

J O H A N N C . D E N N I N G E R

*The 'temporary Binding of Alexis Pierre Bradel*

The discussions between Sun Evrard and Philip Smith (*DB Newsletter* nos 86, 87, 1994) gave me, a simple Dutch bookbinder, much to think about.

I can understand that Philip Smith may not know that Edouard Fourrier had already in 1888 written in his book *Reliure en France aux dernier siècles* (page 199) 'the broken back (*dos brises*) is an intelligent imitation of the Dutch bookbindings'; or that Mathurin Marie Lesné (1777-1841), a French bookbinder-poet had written in his poem dated 1820 entitled *La Reliure* (pages 132/133) 'The Bradel binding is simply an imitation of the German binding made by the bookbinder Lichtscheid who was working in Vienna in 1800. Lichtscheid, a famous bookbinder at the time, stated that he made his bindings using the Dutch bindings of the period as an example'.

However I do not understand why Sun Evrard, a well known French bookbinder, does not realise what a *real* cardboard Bradel binding is. Bradel is surely a well known name in French and European bookbinding history!

I much admire the beautiful bindings of Sun Evrard. However, in her articles and drawings, the techniques she has changed are not so much the 'cartonnage à Bradel', as the 'dos-brise' into an imitation of what in the Netherlands is still referred to as a 'Franse band', or French binding. In France itself this style is called '*LA Reliure Proprement*' and in Germany '*Der Franzband*'. Actually these bindings have nothing to do with the cardboard Bradel binding, so what then is this style?

During the last fifteen years I have discovered much concerning Bradel and the 'Cartonnage a la Bradel' and also the corrections made by the French binder M.M. Lesné, a teacher in a deaf and dumb school in Paris. It is also important to appreciate that the 'Bradel' was, in the beginning of the 19th century, intended as a temporary binding, to only last for several years.

Alexis Pierre Bradel (dates unknown) was in 1772 a 'Maesterbuchbinder' (masterbookbinder) from Bavaria and came to France at the end of the century. Possibly he was a 'Wandernbuchbinder' (travelling bookbinder) at the time but there is no real evidence. He came to Paris around 1800 and quickly realised that the only modern binding style in France at that time was in full leather and very expensive. Most books

were then, as sometimes now in France, sold in uncut, simply sewn sections with a paper wrapper, the intention being that the book be properly bound by a skilled bookbinder. French texts of the period are still commonly seen in Holland in this wrapped format.

Bradel discovered that there was a gap in the market and devised a new binding that was cheap, looked good and could be produced quite quickly. It suffered no material damage and could be later bound in leather if funds allowed. This cardboard binding was not only pleasant to see and handle but was new. Thus the proud owner could show his acquisition as a 'modern' style of binding.

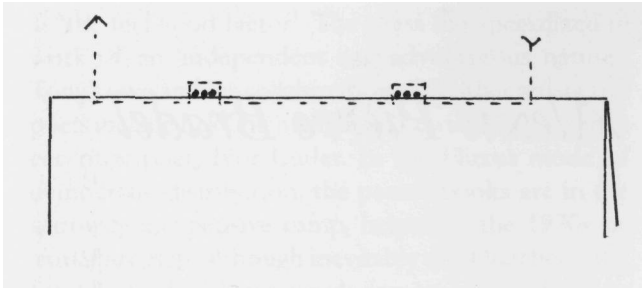
Around 1820 Bradel's friend (and later enemy), the self-taught bookbinder Mathurin Marie Lesné took over and adapted the original form as a 'German binding' as we now know it in Holland. For this 'invention' he was awarded a bronze medal by the government of Paris in 1843.

The purpose of this article however is to describe how the original pre-1823 binding of Bradel was made, although in all my years of research I have never encountered an original binding by him. In numerous European national libraries one can find leather bindings by members of the Bradel family. Bradel married c.1800 a daughter of Nicholas Denis Dérome, one of the famous line of French bookbinders who emanated originally from Italy.

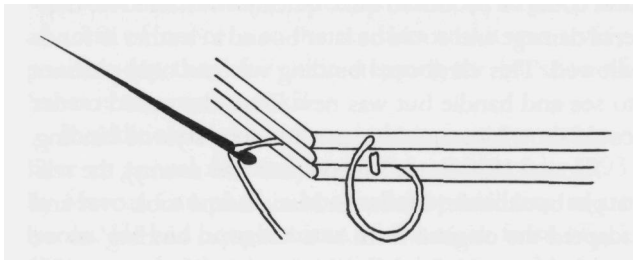
The best contemporary description of a Bradel binding can be found in S. Le Normand's book *La Reliure, toutes les opérations de la Reliure* published in 1827, and also some years later in the *Encyclopaedia Roret*, published in Paris. He states that he saw and handled the book with a silver coating which Alexis Bradel gave to King Charles X of France in 1823. Charles X reigned for only five years. A friend of mine once said to me that if the Bradel binding was intended to be permanent it would have been described as a 'reliure' (bookbinding) rather than as a 'cartonnage' (wrapping).

The following description of how a Bradel binding is made is based on the instructions of Le Normand.

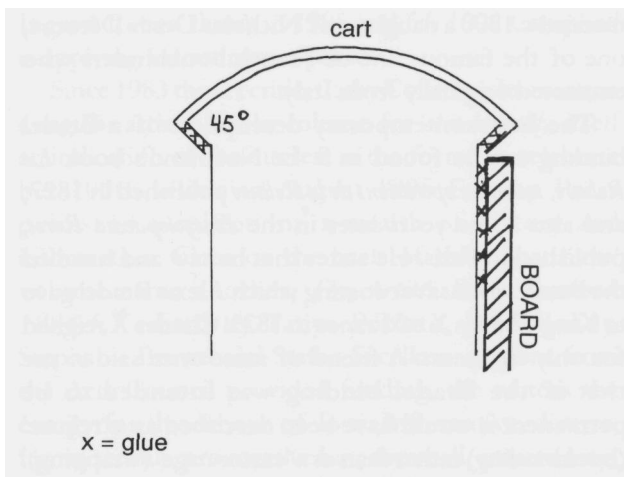
1. Press the sections firmly for ten hours.
2. Add two extra sections, each consisting of at least two folded leaves at front and back, the paper to match the text if possible.



3. Trim all the sections to the size of the smallest one.
4. Sew the sections on two or more cords, Bradel used two cords for a book 25 cms in length. Each cord should consist of three strands (fig.A, above). Do not make a kettle stitch at the end of each section but continue directly to the next section. (fig.B, below)



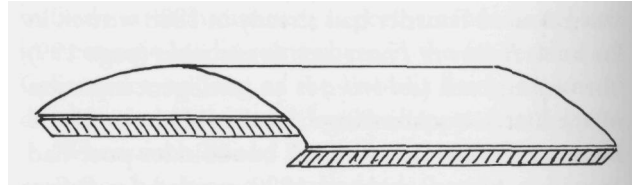
5. Knock up the sewn sections at the spine and head and glue the spine lightly with reversible adhesive.
6. Round the book and back it to an angle of 45° only and no deeper than the thickness of the boards (fig. C, below).



7. Apply a second coating of reversible glue to the spine. Take note that a Bradel binding is not glued or cut after this stage.
8. Trim the sewing cords to the depth of the backing, fray the ends and paste them on to the endleaves.
9. Prepare two boards which extend 2mm at head and

tail and are wider at the fore-edge by about 1 cm.

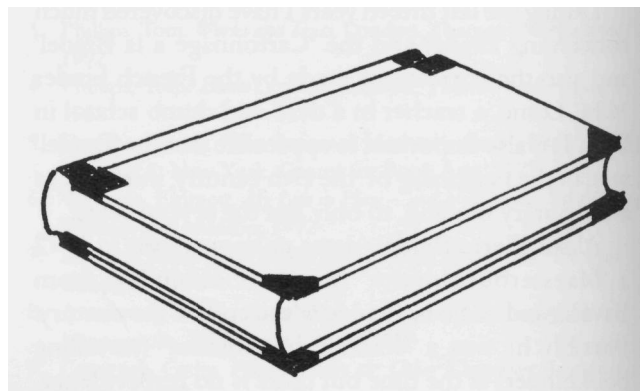
10. Glue the endleaf at the joint to a width of 3cms. Place the boards so as to allow a 2mm gap at the joint (fig.C).
11. Press for ten hours and, on removing from the press, tear out the free part of the endleaf leaving the 3cm glued part on the board.
12. Make a spine piece out of 1mm board (this was termed the 'cart' by Bradel). It is the length of the boards and the width of the spine plus two folded edges, each the depth of the joint. (fig.D, below)



13. The folded edges are glued into the joints covering the sewing cords. Note that the spine area is not glued.
14. Trim the fore-edge of each board to 3mm and allow the book to stand under a weight.

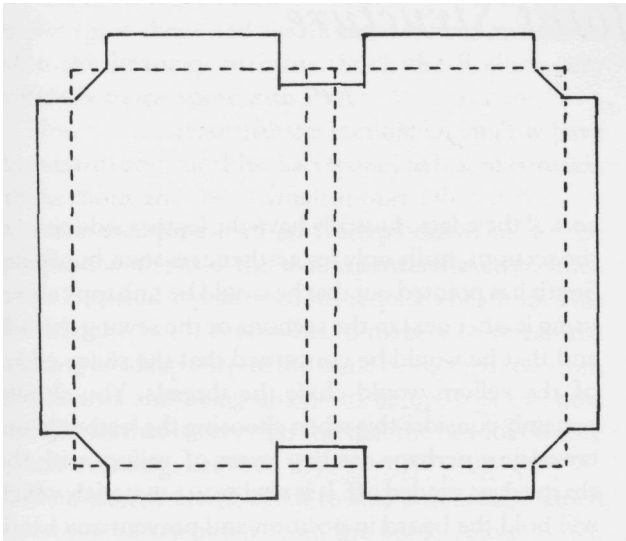
#### The Cover:

15. Cut slits in the fold of the 'cart' approximately 2 cms in length at head and tail.
16. Using thin leather or vellum, cut 2 small strips, 4 cms wider than the spine and about 3.5cms deep. These are pasted and attached at head and tail to extend on to the boards with 1 cm showing on the outside and the rest turned in (see photo E).
17. Small corners of around 1cm in width, also from leather or vellum, are pasted in place. (fig.F, below).



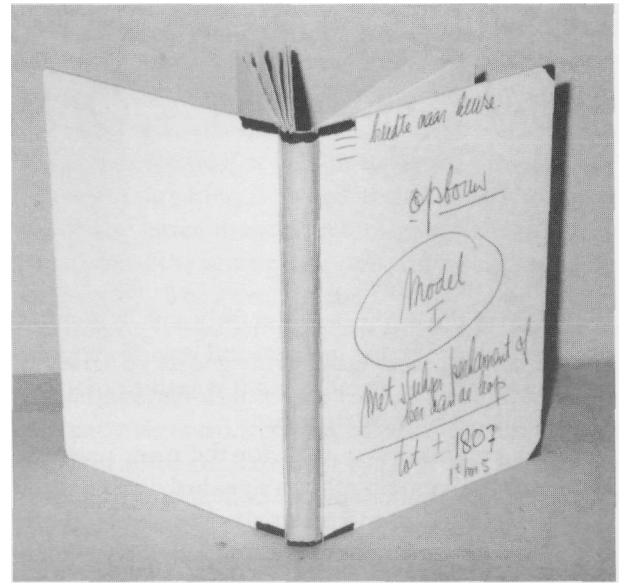
18. Make a cover using silver or gold coloured paper with the corners and head and tail areas cut out

as in figure G below and paste in place taking care to set the cover paper into the grooves.



- 19 The second leaves of the end sections can be pasted down as endpapers, closing the board on to the pasted leaf, and the book pressed lightly for a few hours.
20. Prepare a title panel for the spine and/or front cover and paste in place. The Bradel binding is now complete.

By cutting through the stitching and the leaves of the end sections the original textblock can be removed without damage and can be easily rebound in another form such as full leather.



*This article had to be held over from volume 15, and we regret to report that Johann Denninger died on 5 January 1996. He was active in Dutch bookbinding circles and the driving force behind the magazine Boekbehoud.*