

Make your own Medieval book clasp



Image: <http://interestingpretties.blogspot.com/2012/11/the-geese-book.html>

Early books and manuscripts were often made of parchment (also known as vellum), an organic material made from animal skin. To keep the pages safe, they were sandwiched between stiff wooden boards when not in use. It was necessary to keep the volume tightly closed to stop the pages curling and warping, so the covers were fastened using book clasps. This ensured the pages stayed flat and also kept everything in place should the volume fall off a desk or shelf. The clasps were attached to the cover boards and fastened with a leather strap or metal plate. These clasps were often decorated, highlighting the precious nature of the manuscripts contained inside. As well as clasps, the covers often featured other metal mounts, sometimes on the corners, sometimes elsewhere. These performed both a decorative and a protective function, preventing wear and tear to the volume.

Book clasps and other fittings are a common find when metal detecting and there are more than 2500 recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. To see all examples recorded click here:

<https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/objecttype/BOOK>

Why not have a go at making your very own book clasp strap to keep your favourite book safe? You can use one of our examples below, or you could have a go at designing your own! Turn over for full instructions.

HAMP-C9A55C



NLM-E6FE21



GLO-9B942D



NMS-A664F2



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Instructions:



You will need:

- A picture of your book clasp (2 copies)
- Sturdy card
- Scissors and glue
- Stapler
- Wide ribbon
- Narrow ribbon

1. Take the pictures of your book clasp and glue them to a piece of sturdy cardboard.
2. Once dry, cut them out.
3. Carefully pierce a hole in the end of the clasp, as shown.
4. Next, using a stapler, attach one of the clasps to each end of your wide ribbon.
5. Place the strap around your favourite book. Then, take the narrow ribbon and thread it through the hole in the end of each clasp and tie securely.
6. Voila! Your favourite book is now safe, Medieval-style!

