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 engrains it in the paper.

Do not try to clean off engrafted 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 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 gently wipe them with a pad of pure cotton wool. The crease will get rid of loose dirt and dust only.

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 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.

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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 will deteriorate the fastest.

Climate
Warmth and high humidity raise the rate of deterioration of paper, ink, and photographs, causing problems that are 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 also 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.

Placing your documents in the correct type of transparent plastic sleeves protects them while they are being looked at or handled. 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 on the market. Plastic sleeves have the following disadvantages:

- They protect the document from dust.
- They are easily removed and reattached. 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 they decay they stick 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 bino, 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.

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.