

[Cover to Cover: Exposing the Bookbinder's Ancient Cra](#)

There are many reasons why bindings begin to fail. A small percentage of these can be attributed to poor workmanship and inappropriate choice or quality of materials used during the initial binding process; the vast majority, however, can simply be chalked up to the ravages of time.

Though robust if constructed well, books are not interminable. Their longevity is dependent upon a variety of factors, environmental conditions in particular. Air pollution and extremes and fluctuations in both temperature and humidity can rapidly accelerate the deterioration of glues, paper, cloth and leather.

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Whilst paste is used to attach leather to covering boards, it's never a good idea to use it in the repair of old or roting leather. Paste is very moist, and it has a tendency to turn the outer side of the leather black on contact. A better alternative is PVA or a PVA/paste combination. Only a small amount on the underside is required; excess glue may seep out along the edge of the leather creating an unsightly dark line, as pictured.

It's not only paper that has a grain direction; boards have one too. If the grain direction does not run parallel with the spine, warping and buckling of the boards will inevitably occur putting undue strain on the hinges and the textblock.

Not the finest example of gold tooling! Keeping the pallet straight whilst tooling the spine is a lot harder than it might seem, and whilst gold can be removed from the leather cover, using a little isopropyl alcohol, to minimise the appearance of errors, it is much harder to remove the bli o