

## German/logical/paring

By J. Franklin Mowery

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Guild of Book Workers

Standards Seminar

Greensboro, North Carolina

The method of paring leather I was taught in Germany made use of the Fortuna electric paring machine. There are several other makers now available for commercial applications, but for the handbinder a Scharf-fix (see instruction sheet at the end of this article) or the Brockman paring device works very well and is only several hundred dollars.

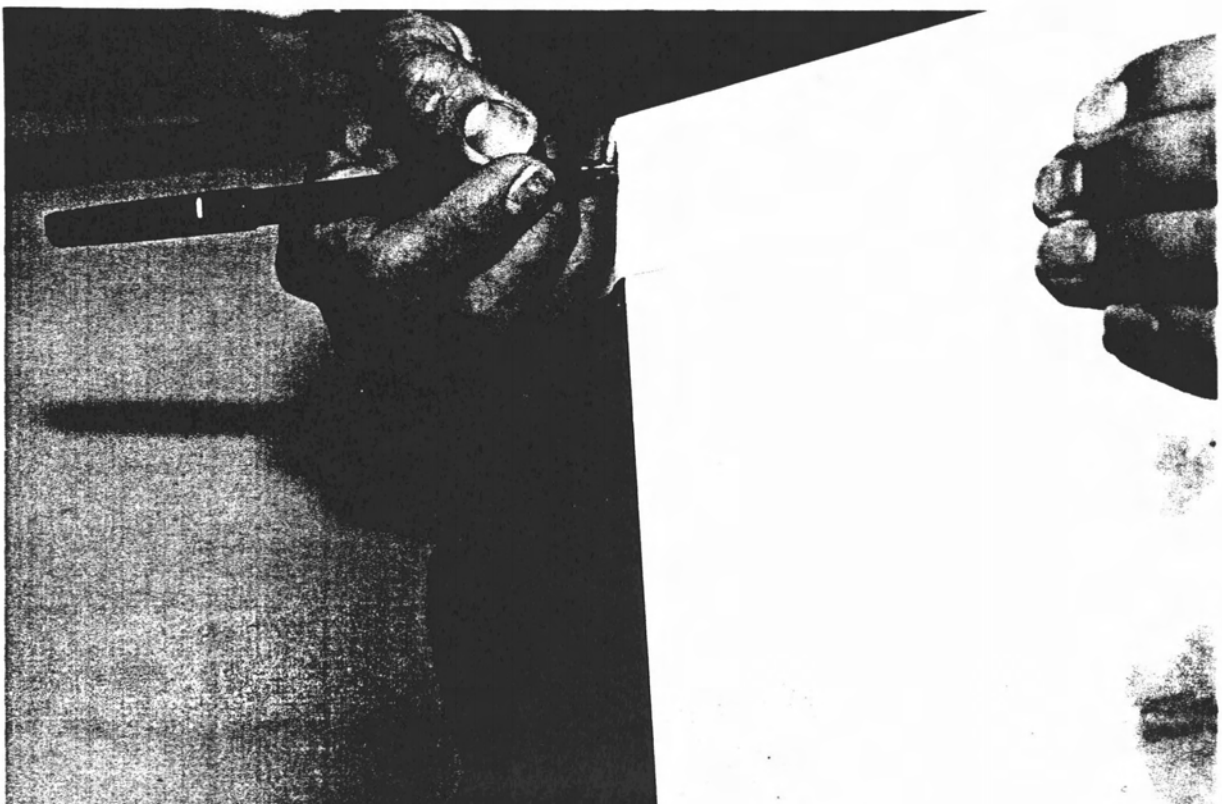
The most significant feature of German style paring is that only the turn-ins and occasionally a little in the joint is thinned and then only to the thickness of a 2ply card. The German style allows for the full thickness of the leather to cover the spine and the boards, this allows for easy inlay work or nice and deep embossing. Only where you must manipulate the leather at the turn-ins is the leather thinned a bit. Where it is pared it is pared flat, not at a bevel. Leather joints are pared to the same thickness as the turn-ins. This guarantees that the card that is used to infill the joint and turn-in fits exactly no matter where you cut.

### Preparing the Leather

The covering of a book in the German tradition requires that the procedure takes place over 4 distinct stages. The leather is tailored to the book, as a fine

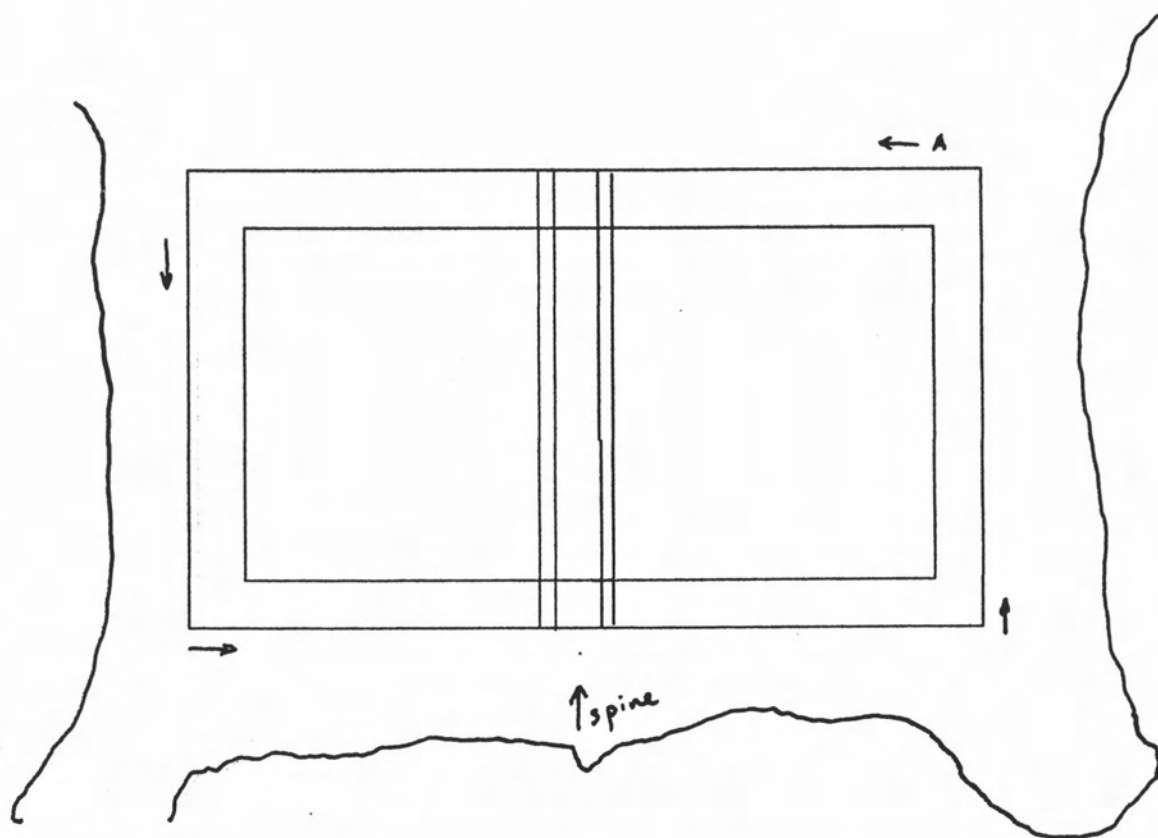
garment is fitted to the wearer, and each step must dry before proceeding to the next step.

Begin by measuring the book with a 1" (2.5cm) wide strip of paper. Mark the fore-edge, then the joint (the edge of the board at the gutter and the shoulder) continue and mark the back joint in the same way and finally mark the fore-edge. At the beginning mark and end mark (fore-edge) add 1" (2.5cm) this is the width of your turn-in. To measure the height of the book use the same paper strip, start the edge of your previous fore-edge at the top of the edge of the board of your book (the turn-in extends beyond the edge) mark the bottom edge of your book and then add the 1" or 2.5cm turn-in measurement. You now have the exact size of your book recorded on the paper strip; it is this paper strip that you will use to mark the leather with. (A trick that will come in handy later is to fold the paper strip between the joints aligning the joint marks to accurately identify the middle of your spine)



Choose your leather well, choose leather that will not have blemishes or mottled areas in the area to be used. Sometimes this means using the center of a skin and thus is not particularly efficient use of the skin but for a fine binding, beauty is paramount to cost. On the reverse of the skin (the flesh side) mark along a ruler with a white pencil the path of the thick spine. At the bottom edge of the skin in the area desired draw a perpendicular line to the spine line. Take the leather to the board cutter and cut along this line. This is the bottom of your turn-in. Using your paper strip begin to transfer the marks to the flesh side of your skin. Align the mark of the center of the spine with the line of the spine of the animal and transfer the marks of your paper strip left and right. Repeat this process several times up the line of the animal's spine. Mark the head and tail turn-ins in the same manner. You will later connect the marks and draw lines with a ruler to indicate the pattern of the book.

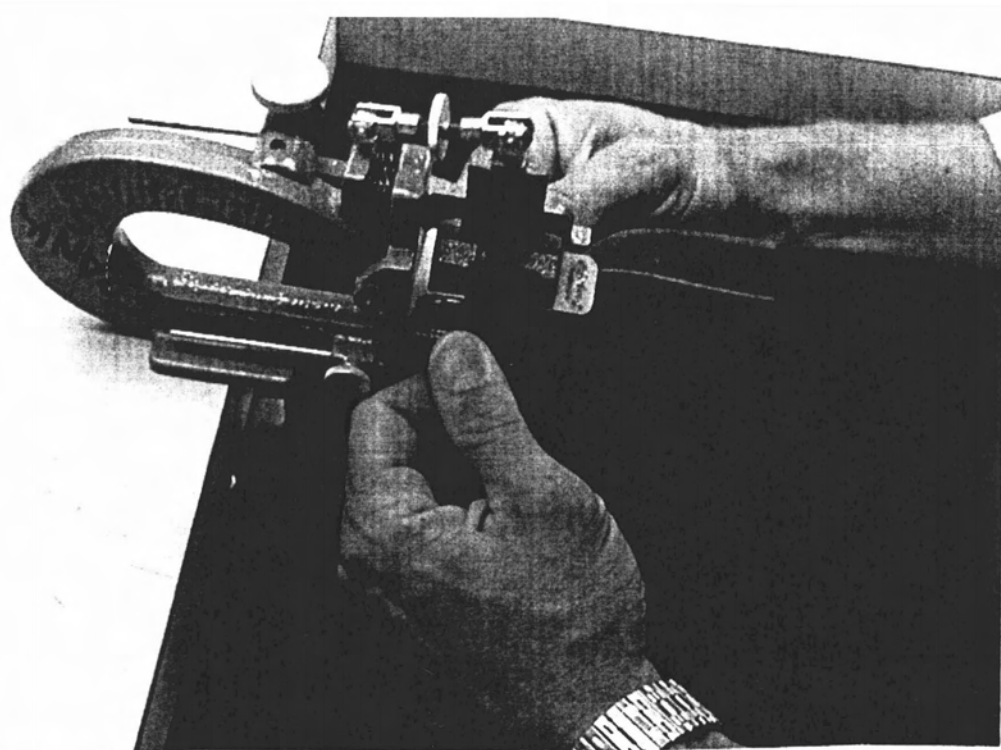




This is what your pattern should look like when marked on the spine..

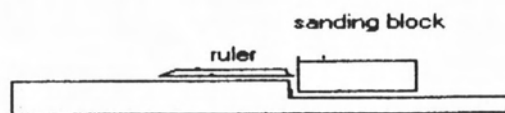
Cut along the outer lines on the board cutter. Bevel the outer most edge of your leather  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (3mm) with a scalpel or your sharpest paring knife. Taking this edge off first will minimize the likelihood of cutting into the leather with the Scharf-fix when you pare the turn-ins.

I start paring at "A" on the drawing and pare from right to left and turn the corner and continue till complete. It is always advisable to set the Scharf-fix to pare the leather a little bit at a time. If you set the thickness adjuster (#1 on the diagram of the Scharf-fix) to pare your final thickness and you are working with thick leather you will invariably cut through the skin. Set the thickness adjuster to pare just an even light amount of leather at a time and simply repeat the



times you pass through the blade, tightening down the adjuster till you reach the desired thickness.

Important is that you do this procedure carefully and slowly, making sure that you are following your lines that you have drawn. Your left-hand thumb is parallel to the roller of the Scharf-fix and pressed firmly down to prevent the leather from riding up and possibly cutting through. When you have finished you must lay the leather on a clean smooth surface. Take a metal straight edge ruler and lay it along the marked lines and with a sand paper block that has been wrapped around the edges you must sand carefully the edge of the step in the leather to ensure that the lines are even and that there is not a waver along the lines.



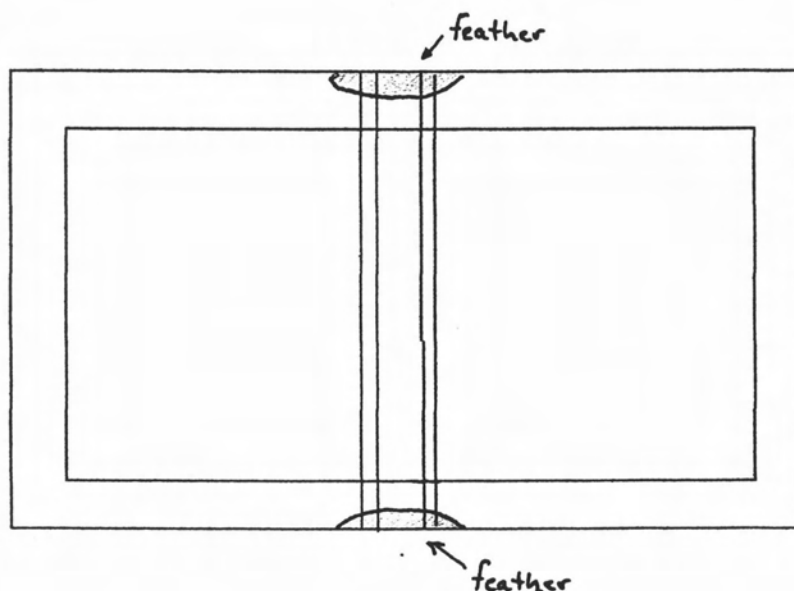
pared leather with step

Once you have sanded an edge, leave the ruler in place and remark the leather with your white pencil and then crease along the edge with a bone folder and carefully fold the leather turn in up. When you have done this on all four edges and you turn the leather over to see the good side you will see clearly the

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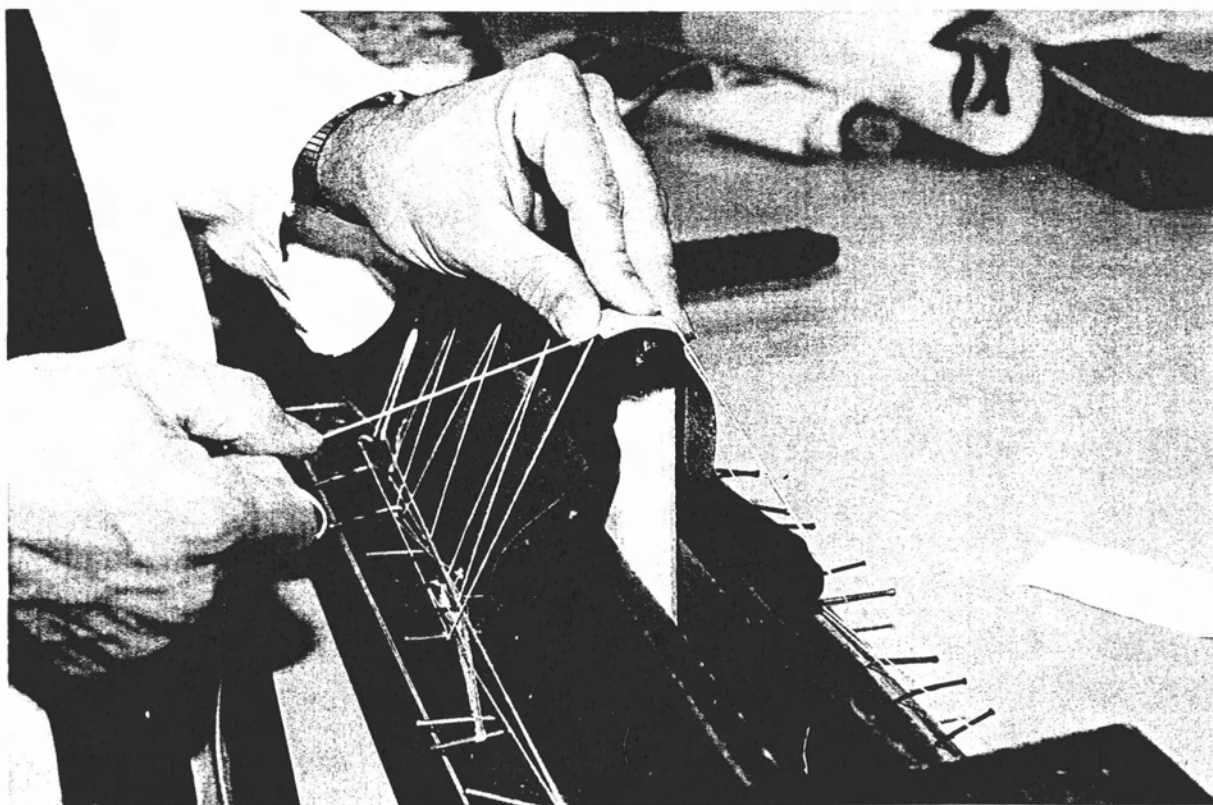
position of the step in the leather which will help when you position the leather in place.

The last phase of paring the leather is to hand pare the head and tail turn-ins. I use a new scalpel blade in my scalpel handle and on a smooth surface (marble, litho-stone, glass, or a Formica surface) I feather the head and tail turn-in. In a gentle arch, it takes only a few passes. The leather is thinned to the point that when you turn the leather over and fold the turn-in over and run your finger along the spine you can not feel a bump or any indication that there are double layers of leather. Do not pare too far back towards the step in the leather, there needs to be meat in the leather to allow for a nice head and tail cap.



Now you are ready to cover your book. In the traditional German method the covering takes place in stages to ensure that your custom tailored leather is

adhered in the exact position and doesn't shift. The leather is dampened on the surface and only the area between the joint lines is pasted allowed to set a moment then repasted. The book is positioned spine down between the marks on your leather. The sides are drawn up and the book turned upright. Looking at the head and tail you can see if the book is still in the correct position, or it can still easily be adjusted, when satisfied gently rub the spine smooth through a layer of clean paper. Place your book in a finishing press with the sides of the leather outside the blocks. When firmly tightened, tie up the head and tail with string using a sandwich of leather and thin cardstock as cushions. (For details see GBW Journal 1990 fall issue "The Logic of German Bookbinding" )



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE USE OF SCHÄRF-FIX 2000

Adjust the position of the blade (5) relative to the roller (6) with the screw (2). Use the screw (1) to adjust the desired thickness. Don't remove more than two-thirds of the original thickness of the leather in one pass but pare the leather in successive passes, if necessary. Start paring in the middle of the leather and proceed to one end and then to the other. Take care to hold down the leather in front of the roller with your left thumb. Unless the leather is forced down with sufficient strength, it will rise into the blade and will be slashed. Pull down the leather on the right in tight contact with the roller. By no means must the cutting edge of the blade strike on the roller as the blade or the roller is exchanged.

- 1) Thickness adjuster
- 2) Adjusting for angle of blade
- 3) Handle for lifting the blade
- 4) Screw for fixing the blade
- 5) Blade, at least 0,15 mm
- 6) Roller, plain
- 7) Stop for defining the paring width
- 8) Bladeholder
- 9-10-11 Rollers for bookspines etc

### CHANGE BLADE AND ROLLER

Lift bladeholder (8) by pressing lever (3) upwards as far as it will go. In this position the distance between blade and roller is as wide as possible.

You can now loosen the screw (4) which holds the blade, with the special screwdriver in the kit. Remove the blade carefully, replace and fasten the screw.

To change the roller, grip the roller between both thumbs and lift it out towards left side. Don't touch blade with roller in the process to avoid dull spots on cutting edge. Hold roller to be inserted between your thumbs, and guide it into its tracks from the right side.

### FLAT SKIVING

Turn setscrew (1) counter clockwise till blade (5) rests on roller (6). Loosen screw (2) and blade will adjust itself to rest smoothly on roller. Fasten screw (2) and You now have an absolutely parallel blade position for flat skiving.

Lift lever (3) and push leather under blade, flesh-side up. Turn setscrew (1) to adjust for thickness of leather and for the amount to skive off in the first run-through. Don't remove more than 2/3 of the original thickness in one pass. You are now ready to start skiving. Have at least 2" of Your leather extend to right side of blade and grip the leather firmly between forefinger and thumb of Your right hand. With Your left thumb push leather against roller while pulling straight down on right side of blade. Don't pull horizontally or leather will rise into blade and will be slashed. If You guide the leather carefully over the roller with Your left thumb, it will glide smoothly under the blade, and the waste will be pushed above the blade.

Take care to keep roller free from leather dust when inserting Your leather to avoid holes in the skived portion. The part of leather You used for holding and pulling to the right can then be thinned by turning the leather around and pulling it through at the same setting. For progressive thinning, reset blade by turning setscrew (1) a quarter-turn counterclockwise for each run-through, no more, or previously thinned portion might tear.

For an exactly even edge the paringstop (7) may be employed.

Large areas can be thinned in 30 mm wide rows, no follow-up by hand is necessary.

### HINGE SKIVING

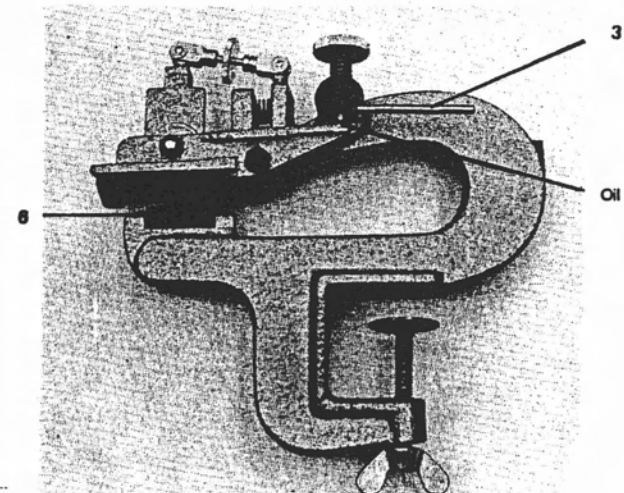
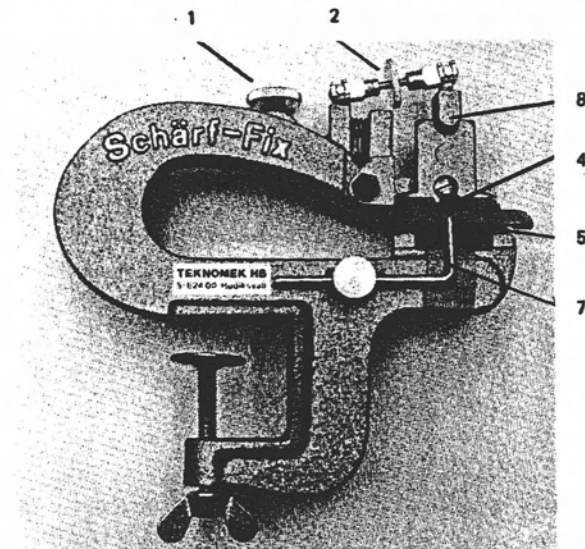
Use one of the narrow rollers, 4-8-12 mm wide. Try out the depth of thinning on a scrap of leather, then run Your leather through to the desired depth. You can mark the leather on the flesh-side and follow the line while pulling the leather through.

### BEVELLED EDGES

Loosen the screw (2) and push bladeholder into desired angle. Fasten screw. Take narrow strips of leather at first, then widen the track gradually. Be careful to avoid folds in the thinned-out edges.

The Schärff-Fix works well with all soft leathers. Harder skins, like pig, should be moistened with a well squeezed-out sponge on the flesh-side before skiving.

Rollers of 16 and 20 mm width are available upon request. SO are replacement blades.



# English Leather Paring

Linda A. Blaser

October 1998

Guild of Bookworkers Standards Seminar

Greensboro, North Carolina

## Tools:

1. English left or right hand paring knife
2. Spokeshave – Stanley No. 151
3. Strop – I make my own using a heavy piece of canvas adhered to a piece of wood. I fill the canvas with Dyco SCR Buffing Compound.
4. Sharpening stones
5. Sanding stick – sand paper adhered to a small piece of molding
6. 2 c-clamps

## Suppliers:

1. Bookmakers  
6001 66<sup>th</sup> Ave. Suite 101  
Riverdale, Maryland 20737  
Phone: 301-459-3384  
Fax: 301-459-7629

## *English paring knives and spokeshaves*

2. Local hardware Stores  
*spokeshaves, sharpening stones, sanding paper, molding, and c-clamps*
3. Read Plastics  
12331 Wilkins Ave.  
Rockville, MD 20852  
Phone: 301-881-7900  
Fax: 301-881-0419  
*Dyco SCR Buffing Compound*

## Bibliography:

1. Diehl, Edith; Bookbinding, It's Background and Technique; Rinehart & Co. Inc.; 1946
2. Johnson, Arthur W.; The Thames and Hudson Manual of Bookbinding; Thames and Hudson; New York; 1984
3. Middleton, Bernard C.; A History of English Craft Bookbinding Techniques; Hafner Publishing Co.; New York; 1963
4. Middleton, Bernard C.; The Restoration of Leather Bindings; American Library Association; Chicago; 1981
5. Robinson, Ivor; Introducing Bookbinding; Oxford Polytechnic Press; England; 1984

6. Young, Laura S.; Bookbinding and Conservation by Hand; R. R. Bowker Co.; New York; 1981

Definition:

English style paring is done to thin out or bevel the flesh side of the leather along the turn-ins. Beveled leather can wrap around the boards' edges tightly producing neat looking edges. If the leather is thick or stiff and the textblock is thin, it may be necessary to pare the spine area slightly as well. Remember the strongest portion of a piece of leather is the flesh side, therefore, it is important to leave as much of the flesh side intact as possible. Overly thinned leather will prove too weak and it will break down quickly.

History:

In the past, leather came from the tannery where it was thinned to the proper thickness and it was simply edge-pared by the binder. Edge paring was done on a slab of marble. At the turn of the twentieth century binders began paring on lithographic stones. Nowadays, some binders also find plate glass is a good surface for paring.

English binders use a straight-angle paring knife to edge-bevel their leather for covering. These knives could be angled either to the left or right depending on the binder's preference. A similar knife, sometimes called an edging knife was also used in Germany. It is completely flat on the underside with a long bevel on the topside, parallel to the angled edge.

English binders occasionally needed to do more paring than just edge-beveling. Until the 1920's they used a curved French paring knife to pare thinner leather. At this time a binder discovered that a wheelwright's spokeshave was able to accomplish the same task more evenly. The spokeshave also proved to be safer and quicker to use than the French paring knife.

Tips for Success:

Successful paring relies on the sharpness of the paring knife or the spokeshave. Beyond that the other secret to success is to practice on many different types of leathers. There is a difference in the amount of pressure you need to apply to your paring knife when you are working with a stiff leather versus a stretchy leather. There will also be a difference in the amount your spokeshave blade extends beyond the bottom of the spokeshave. The only way to get a feel for these nuances is to practice the techniques.

Tool Sharpening:

Since spokeshaves are woodworking tools, they need to be modified in order to thin leather properly. Some binders remove the blade and widen the gap

between the guard and the blade to prevent the scraps of leather from clogging that area. I don't do that, but I do modify the blade. First, round the outer corners of the blade. This prevents the corners from gouging the leather as the spokeshave is pushed over it. In an effort to preserve the flat surface of the stone, I round the blade's corners on the edge of my sharpening stone. Next I increase the bevel of the blade on a grinding wheel. The wheel will cause a burr to form. Remember the underside of the blade needs to remain completely flat, so ignore the burr while you are working on the wheel. Then I use a sharpening stone. At the stone I move the spokeshave blade back and forth in a slightly curved motion, holding the blade evenly on its full bevel. Occasionally flip the blade over, holding the blade completely flat move the blade back and forth across the stone to work off the developing burr. Continue sharpening one side and then the other until the burr has been completely removed. Once the burr is gone, begin stropping the blade to its sharpest point. Strop both the top and the underside of the blade, keeping the blade flat on the underside and on the angle of the bevel on the top. Once the blade has been sharpened it can be placed, bevel side down in the handle.

The English paring knife also needs to be sharpened before using. I believe you can begin sharpening your new English paring knife on a sharpening stone. Hold the knife bevel down and parallel to the long edge of the sharpening stone. Using two fingers, apply pressure to the blade over the bevel. Move the blade straight back and forth along this parallel. I prefer having one long, straight bevel. Flip the knife over, lay it flat on the stone and move it, using the same motion as before, to remove the burr. Once you have finished with the stone, end by polishing the knife on a strop.

It is very important to maintain the sharpness of the blades while you are working. After every few paring strokes with my paring knife or the spokeshave I use the strop.

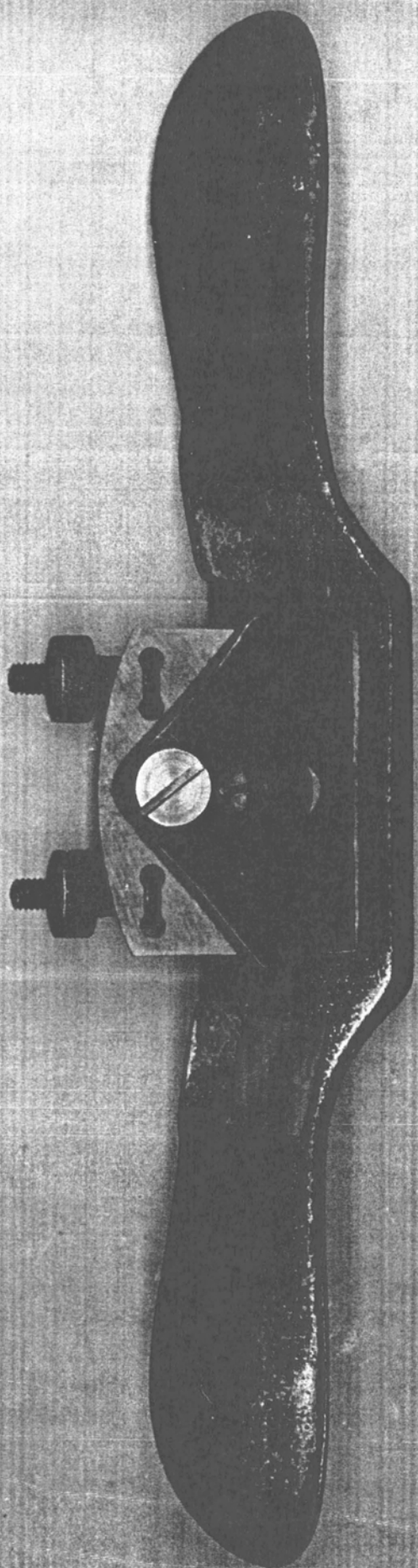
#### Paring Techniques:

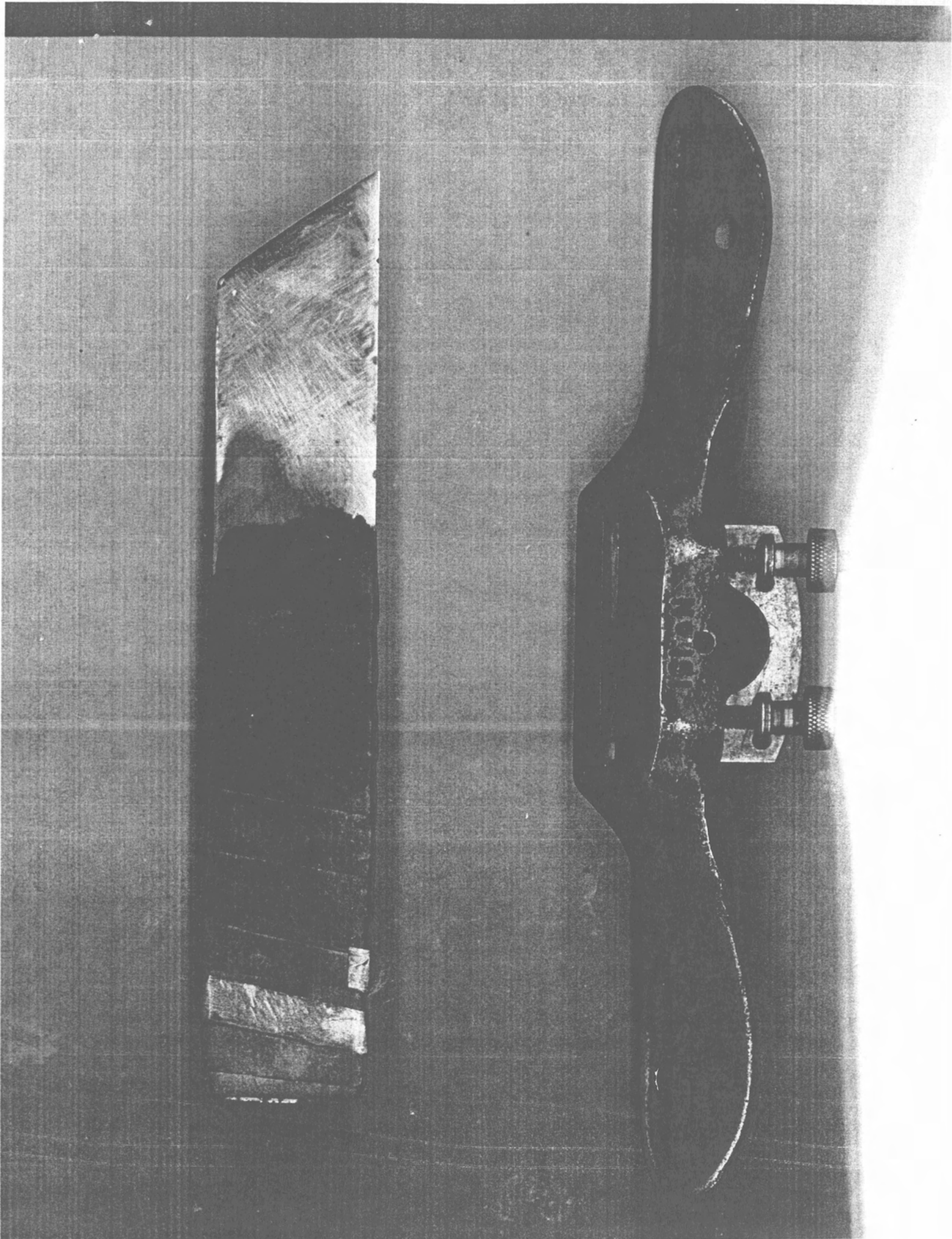
Begin by using the English paring knife to bevel the edges of your leather. It is necessary to reduce the outer edge of the leather to paper thinness. Be certain you have removed all of the feathery bits of leather that tend to form while you are edge paring. Later in the paring process those feathery bits of leather can get caught in the spokeshave and can cause the leather to tear. Place the leather - hair side down - on the slab of marble close to the edge. The paring knife is held 1/8" to 1/4" from the edge of the leather and parallel to it. Hold the knife close to the blade with your working hand. Place the forefinger from your other hand on the knife in such a way that the forefinger can help push the knife along the leather's edge. Beginning at one end, push the knife, into the leather on an angle to create a bevel. Push the knife all the way to the other side, taking off a single strip. Work around the entire

piece of leather removing this strip from every side. At this time I would strop my knife. Once all of the edges have been pared once, turn the paring knife so it is perpendicular to the leather's edge. With the knife turned in the new direction, pare around all of the leather's edges broadening the bevel. Once the edges are uniformly beveled, the spokeshaving can begin.

At this point I use the sandpaper-covered molding and c-clamps to hold the leather down on the marble slab. Hold the spokeshave between both hands with your thumbs resting along side the top of the blade and your forefingers directly below your thumbs. Push the spokeshave away from you and on a slight angle to the edge of the leather. Work on one side of the leather at a time. While you are spokeshaving each side remember to strop the spokeshave a few times by pulling it backward on the strop. You will want to check the thickness of the pared edge as you are working on it. To do this, fold the leather at the turn-in. Then feel with your fingers to see if the thickness of the leather is even along the edge and folds with little resistance. Check on the corners, too, by folding the corner into a triangle and feeling along that fold to see if the leather has been pared evenly.

Once you have finished, remove the clamps a final time and check the edges using the folding technique to ensure all sides have been thinned the same.





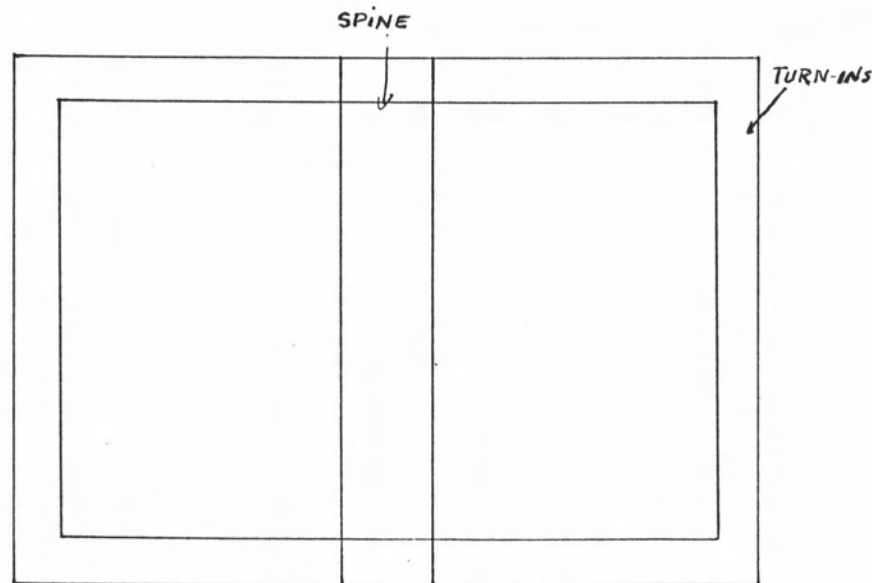
## French Paring Techniques

Information provided by: Monique Lallier

The French bookbinders send their leather out to be pared. The company Monique Lallier uses is able to turn around the product in 2 - 3 weeks at a cost of 50 francs plus shipping and handling. This works out to about \$10.00 plus about \$2 plus for shipping. It is possible to have a rush order prepared and returned to the States in about 10 days.

The binder prepares a paper template that is sent along with the leather to the parer. The template tells the parer where the leather is to be pared and how much.

Ets. Villeroy  
6 Rue Chapon  
75003 Paris France



### **French Paring Techniques suite**

Information on the paper template. (see drawing on the first page)

The parer needs to know:

if you want the leather at its full thickness in the center of the front and back or a first thinning all over your skin, just to have the skin very even.

if you will have raised bands or not. (that determine the thickness of the spine)

the width of your turn-ins (indicated on the template)

You can write in English.