**Frequently Asked Questions: Preservation**

**The storage area**

1. **What advice is there for cleaning and vacuuming strong rooms?**

Boxes reduce the need for dusting. It’s better to sweep the storage area, rather than vacuum, as sweeping is less of a fire risk (vacuum cleaners obviously have electrical components). It is important to reduce the amount of dust in the air, as it reduces the amount of food available for pests to feed on. You can use sticky traps to monitor the level of pest activity.

1. **Our storage area is a shed, are there any problems with insulating it?**

No, insulating will help regulate the temperature/humidity drifts. Insulation may cause stagnant air, but it will be better than not having any.

## **Are filing cabinets suitable for storage?**

Filing cabinets are generally fine, but they can cause document 'lumping' and loss due to gravity pulling the documents down. Remember to air the cabinets out regularly, and you will need to put documents in 4-flap folders (for rigidity) before putting them between dividers, so the first packaging in direct contact with the item is of an archival standard.

## **We store archives in wooden cupboards, is that a problem?**

Cupboards can cause issues with relative humidity. To remedy this, open the cupboards frequently to allow the air to circulate. You could also buy a dehumidifier - just remember to empty this regularly and don't leave it running unattended.

# **Packaging and handling**

## **How should you preserve textiles and clothing?**

Box up the material, and layer on acid-free tissue paper. Don't overpack a box, leave plenty of space under the lid. Assess the materials for weak points and pests prior to boxing them up. The environment should be kept cool, dry and dark.

## **How do you protect the ends of rolled items wrapped in Tyvek?**

Wrap corrugated archive board around the item, using one big sheet to create 5 panels. The fifth panel should overwrap the first and be secured with archival cords or Velcro (without using any self-adhesive). The length of the board needs to be longer than the items to protect each end. See the image below.



## **Is archive standard material always more expensive?**

Yes, initially, but much it is much cheaper if you think of it in terms of the cost per year of the item being preserved.

## **Are there any 'cheaper' archival-quality suppliers?**

It’s a good idea to form a consortium with other groups, to get a discount on bulk orders. Archival quality materials are more expensive, but it will be worth the cost for how many years they will last.

## **Can you check if supplies are acid-free?**

The suppliers’ websites should have those details at the point of buying the supplies. You can get test strips to measure the pH (potential of hydrogen) level - 7 is considered neutral, low numbers are acidic, and high numbers are alkaline.

## **Can you use permanent marker on pockets?**

Only if it is not adjacent to unprotected items - it can slip off plastic but is indelible on paper. You can buy silver backed labels to put on polyester pockets.

## **Should letters be stored in polyester sleeves?**

Paper is relatively robust and can be handled with clean, dry hands, but you can put papers into polyester sleeves, as well as photographic material. There is a benefit to not handling directly if you have the resources to buy the sleeves, it will prolong the longevity of the item.

## **In regular stationary, are white envelopes better than brown?**

Yes, but they might be bleached. Use the best quality enclosures that you can afford.

## **How would you clean rusty or dirty boxes?**

It is best to avoid using these at all as they are likely to rust again. Check any packaging that comes into your archive, to avoid introducing threats to your collections.

##  **Do gloves need to be from a medical supplier?**

No, gloves just need to be tight to skin for dexterity purposes. Latex free gloves prevent allergies and offer more dexterity than cotton gloves.

## **What hand sanitiser protocols does the NRO have?**

Sanitiser is made with alcohol which dries quickly. Make sure it has dried before handling documents. It is better than barrier creams such as moisturiser.

# **Threats**

## **We've found mould on an item in our collections - what do we do?**

Isolate the item from the rest of the collection and let it dry out. You can then try to clean it with a soft brush, if the mould is completely dry, otherwise it will just smear over the page. The

cleaning must be done outside and whilst wearing a mask, as mould can affect the lungs. If the item then stays dry and is kept at a humidity under 60%, that should make the mould dormant. It’s still a good idea to keep effected items wrapped separately after this is done anyway, in case the mould does return.

Putting items in the freezer only comes into play if something gets damp and you’re not able to work on drying it out immediately, or if you have pests.

## **How quickly will mould appear on a wet item?**

Mould can start to grow within 48 hours on a wet item if it is not dried out immediately or put in a freezer to halt the process until it can be treated by a professional conservator.

## **How long should you freeze an item for?**

It’s not about how long to freeze an item, but rather about managing the item and keeping it in stasis until treatment can be applied. Mould needs to be frozen at least at -20 degrees Celsius, ideally in a specialist chest freezer. Check with local museums or record offices for advice on their standards and procedures.

## **Can you recommend a dehumidifier?**

There’s no best recommendation, but all preservation suppliers have them for sale. Ensure the water tank is emptied regularly and don't leave dehumidifiers turned on if they are unsupervised.

## **What happens if you get a box of damaged things come in?**

Check for pests and mould and deal with any threats you discover.

## **Can artificial light cause damage?**

Yes, it's lower than natural light but it is on the UV spectrum. Light damage is cumulative, so it all adds up. Boxing collections up will provide an initial barrier to light.

# **Preserving photographs and film**

## **Can photographs be kept in their original photo albums?**

Standard photo albums will deteriorate but removing photographs from them could cause damage depending on how they're affixed. The best option would be to digitise the album, especially if the album is contextual and part of the archive itself. If you're lucky enough to have the negatives prioritise these as they are the originals, and the photo prints are copies.

## **How do you record the item number on negatives?**

Write the reference number on a piece of archival acid-free paper and sleep it int in the sleeve or pocket along with the negative.

## **What about film storage?**

Contact the [East Anglian Film Archive](http://www.eafa.org.uk/) for guidance. In general, you should be updating the material it is stored on in order to continue accessing the content - for example transferring to a digital file.

# **General**

## **Do gloves need to be from a medical supplier?**

No, the gloves just need to be tight to skin for dexterity purposes. Latex free gloves avoid allergies.

## **Is it okay to copy things at home for preservation?**

Yes, if the item fits comfortably on a flatbed scanner. Be careful of what you store the digital images on, and make sure you update the storage format regularly (for example change hard drives after 2/3 years). Always keep the original document, just in case another copy is needed.

## **What material lasts the longest?**

Parchment. Paper lifespan depends on the quality of the paper. Anything before 1850 is quite good. In war time you get poor quality paper - it's brown and brittle. Newspapers are poor - they're designed to last for one day and aren't dissimilar to chip paper! Archives now are the things that have survived - either by being looked after or by luck.

## **I have 2 books from the 1940s which are well used but in working order. Their dust covers are extremely damaged with areas of loss, tears, old Sellotape etc and barely hanging together. One is our only copy, so it is in our reference collection, and the worse one is in the lending/handling collection. Both will suffer with the covers as they are, so what is the best thing to do?**

There are several options for this scenario.

Option 1. Don't use it

Option 2. Repair the paper cover, we do not recommend Sellotape! Bear in mind conservation treatment can cost £50 per hour.

Option 3. Digitise it

Option 4. Take off the dust jacket and store it safely. The book can then be used as normal. You could digitise it and print a new cover.

## **What is ink made of?**

1. Iron gall (wasp egg protection); 2) carbon 3) gum Arabic

## **What is European paper made of?**

1) plant fibres/cloth; 2) wood pulp (produces lignin) - this can be poor quality/mass produced paper

## **What would you recommend in terms of ‘parsimonious preservation’?**

1. Don’t handle the items very much - make copies of key documents; 2) store in cool, dry, dark conditions 3) Keep the items in good-standard packaging!