

Where should I go for advice on conservation?

If you have valuable items in need of care and repair, consider asking a specialist paper or book conservator for advice. Whether the item in question is a valuable first edition, a manuscript of national importance or a treasured family photograph, a conservator will be able to give you reliable guidance on what can be done to preserve and safeguard it for the future.

What to expect

The advice given by a professional conservator is likely to focus on two aspects:

- The **condition** of the item and how this can be improved
- The **environment** in which the item is stored.

Modern conservation emphasises the prevention of further damage by trying to stabilise an item first rather than undertaking extensive repair which may in itself have harmful effects.

The **condition** of an item is affected over time by both chemical and physical damage. Books, documents, photographs and films are made of organic materials whose components gradually decay, causing chemical damage from within. Physical damage results from handling and use and may include tears, creases, folds, knocks, scrapes, missing boards and lost spines.

The **environment** in which items are kept has a major impact on their well-being. Factors such as atmospheric pollution, damp or excessively dry conditions or pest infestation can be devastating to paper-based collections.

Conservation advice

The conservator's advice will cover the following aspects:

- The physical character of the item, determined through testing of its constituent parts eg. paper, leather, pigments and inks.
- The condition of the item, specifying the nature and extent of damage.
- The likely causes of damage, whether chemical, physical or environmental, or a combination of these.
- Other factors such as religious or cultural significance.

You can expect to receive detailed recommendations designed to prolong the life of an item:

- Any remedial treatment and repairs necessary to stabilise its condition without causing further damage
- The environmental conditions and types of storage needed to protect the item from pollution, insects and extremes of temperature and humidity, as well as major dangers such as fire and flood.

Where to go

Since 1999, conservators with ten years or more experience have been able to apply for professional accreditation, a reliable indicator of qualified expertise. Accredited conservators are entitled to use the letters ACR after their names and to join the Conservation Register, an online list of approved members that can be searched by area of expertise and geographical region.

Organisation	What they can provide	Contact
The Conservation Register	An online list of accredited conservators that can be searched by area of expertise and location.	www.conservationregister.com Telephone: 020 3142 6786
The Book and Paper Group of the Institute of Conservation	Can provide lists of specialist book and paper conservators.	www.icon.org.uk Go to 'Groups' and navigate to the BPG web page. Telephone: 020 3142 6799
Local record offices	Many record offices can offer advice on conservation problems and where to go next.	