



COUNTRY
LIFE
NATIONAL
LIVING
TREASURE

EDEN WORKSHOPS

A BOOKBINDERS RESOURCE



Hello. My name is Richard Norman. I wrote this tongue in cheek letter to a forum of very traditional book binding people. For many days I had seen a continuous stream of threads detailing the problems associated with **Moisture Proof Barriers**.

A **Moisture Proof Barrier** is a simple piece of plastic sheet and maybe a sheet of blotting paper which is used to soak up any moisture from a newly glued book.

I had been warned by the moderator of this popular online forum about Staying on Topic...this means staying close to the subject you are talking about and not wandering onto other subjects.

I had cultivated in previous threads the image of a slightly alcoholic though educated retired book binder.

The letter begins dated 3rd April 2006

How to make a Moisture Proof Barrier from Freely Available Resources

Once again I venture onto the stage of this venerable forum.

I once graced this particular stage for some time, before Dennis the Menacing Moderator of this forum told me I was too much off topic?

I felt injured by this slight at the time I feel? I was somewhat hurt by the affair I remember.

Hurt enough at least to return to my place in my deck chair by the side of my swimming pool here in Southern France, and idly stick pins in a wax image of Dennis for sometimes days at a time I remember?

But I feel I can return to this venerable forum as I have noticed so many threads concerning the problems of suitable **Moisture Proof Barriers**.

Now I was a professional Artist Craftsman for all of my adult life, so I do believe I have some experience in this matter, I was never one to spend money without good reason either, though I must admit I did rather work outside of time, so labour meant very little to me after all.

Now I have said that for many years my wife and I were privileged to work in the grounds of a very private monastery in rural England, we ran a complete system of workshops associated with the Book Arts, this included a bindery with an excellent reputation for it's combined skills...a paper marbling studio which gained a fine reputation for its original papers....a private press which explored pre-reformation printing techniques and a decorative box making department as well.

So we both had over 25 years experience in the field of the Book Arts which I feel gives me a right to comment on suitable methods to employ within the bindery after all, I am also a partly trained professional paper conservator, if there can be such an animal? So I do feel I have something to contribute.

Now I have made it clear that I worked out side of time for many many years indeed, and I was not so concerned with the labour involved in things, I was also a fastidious craftsman and took delight in traditional methods and process's.

So whilst I am not suggesting my method of producing a suitable Moisture Barrier is an economical one, far from it, it may prove impossible to replicate in the real modern world of today, but it was the most effective method I found for dealing with not only the problem of finding a suitable Moisture Proof Barrier, but also...as importantly at the

time...it was a very fine way of dealing with an extremely serious feral cat problem we had at the time?

Now let me explain what I mean by this, after all I feel the connection between a **Moisture Proof Barrier** and a feral cat problem may not at first be immediately apparent.

Our workshops were situated among a group of ancient 17th century farm buildings and many of these old buildings were derelict, also most of them had a family or two of wild cats living in them.

I noticed the many cats prowling around outside my workshops windows on many occasions.

I was at my bench one afternoon and I needed a suitable Moisture Barrier for a bible I was working on....the bible was about A4 size, if that is recognisable by our friends in the USA?

I had nothing available at the time I could think of using, but being blessed by the ability to think creatively I looked around the bindery trying to think of what I could lay my hands on which would serve as a good Moisture Barrier.

I am very aware that this sort of thing is overlooked by the average binder, however I am not suggesting that anyone follows my example in this matter, I simply felt that as a fierce exponent of traditional methods and process's It was my responsibility...nay...it was my duty to bring this method of producing a traditional moisture barrier from freely available resources that has led me to take the time to write this rather long and meandering letter to you all.

Now as I looked around the bindery I noticed the usual things you would expect to see in any normal professional book bindery, in particular I noticed one of our old antique book presses over in the corner lying on a stout wooden bench.

I glanced outside just as a feral cat was passing by, and I thought wait a minute?

That cat if it were squashed flat would be about A4 in size or thereabouts anyway?

Then it occurred to me that something I had noticed about all cats in general might be of help to me here.

I remembered in particular how a cat's fur repelled moisture for example, a cat just shakes itself and moisture flies all around leaving the cat virtually dry?

Now let me make something clear to everyone right from the start, I am not a hateful person at all, neither do I loath and detest the feline race in particular.

I was simply a craftsman trying to make a living and make ends meet, we have never had a private income of any sort after all as many of my more fortunate brother craftsmen seem to have benefited from.

So money was always tight and we never wasted a single resource.

Also these cats were a very real problem to the religious community among whom we worked and lived, on many occasions I saw these cats being pursued by Benedictine monks in black flowing robes, hurling abuse at these wild undomesticated cats...these cats often slunk into the monks dining rooms and stole food from their very plates, now monks are very frugal people after all, not only do they eat little food but they also badly need what nourishment they can get?

I never once saw a fat Benedictine monk after all?

So these cats were a very real problem to this religious community, I bore this in mind as I gazed out of the window of the bindery into the yard at the back of our workshops and at the same time glanced back to the nipping press over in the corner, as I say it had also occurred to me that the fur of a cat may be damp proof, even water proof, certainly at least it should make a very good moisture proof barrier were it possible for the skin of the animal, including vitally the fur, to be compressed into a thin layer of some form.

Now I do see I am taking some considerable time to describe this very traditional method of producing a "Moisture Proof Barrier From Freely Available Resources", in fact I have just now decided to turn this letter, or the fundamentals contained within it, into an e-book which I will freely distribute to anyone who cares to ask me for a copy, I do not intend to profit from the many manuals I have published and plan to publish in the future, I intend to pass on all the traditional methods and process's I am aware of and have been given access to over the many years I worked and laboured in love with my craft and the people of the Arts & Crafts in general.

I decided to attempt an experiment in order to see if it were possible to produce a good "Moisture Proof Barrier From Freely Available Resources".

I snuck around the back of our workshops into the courtyard that lay in the rear of the buildings, I hid behind a drain pipe that led down the side of the workshop, I peered into the court yard to see if I could see any of the feral cats.

I spied one leaving the door of a barn and it unsuspectingly strolled somewhat cautiously across the yard.

Now these feral cats were very nervous creatures indeed, after all they spent there time avoiding thin and very irate Benedictine monks, from whose scanty dinner plates they sometimes stole food?

The one I was looking at was somewhat lean looking though it had obviously been quite well fed, though not intentional by the Benedictine monks who thought of them as a real and very persistent enemy, after all if as a monk you only have a crust of bread to live on each day...when a feral cat leaps onto the table and runs of with half of your daily bread you are going to be very annoyed about it are you not?

So I thought that I would be doing the community a real favour by removing one of these feline dinner thieves from there midst?

As I have said, we worked outside of time so it did not matter how long it would take me to make this new **"Moisture Proof Barrier From Freely Available Resources"** after all.

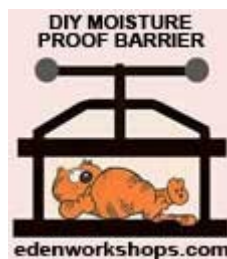
I waited until the lone feline tom had come within striking range, I am no expert when it comes to catching tom cats, but I felt somewhat confident I could manage to capture this one at least.

As it walked past the corner of the workshop wall I was hiding behind, I lunged for the animal as it walked by, I caught him completely unawares it seems and the tom cat looked up in complete amazement at me, just before he was shoved into the small sack I was carrying for the purpose of holding the captured beast.

Triumphant I returned to the bindery holding the small sack in one hand and congratulating myself on a job quite well done I thought at the time anyway.

The animal met a very quick end I have to say, I took no delight in ending the creatures life, It was very likely if he had not met his end in the way he did he would probably have met his end at the hand of a half starved Benedictine monk, Benedictine monks are not naturally violent men after all, but when a cat comes between you and survival some very basic instincts come into play I feel?

So I whipped out the tom cat and placed him firmly between the platens of the nipping press, fortunately there was sufficient daylight for the animal to fit between the platen without problem....



The cat was apparently still in a state of shock from the capture, it still looked surprised as it lay on its back in the nipping press?

I grasped the two antique handles of the large nipping press, now I am far from being a very strong man, but I was confident I could squash the cat thin enough to work with?

For the sake of the squeamish I will not go into further details concerning the final end of the cat, I believe you will be able to piece that together for yourselves.

The cat ended up thinner than I had thought, obviously the inner content of the animal had squashed out at all sides of the press, it was but a moments task to clear up the mess.

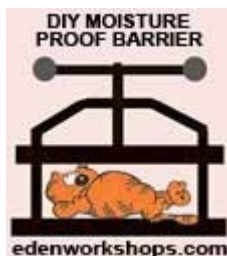
After a minute or two in the press, I undid it and removed the now dead and very flat tom cat, I was surprised at how even the fur appeared on the surface, it did not occur to me to use pressing boards to impart a smoother surface to the skin of the tom ca..., perhaps further experiments could be made in this rather obscure and arcane area of the Book Arts? I feel good results could well be obtained by using chrome plated pressing boards, this type of thing was used when pressing the raised areas of leather and could be used for this purpose as well?

Anyway the tom cat skin was now flat and smooth, though it was still about an inch thick overall, now obviously this was far too thick to consider using as a Moisture Proof Barrier, but it gave me something further to work with.

I also had access to a system of educational workshops which had among other things a heavy duty industrial belt sander.

I let the 1 inch thick squashed dead tom cat for several days in a very dry environment, I also kept a de-humidifier running 24 hours a day to remove any moisture from the thick skin.

After some time I removed the dried dead tom cat skin and found it had become quite hard on the flesh side of the animal?



This suited my purposes as I intended to remove the thickness of the dead tom cat skin on the industrial belt sander, I took the dried skin across to the educational facility where the belt sander was housed, of course I wore suitable goggles in order to protect myself from flying dead tom cat debris.

I turned on the belt sander and applied considerable force as I lay the dead tom cat skin on the revolving belt, as I had thought, protective goggles were a must as pieces of dead tom cat flew all over the place.

It took only a minute or two to reduce the dead tom cat skin to a more useable thickness, in the end the skin must have been about a quarter of an inch thick.

I took the dead tom cat skin back to the bindery, and started to finish the flesh side of the tom cat skin by hand with a tool designed to reduce the thickness of bookbinding leathers.

I worked for about half an hour moving all over the dead tom cat skin until I had reduced the thickness of the skin to about 3mm...I could not go further owing to the nature of the skin and the natural thickness of the fur, this worried me a little as this might prove too thick to insert between the board and the text block of the bible I was re-binding.

However I need not have worried at all, as I had thought originally the fur of the tom cat formed a dense damp proof barrier and was very firmly compacted as well.



After finishing the dead tom cat skin and making sure it was very thin and even....I laid the finished dead tom cat skin onto a cutting mat and looked at the overall size of the skin.

The bible I was working on was about A4 in size as I have said, so I cut the skin with a scalpel aided by a steel rule and trimmed the skin to slightly oversize.

I feel I should note here, that not every tom cat is going to be the correct size for an A4 book, but an averaged sized tom cat should provide a moisture proof barrier for an A4 book at least.

Thus I suggest we introduce an internationally recognised standard size for an A4 tom cat based on the approximate weight of the animal and let this become the standard for future Arts research on this interesting and rather arcane area of the Book Arts.

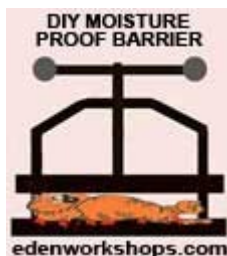
I have since made many dozens of "**Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources**", they surround me

now as I speak, these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** have over the years become much more than mere utilitarian objects used within our bindery for example?

I knew all of my Moisture Proof Barriers when they were alive after all?

While I would hardly describe any of the feral cats I used in my early experiments concerning finding a **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** as being close friends of mine, none the less I feel I knew these **Moisture Proof Barriers** personally and this lends an added aspect to there use within our present workshops.

In closing I would have to say that it may not be a good idea to use these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** in any environment containing live female cats or any other live and kicking tom cat for that matter?



The odour of feral tom cat is very hard to remove after all and also I have not tried experimenting with odour removal equipment or washing for example which might reduce the smell of feral tom cat overall.

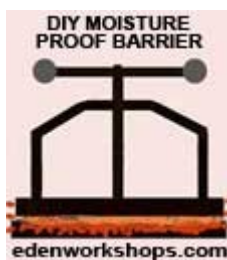
So I strongly suggest not keeping these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** in the same house as a real cat of either sex, the unidentifiable odour of feral tom cat in your own cats territory may drive your own pets to mental distraction causing them to develop quite severe personality disorders of various kinds?

So please all of you who like we did... keep several bindery cats, be aware of the potential problems associated with keeping these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** they could lead to your own cats developing various unpleasant neurotic symptoms and may need a course of feline anti depressants to recover from the stress's involved in finding out where the unidentifiable smell of feral tom cat is coming from.

I have seen our own bindery cat trying to find the invisible feral tom cat odour, it is not a pretty sight to witness a cat you are fond of pacing around like a demented psychotic trying to find the source of the intruder after all as you may well imagine for yourselves after all?

So please be aware of the problems which can be associated with using these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** they are made from freely renewable resources as you can tell from the strong smell that these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** give off, however this very strong smell can be easily removed by washing in strong disinfectant or some other archival equivalent the name of which escapes me for the moment?

Anyway apart from the eventual smell of these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** and the decidedly laborious method of there preparation, I feel these **"Moisture Proof Barriers From Freely Available Resources"** have considerable potential amongst the book binding and paper conservation community in very particular.



Thus I have decided to release an illustrated e-book showing the whole process involved in the capture of the animal right through to it's final finishing, I make no bones about the fact that I consider myself to be a very traditional craftsman indeed.

I feel it my solemn duty to pass on all these trade secrets so that others may freely make use of them.

In the past as we all know many methods and processes have remained hidden and closely guarded secrets.

It is my firm intent to publish many manuals concerning these process's and methods contained with the Book Arts as a whole, with the intention of spreading knowledge of these obscure and arcane methods to a many as need or show interest in these old traditional process's

Richard Norman

**Le Pignoux
France April
2006**



All these monographs are available free of charge at the www.edenworkshops.com website now.

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