



Jersey Archive Information Leaflets

PRESERVING YOUR DOCUMENTS AND MEMORABILIA:

STORAGE

In your home it is difficult to achieve optimum conditions for the preservation of your important documents and treasured memorabilia. In the future you may like to consider depositing your collections at the Jersey Archive, which has the correct preservation, conservation, access and security facilities.

This leaflet concerns improving the storage of collections in the home.

Using and handling documents is the most obvious cause of damage to paper. However, even documents that are not being used can still suffer harm while in storage.

If stored in poor conditions, their rate of decay accelerates, and they may also be at risk from accidental damage.

This tip sheet is intended to:

- point out some significant hazards to the preservation of paper;
- help you select a safe storage area in your home for the family memorabilia that you would like to preserve;
- suggest methods of preparing and packaging the items that will protect them during storage and that will also make them easier to handle.

Significant hazards

Mould and pests

Paper can provide a food source for mould, insects, and rodent pests. A combination of damp, warmth, and lack of ventilation or disturbance provides the ideal environment for these pests to proliferate.

Light

Light causes fading and the browning or deterioration of some types of paper. Photographs, some inks and markers, and poor quality paper deteriorate the most quickly.

Climate

Warmth and high humidity raise the rate of deterioration of paper, ink, and photographs, causing problems that it is difficult to treat or repair. Documents and memorabilia may be on poor quality paper or written with a type of ink that is corrosive and even if they are never used, these will deteriorate more rapidly in a poor storage climate.

Presentation and packaging

Self-adhesive tapes, albums and protective films are harmful to paper and difficult to remove; try not to use them.

The way that documents are bundled or wrapped may be damaging.

Accidents

Perhaps the most common accidents that damage books and documents involve water, spillages, and physical damage such as crumpling or tearing.

There is more information on these topics later in the tip sheet.

A safe storage area

The ideal storage environment for paper is cool, relatively dry, well ventilated, dark, and clean. In these conditions, papers and photographs won't go mouldy, insects or vermin shouldn't eat them, they won't fade or get disfigured by dust, and they will age more slowly.

Some suggestions follow to help you find a good storage location for your treasured family records, in your home.

Store your valued documents in the best environment you can find in your home. This will usually be in your living areas rather than the attic, garage, cellar, or shed.

Avoid shelving books, files and boxes of documents against outside walls that are prone to condensation. Dampness causes mould and a musty smell, it encourages some insect pests such as book lice and silverfish, and causes acidity in the paper to worsen more rapidly.

If your home is at risk from flooding, do not store important documents on the floor of your ground floor or cellar. Also avoid shelving them below water pipes and bathrooms, as they can also be the source of flooding or dripping.

Choose a storage area that avoids dust, fumes, and heat from cooking, radiators, and fires. In particular, colour photographs, negatives, video, cassette and film, deteriorate much more quickly with rising temperature.

Keep documents and photographs out of direct sunlight and fluorescent light. These will cause fading and colour changes. If you want to display a favourite photograph or manuscript document, consider getting a copy or print made to display, and preserve the original.

Places you could consider for storage are a trunk, wardrobe or chest of drawers in a bedroom or under the bed; a spare room or study; or shelves in a hallway or landing. These areas of a house are often cooler, and away from cooking, fires and smoking. Do be sure to package the items to protect them from dust.

Try to remind yourself to check the condition of the items regularly, looking for dust, mould and insects.

If you have to move house or your room contents, make sure you put your treasured memorabilia in a safe place – someone else may not recognize their significance and might even throw them away!

Packaging

Enclosing and boxing documents carefully has several advantages, if the correct materials are used.

First and foremost, packaging protects them from bumps, crushing, tears and dirt.

It supports them during movement.

It saves marking the documents – you can label or write on the packaging. This makes documents easier to find, and protects them from wear and tear because you only need to handle the documents you want to look at.

It helps to insulate the document from changes in humidity and temperature, and to protect them from accidental water damage and even from destruction in a fire.

Good packaging can also mean good presentation, making it even more of a pleasure to share memorabilia.

Good quality packaging is more durable.

Choosing packaging materials

Because the packaging will be in close proximity to the documents for a long time it is important to choose the correct materials.

Harmful packaging

In fact the wrong materials could actually do harm, for example:

Self-adhesives in direct contact with the items, i.e. self-adhesive album pages, sticky backed plastic, sticky tape, double-sided tape, self-adhesive labels, and Post-it notes. In all these materials, the adhesive migrates into the paper with time and forms chemical bonds with it, making it impossible to get rid of. It causes unsightly stains, makes the paper hard and brittle, and can seep out of the edges of the tape and stick documents together. Biro or felt tip covered with self adhesive gums will blur and discolour, and may transfer from the paper to the tape.

If storing documents in envelopes cut the sticky flaps off the envelopes so there is no chance of them sticking to the documents.

Use plain materials for all wrapping and tying – coloured folders and ribbons could run if they get wet. Do not use elastic bands or steel paper clips or pins to attach documents together, because as they decay they stick to the documents.

When boxing and wrapping documents for long-term storage, do not use recycled paper or card – it could contain harmful residues. Avoid using any poor quality papers and boxes because the pulp they are made from contains substances (e.g. lignin from wood and acids) that quickly degrade. The packaging breaks down quickly, and more importantly, the storage environment becomes acidic and this is harmful to the documents.

Avoid using biro, non-waterproof inks, felt tips and roller balls for labelling your packaging because they run if accidentally wetted. Use a pencil or waterproof ink pen.

Placing documents in transparent plastic sleeves protects them while they are being used. Generally these are of benefit to the preservation of documents when they are in use. However the following disadvantages must be considered when the sleeves are for long-term storage:

The storage environment must not be damp; if it is damp, mould could develop; and photographs could stick to the plastic.

Do not use them for long-term storage if you suspect that the document is highly acidic. There is some evidence that severely acidic documents deteriorate more quickly when kept in sleeves. Acidic paper looks brown, sometimes smells sweet, and is soft and brittle.

Pastel or other friable media will be dislodged by the static in plastic sleeves.

If you are using plastic sleeves for long term storage they should be 100% pure polyester or polyethylene because cheaper products contain plastics that degrade. The harmful gases and acids they produce are trapped in with your documents. The sleeves also become brittle and start to yellow.

Transparent pure polyester film and polyethylene sleeves can be obtained from the specialist suppliers listed below, and also from quality photography shops. Sometimes sleeves made of harmful plastic such as PVC, can be identified by their odour – a plastic smell similar to the inside of a new car. They are acceptable for short-term storage only.

Good packaging

Enclosures should always be larger than the document as any protruding edges soon get bent, torn and dirty.

Envelopes, boxes and folders should be made from lignin free paper and should have a neutral pH. Do not overfill them.

The enclosures for degraded documents should also contain an alkali reserve or “buffer” – chemicals that absorb the acids that are generated by the degraded paper or ink.

In the product description look for the words like “wood free”, lignin free”, “alkaline buffered” or “permanent”, because manufacturers can use the term “archival” to simply mean a design or style of enclosure, and “acid free” boxes will soon become acid if they are made from pulp that contains lignin.

If you cannot afford all top quality materials, put the best quality in contact with the document. For example it is better to have all the documents in buffered envelopes that are then stored in an ordinary box, than to put them in poor quality envelopes in a buffered box.

Photographs can be stored in polyester film sleeves or paper enclosures. Ideally paper or boxes should be very pure and neither acid nor alkali buffered – look for the trademarks “Silversafe” and “Microchamber”.

100% pure polyethylene or polyester sleeves are especially good for protecting frequently used documents.

Use a B or HB pencil if you must write on documents, and a pencil or indelible archivists pen for writing on packaging – it will not run if they should ever get wet.

Put fragile items in a paper sleeve or folder before storing them in an envelope: it will provide extra protection when you are withdrawing the document.

Preparing documents for storage

Before putting your documents away it is a good idea to go through them checking for damp, mould, live insect infestation, and loose dirt.

As a general rule, never do anything to a document that cannot be easily reversed. If you are in any doubt about what action to take please speak to a Conservator.

If the documents are dirty, mouldy or have been infested with insects or rodents, consider them a hazard to your health. It is very important to protect yourself from spores and dust, so wear gloves, overalls, and a well fitting dust mask – Type FFP3 is recommended. Wash your hands well before eating or drinking.

Damp

Documents must be dry before they go into storage.

To dry out damp documents simply spread them on a clean dry surface in a dry, draught-free room for a few hours. Make sure they can't be disturbed or blown about.

Insects and vermin

Paper is a complex starch and there are a variety of insects and vermin that can use it as food. Woodworm type beetle, silverfish, book lice and moths are the most common pests.

Their activities leave behind evidence such as holes and grazed surfaces, and you will also notice black gritty debris – their eggs and droppings. If it is a current infestation you may see moving insects or larvae. Gently remove debris and insects from the volume, document and packaging with a soft, clean brush.

Air infested documents in a light, well-ventilated place – this will get rid of silverfish and booklice, and as long as you keep your collection in the correct environment they shouldn't return. Woodworm or moth are more difficult to deal with but there are ways of eradicating them without using insecticides – for more details, consult a Conservator.

Loose dirt

Documents must be dry before making any attempts to clean them, because brushing or wiping damp dirt or mould causes it to smear and engrain it in the paper.

Do not try to clean off engrained dirt or mould. The method described below is for loose dirt and dust only.

Work on a flat, solid, clean surface. If you want to cover the work surface, use unprinted paper because newspaper can offset. Keep the work surface beneath the document clean.

It is only possible to clean areas of the document in reasonably good condition – fragile paper or ink may crumble away. If in doubt do not proceed with cleaning.

Dust documents with a soft, clean mop shaped brush. If the document is in good condition, gently wiping them with a pad of pure cotton wool can be very effective.

Gently unfold dog-eared, creased edges and smooth along the peak of the crease with your fingertip. Do not fold the crease backwards and forwards to reduce it.

Remove old elastic bands and metal attachments with care. If they have already stuck to the document it is best to leave them in place. Sticky tape removal should be done by a Conservator. If it is oozing and threatens to stick to other documents, interleave the documents with sheets of pure polyester film or silicone release paper.

Always wear clean cotton gloves while you are handling and packaging your photographs.

Using Packaging

When using polyester film sleeves, place the sleeve flat on the table, open the end of the sleeve, place the document flat on the table and slide it into the sleeve. Resist the temptation to hold the document and sleeve above the table – it is much safer if the document is kept flat and supported. Put fragile documents in a sling of paper to protect and support them while they are inserted.

Try to align the edges of bundles of documents, as any that protrude are vulnerable. For the same reason, do not use envelopes, sleeves or folders that are smaller than the document.

Try not to tie bundles of documents. If you must tie them, align them, wrap them well, use a broad flat tape rather than string or cord, and do not tie them too tightly. We put groups of documents in folders to avoid tying them.

This information is provided courtesy of Jersey Heritage; it is intended as guidance only, and Jersey Heritage does not assume responsibility or liability.

If you are unsure how to preserve your documents and memorabilia please contact a Conservator.

UK SUPPLIERS OF ARCHIVAL QUALITY STORAGE MATERIALS

Conservation By Design

Miscellaneous products

Timecare Works
5 Singer Way
Woburn Road Ind. Estate
Kempston
Bedford
MK42 7AW

Tel: (01234) 853555
Fax: (01234) 852334
E-mail: info@conservation-by-design.co.uk
Web site: <http://www.conservation-by-design.co.uk>

Conservation Resources (UK) Ltd.

Miscellaneous products

Unit 1 Pony Road
Horspath Industrial Estate
Cowley
Oxfordshire
OX4 2RD

Tel: (01865) 747755
Fax: (01865) 74703

Preservation Equipment Ltd

Miscellaneous products

Shelfhanger
Diss
Norfolk
IP22 2DG

Tel: 01379 651527
Fax: 01379 650582
E-mail: sales@preservationequipment.com
Web site: <http://www.preservationequipment.com>

G.Ryder and Co. Ltd.

Boxes and storage systems

Denbigh Road
Bletchley
Milton Keynes
Buckinghamshire
MK1 1DG

Tel: 01908 375524
Fax: 01908 373658
E-mail: ryderbox.co@virgin.net
Web site: <http://www.ryderbox.co.uk>

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Polyester sleeves and storage systems

13 –16 Howlett Way
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The purpose of the Jersey Archive is to identify, select, collect, manage, preserve and provide access to the Island's Records on behalf of the whole community, promoting Jersey's culture, heritage and sense of place, both within its shores and beyond.

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Opening Hours: 9am to 5pm, Tuesday to Thursday. The Reading Room and Help Desk are closed between 1-2pm. Late night till 7pm the last Thursday of the month.