

A Medieval Binding

For the devotee of bookbindings, the College Library provides much to regret. While there are important early bindings on some of the Greek books, and indeed on the Arabic, most of the Latin and English manuscripts—which form the great part of the collection—were rebound in the late seventeenth century, when the older bindings were discarded. Regret turns to disappointment in finding that these replacement bindings are, to say the least, indifferently done. Everywhere there is the monotony of reverse calf over pasteboards, and what was very badly done was the decorative red wash carelessly splashed over the edges of the text-block, which has often spilled down between the pages. Amongst the rank and file, there are, however, some true gems. One of them is MS 49, still retained in its medieval binding. It is in most respects a typical fifteenth-century binding of white-tawed leather over bevelled wooden boards. What is very unusual, and which makes the binding very interesting, is the presence on the back board of a substantial piece of metalwork, a long staple arched high at the centre, of a size that has ensured its removal in other college libraries. It is the sign of a common arrangement in a medieval library, by which books would be chained to the desks where they were stored. This staple is 128 mm long and 14 mm broad, placed horizontally across the centre of the back board about 30 mm from the foot, where it is held by four nails. A cushion of stout leather comes between the metal and the cover. The nails show through the pastedown on the inner side of the board, three of them still shod with their metal washers. The middle of the staple is arched to a height of 11 mm to take the first link of the chain, or the ring to which the first link was fastened, and the other end of the chain would have linked to an iron rod running under the desk, ensuring its security in what would have been a communal reference library. The fact that the staple is on the back board shows that the book was originally stored lying flat on a sloping desk with the back board uppermost, the common arrangement for books in a chained library before the sixteenth century.





What is most unusual is to find this to have been shelved in any way other than for an inconveniently bulky mass of metal the way books were shelved, which saw them facing outwards, chained from the fore-edge were naturally intolerant of unneighbourly from the board and therefore wasted space leather of the volume next door when the on old bindings has now normally to be leaves, such as nail holes or rust marks. T11.2622 0 0 11.2896 226.86 344.04 Tm0 Tc0 Tw(i)TjETQq1 i 177.72 edge was less likely to attack than our survivor here, which health of the book next door. brass clip attached to the foot has gone, detectable only by its primary staple that was here so

The manuscript itself is a Franciscan friar Petrus Iohannes the scholarly abbot of St Albans cost of its production, according to a sum high enough to include a sum high enough to include gave the book to Gloucester (Worcester College), and, like the university's second-hand market known when the book arrived it was reported in the unique *Hiberniae in unum collecti*. It at Gloucester College, although New College, witnessed by its board. It shows that desking in the sixteenth century, since that time of Canterbury William Warham these books should have escaped a question that probably has not