



The Institute of Paper Conservation is grateful to the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC) for allowing the use of their text, modified for the English edition. Original American text prepared by Deborah Derby with assistance from M Susan Barger, Nora Kennedy, and Carol Turchan and modified for this edition by Susie Clark ACR MIPC and Frances Hinchcliffe ACR MIPC. For additional information about AIC, please visit their website:<http://www.aic-faic.org>

**Suppliers of conservation quality storage materials:**

**Conservation by Design Ltd Timecare Works**

5 Singer Way, Woburn Road Industrial Estate, Bedford MK42 7AW  
Telephone: 01234 853555 Website: [www.conservation-by-design.co.uk](http://www.conservation-by-design.co.uk)

**Conservation Resources** Unit 2 Ashville Way, Oxford OX4 6TU

Telephone: 01865 747755 Website: [www.ConservArts@aol.com](http://www.ConservArts@aol.com)

**John Purcell Paper** 15 Rumsey Road, London SW9 0TR

Telephone: 0207 737 5199

**Preservation Equipment Ltd** Vincennes Road, Diss, Norfolk IP22 4HQ

Telephone: 01379 647400 Website: [www.preservationequipment.co.uk](http://www.preservationequipment.co.uk)

**Secol** 13-16 Howlett Way, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1HZ

Telephone: 01842 752341 Website: [www.secol.co.uk](http://www.secol.co.uk)

**Silverprint - photographic archival suppliers.** 12 Valentine Place,

London SE1 8HQ Telephone: 020 7620 0844 Fax: 020 7620 0129



The Institute of Paper Conservation

*For the care and repair of book and paper artefacts*

For further information contact IPC email:[information@ipc.org.uk](mailto:information@ipc.org.uk)  
[www.ipc.org.uk](http://www.ipc.org.uk)

**Contact the Preservation Department**

Phone: +44 (0)20 8392 5200

email: [preservation@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:preservation@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

The National Archives Kew Richmond Surrey TW9 4DU



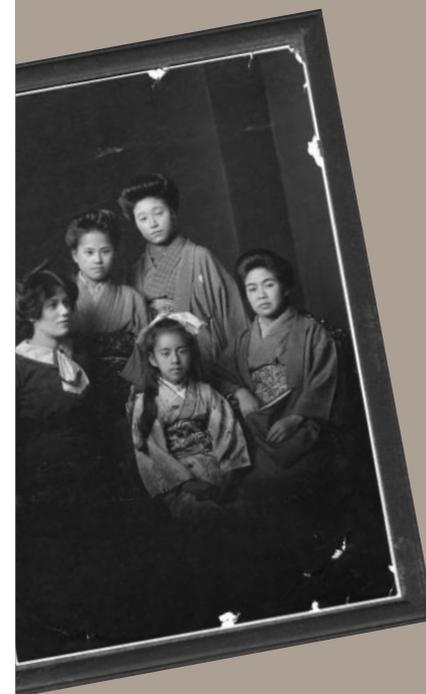
the national archives



the national archives

# Caring for your photographs

Photographs are commonplace in every household and it is easy to forget that they are inherently fragile and easily damaged. The advice in this leaflet relates to those particularly precious or vulnerable photographs that you wish to preserve for the future.



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Photography has been around for over 150 years. The word 'photograph' is most often used to refer to the photographic positive image on paper, although a photograph can be one of many processes in which light-sensitive media are used to create a visible image.

Photographs are complex physical and chemical structures. All photographs have a base support and an image. Base supports are usually made from paper, glass, metal or plastic. The light sensitive image material - commonly silver, organic dyes, or pigments - creates the image we see. This image forming material is usually suspended in a binder. Binders are transparent substances such as albumen, collodion, or gelatine. Although many photographs have this three-part structure, individual images may have additional components, like applied colour or coatings and also original mounts and frames. These are usually considered as part of the photographic object.

### Causes of damage

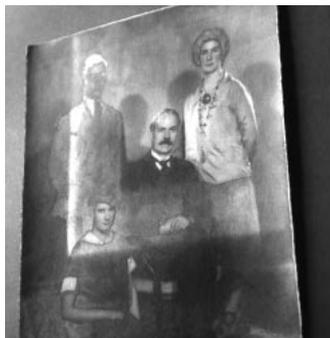
Careless handling is a major cause of harm. Fingerprints leave perspiration and oily stains on the emulsion. Dirt can scratch delicate surfaces and act as a catalyst for unwanted chemical reactions. Poor-quality storage materials, including PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastics, acidic backing boards and mounts, new wood frames, and magnetic or self-adhesive albums, cause deterioration, as can self adhesive tapes, paper clips, and rubber bands.

Do-it-yourself cleaning of photographic materials can also cause serious and often irreversible damage. Inherent instability of some photographs, often due to poor processing at the time the print or negative was made, causes deterioration. Exposure to light, especially sunlight, causes fading. Some fading can even happen in darkness, particularly if a photographic process is exceptionally acidic.

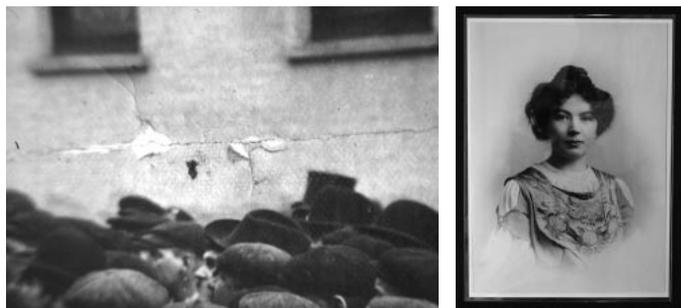
High temperatures and moist air increase deterioration and promote the growth of mould and mildew, which can mar surfaces and break down binder layers. Damp conditions can also cause framed photographs to stick to the glass. Mould, insects and rodents find paper, albumen, gelatine binders and other photographic materials attractive sources of food.

### Signs of damage

- Images may be faded, discoloured, stained or tarnished, and surfaces scratched or dented.
- Binder layers may be cracked, flaking or stuck to another surface.
- Paper supports may be discoloured, torn, creased, curled or puckered. Glass supports may be chipped or broken, metal ones bent, tarnished or corroded, and plastics (commonly used for negatives) may have a pungent aroma, be wrinkled or sticky.



Left: Silvering or tarnishing of an image Right: Sticky tapes will cause permanent damage and should not be used on photographs



### Good Practice for Preserving Your Photographs

#### Handling

- Handle photographs with clean hands and avoid touching the image layer. Wearing clean, lint-free cotton gloves lessens the possibility of leaving fingerprints and soiling the materials.
- Support photographs carefully with both hands or, especially for larger and fragile photographs, slide a piece of paper or card underneath to act as a carrier.
- Keep food and drink away from photographs.
- Avoid marking photographs with ink. If necessary write lightly with a HB pencil on the reverse of the image.

#### Cleaning and repairs

- Avoid the temptation to clean photographs with erasers, water or solvent based cleaners, such as window cleaner or film cleaner, or to repair tears with self-adhesive tapes.

#### Environment

- Photographic materials benefit from a cool, dry, well-ventilated storage environment. Avoid storing photographs in the attic, the basement, or along the outside walls of a building, where environmental conditions are prone to extremes and fluctuations and where condensation may occur.

#### Storage

- Keep photographs and negatives in folders or pockets to protect them from dust and light and provide physical support during use. Chemically stable plastic or paper folders or pockets, free of sulphur, acids, and peroxides, are recommended. These storage materials are not readily available but can be ordered from specialist conservation suppliers. Plastics are unsuitable for photographs that have a flaking binder layer or friable surface components, such as the pastel colouring often seen on crayon enlargements.
- Store film-based negatives (single sheets or strips cut into lengths of 4-6 frames) separately from other photographic materials, as they can produce acidic gases as they age.
- Keep cased items, such as daguerreotypes and ambrotypes, in their original

Opposite Left: Poor storage causes, breaks, tears and losses.

Right: Polyester sleeves will protect photographs.

cases or frames. Wrap them in acid-free or photographic storage paper to reduce wear and tear on fragile cases.

- Place individually packed prints, negatives, and cased items in sturdy, acid-free or photographic conservation board boxes for extra protection from light, dust, and environmental fluctuations.
- Preserve old photograph albums intact, storing them flat, preferably in acid-free or photographic conservation board boxes. They serve a dual purpose of organising groups of images while protecting them from physical and environmental damage, and can be wonderful sources of historic and genealogical information.
- Check stored boxes of photographs from time to time to make sure that they are free of dust, dirt and insects.

#### Display

- You will extend the life of your photograph by reducing exposure to light. Have vulnerable or unique images professionally reproduced (i.e. photographed or digitised) and display the duplicate image; in this way the original photograph can be properly stored and preserved. Ultraviolet filtering glazing helps protect photographs during light exposure.
- When mounting original photographs it is preferable to use 100% cotton fibre, 'unbuffered' mount boards - these are different from boards used for mounting prints and drawings. Ask your framer to follow the advice in the Institute of Paper Conservation's leaflet,

#### Guidelines for Conservation Framing.

When to Call a Conservator. When it is too late for preventive conservation and the damage is already done, there is little that you as a collector can do.

- Repair of most damage will need specialist conservation expertise. In the meantime provide extra protection. If the base support of the photograph is badly damaged, place it carefully in a polyester sleeve with a photographic museum board support. If the photograph has a flaking binder layer or friable surface components it should be wrapped in a photographic storage paper with a photographic museum board support. Put broken glass negatives or ambrotype glass plates into photographic storage paper enclosures. Use a separate, clearly marked enclosure for each piece to reduce the possibility of scratching.
- If film-based negatives are brittle, discoloured, sticky, or appear wavy and full of air bubbles, separate the negatives from the rest of the collection. A photographic materials conservator will be able to help identify the materials and make recommendations for their safe storage or duplication.
- Photographs or negatives stuck to enclosures or glass need specialist treatment, as they are difficult to separate without damage.
- If photographs get wet contact a conservator as soon as possible for assistance and advice on the recovery and repair of damaged materials.

### Finding a Conservator

The Institute of Paper Conservation (IPC) operates a professional accreditation scheme to protect the users of conservation services, whether individuals or large public institutions. The scheme is run in partnership with other conservation bodies. Accredited members are designated as ACR MIPC.

IPC supplies free of charge, the names and addresses of ACRs either by geographical area or particular expertise. This service is open to both individuals and institutions, for a single item or for a large and diverse collection. ACRs may also give advice on preventive conservation, disaster planning, storage and display.

The Institute of Paper Conservation is the leading organisation devoted solely to the conservation and care of paper, books and related materials.

#### *The Institute of Paper Conservation*

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Wearing gloves will lessen the risk of damage from handling