

Looking after your family history memorabilia - a few guidelines...

Storage conditions

- Store items in a cool, dry, well ventilated room where a stable environment can be maintained.
- Avoid attics, lofts, cellars, garages etc as the temperature and humidity varies greatly from day to day, and throughout the year. Extreme fluctuations are stressful for books and photographs, and other hygroscopic materials and may encourage mould and insects.
- Avoid placing bookcases against outside walls; items stored here become part of the buildings structural insulation creating high levels of humidity behind them.
- Heat dries out glues in book spines and covers and causes photographs to curl, split and crack.
- Damp conditions encourage mould growth and pests which destroy archives.
- Be aware of possible leaks from damaged roofs, tanks, pipes, sinks and flower vases.
- Sunlight, ultra violet light accelerates deterioration in paper, leather bindings, dyes and pigments in pictures and photographs. Cover windows if possible, and don't put books of value on shelves in direct sunlight. Both heat and light will badly affect them.
- Provide protective insulating barriers around special items, folders and solid cardboard boxes are a good idea. Avoid direct contact with wood, plastic, metal, rubber and glass.
- Remove metal items subject to oxidation (i.e. rust) like pins, clips and staples.

Handling

- Do not eat, drink or smoke whilst handling or using the material. Food crumbs, spilt tea and fizzy drinks stain documents and can promote mould growth and insect attack. Don't forget smoke particles, fatty deposits and fingers can easily affect your archives.
- Wash and dry your hands before looking at material. Sweaty fingerprints adhere to the surface of photographs and can damage the chemical image layer. Wear nitrile or vinyl gloves (not latex or cotton) when handling photographs.
- Do not use pins, staples, tags, paperclips and rubber bands to group papers or bundles. These can be difficult to remove later without damaging originals and rust stains are impossible to remove. And don't tie up with string or tape, use envelopes and folders.
- Do not use self adhesive tapes to mend tears and loose pages. Over time adhesives react with and stain the repaired material. Some tapes and all adhesives can prove very difficult, or impossible, to remove safely.

Packaging, storage and copying

- If you intend using A4 pockets use archival polyester. Get rid of PVC pockets or any packaging that is stained or has been damp.
- Remove pins, staples, tags, paperclips, rubber bands and self adhesive tapes, red tying tapes.
- Unfold folded items and keep flat where possible to prevent wear and tear.
- Try not to use coloured packaging, aim for plain neutral material. In the event of water damage, colour from the packaging will transfer to your stored items. Use archival, good quality folders and boxes if you can.
- Books of value should be stored, at least, in slipcases if not in made to measure boxes. Large, heavy books should then be laid flat on an evenly supporting surface, the aim being to prevent distortion and spine damage occurring.
- Regard all adhesives as potentially damaging. Avoid 'self seal' adhesive photo albums as the adhesive accelerates fading and deterioration of image, especially colour photographs.
- Photographs and documents can be put into A4 polyester or polypropylene 'Copysafe' pockets for ease whilst you are sorting them out. Photographs can be mounted onto white paper by making slits in the paper and tucking the corners of the photo in - do not glue photographs down!
- Copy important photographs, newspaper clippings and documents etc and use as surrogates to work from, keeping the originals safe elsewhere. This prolongs their life.
- Be aware of the performance and limitations of modern inks, dyes and toners, always check.
- Be aware that photocopier toner can offset onto other paper or plastic A4 pockets in certain circumstances, especially under weight for extended periods.

These are only general guidelines, for further information please contact
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British Library Collections Care has useful leaflets at:

<http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/publications/booklets/index.html>

Find a UK conservator via the **Conservation Register** <http://www.conservationregister.com>

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