

Guide to caring for family and estate archival collections in Irish historic houses

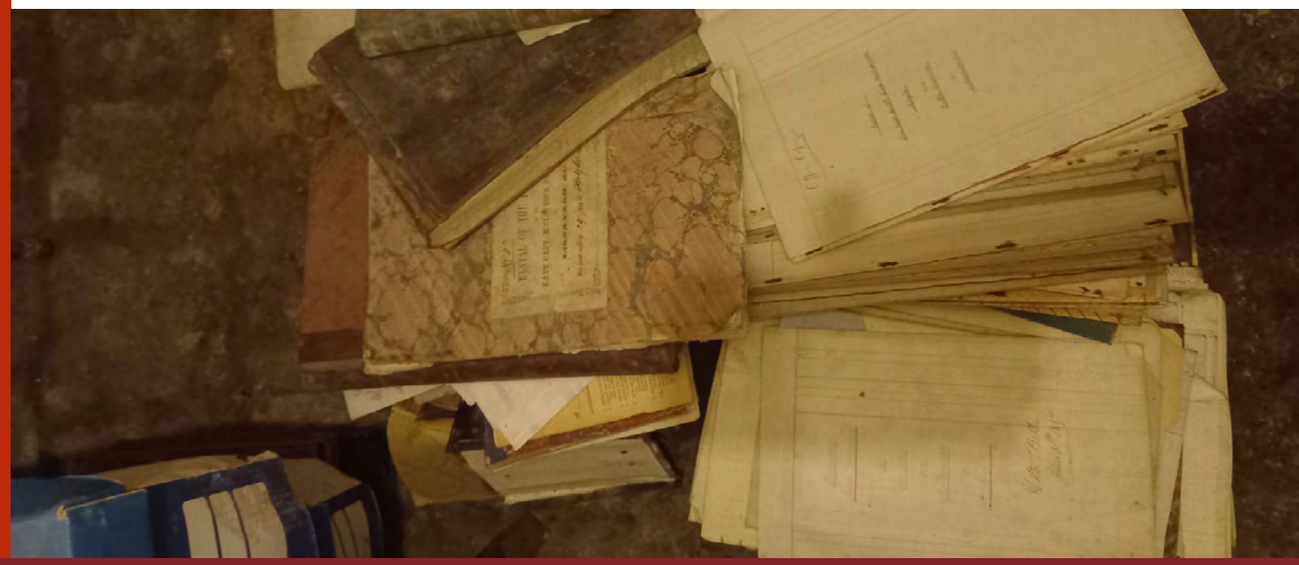
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Centre for the Study of
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Contents

	PAGE
About this Guide	**1**
Introduction: Estate Collections in Irish Country Houses	**3**
Section 1: Identifying your collections	**4**
Step 1: Locate your collections	4
Step 2: Start a list	5
Step 3: Specify what is in each location	5
Step 4: Describe what each item is, keeping it in order	5
Step 5: Record how and when the items entered the collection	6
Step 6: Rate the condition of each item	7
Step 7: Schedule regular audits and assessment of your collection	8
Section 2: How to care for your collections	**9**
Step 8: Understand the conditions your collections are stored in	9
Step 9: Storage concerns - How much space do you need?	13
Step 10: Identify a suitable storage space/spaces	13
Step 11: Take steps to address any issues with the conditions in your storage spaces	14
Step 12: Get the right housing and storage for your collections	16
Step 13: How to look after the different types of material in your collection	18
A note on digitisation	***22***
Appendix 1	***23***



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended for the owners of country houses and those who care for family and estate archival collections.

The aim of this booklet is to serve as a practical manual giving accessible guidance to private owners and custodians on how to look after their archival collections. It is presented as a step-by-step guide that outlines how to identify your collections and how to store and preserve them. It also details where to go for professional advice, support and other helpful resources.

It will help you

- Identify your collection – See **Section 1: Identifying your collections**
- Preserve your collection – See **Section 2: How to care for your collections**

This guide starts from the very basics and progresses through the steps to follow to help you achieve a basic inventory and record of a well-maintained archival collection. However, we appreciate that not everyone will be starting from the same position. **Skip to the step relevant to you.** For example, you may yourself, or with the help of an archivist or collections care professional, have already produced an inventory or catalogue of your archival collection. In this case, the advice at Step 8 onwards may be more relevant and useful to you. However, all the advice in this guidance should be a useful reminder of the ongoing responsibilities in maintaining and caring for your archival material.

Important note: We advise that all collection holders seek the advice of an accredited archivist, and if necessary, a professional conservator, to undertake the work outlined in this guide to the appropriate professional standards. However, where this is not possible, we hope this guidance will serve to provide for the minimum safekeeping of estate archival collections.

Further Information

Throughout this guide we have advised seeking the support of accredited professionals where possible. Further support and useful information can be found at the following:

- Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates
- The Heritage Council
- The Archives and Records Association of Ireland
- Institute of Conservator-Restorers Ireland
- For professional custodians, see also the Heritage Council Museum Standards Programme for Ireland, in particular Factsheet 6: Care of Collections Situation Review
- *Caring for Collections: A manual of preventative conservation* by Susan Corr, published by The Heritage Council (2000).

Material Suppliers

- Preservation Equipment: preservationequipment.com
- Darac: darac.ie
- Conservation by Design: cxdinternational.com
- Archival box Co. archivalbox.ie
- Secol secol.co.uk for polyester sleeves

This guidance was written by Dr. Patrick McBride and Ciara McQueierns A-ICRI for the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates and supported by The Heritage Council.



INTRODUCTION: ESTATE COLLECTIONS IN IRISH COUNTRY HOUSES

There are many magnificent examples of historic houses in Ireland which are now seen as part of the national patrimony. These properties and their history, as well as their landscapes, archives and collections, offer a view into the cultural, political and social history of the country which is vital to preserve.

Along with being living cultural and economic assets to the wider public, many of these stately homes remain family homes, occupied by the descendants of their original owners, and with that, the family's own personal history in the form of their archives and other collections have survived. These have been passed down through the generations and help to preserve the 'memory' of these estates, as well as carrying huge historical, social and cultural importance not only to the family and estate, but at a national level also.

This guidance has been designed for the private owners and stewards who have day-to-day responsibility for these collections. It is intended as a 'how to' guide that sets out the minimum first steps you should take that will help to ensure the long-term preservation of country house and estate collections. In addition, this guidance describes how best to inventory and store the material you have, until such time that a professional archivist, conservator or other collections professional can establish a full catalogue and collections care regime. It is hoped that this guidance will help to ensure that collections remain intact, accessible and in the best condition possible so that their important legacy can be realised for generations to come.

It is important to emphasise that the most important first step to ensuring the long-term survival and preservation of archival collections is to establish what is in the collection. You cannot care for something if you don't know you have it. **Section 1: Identifying your Collection** provides step-by-step guidance on how to produce a basic inventory of what you have. An inventory will also enhance the security and support the integrity of your collection.

The process of producing and maintaining an inventory, along with the information provided in **Section 2: How to care for your collection**, will enable collection holders to establish how best to care for the items they have, benchmark the overall condition of their collections and ensure they are securely located and safely stored. It will also help collection holders prioritise the deployment of resources towards any necessary professional archival and conservation support.

SECTION 1: IDENTIFYING YOUR COLLECTIONS

STEP 1: LOCATE YOUR COLLECTIONS

You need to make sure that you have established the location of all archival collections on site. This is especially important for people who may be new owners or who have recently assumed responsibility for collections. This step is as simple as checking around the site to identify where the material is currently located. This includes checking boxes, outbuildings and any stores. Keep an open mind when doing this in terms of the material that should be included.

It would be important to identify whether the property contains an archive or collection of papers. Although the material may not be directly related to the new family, it could be valuable to a local institution.

Tip: At this stage, unless material is being clearly, actively damaged, or you feel there is a health-risk (including animal droppings) in the location, we would not recommend moving anything. You may decide to move items to improve their storage conditions after you have completed Step 9.

Tip: You may wish to take overall location photographs of the items in situ at this stage as an aide memoire and to record the original storage conditions. Recording this information could be helpful to future archivists or conservators.



Investigate all areas and boxes contained within the property

STEP 2: START A LIST

This is the first step in being able to adequately care for your collections. You need to record a list of what you have before you can begin to assess what they are exactly, how they should be stored and additional collections care actions such as professional archiving and conservation. This should help you to prioritise your resources most efficiently and effectively to the greatest benefit of your collections.

Appendix 1 includes a template that you may wish to use or copy when compiling your list.

Tip: Ensure that you date the creation of the list and record the date of any subsequent edits or amendments to it.

Tip: Make sure that you keep your completed list secure. If it is safe to do so, keep a copy of your list with your collections, but also retain digital copies. Ensure that all the relevant people know where to find it.

STEP 3: SPECIFY WHAT IS IN EACH LOCATION

Next, you need to do your best to identify what types of items are in your collections. This is important because it will dictate future decisions about storage and care of the material. Do this for all the items in each location that you have identified. This is where you quantify how much material you have. Do you have thousands of loose paper items or hundreds, a single photo album or tens of bound volumes? You would not be able to count every single sheet of paper, but gauging the approximate quantity of material will inform storage decisions and clarify repository needs later. For this step, you can summarise at the level of boxes of items, bundles, bags, shelves, cupboard etc, rather than each individual piece of paper or object.

Ideally, as you do this, you will label and number each storage container in a sequential manner. This is vitally important for ensuring that you can locate the precise item/container as you work but also, more importantly, in the future. If this is not possible, provide a unique description of the item so that it cannot be mixed up in the future.

The template in **Appendix 1** includes a checklist of item types that you may find helpful.

A professional archivist, conservation or collections care specialist would also be able to establish this for you.

STEP 4: DESCRIBE WHAT EACH ITEM IS, KEEPING IT IN ORDER

Next, you should aim to work through each item that you have identified at Step 3 and produce a description, as best you can, of each individual item within each container or location.

If possible, seek professional help: Ideally, at this stage, a professional archivist would assess the contents of the collection. Their input at this stage would be hugely beneficial to the collection as a whole. They can appraise the collection, put it in safe storage conditions, give advice as to what should be preserved and any conservation treatment necessary, and put a cataloguing system and finding aids in place.

If you cannot consult with an archivist at this stage, it is crucial to take the time to familiarise yourself with the contents of your collection if it is not already fully known. Skim through every item first, **without re-arranging** them, to get an overview of what you have.

We appreciate that this task may be time-consuming or daunting. An archival collection could span centuries and there is likely a mix of materials, such as legal, financial and personal items. The checklist in **Appendix 1** has been designed to assist you. Add this additional detailed information to your list of items.

For each container or location, describe the items by type, such as '10 boxes of parchment deeds and paper correspondence', '3 boxes of bundled pamphlets', '5 drawers of rolled maps', 'shelf of 56 bound volumes'. Doing this is an important step in organising and keeping track of the material you are responsible for.

Respect the original order: It is essential not to mix up the order in which the papers are stored. They may be in a particular order for a reason that might not be initially clear. The sequence in which they are found may provide vital context to the collection.

If there appears to already be an order, even if how it is categorised is not clear to you, it is best to retain that order and concentrate on becoming more familiar with the contents first. If it was placed in an order, it was for a reason, and that should be understood before reorganising anything, or some context could be lost.

Tip: If items are crumpled, stuck together, damp, mouldy or exhibit signs of being fragile when handled, it is best to leave them as you find them. In this case, we recommend that you do two things

1) Note this on your list (if using the checklist, noting this under column 'Condition')

2) Seek the services of an archivist or conservator as a priority for these items.

Tip: If you feel as though you should not touch items within your collection without wearing gloves due to mould/ dirt/ fragile parts, please do not touch them at all. This would be an indication that a conservator is required.

STEP 5: RECORD HOW AND WHEN THE ITEMS ENTERED THE COLLECTION

Include this information on the checklist in the appropriate column if known or not. If you do not have this information, record the fact that it is (currently) unknown.

Again, assuming there is no urgent reason to move them (in which case we advise the services of a professional) leave items in the order you find them.

STEP 6: RATE THE CONDITION OF EACH ITEM

It is important to get a sense of the state of repair or condition of each item. This will form your priority list for conservation treatment later on, where the items in the worst condition are considered first for preventative or interventive conservation.

Again, assuming there is no urgent reason to move them (in which case we advise the services of a professional) leave items in the order you find them.

A priority list needs to be established, the most important pieces need to be identified, and their condition should be documented. The template in **Appendix 1** will assist you in this. See also Museum Standards Programme for Ireland: Factsheet 3, Condition Assessment (available on the Heritage Council website www.heritagecouncil.ie).

In terms of assessing the condition of the collection yourself it must be understood that it is difficult for the untrained eye to accurately carry out this assessment. Engaging the services of a professional conservator is the only way that an objects condition can be precisely rated. Items may appear damaged, but are stable, and others may appear less damaged, but are unstable for reasons such as chemical instability or inherent fragility which may not be initially visible to someone who doesn't know what to look for.



An example of extensive mould activity

When observing your collection, trust your instincts. Simply, if you feel that something is in poor condition, assume it is and record it as such in your records (either using the template in **Appendix 1**, or in your own inventory or catalogue). There are certain indicators that would require urgent action, such as extensive mould, and if you cannot touch items without causing further damage, they would need to be seen by a conservator. Your own sense of concern and observation will assist you in the decisions you make, but all you can do is carry out a visual assessment and note items that are of concern to you. Taking photos will help you to document changes occurring over time

A note on gloves: The advice for a long time when accessing or handling original objects was to wear gloves to prevent the transference of oils or dirt from hands. That advice has now changed because gloves can interfere with dexterity and reduce your ability to feel the true condition of an object. White cotton gloves in particular can catch on damaged paper fragments and worsen them. The general handling advice now is not to use gloves; clean and dry hands will suffice. However, if you suspect mould, animal droppings or another other dangerous substance, either avoid handling altogether and seek professional advice or, at a minimum wear conservation-grade nitrile gloves and handle with care.

It would be of great benefit to access the services of a professional conservator at this stage. A conservator can carry out a general condition survey or focus on your priority list. They can tell you whether something needs urgent attention, or they can alleviate your concerns when something may appear at risk but is in fact stable and safe to box in its current condition.

STEP 7: SCHEDULE REGULAR AUDITS AND ASSESSMENT OF YOUR COLLECTION

We recommend that you check that your list every 12 months at a minimum.

Using the list you have established, check that all the items are still there, in the location you have recorded and in the condition you have noted. Any changes in condition should be noted and dated and urgent deterioration marked as priority and escalated to the attention of a professional conservator where possible.

Tip: If items must be moved for any reason at any point, record this movement on your checklist.

Tip: If there are significant weather events, check your storage locations and items carefully afterward to ensure they are unaffected.

SECTION 2: HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR COLLECTIONS

There are several potential sources of harm that can negatively impact the wellbeing of a collection of this kind. Understanding what causes damage to your items will help you make decisions about how best to store your items.

While we would always recommend the services of a professional accredited archivist or conservator to advise you in relation to the storage of your collections. This section will provide you with a basic understanding of the issues to be aware of and steps you can take to address them.

The checklist provided in **Appendix 1** lists seven factors to consider when assessing the conditions in which your items are stored.

Below, we look at each of these seven factors in turn, to understand how they affect objects. They can be categorised into four main causes: **Environmental, biological, chemical and human**.

Your collections should be stored so they are protected from the following:

1) **Excessive moisture or fluctuations in humidity**
2) **Heat / Cold / Fire / Temperature fluctuations**
3) **Light**
4) **Dust / Dirt / Pollutants / Chemical agents (internal and external)**
5) **Pests / Biological Factors / Mould / Droppings**
6) **Physical Force / Stress / Vandalism**
7) **Disassociation / Loss**

STEP 8: UNDERSTAND THE CONDITIONS YOUR COLLECTIONS ARE STORED IN

a) Excessive moisture or fluctuations in humidity

The damage that the wrong environment can cause to paper-based material is profound. A wet or humid environment and one that fluctuates between hot and cold can cause and accelerate mould growth which, if it gets out of control, can degrade the material to the point of destruction.

b) Heat / Cold / Fire / Temperature fluctuations

Temperatures or environments that are too dry can cause desiccation of papers and parchment, and if the environment is too warm, it can speed up the chemical breakdown of ink and paper. Fire poses an obvious risk to materials and you should put measures in place to mitigate fire risks.



Severe environmental damage to a document

c) Light

Another major factor is the damage that is caused by exposure to UV light, which causes weakening to the paper and severe fading to pigments and media.

d) Dust / Dirt / Pollutants / Chemical Agents

Dust, soot, nicotine, and particulate/atmospheric pollutants can all increase the weakening of paper fibres. Harmful chemicals agents can derive from the objects themselves (such as the chemicals in certain inks or paints, paper, photographs, film, canvas, metals etc) or from external environmental factors (such as tobacco/vaping smoke, open fires, household cleaning products, dust, pollution etc).

Note that **no** common household cleaning agents are suitable for use around archival collections.

Harmful chemical agents can be present within the archival items themselves and need to be managed over the long term by a professional conservator. For example:

Acidic paper: From the 20th century onwards, cheaper and easier ways of making paper were introduced. This means that some modern material can, in fact, be more acidic and therefore vulnerable to becoming delicate and damaged than older, higher quality, items.

Iron gall ink: Iron gall ink documents date from antiquity and were used in the western world from the 12th century to the early 20th century, so it would be reasonable to assume that an historical collection of family estate papers will contain material with iron gall ink. This ink is made from galls or growths on an oak tree. The damaging process of iron gall ink can take years to manifest; however, it is highly acidic and can burn through the paper. The extent of its corrosive qualities depends on the recipe of that ink, and the composition of the paper or parchment.

e) Pests / Biological Factors / Mould

Pests such as moths, silverfish, rodents and carpet beetles can cause irreversible damage to collections due to feeding/ gnawing/ burrowing through pages, books, leather, natural fibres, starch and animal-based adhesives. Pest activity causes visible damage to the collection in the form of holes, pits and lost areas.

Rodent droppings and associated bacteria are a health hazard and can contaminate materials. Rodents can also physically feed on and chew archival material. Very often, bitemarks can be clearly seen on pages or other material, furthermore, where pests are present, their faeces promote further insect growth and contamination.

Biological damage comes in several forms, it includes mould activity, which thrives in poorly ventilated and damp conditions.

f) Physical Force / Stress / Vandalism

Frequent or careless handling of the material can put it under stress and be a contributing factor in its physical degradation. Examples of this would be frequent folding and unfolding of large items such as maps, over-opening volumes with fragile or damaged bindings, writing or annotating on original documents, handling of items with unwashed hands or having food/ drink around the material.



Severe pest damage

Improper storage such as overfilled boxes, storing rolled items improperly, piling-up or squashing material can all cause damage. Repairs and preventative conservation measures carried out by non-professionals, including the family owners or stewards of collections, often result in irreversible damage. Please leave repairs to professional conservators and if you are in any doubt about any aspect of the care of your collections, please seek professional advice. Much of the damage that conservators and archivists must deal with has been caused by well-meaning, but untrained, attempts to fix or repair items.

g) Dissociation / Loss

We have already described how important it is to establish what is in your collections and log the movement of items, to ensure they do not become lost. Even a basic inventory, such as the template provided in **Appendix 1** will enhance the security and support the integrity of your collection. Ideally, a collections care professional would catalogue and appropriately house your collection in full.

It is also vital to consider the security of your items. Undertake regular checks, as advised previously, to ensure you know what you have, where it is and that everything is present and correct.

Consider also the way items are collated and stored. For example, loose papers on open shelves or bags of loose items or fragments could easily become lost or disassociated. There is further advice on mitigating this risk through the correct housing of collections.

STEP 9: STORAGE CONCERNS - HOW MUCH SPACE DO YOU NEED?

Once you have identified what is in your collection, you will need to establish how much space you need to, ideally, devote to storing your collections. Your inventory will help you understand how much material you have and your condition assessment will help you gauge which items are vulnerable and therefore in need of particular consideration such as protective storage containers or dedicated space within storage areas.

Individually housed, or contained, items obviously require more storage space, either on racks, tables or shelves and this will impact the overall space requirements of your collection.

TIP: It is fine to store your items in several locations. Just be sure to note any location changes or moves on your inventory so you know where everything is.

STEP 10: IDENTIFY A SUITABLE STORAGE SPACE/SPACES

To identify a suitable storage area for your items, it is important to consider the environmental stability of the space. Ideally, a clean, stable environment will offer the best conditions for collections. Storage spaces should be maintained at a reasonable temperature of between 19-22 degrees Celsius, and a relative humidity (RH) at approximately 40%- 55%. A simple RH monitor can provide this information but essentially this means a room that is a comfortable temperature, that doesn't become too hot or too cold. Generally speaking, archival collections should not be stored in basements or attics as the environments in these spaces can fluctuate too much. Lastly, please do not store material in direct light and ideally, in no light at all.

Paper based collections are delicate by nature. They cannot be stored outdoors, or in outbuildings permanently. A secure area inside the home should be identified as a suitable place to store the material. The collection should not be stored near an outside wall, or in a place with large fluctuations in temperature, or in any basements/ attics due to their unsuitable environments. It should not be stored directly on the ground but raised off the floor on shelves.

It is relatively straightforward to set-up the necessary pest control in any storage areas. Pest traps should be laid around the vicinity of entrance/ exit points and should be checked fortnightly. Good housekeeping is the single most effective method of pest control. Storage spaces should be vacuumed regularly and immediate action taken if pests are identified. Should you suspect the presence of any pests, as a first step, the advice of a professional conservator should be sought, rather than a general, commercial, pest control company.

If space is limited, you may wish to explore options for installing shelving, racks, cupboards, chest of drawers, cabinets or other means of creating storage space. An professional archivist, conservator or collections care supplier will be able to provide the best advice on your storage needs.

TIP: There is further advice on how best to house your items in Steps 12 and 13.

STEP 11: TAKE STEPS TO ADDRESS ANY ISSUES WITH THE CONDITIONS IN YOUR STORAGE SPACES

If any of the agents of deterioration listed apply to the environment in which your collections are stored, as far as practical, you should prioritise addressing those factors as quickly as possible.

Alternatively, consider moving your collections to a more suitable storage space.

The table on the following pages summarises the preferred conditions in which to store your collections.

Agent of deterioration	Overall mitigation strategy	How to apply this to your collection
Moisture, fluctuations in humidity	Maintain a storage space that is not too dry and not too damp. Emergency water ingress measures in place.	An RH monitor can record the temperature and humidity in your storage spaces and give you the information you need to understand, and manage, your storage conditions more accurately. Keep windows closed. Storage spaces in the main house, rather than outbuildings, typically maintain better humidity levels and are more suited to store archives. Avoid storage areas that are prone to flooding, near water pipes or below the waterline, such as basements. Consider storing items raised off the floor. Check storage spaces regularly. Emergency water-ingress salvage kits are available from conservation suppliers.
Light	Items should be stored in darkness.	Cover your items by housing them in appropriate storage containers. Use LED lighting to provide illumination in your storage spaces when needed. Any windows in storage spaces should be covered to maintain the collection in darkness.
Heat, cold, Fire, temperature fluctuations	Maintain a storage space that is not too hot, not too cold. Maintain a constant, level temperature if possible. Fire prevention measures in place.	Older houses tend to breath with the seasons – cycling slowly over the course of the year through a gradual variation in temperature and humidity. An unheated, internal storage space, so long as it doesn't get very cold or very hot is adequate. Be aware that temperatures in basements or lofts can tend to fluctuate too much for the storage of archival material. Walls can be cold and conduct moisture, store items an inch or so away from walls if possible. Monitor the temperature in your storage space. Have a fire prevention assessment and plan in place. Liaise with your local fire brigade to ensure they are familiar with the site and for their advice.
Dust, Dirt, Pollutants, Chemical agents	Maintain clean storage spaces, free of dust, dirt, pollutants and chemical agents. Emergency chemical damage measures in place.	Ideally store your items in boxes, chests, tubes, racks. Do not use cleaning products. Dry dusting of shelves and floors etc, on a periodic basis is fine, as is regular, careful hoovering. Store away from busy roads, in non-smoking environments, away from open fires or other sources of pollutants/particulate matter. Professional archivist or conservators can advise on long-term chemical deterioration of archival material. Conservation suppliers sell emergency chemical damage salvage kits.
Pests, biological factors such as mould and droppings	Keep storage spaces free of pests.	Use pest traps suitable for conservation environments, available from the listed suppliers and check them regularly. Seek the advice of a conservation professional or archivist rather than commercial pest-control companies. Maintain clean storage spaces.
Physical force or stress, vandalism	Items stored in appropriate, protective, supportive, conservation-grade containers. Objects handled by trained object handlers, wearing conservation-grade gloves if necessary.	Item handled when they are stable enough to be handled, by appropriate professionals or by people who have been trained in how to handle objects. Items stored in secure spaces that are checked regularly. Items labelled and inventory or catalogue kept up to date with loans or object movement.
Disassociation, loss	Secure storage spaces, inventory maintained and routinely checked.	Ideally, store items in a secure space that can be accessed as needed. Inventory or catalogue securely stored in duplicate copies, which can be accessed in an emergency. Keys or access codes securely stored and accessible in an emergency. See also 'Physical force or stress, vandalism' advice above.

STEP 12: GET THE RIGHT HOUSING AND STORAGE FOR YOUR COLLECTIONS

Storing the material in the correct way is central to its preservation and is often the difference between a collection lasting for centuries or crumbling within decades. Correct storage offers physical protection and support to items, for example by preventing tears, folds, abrasions or crushing to paper. It is also a form of defence from light, humidity and temperature fluctuations, and a buffer from particulate and atmospheric pollutants.

Though professional advice is recommended where possible, it should be noted that even simple steps, like storing items in the correct storage boxes in stable, secure, environments will significantly improve the protection afforded to your collections.

TIP: Where there is a limited budget available for the care of your collections, once you have an inventory complete, (and ideally a condition survey also), we recommend investing in conservation grade storage materials.

TIP: The suppliers listed in the resources section stock conservation grade storage materials and equipment.

BOXES

Archival boxes should be made of acid free, lignin free and buffered materials, they should be robust with good rigidity and structure and be fully enclosed with a tight lid. They can be stacked so the material can be housed in areas with limited shelving more easily, and they are available in a range of sizes and types.



Archival storage boxes

There are various boxes available depending on what you need:

- Drop front box, which allows documents to slide out safely, avoiding damage
- Clamshell/ Solander box, which is a sturdy book like box with a hinged lid and is ideal for storing valuable volumes or bound bundles.
- Flat storage boxes (A2, A3, A4), these are boxes for more general use, for storing loose papers, pamphlets, parchment and photos.

CHESTS OR MAP BOXES

In an ideal world, large items like maps should be stored flat in a plan chest or archival map box. Rolled storage is not ideal but is often necessary. If you have rolled items in your collection you may wish to leave them as they are until professional advice can be sought. A professional archivist or conservator will be able to advise further.

ACID FREE TISSUE

Acid free tissue is often used as a protective wrapping paper which offers barrier protection and prevents acid migration into historic material; however, it cannot offer robust protection to objects as it is very thin, but items can be wrapped in acid free tissue and placed into archival boxes.

ARCHIVAL FOLDERS

When you investigate a box that contains mixed or loose materials, what you should see is a number of archival folders. The folders should be acid and lignin free and ideally of the same size. They should fit comfortably within the box and have enough space to be easily removed and replaced. Archival folders can be a four-flap design for particularly delicate pieces, or they can be a standard type that serves as a second protective shield within the box and keeps desired material together.

MELINEX / MYLAR

Melinex or Mylar sleeves can be used for the most valuable/ most delicate/ most damaged pieces. Mylar and Melinex are brand names of the same thing, which is a durable, temperature resistant, chemically inert polyester film. Ready-made sleeves can be obtained from size A5 to A0, which are constructed to allow airflow, combatting the potential of creating a microenvironment. Note that at an initial glance, both Melinex and Mylar appear very similar to plastic however, they are conservation-grade materials that offer support for fragile items, retain the clarity of material, and is suitable for long term storage of particularly valuable documents.

Melinex is also available in rolled sheets, which again, looks very similar to plastic, but is in fact, a conservation-grade material suitable for wrapping and storing larger objects, such as artworks.

A NOTE ON PLASTIC

We cannot recommend objects be stored in plastic for long periods. This includes bubble wrap, plastic sleeves, or plastic wrap. If an object is wrapped or placed into plastic, is has essentially been placed into an unsuitable microenvironment, which can accelerate degradation. If you are unsure if your collections are stored in plastic or Melinex/Mylar, seek the advice of an archivist or professional conservator.

If possible, seek professional help: Ideally, at this stage, the services of a professional archivist, conservator, or collection care professional would be sought. They will able to assess your storage needs, procure the necessary equipment and establish a coherent system for the storage of your collections.

Though aimed at professionals working in environments worldwide, the RE:ORG resources may also be of assistance to you here.

STEP 13: HOW TO LOOK AFTER THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MATERIAL IN YOUR COLLECTION

DRAWINGS

Drawings can be stored flat and unfolded in individual folders or polyester sleeves within archival boxes.

Graphite or pencil drawings are robust but charcoal or pastel drawings should be mounted within a conservation grade window mount and either wrapped in acid free tissue or placed into a polyester sleeve. The nature of this media is such that it is powdery and sits loosely on the surface of the paper, making it very easy for particles to smudge or fall and results in pigment loss.

Pastel and charcoal drawings are highly vulnerable to damage. Mounting them reduces the handling of the piece itself as only the mount is touched, and wrapping the mounted work in acid free tissue or a polyester sleeve creates a space between the surface of the work itself and the tissue, so nothing presses directly against the work of art.

LETTERS OR LOOSE PAPERS



Loose Papers wrapped in archival paper and loosely held with cotton tape

As always, the advice is to store objects flat where possible. In the case of letters, they would likely be folded and may be loose or with their envelopes. In this case, the envelope is considered part of the object and should be kept stored with its corresponding letter.

Letters can be stored in sleeves or folders and kept together by using plastic or brass paperclips only. Metal paperclips can rust which can eat into the paper over time and should not be used. A wide, soft, sable paintbrush can be used to gently brush the front and back of the paper, to remove any particulate matter such as dust or dirt (but only do this if you feel confident to do so). The paperclips and brushing can be done if the documents are in a good and stable condition, but not if they are badly damaged, as it could cause further harm.

In the case of severe damage, it is best to just place the document into a polyester sleeve where it will remain safe, assess the importance of that piece to the collection, and make a value judgement as to whether a conservator should assess it.

Large bundles of letters can often be found tied together with chords. In such cases it is important to keep the set stored together, but the chords can be undone to allow you to access the material to undertake condition assessments and properly inventory or catalogue the material. If the papers appear weak or damaged at first glance, please do not untie, fold or unfold them, as it could cause the document to split.

If you suspect or identify mould activity, seek the advice of a professional conservator. In such cases, you should not disturb the mould without proper personal protective equipment (such as conservation-grade gloves, overalls and a NIOSH-approved N95 face mask) as it could present a health hazard and risk to the rest of your collections.

For extensively mould damaged documents, you must isolate them from the rest of the collection, place them into a separate box and ask a conservator to look at them. Please do not attempt to clean or unfold them yourself.

PLANS

Estate collections often include architectural plans, surveys and large format technical drawings.

If the media is friable, conservation grade gloves should be worn during handling. If possible, store plans flat in acid and lignin free folders. Damaged plans to be stored in polyester sleeves.

OVERSIZED OBJECTS

The largest members of the collection are likely to be plans as noted above, or maps.

They should never be forced into standard sized boxes or enclosures, as it causes weakening and tearing. Oversized object also require specialist, careful, handling due to their size.

Maps are often lined onto a linen or canvas backing, which offers a layer of support to the piece. When moving an oversize object, it is prudent to have it placed onto a rigid support, especially if it is weak or damaged. Maps can be brushed with a wide soft brush to remove any dust or particulates as long as they are not damaged.



Rolled storage

Ideally, they should be stored flat in a plan chest, or a box, but often maps can be extremely large. If they must be stored rolled, a wide acid and lignin free archival tube should be used, and an interleaving layer of acid free tissue should be placed over the map before rolling it loosely in the tissue and placed into the tube, which should also be stored horizontally, not vertically to avoid sagging or crushing. Avoid rolling fragile or heavily damaged pieces.

VOLUMES

Bound volumes can be stored upright on sturdy shelves if they are in a stable condition with intact covers and spines. Bookends should be placed on the shelves to prevent the volumes from slumping. Oversized and damaged volumes should be stored flat and preferably boxed.

Common forms of damage to volumes are to their spines and covers. Often one or both covers can be loose or detached, and spine damage can be sustained through improper handling, such as pulling books off shelves by the spine. As a security measure for loose covers and spines, a soft cotton tape can be tied loosely around the book to prevent loss of the damaged parts.

Book supports should also be used when accessing volumes, these can be made of foam or plastazote and are placed under the front and back covers of an open volume, helping to prevent undue pressure to the spines. A wide sable brush can be used to brush the exterior of the book free of surface dirt, and any detritus lodged in the pages.

The leather exteriors of books can suffer ‘Red Rot’, which is a chemical breakdown of the leather covering, and appears as a red powdery residue that comes off on hands when the book is touched. These books should be boxed individually, and a conservator should be consulted.

MANUSCRIPTS

A manuscript is defined as an original, unpublished version of an author's work. It mostly refers to handwritten material, but more modern methods such as typewritten and word-processed work is included in the definition also. They can take many different forms but all manuscripts are original format objects, such as an illuminated manuscript or diary, and can be comprised of loose sheets, bound volumes, sheet music, ancient texts and historical documents.

Manuscripts should be treated according to the form it takes. If it is a document comprised of loose sheets, it should be housed in polyester sleeves and contained within an archival box. If it a volume in good condition, it can be shelved upright, if it is damaged, it should be laid down and boxed.

PHOTOGRAPHS

While gloves are generally not necessary when handling items in good condition, the exception is when handling photographs, especially those with a glossy surface. In these cases, fingerprints can cause significant damage so conservation-grade nitrile gloves should be worn. Photographs should be handled only at the edges, not flexed or bent, and individually stored in individual polyester sleeves or uncoated, lignin free folders.

Generally, the preservation advice for photos is slightly different from the advice given for other paper objects, as photographs are more chemically unstable. A cooler temperature of 18-20 degrees and an RH of between 30-40% is better. Your collection may include nitrate/ acetate film, which is highly unstable, and in these cases special cold storage should be considered.

If in any doubt, the advice of an archivist or professional conservator should be sought.

ALBUMS

If original albums exist within your collection, keep them intact, and store them in archival boxes.

GLASS PLATE NEGATIVES

Store vertically in 4 flap enclosures, inside sturdy boxes.

EARLY PHOTOGRAPHIC PROCESSES

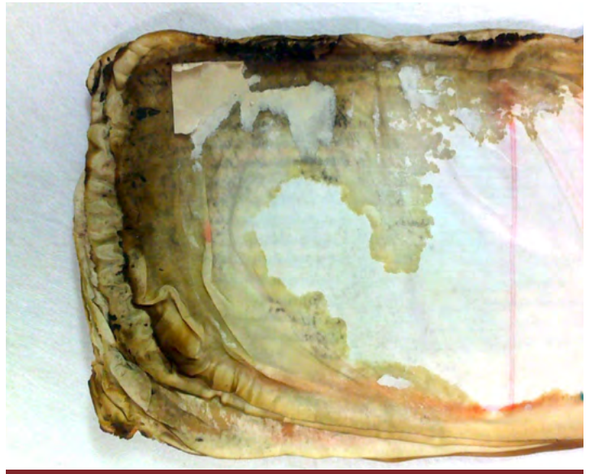
Cyanotypes and albumin prints are extremely light sensitive and need minimal exposure to light. These should be stored within an archival box.

PARCHMENTS

Parchment behaves very differently to paper or photographs. It is made from animal skin, so it reacts strongly to humidity and temperature. In collections of estate papers, parchment items such as deeds, indentures or charters can be among the oldest items within the collection.

Issues with parchments are mostly caused by their environment. They are extremely sensitive to light and must be stored in the dark. Parchment is hygroscopic, which means it absorbs moisture from the air. If it is too dry, the parchment can become brittle, and if it is too damp, the parchment can become mouldy, gelatinize, and can cockle.

It is most beneficial to store parchment flat, in archival quality enclosures or polyester sleeves. If the parchment contains a wax seal, it needs a custom support, such as a foam cavity or padded mound to prevent the seal from bearing weight.



Moisture damaged parchment

TIP: For all other types of objects, please refer to the resources listed under 'Further Information', or contact an accredited professional archivist or conservator for further advice.

A FINAL NOTE ON DIGITISATION

While digitisation is an excellent tool to augment the long-term preservation of a collection and can facilitate engagement with collections by the public, it is not a replacement for physical preservation. Digitisation should be seen as complimentary to physical preservation, but it is not a replacement. Before considering any digitisation, we recommend following the previously listed steps first and seeking the advice of an accredited professional archivist.

APPENDIX 1

Inventory Checklist Template

Compiled by (insert name):

Date:

Date next check due:

Number	Overall Location	Detailed location/ container	Type	Detailed description	How /when item entered collection	Note any storage condition issues	Object condition
1	e.g. storeroom, attic room 1, under main stairs, garden shed, etc.	e.g. Plasic bag 1, Topshelf box A, Trunk on floor, etc.	e.g. Loose papers, photos, prints, bound volumes, albums, manuscripts, parchment, prints, newspapers, negatives, photographs, correspondence, loose miscellaneous objects, unidentified 3D/2D material, etc.	e.g. 8 Bound volumes, look to be estate records from 1890's, or 12 assorted loose papers including letters, receipts, postcards, or Large quantity of loose photos, or Bag of newspapers, c1960, some stuck together, hard to decipher.	e.g. Donated in 1980 part of x bequest, Transferred to estate when x married x in x, unknown, possibly predates x family presence in house, etc.	(refer to Table A below)	Very Good, Good, Poor*, Very Poor*. Describe any issues e.g. extensive foxing, tears, mould, etc. *'Poor' and 'Very Poor' are priority for conservation appraisal or treatment.
2							
3							
etc							

TABLE A

a) Excessive moisture or fluctuations in humidity
b) Heat / Cold / Fire / Temperature fluctuations
c) Light
d) Dust, Dirt, Pollutants, Chemical agents
e) Pests / Biological Factors / Mould / Droppings
f) Physical Force / Stress / Vandalism
g) Disassociation / Loss (loose items at risk of being lost)

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