

# How to Look after your Family Documents

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You may have in your possession lots of precious family documents, which can vary in age, condition and type. If you are lucky, you may have deeds written on parchment, wills or other legal documents, family letters, original certificates, newspaper cuttings etc.

The next step is to identify what you have, their condition, and how to preserve the different documents you hold.

## **Basic preservation: (links to suppliers is provided at the end)**

- Wash your hands before handling anything
- Don't have drinks or food near your documents
- Remove staples carefully, using either a small scissors or a staple remover
- Use plastic or brass paperclips instead
- Don't use rubber bands to keep bundles of documents together, these disintegrate over time and stick to documents: use unbleached cotton tying tape instead – usually comes in a roll
- If a document is particularly fragile or important, consider scanning it and use the copy, place the original in an archival polyester pocket
- Use pencils at all times, HB should be fine, 2B if the paper is particularly dark  
Remove paper clips unless they are made of brass (they rust over time)
- Never use sellotape to repair documents, see below an example of what happens to the paper after a while



If one or several documents are damaged and you would like to have them repaired, you can ask your local archive for help

In the UK, Record Offices or Borough Archives often have a Conservator and should provide advice free of charge; they may also be able to offer to carry out the repair for a small fee or recommend someone who can

For instance, the West Yorkshire Archive Service <http://www.wyjs.org.uk/archives-conservation.asp> offer the following services:

- Conservation of books, paper and parchment documents, seals, maps, prints and watercolours
- Archival boxes, folders, sleeves made to measure
- In-house micro-filming, duplication or scanning of documents
- Advice on archival storage, exhibitions and environmental management.



### **Storage best practice:**

Once you have carried out some basic conservation or have obtained professional help, the time has come to store your archive collection correctly:

Use cotton tape to tie bundles of documents together

Place documents in acid free folders; they usually expand and can hold more pages than you think!



For very fragile documents, polyester pockets are best

Use plastic paper clips to keep loose sheets together

Pencils are the best way to make notes, preferably on the folders, although they can be used for brief notes on the actual document, i.e. to mark a reference number, a name or a date

Consider placing them in an acid free box



Store them preferably somewhere cool and dark

Consider digitising the most fragile documents and printing a good copy for handling; if they are particularly fragile, and you are concerned about digitising them yourself, contact your local archives for advice

Some suppliers only supply in bulk, i.e. 100 folders, which is more than what most people require. Get together with other family historians to share the cost or offer to sell the surplus to your local family history society.



### **Links to Resources and Suppliers:**

Cyndi's List names suppliers and services for UK and USA, but beware, *some links are no longer valid*

<http://www.cyndislist.com/preservation/vendors/?page=2>

### **United Kingdom:**

Find your local archives through the National Archives website:

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>

If you live near a large town, there may be a municipal archives, such as the Lancashire Archives:

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-record-office/>

Suppliers of archive material:

There are suppliers who supply professional archives, and are reasonably priced:

<https://www.secol.co.uk/>

<http://www.preservationequipment.com/>

<http://www.conservation-by-design.com/>

This is not an endorsement or recommendation