

# Making An Elizabethan-style Chapbook

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Chapbooks were cheap, inexpensive booklets, often made by folding a large sheet of paper into an octavo (so called because it produced eight pages). When produced with a cover, these were often made from recycled paper or poor quality vellum to keep costs down, and these helped make them more robust than the single-sheet broadsides (typically song lyrics) or slip-poems of the time.

Alison Plowden, writing in *Elizabethan England, Life in an Age of Adventure* (Readers' Digest 1982), noted: "At the cheaper, and more remunerative, end of the trade, books and pamphlets sold for sixpence or a shilling (the equivalent of modern paperbacks) were illustrated with woodcuts and either just sewn together or roughly bound in a limp vellum cover."

Chapbooks were called that because they were sold by peddlers known as chapmen, *chap* being an Old English term for trade (Hausman). Typically they contained reprints of popular ballads, jests, stories, recipes, horoscopes and rude stories, sometimes illustrated with suitably racy woodcuts (comparisons with modern women's magazines spring to mind....).

*Chapbooks – Definition and Origin* <http://web.mit.edu/21h.418/www/nhausman/chap1.html>

They became popular in the mid 1500s, reaching their heyday over the following two centuries. These books appealed to the middle to lower classes who couldn't afford the higher quality printed and bound works but who would fork out twopence for a collection of entertaining material. Chapbooks were particularly popular in Scotland, where literacy rates tended to be higher than elsewhere in the British Isles, according to the Scottish Chapbook Project.

*The Scottish Chapbook Project*, <http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/britlit/cbooks/cbook1.html>

In 16th-century England, small books of this nature were often sold in blue or brown paper wrappers, or often no covers at all, and stab-stitched through the side with three or five holes. These books were neither trimmed along the edges nor lettered on the outside. (Middleton, pg 11).

Middleton, Bernard C; *A History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique; Oak Knoll Press & the British Library, 1996*

Stab-stitching is a simple, period approach to attaching pages to a cover, although these days it is more commonly associated with Asian binding techniques (LaPlantz). A series of holes are punched through the cover and paper sheets, and sewn through with waxed linen thread. Another period approach uses pamphlet stitch to attach folded sheet/s to a cover to produce a small notebook. Pamphlet stitch is still in common use today, and small-scale, short-run paper-covered books are still called chapbooks.

The equipment to produce a chapbook includes:

- paper (in use from the 1300s on); A4 folded to A5 is a convenient size
- cover material: leather, vellum, card, paper
- unbleached linen thread waxed with beeswax (for strength; plain cotton is fine)
- tapestry needle
- awl (map pins are a useful substitute)
- bone folder (or fingernails)

Clement, Richard W.; *Medieval and Renaissance Book Production - Printed Books*

<http://www.ukans.edu/~bookhist/medbook2.html>

LaPlantz, Shereen, *Cover to Cover*; Lark Books, 1995

Roberts, Matt T & Etherington, Don; *Bookbinding and the Conservation of Books - A Dictionary of Descriptive Terminology*; <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/don/don.html>

Steinberg, S.H.; *Five Hundred Years of Printing*; Oak Knoll Press & the British Library, 1996

## Pamphlet Stitch Binding for a Small Chapbook

Cut a cover at least 3mm larger than the pages on all sides.

Fold the cover and the stacked sheets (8 is enough to give you 32 pages) in half to mark the spine.

Use an awl or map pin to punch evenly-spaced holes through the aligned pages and cover.

Make a central hole; then, depending on the size of the pages, add holes at top and bottom.

For small chapbooks (A4 folded in half to A5) or under 20cm in height, three holes should be adequate, otherwise make five holes (one central, two above and two below).

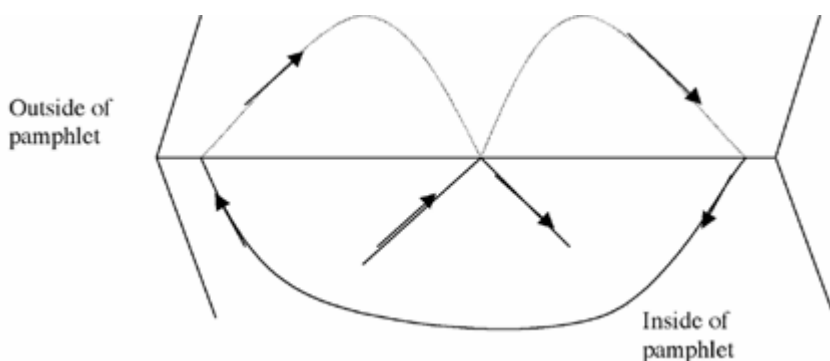
Putting a folded cloth under the cover and pages gives you something to punch through to, which makes it easier than trying to do against a hard surface. A folded tea towel works well.

Keep everything aligned!

Cut a piece of linen thread that is approximately twice the length of the chapbook.

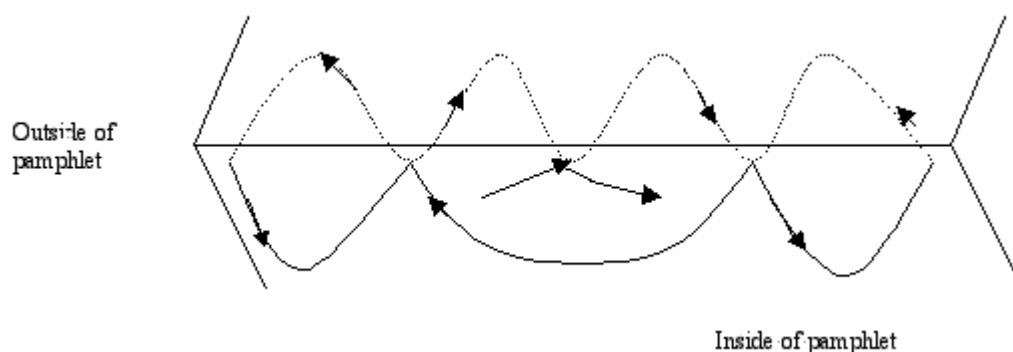
Lightly run the thread over beeswax and thread it through a tapestry needle.

For a three-hole pamphlet, start from the inside of the centre hole and sew in a figure-eight pattern until you come out the centre hole again (or start from the outside and work your way round the other way). Pull the thread in the direction of the sewing to tighten it at each hole. The long stitch is what identifies this as a pamphlet stitch.



Make sure that the two ends of thread lie on either side of the centre thread before tying off. You can trim the ends or tie them in a nice bow; if on the outside, you can attach beads or other decoration. This could be used as a bookmark, though chapbooks typically wouldn't be too thick.

For a larger book (using A3 paper) make a five-hole pamphlet for added strength. Start from the inside of the centre hole. Sew the bottom half of the pamphlet in a figure-eight pattern, skip over the centre hole and sew the top half. End by coming out the centre hole again.



Diagrams from CONSERVATION LABORATORY MANUAL FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY LIBRARIES: <http://www.uky.edu/Libraries/conserpb.html>