

# Bookbinding Thread

Derek Fordred [3703]



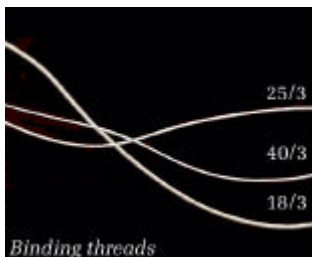
As disclosed in the March 2003 issue of *Small Printer* ("Are we a Letterpress Society"), the subject of bookbinding is severely under-represented in the pages of our magazine.

This article might trigger off some interest among our members. Staples might be OK for small booklets such as catalogues, which are designed to have a limited life, but for a larger book or a private press publication, you need a more suitable method of binding. So, let's start by trying to uncover some of the mysteries of one of the most important materials used in book-binding — the thread used for sewing.

Bookbinding thread is supplied in various sizes. A quick look at a supplier's catalogue will show that the following thicknesses are available:

16/3 ply

18/2 ply, 18/3 ply, 18/5 ply



Common  
Thread  
Sizes

25/3 ply

40/3 ply

This is all very well, but what do the numbers mean? Sixteen whats? Three whats?

Well the 3, 2 and 5 part is easy. If you examine a thread, you will find that it is formed from a number of separate strands wound together (usually 2, 3 or 5).

The first part of the number is, however more obscure. Many books on binding suggest the size of thread to be used for a particular book, but few bother to explain the derivation of the numbers. After a lot of searching I came across the following description (Ref. 1):

*"If one pound of flax is spun to a length of 300 yards, its number is 1; if spun to 600 yards, No. 2; 900 yards, No. 3, and so on. No. 16 is 4800 yards and 16-4 is made from four cords of No. 16.... Cotton is worked on a similar principle: No. 1 is 840 yards."*

So much for metrication! And the definition still doesn't give much idea of thickness to the average bookbinder except that the higher the number, the thinner the thread will be.

A photograph of three sizes of thread appears here. These samples appear to be the most useful sizes for average books, though books with a large number of sections might require an even thinner thread. John Corderoy (Ref. 1) recommends 16/4, 25/3, 35/2 and 50/2 threads to cover most needs.

*Ref. 1. Bookbinding for Beginners, John Corderoy, published by Studio Vista Limited. 1967.*