

The Institute of Paper Conservation is grateful to the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC) for allowing the use of the above text for the British edition. The original text was prepared by Betsy Palmer Eldridge, Nancy Schrock, and Shannon Zachary and modified for this edition by Frances Hinchcliffe ACR MIPC and Kate Collieran 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 (UK) Ltd** Unit 2 Ashville Way, Oxford OX4 6TU

Telephone 01865 747755 Website: [www.conservationresources.com](http://www.conservationresources.com)

**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)

**John Purcell Paper** 15 Rumsey Road, London SW9 OTR

Telephone: 0207 737 5199 [www.johnpurcell.net](http://www.johnpurcell.net)



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)  
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The National Archives Kew Richmond Surrey TW9 4DU



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# Caring for your Books

The book is an ingenious invention. Compact and portable, it has been the primary means of transmitting and preserving mankind's accumulated knowledge for hundreds of years.



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Printers and bookbinders have used a wide variety of materials and structures. Materials include paper, parchment, textile, leather, paste and glue.

## Causes of damage

These organic materials can be damaged by light, fluctuating and extremes of temperature and humidity, dirt and dust, poor shelving and handling.

Light causes rapid deterioration and fading. All lights cause some damage but daylight, containing high levels of ultraviolet radiation, is the most harmful. Hot and dry conditions desiccate and embrittle leather and paper; damp conditions encourage mould and insects. Accumulation of dirt and dust can trigger chemical degradation.

Shelving and handling can also cause physical and chemical damage. Most of the dirt on book covers and pages is accumulated grime from oily fingertips. While invisible initially, finger grease becomes all too visible as it oxidises and collects dirt.

Books packed tightly on a shelf are difficult to remove without harming them; removing a book by pulling on its headcap is apt to break it. Leaning books place stress on the entire book structure. Opening a book flat on a table stresses the structure, flattening the spine and stretching the joints. Placing books face down onto a flat surface, for example during photocopying, break the binding.

Felt tip pens and biros may stain; self-adhesive slips (post it notes) leave an invisible residue of adhesive on the page to attract dirt. Newspaper cuttings, flowers and other miscellaneous material left in books leave stains and stress the bindings.

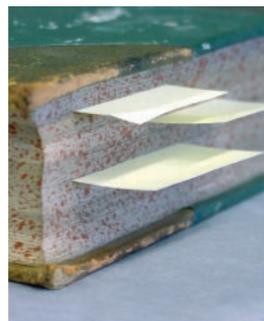
Unskilled, DIY repairs and indiscriminate rebinding can seriously reduce the value, particularly of rare or special items, and lose irretrievable bibliographic information.



Through prolonged exposure to light these leather volumes are now faded



High levels of relative humidity will encourage mould growth



Self-adhesive labels like Post-it-Notes will stain the surface of the book



Keeping books in protective enclosures will help to prevent physical damage

## Signs of damage

Torn and loose pages, text blocks out of their covers, broken and detached spines and joints, yellowing self adhesive tapes or discoloured paper repairs, 'foxed' and brittle paper, stains, worm holes, mould all require attention.

## What can you do

- Regular dusting is important and gives an opportunity to check the condition of books. When dusting the edge of a book, wipe away from the headcap towards the fore edge, using a clean cloth or soft brush such as a shaving brush. Dirt brushed down the spine of the book is trapped there forever. A vacuum cleaner can also be used with the lowest suction. Muslin or fine net can be tied over the nozzle to catch any loose bits that might accidentally break off.
- Leather dressing is **not** recommended as it can cause stains, make the leather sticky and degrade paper. Recent tests have shown that such dressings are only cosmetic and do nothing to prolong the life of the leather.
- Handle books with clean hands. Wearing white cotton gloves for handling rare binding is a good preventive measure, but turning fragile or brittle pages with gloves may cause damage and is not advised.
- When opening a book on a flat surface, protect the structure from stress by placing another book or a rolled up towel on each side to support it.
- When removing a book from the shelf, either push the two neighbouring books back in order to grab the spine in the middle. If there is room above the book, reach over the top of the book to the fore-edge and then pull it out. If there is no room, push back the books on either side of the one to be removed, to expose enough of its spine to allow you to get a firm grip on it.
- Damaged book, detached spine or boards – to prevent further damage tie up firmly with a flat cloth tape and place in an envelope.

- Reduce exposure to light by keeping lights turned off in rooms that are not in use; block daylight by using curtains or blinds.
- Prevent exposure to rapid changes or extremes in temperature and humidity by keeping books away from sources of heat such as radiators and fireplaces. A cool, dry and stable environment is ideal. Temperatures between 13–19°C and a relative humidity of 45–60% are recommended. Avoid placing them next to damp external walls. Good air circulation is imperative to prevent stagnant air pockets, where condensation will collect and mould might grow. For this reason it is best not to push books right to the back of the shelf.
- Ensure that books standing vertically on shelves are upright and supported by neighbouring books or bookends. It is best to lay large books horizontally in stacks of two or three.
- Important and fragile books may require additional protection. A variety of wrappers and boxes are available from conservation suppliers. A conservator will be able to advise on custom-made boxes.
- If you have to pack books away for storage avoid wrapping them in common household plastics such as bin liners, plastic bags or cling film. These emit harmful gases as they degrade and may also encourage condensation. Don't place books on fore-edges, as this is likely to damage the structure of a book and loosen the binding.
- Avoid storing boxes of books in attics, garages or basements where temperature and humidity fluctuations are great, where pests may be a problem, and where leaks or floods are common. Allow at least four inches of space between the boxes and the walls, ceilings and floors. Lift boxes up on wooden pallets.
- If books get wet in a flood small numbers can be air-dried. Stand the books up, fanned open, alternating spine to fore edge, with sturdy bookends at each end to prevent them falling over. Fans can be used to circulate the air and increase evaporation. The room temperature needs to be as low as possible to discourage mould and use dehumidifiers or air conditioners to reduce humidity. A wet book may also be frozen to stabilise it, to be thawed and dried later. Wrap individual books in polythene and place it in a freezer. In the case of a serious flood or a fire, get help from a conservator as soon as possible.

## What you can't do

When it is too late for preventive conservation and the damage is already done, there is little that you as a collector can do. Resist the temptation to do home repairs with any of the wide variety of self adhesive tapes as these are likely to cause further damage and are difficult to remove.

Contact an accredited book conservator through the Institute of Paper Conservation and they will advise on the most appropriate treatment for your book.

## Finding a conservator

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.

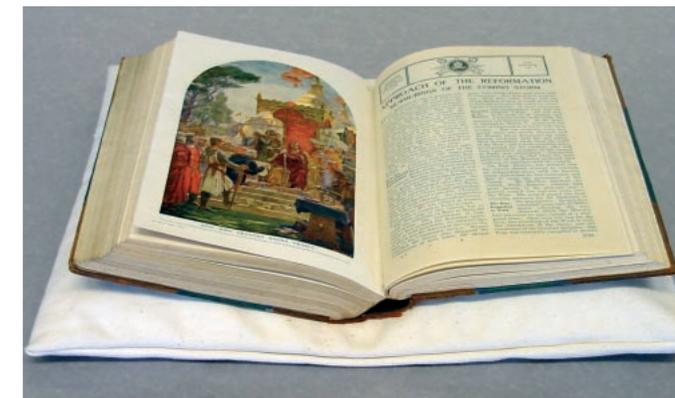
IPC supplies free of charge, the names and addresses of ACRs either by geographical area or particular expertise. This service is open to both individuals and institutions, for a single item or for a large and diverse collection. ACRs may also give advice on preventive conservation, disaster planning,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

email: [information@ipc.org.uk](mailto:information@ipc.org.uk)

website: [www.ipc.org.uk](http://www.ipc.org.uk)

The recommendations in this leaflet are intended as guidance only. IPC does not assume responsibility or liability.



When opening a book on a flat surface, protect the structure from stress by supporting the covers and the spine