

# Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 5

## Caring for your books and documents at home

All of us own books, periodicals, photographs, maps, certificates and various papers of sentimental, intellectual or family interest, some of monetary value. We may wish to keep these just for record purposes or to hand them down within the family. Here are some suggestions for keeping them in good condition.

### Handling and Storage

The factor that most affects the condition of books and documents is mechanical damage caused by usage and mishandling. Every time you handle a document you shorten its life just a little, handle it roughly and you shorten it a lot. Tightly packed shelves reduce air circulation and encourage excessive tugging on spines to remove a book. Articles in contact with other items of a poorer quality will be affected by them, for example, acid migration from a cheap folder may affect even the best quality paper, and photographs stored in albums of poor quality may tarnish and discolour.

#### **Suggestions:**

Wash your hands before handling books or documents.

Place fewer books on a shelf to reduce damage.

Large volumes may benefit from being laid on their sides.

Avoid folding papers if possible; fold only once if you must.

Keep smaller items together in good quality envelopes, folders and albums.

Do not use self adhesive tapes on anything you wish to keep.

### Light

Light, especially direct sunlight, may cause fading of inks and photochemical deterioration of paper. Photographs and coloured materials are particularly susceptible to this kind of damage.

#### **Suggestions:**

Place books, documents and display framed articles away from direct sunlight and provide some shade in the room.

A bookshelf facing a window could be fitted with a roller blind or simple curtain to protect valued books.

Display copies rather than originals, that way, if they fade, they can be replaced by another copy.

### Heat, Humidity and Moisture

Temperature and humidity (the water content of the air) are related. Heat accelerates chemical processes within paper and leather, especially in moist conditions. Rapid changes in temperature cause expansion or contraction, change in water content and, worst of all, condensation. Excess moisture encourages fungal growth and may weaken adhesives or cause staining. Too

little moisture makes paper, leather and parchment shrink and become brittle and distorted. The boards of a book may warp so badly that they tear away from the textblock.

The recommended levels for storage of archives are 45-60 per cent relative humidity and 13-19 degrees Celsius temperature. This may be difficult to maintain in the home, but cool, dry, well-ventilated conditions are best.

**Suggestions:**

Do not store materials in kitchens, bathrooms, cellars, attics, garages or conservatories which are subject to rapid changes in heat and humidity. Keep materials away from direct heat sources such as radiators and storage heaters.

Do not situate bookshelves against a damp wall - avoid outside walls if possible. Dry lining can help.

Provide air space behind shelving.

Avoid paraffin or portable gas heaters which produce moisture as well as heat.

Glass fronted shelves protect against dust, but can seal too well, containing humid air and providing a 'greenhouse' environment. Drill ventilation holes and cover with gauze, or leave doors open a little.

**Pollution, mould, insects and vermin**

Rats, mice and some insects can damage archival materials. Dust and dirt encourage growth of mould and insect infestation. Dust also contains aerial pollutants from the combustion of fossil fuels. The sulphur reacts with moisture to produce weak but persistent sulphuric acid. Acids will degrade all materials. Dust and soot from domestic fires are also harmful.

**Suggestions:**

A vacuum cleaner is best for cleaning shelves and boxes, as the dust is contained rather than re-distributed. Dust volumes closed, using a soft brush to direct dust towards the nozzle. A very powerful vacuum may damage materials, so exercise caution. When 'spring cleaning', wash down empty shelves with a mild detergent and dry thoroughly before replacing items.

**Photographs**

Photographs are, by nature, unstable and difficult to preserve for long periods, however, these basic suggestions for storage and display can greatly enhance their effective life.

**Suggestions:**

Handle photographs with clean hands and avoid touching the face of prints, negatives, transparencies or plates except by the edges.

The best protection for prints and negatives is polyester enclosures. This material is clear, strong and chemically inert.

Albums with polyester pockets are far superior to 'sticky back' varieties.

Traditional photo-corners are fine if the page is of good quality.

Negatives should be stored in sleeves and placed in an envelope or folder; they are an original and irreplaceable item.  
When it is necessary to write on prints, use a soft (2B) pencil on the back and press lightly to avoid embossing the surface.  
If displaying prints use copies where possible, that way, the original may be properly stored and preserved.

## Useful Addresses

The Institute of Conservation  
The National Archives  
Kew  
Richmond  
Surrey TW9 4DU  
[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

The Society of Archivists  
Prioryfield House  
20 Canon Street  
Taunton  
Somerset TA1 1SW  
[www.archives.org.uk](http://www.archives.org.uk)

The National Museum of  
photography, film and television  
Bradford  
West Yorkshire BD1 1NQ  
[www.nmpft.org.uk](http://www.nmpft.org.uk)

Conservation Register  
c/o Institute of Conservation  
3rd floor, Downstream building  
London Bridge  
London SE1 9BG  
[www.conservationregister.com](http://www.conservationregister.com)

National Preservation Office  
3rd floor  
London Bridge  
London SE1 9BG  
[www.instituteofconservation.org.uk](http://www.instituteofconservation.org.uk)

The British Library  
96 Euston Road  
London NW1 2DB  
[www.bl.uk/services/npo](http://www.bl.uk/services/npo)

These suggestions are for information purposes only. They are not intended as, nor should they be taken to be, a substitute for obtaining independent professional archival or conservation advice. Norfolk Record Office does not and cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage howsoever caused as a result of any person acting or failing to act on the suggestions made.

Unfortunately, the Norfolk Record Office Conservation Department is unable to undertake any work on a commercial basis, but is happy to advise holders of archives in Norfolk about it's methods of storage and repair.



If you need this leaflet in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the County Archivist on 01603 222599 and we will do our best to help.

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