The oldest codex bindings had boards made from oak. It is very hard, and durable and not susceptible to insect damage. After the 11th century beech wood was used as well as oak for book boards. After the 15th century in northern Germany beach wood became the predominant wood for book boards. In the 14th century the first half covered, wooden board bindings appeared, and this style disappeared by the beginning of the 16th century. During the 16th century the wooden board binding was replaced in different areas at different times by pasteboards (laminated paperboards).

The development of the wooden board binding and its profiles

Early medieval manuscripts

Late medieval manuscripts

Incunabula period

16th century boards with bevels and shapir
Preparation of a new wooden board for a binding of the second half of the 15th century.

1) Choose board with grain parallel to the height of the book.  
2) Saw the board to size.  
3) Pencil on the board, top, back, gutter edge, front, back.  
4) Squares of the board are worked with a file so that they are no longer absolute at right angles.

5) On the top, bottom, and foredge mark with a pencil a middle line equal to half the thickness of the board.  
6) Shape the gutter edge: on the inside to fit the swell of the book, on the outside to continue the rounding of the spine.

7) On the inside of the board mark with a pencil the dimensions of the textblock at the top, bottom and foredge, and with a file bevel the board to the previously marked middle line i.e. Half the thickness of the board.

8) Bevel slightly the upper edge.
9) Corners at the top and bottom round slightly.

10) Corners along the gutter edge round the width of the inner bevel.

11) Drill the holes for the cords, chisel or grind out the channels on the inside of the board.
12) Mark the area for the depression for the clasp parts and chisel out the wood.

13) With fine sandpaper smooth all edges and surfaces.

Drawings by Dag-Ernst Petersen
Translation by Frank Mowery

Guild of Book Workers
Seminar on the Standards of Excellence, 1997
1) Board completely broken through.
2) Board with a crack that is away from the edge or weakened from insect damage.
3) Board that has a crack, or has been damaged by insects that is close to an edge.
4) Corner very badly damaged.
5) Corner only slightly damaged.
6) Cracks starting to appear along an edge.

Damaged wooden board before repair

After repair

1, 2, 3

4, 5, 6