ANGELA JAMES

Containing Bindings

Somehow a fine binding without a box seems naked, incomplete and vulnerable. Many binders make boxes or other containers for their books either to protect them or to make the object more of a whole, or both.

The most commonly made container is the drop-back box which fulfils all the necessary functions required of it although it may not in itself be very exciting. A shaped spine covered with leather can be used on the box and lettered in gold so that on the shelf it has the appearance of a book. This may satisfy some collectors who derive much pleasure from rows of tooled leather spines, but I am not fond of these ersatz spines: I prefer to make a container which hints at the pleasures within. A box does have to perform its function and one does have to be wary of making such a work of art that a second box is required to protect the first—although the notion of a set of boxes like a Russian doll with a miniature book in the innermost one is most intriguing—but there is no reason why the design and construction of the container should not be as well thought through as the binding it will contain. A miniature binding which I did on a book called *Nothing to Wear was* housed in a little dress box such as used to be supplied by all smart department stores and exclusive dress shops. The lid was covered with dyed pale blue sheepskin and the base with pale pink sheepskin. It was lined inside with padded blue and white striped silk, and the box was 'tied' (but permanently fixed on the lid) with a blue silk ribbon and a label was tied on with the title of the book on it. This almost fell into the trap of needing a second box but I assumed that, given its small size, it was unlikely to be stored on a shelf. As you may imagine, the box itself created anticipation of what might be inside just as one experiences the excitement of lifting off the lid of a large dress box and folding back the layers of crisp white tissue paper to find the frock beneath. Perhaps I have been unconsciously influenced by the reading of Noel Streatfield's *Party Frock* when much younger!

I have done a series of bindings on *The Art of Binding Books,* a miniature which I wrote and which was printed by the Fleece Press. It gave me an opportunity to experiment with several different kinds of contain-

ers, one of the most successful of which was a 'matchbox' ideally suited to the scale of the book. Of course not only miniature books need boxes and not all of the containers which I have made for them can be suitably scaled up for larger volumes. At the other end of the size scale, one of the most successful boxes I have seen was for Ron King's book *The heft-Handed Punch*—a blue and cream striped cloth-covered slip case with a rectangular hole cut out of the side like a Punch and Judy booth, the red cloth cover of the book showing through with the title blocked on to it. The advantage of experimenting with miniatures is, of course, that they are not extravagant with materials and a failed experiment is not such a disaster.

I propose to describe only three types of container: the folding case, the drop-back box and the slipcase with tray. Once the techniques of these three have been learnt then the variations are as infinite as your imagination, and you are free to explore other constructions and materials. A well made and designed container is immensely satisfying, but it is very important to bear in mind that all measurements must be exact and accurate. An ill-fitting box is not performing properly—the lid must not gape, it should not squash the book nor allow it to slop around, and there should be no gap at the spine which allows dust to creep in. Although I have reservations about slipcases because they leave the most vulnerable part of the book, the spine, exposed to light and pollutants, a case within a slipcase can be a very successful way of containing a binding. (see illustration of *A Flora).* The advantage of having a tray inside a slipcase is that it can be withdrawn and provide a surface for the book to sit on. The tray in the illustration has a ledge under which the fore-edge of the binding fits. The reason for this was that the book was printed on extremely heavy paper and had a tendency to gape. Inhibiting this in the box obviously helps to correct the problem and allows the book to be slid into the slipcase without damage.

For ease of description I have confined the materials in the examples described to millboard, buckram and a lining of suede or felt. There are, of course, many other materials which could be used, for example, leather, cloth and plastics.

The thickness of millboard used will depend on the size of the book to be housed but, as a rough guide, a box for an average hardback novel would need a 2.3mm millboard, a much larger box a 3-4mm board and conversely a small or miniature box a 1.2mm board. Buckram rather than bookcloth is recommended for its superior strength, and if other kinds of cloth are used it is very much easier to handle them if they are first lined with paper. PVA adhesive is used throughout.

Tools Required	Materials Required
knife	millboard
straight edge	buckram
cutting mat	PVA adhesive
a sharp pencil	kraft paper
ruler	felt or suede
scissors	drafting tape
bone folder	sandpaper
weights	buttons or beads
needle	elastic
awl	polyester threads
a board chopper	
makes cutting much	
quicker and more accurate.	
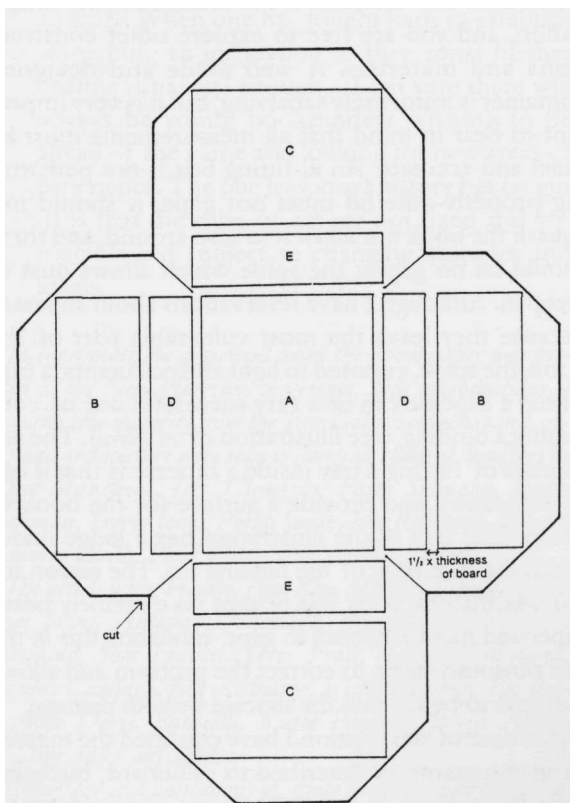
A Folding Case

1. Cut the base board A to the size of the book plus the thickness on all four sides of the lining being used, including *any card that the lining is to be stuck on to.*

2. Cut the second board B to the same dimensions and cut it exactly in half down its length.

3. Cut a third board C 5mm wider and 5mm longer than the first two. Cut this exactly in half across the width.

4. Cut the walls as follows: Lay base board A on a flat surface, on top of that the lining, then the book, then another lining and the second board B. Measure the height of the two long walls D by placing a board on its edge on the flat surface and marking accurately to the top surface of the sandwich. **[2]**
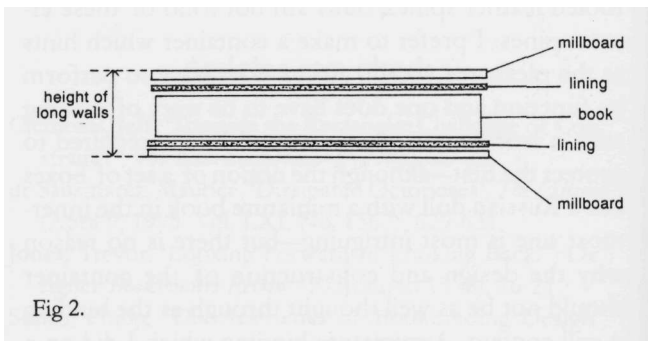Cut the length to the same length as board A.

Fig 2.

5. To cut short walls E, the height is that of the long walls plus another board thickness. The length is the same as the width of board C.

6. Cut a piece of buckram to allow for the layout in figure 1, leaving a 50mm turn in all round.

7. Starting with board A, glue each piece with PVA and fix them to the buckram. Leave a gap of one and a half times the thickness of the board between each piece of board. Rub down thoroughly through silicone paper on the buckram side.

8. Cut the covering material across the corners as shown in [1] allowing for a neat turn-in of the corners and make cuts of 45° towards, but not quite up to, the corners of board A as shown. Glue and turn in all round.

9. Cut four pieces of buckram almost the same length as, and the same width plus 70mm, of the walls D and E. Glue each piece and stick down the walls and across on to the boards on either side. [3]
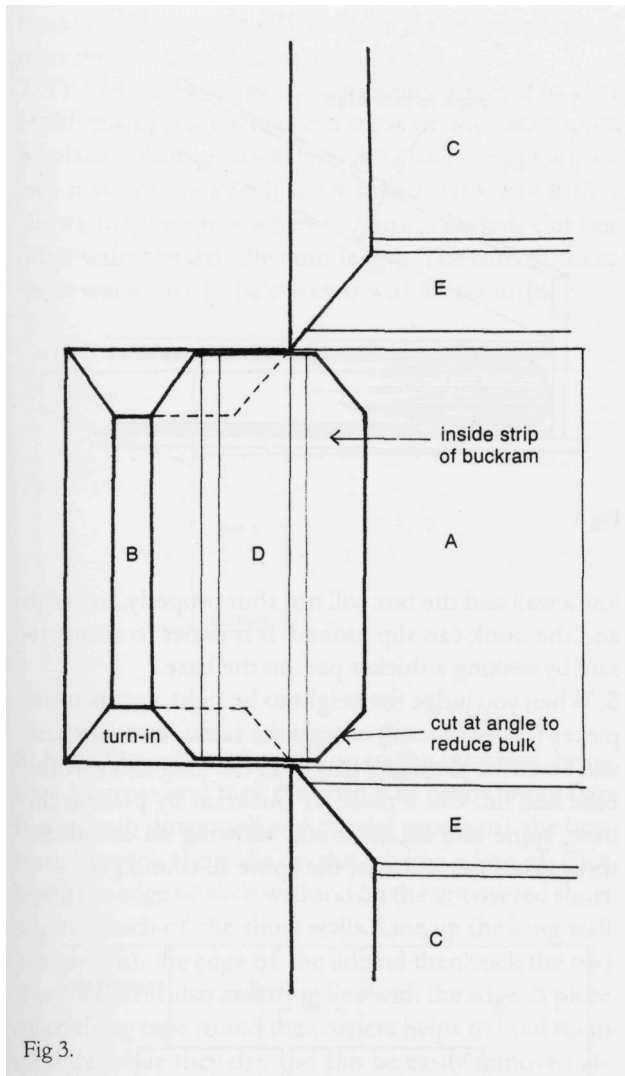
Fig 3.

lining on wall fitting inside other pads
lining
Fig 4.

10. To make the lining pads:

If using felt, cut a piece of kraft paper the size of board A less 3mm all round. Glue the paper and stick it on to a piece of felt which is then trimmed, leaving 3mm all round beyond the kraft. PVA the kraft side carefully and stick directly on to the board, but be careful not to use too much PVA which would result in it seeping through the felt or creeping out of the sides.

If using suede, felt or other fabric, a better finish is achieved by turning the edges over a card. Cut the card for board A to the size of the board less the thickness of the suede all round. PVA the card, stick on to the suede and then turn in all round making neat corners. You may find that you need to fill in inside the turn-ins to make the back surface level. The pad can then be glued and stuck down firmly. It can take some time to adhere completely so it should be kept under a board with weights on top for at least half an hour. The boards B and C are lined in exactly the same way.

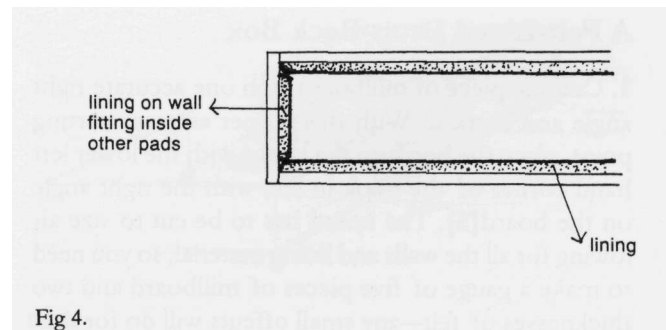The lining pads for the walls have to be cut

narrower to allow them to sit snugly inside the other pads when the flaps are folded over. [4]

You may, of course, wish to line simply with paper in which case it need only be cut to size and stuck direct. No allowance need be made for lining pads when cutting the boards in the first place.

The case can be fastened using various methods: ribbons, buttons, elastic, Velcro, hook and loop or press studs. Whichever way you choose, it should be remembered that in most cases the fastening will have to be fixed through the two flaps C *before* the lining pads are stuck down.

Interesting buttons or beads make an excellent closure with either dyed elastic or a plaited silk or polyester thong to wind round them. I like to make my own buttons from maple or other wood which can be stained, but there is a huge selection of buttons and beads available from good haberdashery counters and specialist shops. To attach a bead or button, strong linen or polyester thread must be used, or wire, making holes through the board with a thin awl in advance. A small depression cut on the inside of the board will take up the thickness of the thread and the knot used to tie them off. Make sure that the button is not sewn tightly down against the board or you will be unable to wind a thong around or secure elastic. White elastic can be dyed to match the button using coloured inks: cut the elastic to an approximate length and immerse it in artists' ink for about thirty minutes. Lift it out with tweezers and leave it to dry. To secure it into the flap, make a hole with an awl, push the elastic or thong through and PVA it down into a small depression cut on the underside of the flap, hammering down the board pushed through in making the hole. You may find it advisable to line the inside of the flaps with a piece of manilla card to conceal the unevenness of the closure fixings. Once the technique of making a folding case has been mastered, there are several variations which can be tried. The top flaps can be edged with leather and they can be cut to different shapes. It can be made to fold in like an envelope and many different ways of securing the flaps can be devised.

A Felt-Lined Drop-Back Box

1. Cut one piece of millboard with one accurate right angle and mark it. With this corner as your starting point, place the book on the board with the lower left hand corner of the book in line with the right angle on the board **[5].** The board has to be cut to size allowing for all the walls and lining material, so you need to make a gauge of five pieces of millboard and two thicknesses of felt—any small offcuts will do for this. The five millboards are to allow for the top and bottom walls of both the base and the lid plus an extra thickness to allow for easy closure and the buckram covering.

Fig 5.
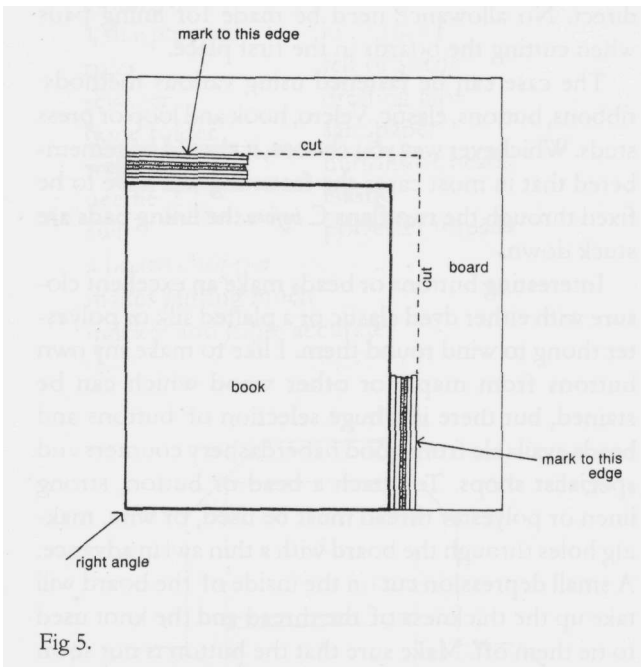
2. Place the millboard and felt gauge against the top edge of the book and mark the outside edge of it with a very sharp pencil. To mark the long side of the box use four millboards and two felts i.e. the long walls of base and lid plus the spine plus an extra one. Place gauge against the fore-edge of the book and mark along the outside edge, as in [5].

3. Cut the board to these marks and cut a second identical one.

4. To cut the walls and spine: place base board on a flat surface, then a thickness of felt, the book, a second layer of felt and the lid board. The walls sit on the base board so put a piece of board on its edge and mark the height of the wall to exactly the top surface of the lid board[6]. It is wise to cut this wall to your mark and try it again to see if any adjustments need to be made. It can be tricky to judge this exactly—too
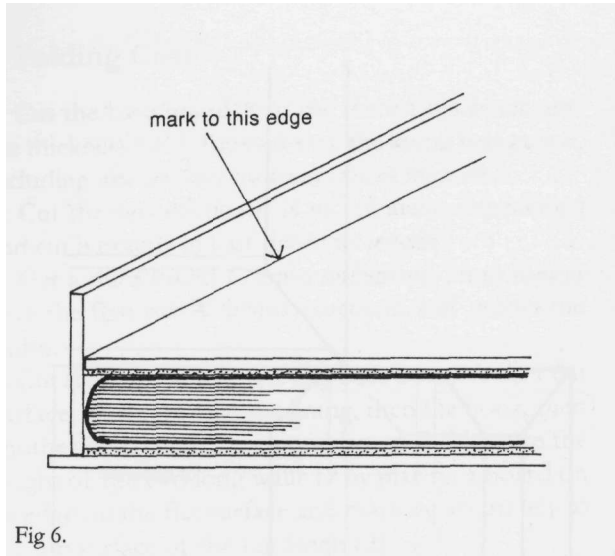

Fig 6.

low a wall and the box will not shut properly, too high and the book can slip around: it is easier to compensate by making a thicker pad on the base.

5. When you judge the height to be right, cut six more pieces (seven in total) exactly the same. Two of them can be cut to the same length as the long sides of the base and lid. Cut a piece of buckram by placing the base, spine and lid on it and allowing an additional three times the width of the spine all round. [7]
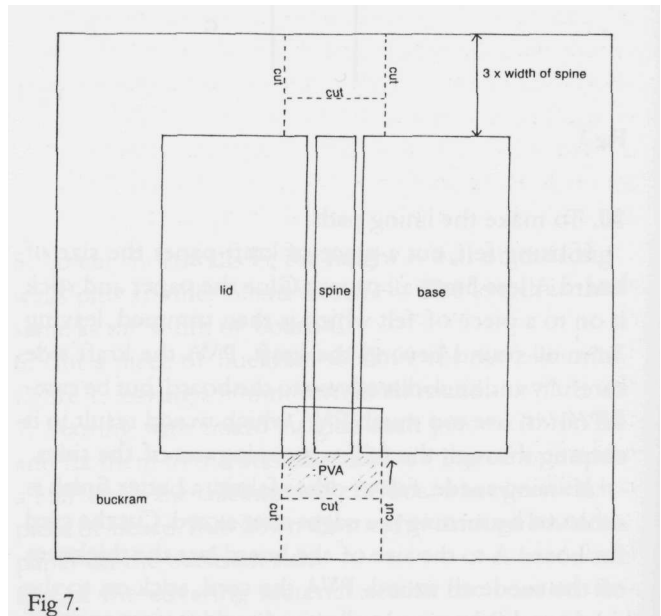

Fig 7.

6. To assemble: glue out and stick the lid on to the buckram, rubbing down well on the reverse side. Place a steel straight edge along the top to ensure that the next two pieces are in line and stick on the spine and base, allowing a gap of one and a half times the thickness of the board between lid and spine and base. Rub down well. With a knife and straight edge cut the

buckram as shown in [7] and glue the two flaps down over the end of the spine as shown.

7. The long wall of the lid has already been cut to size. Hold this in place while you measure the short walls by placing one up against the long wall at right angles and marking its length *less* a board thickness which allows for the spine when the box is closed. Cut the other wall to exactly the same length. The ends of these short walls have to be covered with buckram [8].

Fig 8.
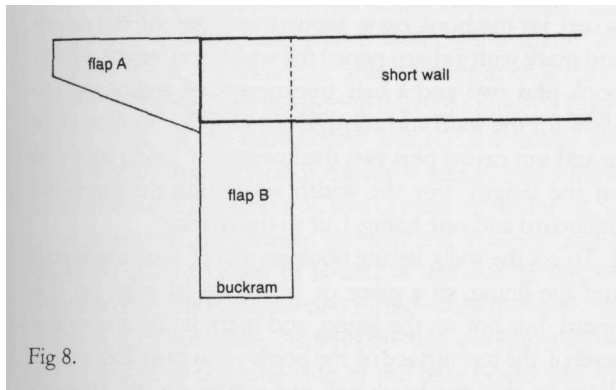
8. Stick the end of the wall on to the buckram, bring flap A across and tuck the corner in neatly, bring flap B over, rub down well and cut the excess off the bottom. To stick the walls on the lid, run a line of PVA along the edge of each wall and on the uncovered short edge of each of the short walls. Line up the long wall exactly with the edge of the lid and then stick the two short walls on also exactly in line with the edge. A piece of drafting tape round the corners helps to hold them in place while they dry and can be easily removed afterwards. Place heavy weights on the top edges to hold the walls firmly in place until thoroughly stuck.

10. The walls of the base have to be set in to allow for the lid to close over them. Using a sharp pencil, mark one and a half times the thickness of the millboard in from the edge of the base board on three sides (not the spine edge). The long wall and the two short ones then have to be cut to length accordingly: the long wall will be the length of the base less three thicknesses of millboard, the short walls at right angles and to within one thickness of board from the spine, as on the lid. The ends of the short walls must be covered with buckram as before [9].

11. When all the walls are firmly stuck on, the buckram has to be cut ready for sticking on to the walls [10] and [11]. This is most easily done by bringing the buckram up and marking the corners through with a bodkin before cutting with a knife and straight edge. When marking the buckram for the base it is very important to make sure that it goes neatly and firmly over the step before going up the wall.
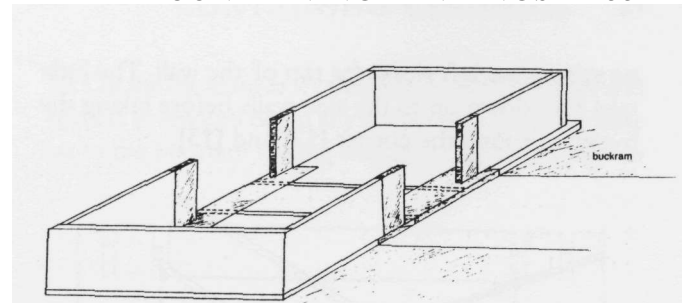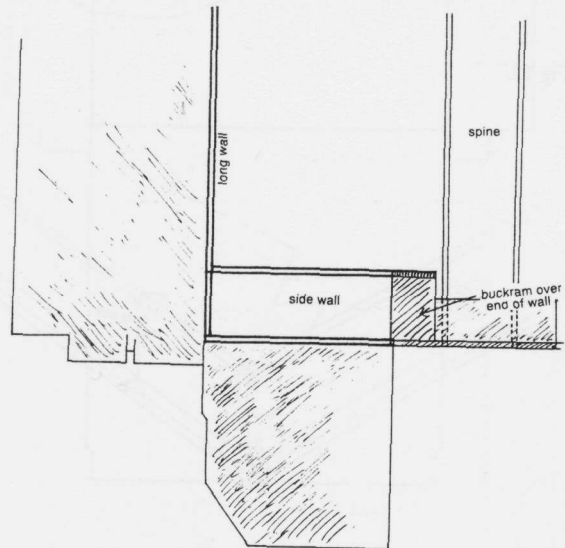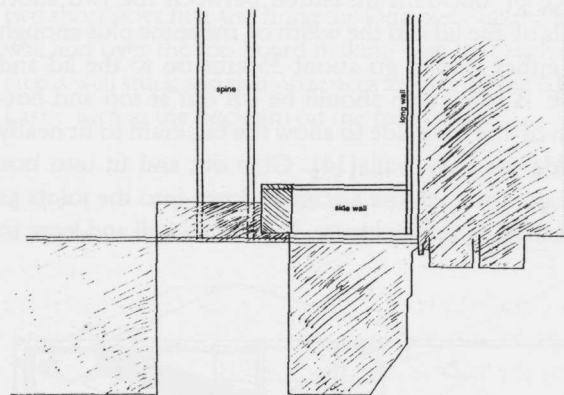

Fig 9.

Fig 10.

Fig 11.

12. When the buckram has been cut it can be glued and stuck down, starting with the long sides. Bring the buckram up on the outside and rub it down well before taking it over the wall and down on to the base or lid, pushing well into the corners and ensuring that

no spaces are left along the top of the wall. The little tabs fold down on to the side walls before taking the buckram round the corner **[12]** and **[13]**.
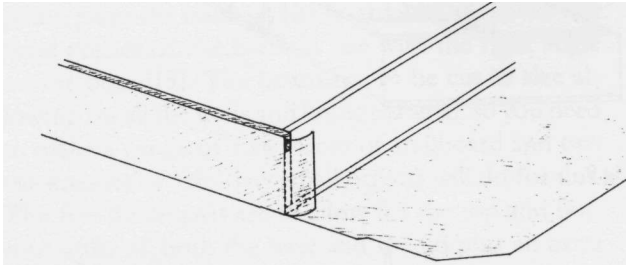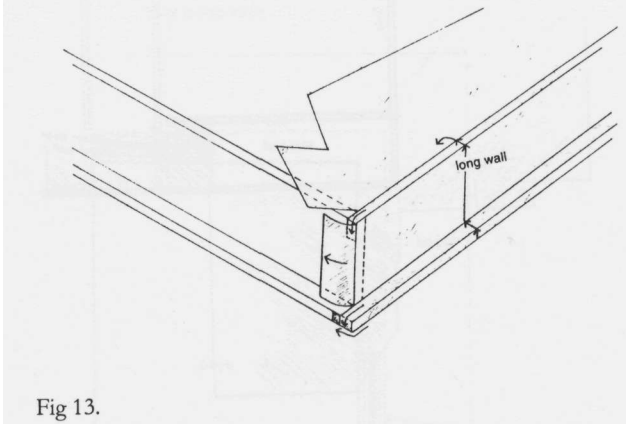

Fig 12.

Fig 13.

13. Lastly, the spine has to be covered inside. Cut a piece of buckram measured between the two short walls of the lid and the width of the spine plus enough on either side to go about 35mms on to the lid and base. A small step should be cut out at top and bottom of the base side to allow the buckram to fit neatly inside the base walls [14]. Glue out and fit into box but do not push the buckram down into the joints as this would inhib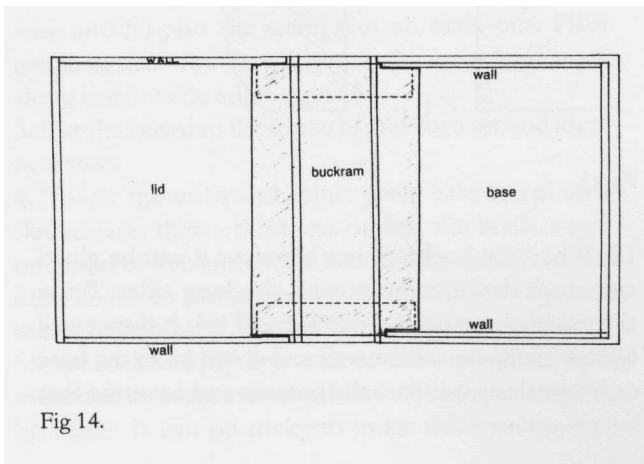it closure. Rub down well and leave to dry before shutting the box. To line the box with felt, use the same method as for the folding case. The lining for the base goes from wall to wall but when lining the lid, the felt must be cut one and a half board thicknesses shorter all round to allow the lid to close over the base properly.

A Slipcase and Tray

1. Make the tray first. With one right angle marked on the board, lay the book on it, aligned with two of the edges and mark with a sharp pencil the width and length of the book plus two and a half thicknesses of millboard (to allow for the walls and enough extra for the book to slide in and out easily) plus two thicknesses of lining material on the length. For the width allow one thickness of millboard and one lining. Cut to the marks.

2. To cut the walls, lay the book on top of the base board and the lining, sit a piece of board on its edge on the board, but not on the lining, and mark it just above the level of the top surface of the book—you can allow about 2mm so that the book will not scrape on the slipcase when the tray is inserted. Cut the long wall to the length of the base board and the two shorter walls to the width minus a board thickness. Stick the walls down accurately to the edge of the board using drafting tape to hold the corners together temporarily. Weight down until firmly stuck. Using sandpaper with a block, sand off any unevenness on the joints and edges.

3. Cut a piece of buckram to allow for the size of the base board and enough to come up the walls, down the inside and onto the base on three sides. On the fourth side only enough to turn in is needed. Glue out the base and stick firmly onto the buckram, rubbing down well on the buckram side.

4. Cut the buckram for the corners as shown in **[10]**. The front edge is turned in as in **[15]**. The tray can now be lined checking that the book fits in snugly. Any slight adjustments can be made by varying the weight of the card or paper used for backing the lining material.
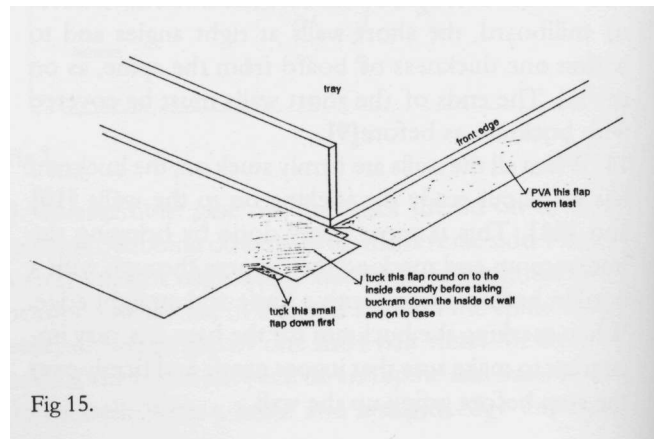

Fig 14.

Fig 15.

5. To make the slipcase:

Use the tray for measuring the size of the slipcase. Place it on a board aligning two edges and mark the length *plus* two and a half thicknesses of millboard and two thicknesses of felt or paper. The width will be the same as the tray *plus* one thickness of board and one of felt or paper. Cut two boards to these marks.

6. To cut the walls, make a stack of base board, felt or paper lining, tray, lining and a second board. The tray must be able to slide in and out easily but not so well that it falls out without being pulled. Some adjustments will be needed but you should be able to arrive at an accurate height for the walls by measuring thus: sit a piece of board on its edge on the base board (but not the lining) and mark it to the top surface of the top board *less* half a thickness of board. Cut one wall to this marking and try it for size. It should sit between the top and bottom boards and just allow the tray to be slid in and out. If you are satisfied that it is right, cut two further walls to exactly the same size (three in all). As with the tray, cut one wall the same length as the long side of the base board and the two short walls the same as the shorter sides of the base less one thickness of millboard.

7. The lining of the slipcase has to be done before assembly. The felt should be stuck on the top and bottom boards leaving a board thickness along three sides unlined where the walls will be stuck on. On the front edge leave a wider margin of approximately 10mm where the buckram will be turned in. The two short walls should have the same margin left at the front edge and the long wall should be lined all along, except for thickness at either end where the short walls will join on.

8. A ribbon pull will make it much easier to withdraw the tray from the slipcase and it is at this stage that it should be affixed. Cut a piece of ribbon which is suitable in relation to the size of the slipcase and its length should be one and a half times the width of the case. On the outside of one board measure one third in from the back and exactly half way up and make a pencil mark. Using a chisel of the same width as the ribbon, and a hammer, place a waste board underneath and make a slot through the board. The ribbon is threaded through from the lining side so that it comes through about 40mm on to the outside of the board. Cut out a thin piece of board to take up the thickness of the ribbon. Hammer the slot closed to grip the ribbon and glue the end down. You may wish to cover the board with a piece of card cut to the same size to conceal any unevenness.

9. Assemble the slipcase in the same way as the tray but with the top board also glued on to the top edges of the walls. Drafting tape can be used to hold the boards in place until they are firmly stuck. Put heavy weights on top and leave until thoroughly dry.

10. Cut the buckram as shown in [16]. Sand the joins and corners to smooth down any unevenness. Stick the base on to the buckram leaving enough at the front edge to
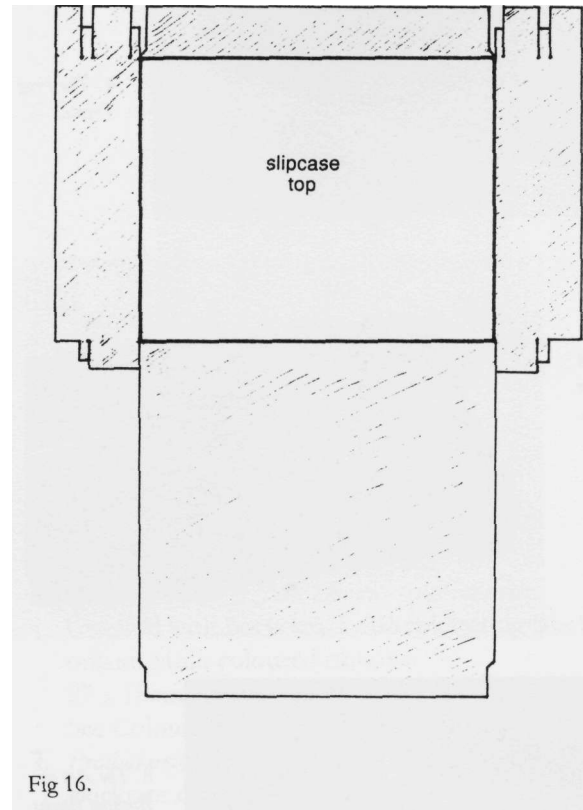

Fig 16.

turn in, as shown on [16] and [17]. PVA and stick the two short sides first and bring the long piece up the back wall and over the top board making sure that each surface is well stuck and that no spaces are left on the edges. Lastly, turn in the buckram on the front edge.
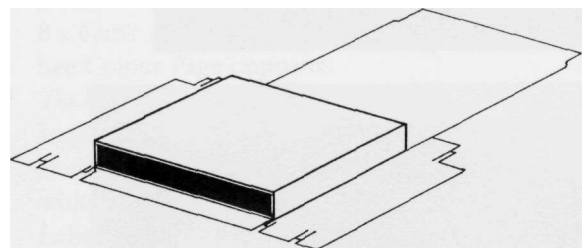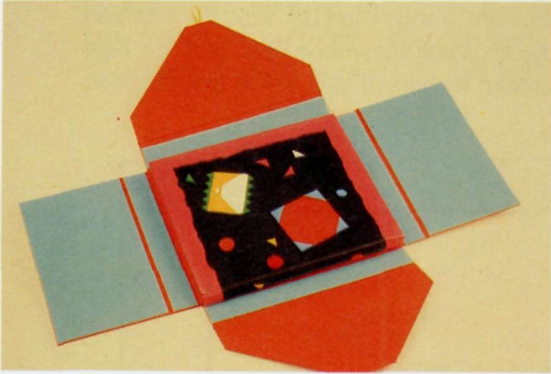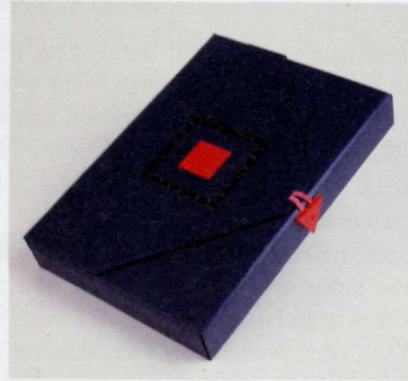

Fig 17.

If you wish to edge the case with the leather then the buckram should stop short and not be turned in on the front edge. The slipcase is now complete and the tray should slide in neatly.
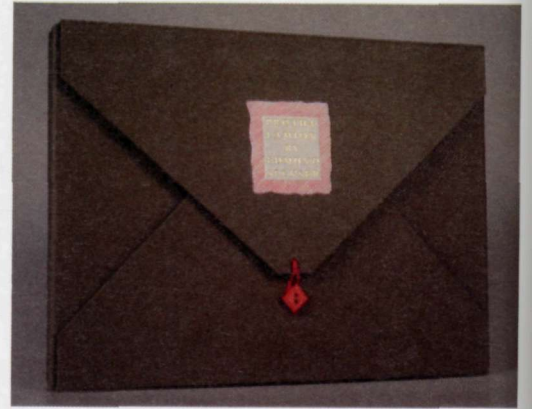
1. *The Frog Prince.*
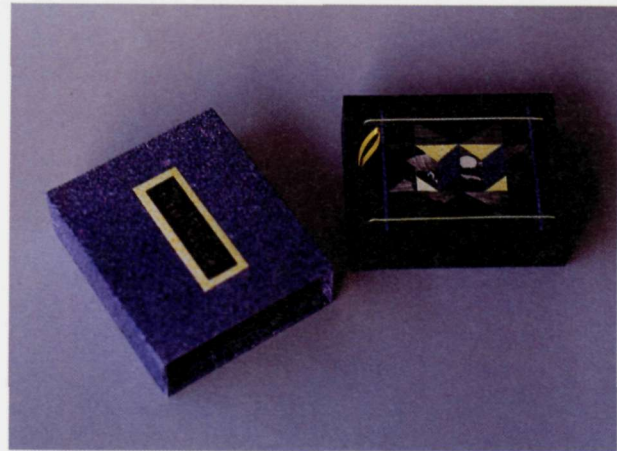

2. *Pagina Tertia de Deluvio Noe.*

6. *The Love Poems of John Donne.*

7. *Prothalamion.*

8. *The Art of Binding Books.*

9. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.*

10. *A Flora.*

11. *A Flora.*

Some Examples of Containers

1. *The Frog Prince*—folding case showing felt lining.
   Buckram covering with leather inside joints and
   leather lining of two of the flaps.
   27 x 23cms   Private Collection.
   See Colour Page opposite.

2. *Pagina Tertia de Deluvio Noe*—folding case.
   Buckram covering. Leather inlays and gold
   lettering. Button and elastic closure.
   30 x 19.5cms   Private Collection.
   See Colour Page opposite.

3. *A Child's Garden of Verse*—folding case.
   Buckram covering. Leather lettering onlaid.
   Button and elastic closure.
   27 x 18cms   Private Collection.

4. *The Stone Diaries*—folding case.
   Buckram covering. Flaps edged with leather.
   Maple wood button and plaited silk cord.
   Approx. 22 x 16cms   Collection: Carol Shields.

5. *The Hand Press*—folding case.
   Covered with yellow goatskin.
   Button and elastic closure.
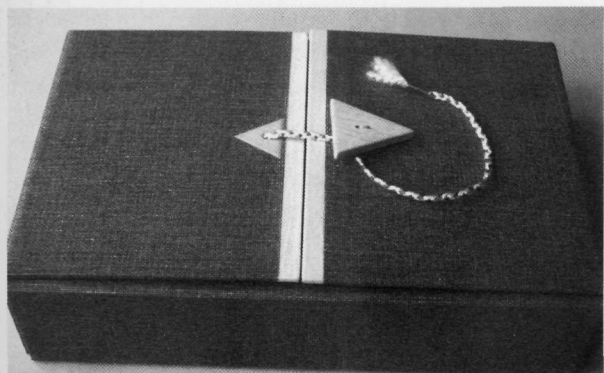   8 x 5.5cms   Collection: Claude Boisset

5. *The Hand Press.*

3. *A Child's Garden of Verse.*
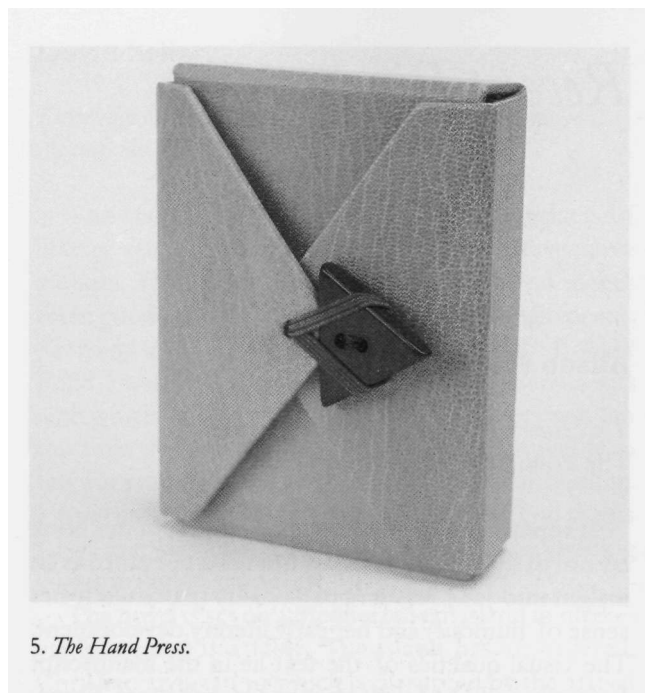
4. *The Stone Diaries.*

6. *The Love Poems of John Donne*— folding case.
   Covered with buckram. Leather lettering label
   onlaid. Multi coloured ribbons.
   27 x 18cms   Private Collection.
   See Colour Page opposite.

7. *Prothalamion*—folding case.
   Buckram covering. Leather lettering label onlaid.
   Button and elastic closure.
   35 x 26cms   Collection: Anthony Dowd.
   See Colour Page opposite.

8. *The Art of Binding Books*—matchbox.
   Inner tray covered with yellow goatskin and lined
   with suede. Outer case covered with white
   sheepskin sprayed with acrylic colour. Edged
   with turquoise sheepskin. Onlaid leather lettering
   label.
   8 x 6cms   Private Collection.
   See Colour Page opposite.

9. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*—matchbox
   Inner tray covered with dark purple goatskin and
   lined with suede. Outer sleeve covered with
   white sheepskin sprayed with acrylic colours.
   Label lettered in gold.
   7.5 x 6cms   Private Collection.
   See Colour Page opposite.

10 & 11 *A Flora*—slipcase with tray.
   Black buckram covering. Edged with red goat-
   skin. Lined with red suede. Ribbon pull.
   35 x 27cms   Collection: Anthony Dowd.
   See Colour Page 58.