, and fragments of five tackets remained in place.

In contrast, the earlier sewing of MS. Auct. D. 2. 6 was known to be of interest, and the discoveries made during treatment have been detailed above. When choosing which of the existing sewing stations were to be reused when the manuscripts was resewn it was decided to reuse the later stations, leaving the earlier stations untouched and unrepaired. With both manuscripts, fragments of thread (endband tiedowns, sewing and quire tackets) were retained in the volume and will be visible after
treatment. In the case of MS. Bodl. 271, when the replacement primary endband was sewn, fols. 34–5, which had the best preserved of the tackets, were deliberately missed to preserve and display the tacket.

Endleaves

The institutional history of MS. Bodl. 271 has been recorded by its binding. The lower corner of the left board has evidence of two chain staples, one from Christ Church, Canterbury and a later one from the Bodleian. Two holes from the Bodleian staple pierce the board-sheet, while the Christ Church staple was attached before the board-sheet was put down. The binding was carried out after a separate building for a chained library was completed at Christ Church in 1442. Unfortunately, the conjoint leaf to the board-sheet had been roughly cut away at the joint, leaving a small but prominent stub with a heavy edge. The board-sheet had been partially lifted in the past and had become badly creased and folded back. It was completely lifted for this treatment and to protect the jagged spine edge its position had to be moved towards the fore-edge when it was replaced. This has now obscured the evidence of chaining practice, although the original position has been recorded and photographed (Fig. 222).

In MS. Auct. D. 2. 6 one of the original board-sheets had been adapted and incorporated into the eighteenth-century binding, hooked around the first quire. This arrangement has been retained in the new binding rather than unfolding the stub and attempting to recreate an earlier endleaf structure. In this case adding additional functional endleaves to the binding and retaining the eighteenth-century position of this leaf seemed to be a more appropriate solution. Perhaps surprisingly, the rebinding of MS. Auct. D. 2. 6 has preserved the context of its earlier endleaf arrangement, whereas the in-situ repair of MS. Bodl. 271 has resulted in the arrangement of the board-sheet being disturbed.

Endbands

MS. Bodl. 271 retained both of its fifteenth-century compound endbands, although both were damaged. These were sewn over and through the covering leather and the manuscript fragments used to line the spine. The
desire to lift the music fragments and store them off the book will allow them to be studied by musicologists, but left the dilemma of whether repairing and enhancing the endbands in-situ would be possible. Structural endbands would be necessary to enable the large volume to function but would require intervention. It was decided to remove and retain the original endbands and to replace them with new structural endbands. The unrepaired endbands can be studied in conjunction with photographs of their original position and new secondary endbands, sewn over and through the reback, recreate the originals and should alert readers to them.

With MS. Auct. D. 2. 6 there is clear evidence of a decorative endband at head and tail using green, purple, yellow and red thread. This is almost certainly associated with the textile covering, of which we see remnants on the board-sheet, of the first luxurious binding. Further details of the binding cannot be ascertained, and to attempt to recreate such a vibrant decorative feature on a new binding seemed inappropriate. The position and colour of each tiedown was recorded and the threads secured in place, and a neutral coloured structural endband was sewn which is visually different from the remaining tiedowns. The rebinding of MS. Auct. D. 2. 6 has preserved the context of the remaining earlier endband tiedowns, whilst with the in situ repair of MS. Bodl. 271, the need for structural endbands has resulted in the evidence of the original endbands being preserved off the book.

In conclusion, this project prompted us to compare and assess the concurrent treatments of these two manuscripts. Both treatments have proved to be successful, halting further physical damage to the manuscripts and allowing them to be safely consulted by readers. Although superficially the treatments may appear to be contrasting, we maintain that they derive from a common approach. They both aimed to restore functionality whilst recording and preserving a range of evidence and revealing material that would otherwise be hidden from readers. We do not claim that either treatment is more sympathetic to the manuscripts or to the range of physical evidence that they carry. Rather we hope that these manuscripts show that treatment decisions must answer the needs of users while respecting the history and integrity of existing structures.
Notes

1. For Anselm (c.1033–1109), arguably the most significant theologian and author ever to hold the office of Archbishop of Canterbury, see the Oxford dictionary of national biography (www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/572?docPos=1 last accessed 1st October 2012). The colloquium ‘Early Manuscripts of Anselm: a discussion with five manuscripts’ was held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, on 27 April 2009. Details can be found at: www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/csb/Anselm_Day_Bodleian.htm and www.history.ox.ac.uk/sharpe/index.htm (both last accessed 9 August 2011).


4. Thomson has suggested that they were bound together and at Oxford c.1200, ‘probably at the nunnerie of Littlemore’, but that they were not initially conceived as a single volume. Thompson, Manuscripts from St Albans, pp. 36 & 136.

5. The term ‘inboard binding’, coined by Nicholas Pickwoad, is used to denote a binding structure where the boards are attached to the text block before the volume is covered.


8. The lifted fragments have been published in RISM and digital images with the RISM catalogue entry are available in the Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music (www.diamm.ac.uk/jsp/FacetManager?op=1&FacetType=SOURCEFACET&sourceKey=493 last accessed 12th October 2012). There were two thread hitches, to first and second sewing supports at the lefthand board, which may have been carried out at this time as a crude repair.

9. Additional paper endleaves had been added for the eighteenth-century binding. These were removed and retained with the boards when the volume was treated.

10. This is a variation of a technique first used to reinforce the broken endband cores of a Greek-style binding (see Andrew Honey and Nicholas Pickwoad, ‘Learning from the past: Using original techniques to conserve a twelfth-century illuminated manuscript and its sixteenth-century Greek-style binding at the Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai’, in: Christina Rozeik, Ashok Roy and David Saunders, eds., Con-
servation and the Eastern Mediterranean: Contributions to the IIC Congress, Istanbul (London, 2010), p. 59 and fig. 6.)