

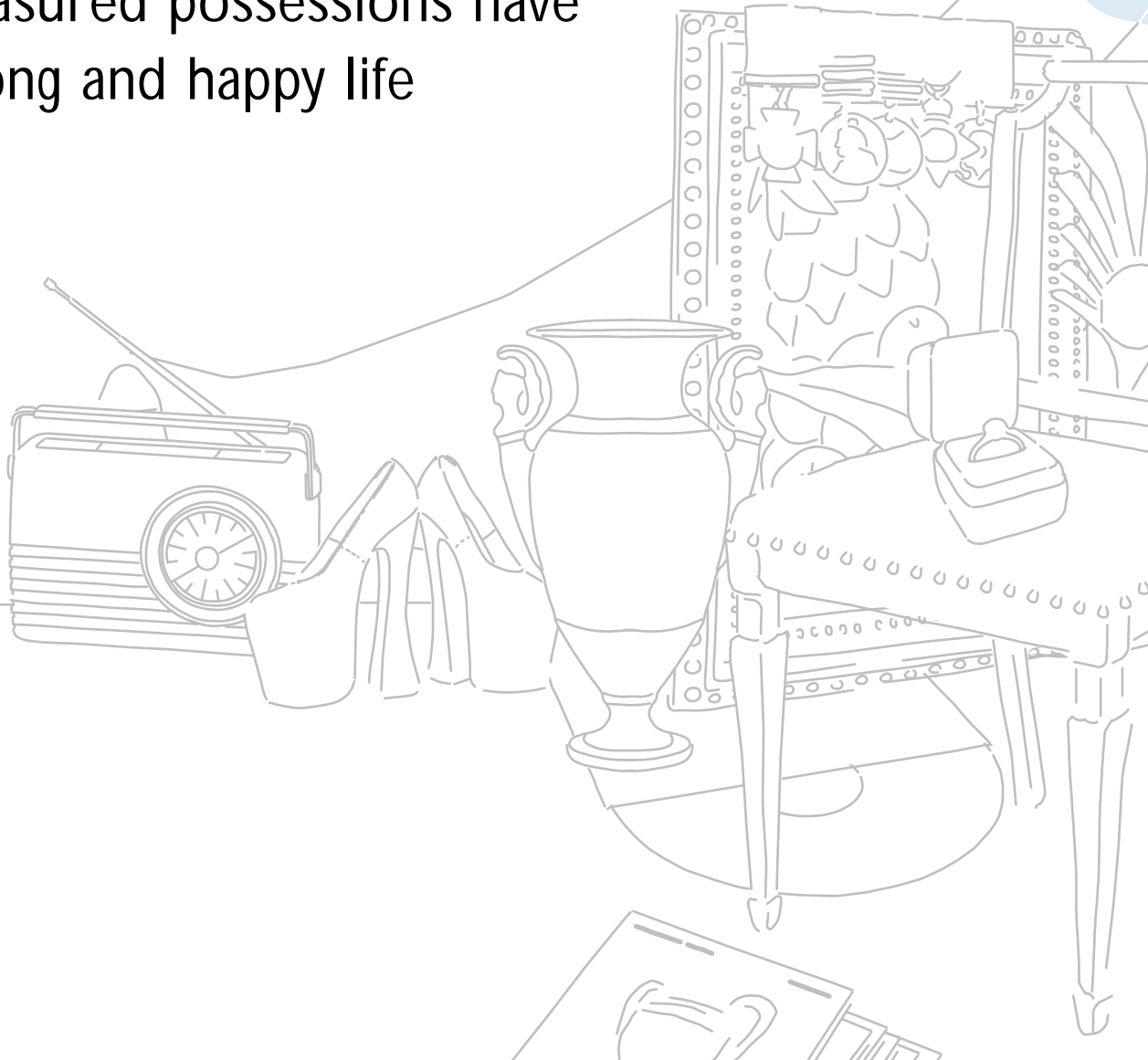
PAST PRESENT FUTURE



How to make sure your
treasured possessions have
a long and happy life

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

How to make sure your treasured possessions have a long and happy life



This booklet will help you to look after treasured items to help them remain in good condition for many years to come. By learning more about what damages different objects, you can take better care of them and prolong their life.

There are two important points you need to remember:

We'll give you tips for maintaining your treasures, not for repairing them or restoring them to their former glory.

Don't be too ambitious. If you have an item that is of particular sentimental value, is very old, fragile or may be worth a lot of money, let the experts look at it rather than trying to conserve it yourself. Experts can advise you on the best handling, cleaning and storing techniques.

See the inside back cover for further information.

I have a Bakelite radio set.

It's a bit grubby and dusty – how can I clean it up?

You can clean your radio by dusting it with a soft brush, then wiping it with a cloth that has been dampened with water and a gentle liquid detergent. Rinse it carefully and dry thoroughly. Don't get too much moisture on the cloth. If the surface is dull, you could remove marks by polishing it gently with a soft cloth and a mild abrasive cleaner such as a brass cleaner or car-body renovating polish, but don't attempt this on any valuable plastic item.

What's the best way to clean a violin or guitar?

Slacken the strings if this has not already been done. Dust it with a soft paintbrush, guiding the dust towards a vacuum cleaner nozzle held sideways on to the surface. If there are ingrained stains and dirt, and only if the varnish or paint is intact and smooth, you could clean it with a soft cloth just moistened with water mixed with a few drops of mild liquid detergent.

I have a model ship that my grandfather made. It's been kept in a cardboard box in the attic for a number of years. I'd like to bring it down and display it in living room but it's very dusty and grimy. As it's so delicate, I'm not sure how to go about cleaning it.

First of all, do some research and find out if it is valuable. If so, you should ask a conservator for advice. If you decide to go ahead, be prepared for it to be a long and fiddly job. You may be able to remove loose dust in the same way as for the violin, but use a small brush, and be careful not to damage any rigging. After that proceed very carefully with small swabs of cotton wool just moistened with water mixed with a few drops of mild liquid detergent. Press them onto kitchen paper if they seem too damp.

Bits and pieces



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What's in
your attic?

Jewellery hates... rough handling, chlorine, salt water, cosmetics and beauty products.

I need some help... I have a gold wristwatch on a leather strap – I think it's about 50 years old. It's still working. Should I wear it and how should I store it when I'm not using it?

It would be a shame not to wear it sometimes. Gold is a very stable metal and will not be harmed by contact with the skin. Remember that if the gold is a low-carat and has been made with a mixture of other metals you can expect it to tarnish slightly over the years. Be sure to remove the watch when you wash your hands. If it has a leather strap, watch out for tears and weaknesses in the leather. If the leather is red and powdery it is likely to be actively deteriorating and needs to be treated. See a conservator for advice.

At the Conservation Centre... we have worked on gold discs given to the Beatles when a million copies of a record had been sold. Gold discs are actually made of gold-plated nickel. These discs had been framed using thick card, hessian and masking tape. The metal had been very badly tarnished by pollutants given off by the cardboard.

You may not have a queen's ransom of family heirlooms tucked away in your jewellery box, but you will probably have a few pieces that you want to keep. Even trinkets that are only worth a few pounds have great sentimental value.

Handling

- Jewellery is meant to be worn. By following a few simple rules, you'll get years of pleasure from your rings, necklaces and bracelets as well as helping them to retain their lustre and their value.
- Don't wear jewellery when you go swimming or take a bath or shower. Chlorine, salt and bath products can damage it.
- Put on jewellery after you get dressed so that you don't snag it in your clothes and weaken catches and chains.

- Put on your jewellery after your perfume, make-up or hairspray, all of which can damage it.
- Check catches and gemstone settings regularly for any weakness and get them repaired straight away.

Cleaning

If you have valuable items, it is worth getting them professionally cleaned.

Storage

- Store each piece of jewellery separately. Metals and gemstones have different degrees of hardness so don't let the pieces rub against each other.
- Keep chains flat so that you don't twist and weaken the links.
- Pearls are soft. Wrap them in a piece of silk and store them separately.



Anyone who's watched *Antiques Roadshow* will have dreamed of finding that the ugly old chair in the corner is worth a fortune. Monetary value, however, is not the main reason most of us want to keep special items.

Objects become precious because they are part of our family history – they connect us to the past. You may have an old book in which someone has recorded all the births and deaths in your family for the past hundred years. This is a unique record; even the handwriting and the faded ink give you a sense of the continuity of your family over the generations.

You may have something you bought recently that is also precious. Many of us want to keep a piece of jewellery, clothing or a souvenir of a special time in our lives to pass on to future generations. Again, this reinforces our sense of life continuing.

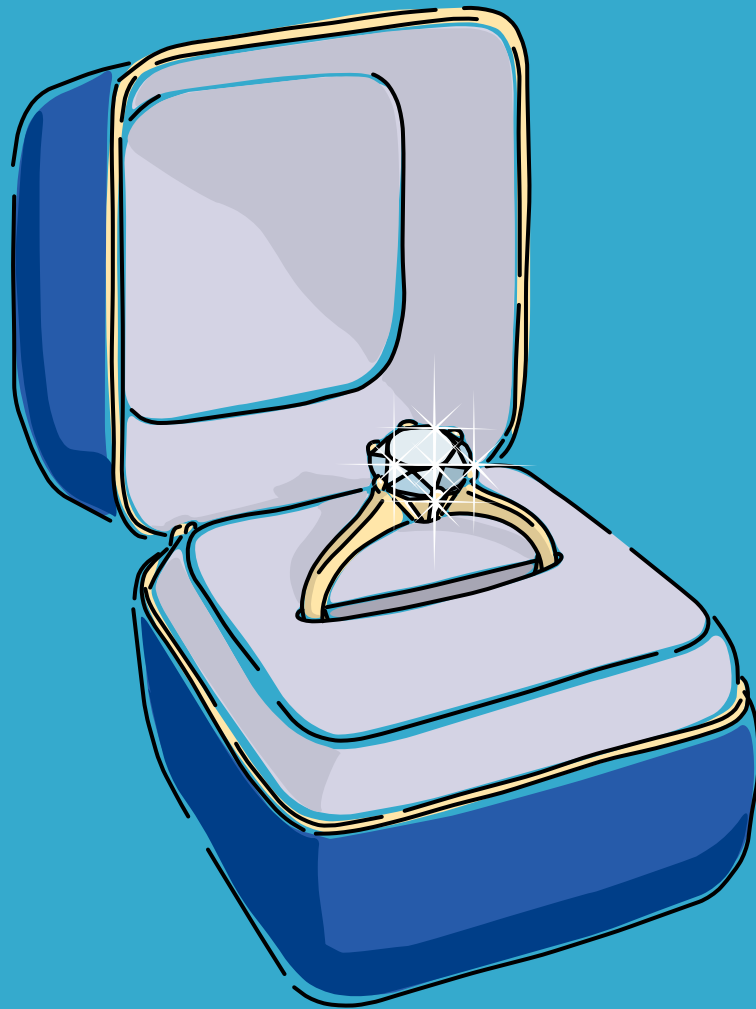
There are objects that we keep because they are unusual, have sentimental value or because they may become collectors' items in the future. Long-playing records from the 1960s, a pair of original platform shoes, a clockwork toy – they bring back memories and will amuse and possibly amaze our children and grandchildren.

Your community or church may also have articles that need to be preserved. At a recent display to celebrate the Millennium, one community produced photographs from the turn of the century, embroidered banners from trade unions and women's groups, trophies won by the football team and documents, deeds and parish registers that traced the history of the area. With care, many of these articles could still be fit for display in 2100!

So have a look around. What is stored away in your home that is worth keeping? To help you decide, try making a catalogue of your precious items. Make a note of things you want to keep and why you want to keep them.

Item

Jewellery



Storage

- Keep pieces on display if you want to – they were made to be used and admired.
- If you do need to put pieces away, wrap them in acid-free tissue paper and pack them in plastic or metal containers, rather than cardboard and wooden boxes.

Coins and medals

- Collectors tend to value the fine detail on the surface of a coin or medal, rather than its shine, so never use any abrasive cleaning materials which can scratch or wear the surfaces.
- Wrap each piece individually in acid-free tissue to prevent them from rubbing against each other, especially if several medals are mounted together on a ribbon.
- If you have a particularly special piece, it is possible to buy specially made acid-free coin envelopes.
- Avoid wood and textiles when storing or displaying coins and metals, especially wools like felt.

I want to keep this because...

General principles

1 Find out what you've got

Start by finding out what your object is made of because this will determine how you treat it. Many objects are made up from more than one material. Even something that looks straightforward such as a wooden storage chest with brass fittings is made of different materials (wood and metal) that need different treatments.

If you are not sure what an object is made of, or how to look after it, check with a conservator before you use any products on it or put it away in storage.

2 Handle items gently

Careless handling causes far more damage to items than natural decay. Accidents lead to chipped and broken glass and ceramics, scratched furniture and torn fabrics. Once an item is damaged, it may be impossible to repair.

3 Work slowly

If you are planning to clean or pack something, take your time. By trying to do too much too quickly you could cause accidental damage. If you are using substances such as furniture wax, read the instructions and give them sufficient time to work. Experiment on an inconspicuous area first. Use a very small amount of cleaning product at a time. Always follow any safety precautions on the label.

Brass candlesticks, pewter tankards, coins and medals – if you have any metal items in your home, they will respond well to gentle care.

Although metals may look hard and durable, they are vulnerable to damage. The two major enemies are rough handling and damp. If you have a metal piece which is badly corroded, get advice from a conservator. Never try to restore it yourself with a metal cleaner because you could cause irreversible damage.

Like wood, some metals acquire a sheen (patina) over time that adds to its beauty. Don't try to remove this – you may spoil the finish on the item and the patina can act as a protective coating which slows down any further tarnishing.

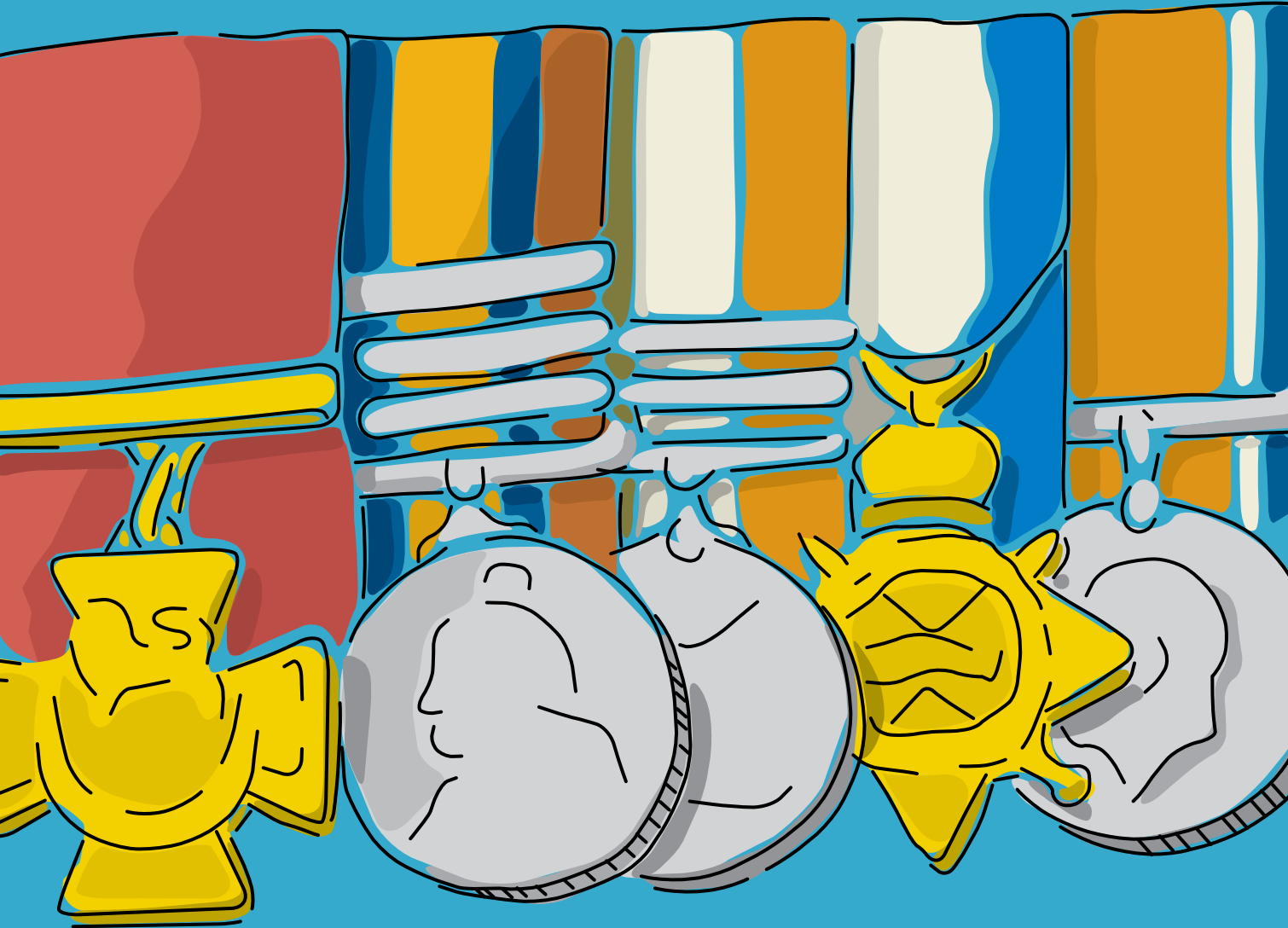
Handling

- The acidity and salts from your skin will tarnish metal so don't touch items unless you are wearing cotton or latex gloves.
- Work slowly and avoid rough handling, which can scratch or dent metal pieces.

Cleaning

- Dust pieces regularly with a soft cloth. Don't use a feather duster as the quills can break and scratch the surface.
- Polishing with a metal polish wadding is abrasive and can wear away the surface of the item, so polish sparingly.
- A gentle rub over silver with a silver cloth will reduce the rate of tarnishing.

Metal



4 Store items properly

Items need to be stored in the right environment. The general rule is to keep things in a cool, dry place away from direct light. If you wrap items, use acid-free tissue paper. Don't seal anything tightly in plastic bags because these can create a warm, humid environment. Check the items occasionally for signs of damage.

5 Get professional advice

Don't take any chances. Using the wrong products on items or storing them in inappropriate conditions can cause permanent damage. Get advice from a conservator about any item that is delicate or needs attention. Our conservators hold surgeries for the general public. There are details about how to contact them on the back page of this booklet.

6 Use the right materials

If your object is very important to you, we would recommend that you use 'conservation quality' materials – for example acid-free tissue, paper and cardboard. Some of these materials can be purchased at the Conservation Centre shop or an art shop. Ask a conservator for advice if you are unsure.

Recognise the enemy

Time isn't kind to anything – and that includes your precious objects. Knowing what can cause damage will make it easier to protect them.

Light

Light is one of the most harmful factors in speeding up decay because it causes colour change and weakens materials. Both natural and artificial light can cause problems. You can reduce fading and damage by keeping objects out of direct, harsh light and moving them around so that no single item is exposed for long periods.

Relative humidity

Humidity means damp in the atmosphere. If the air is very humid, and especially if it is warm, destructive moulds can grow, particularly on organic materials such as leather, paper and fabrics. Changes in humidity are also damaging. If an object gets damp and then dries out, it will expand and contract and may crack. You may have noticed that new central heating can sometimes make doors crack – it's the same principle. Try not to keep objects in areas that are prone to damp, such as garages and cellars.

Temperature

It's important to keep objects in a place where the temperature is fairly constant. Avoid storing items in places that can get very cold and damp, such as garages, or very hot and dry, such as near central heating boilers. Don't put delicate items on window sills where condensation may form.

- If your item is made of other materials as well as leather, for example a wooden chair with a leather seat, be careful not to touch the leather with the cleaner or treatment you use on the wood.

Leather hates...

dust, dirt, ink stains,
damp, excessive dryness,
carpet beetle, sharp
edges, being squashed.

Storage

- Keep leather in a cool, dry place. Damp can cause mould to form on the surface. If the atmosphere is too dry, then the leather can become brittle and crack.
- Don't leave leather in direct light because it will fade.
- Check occasionally for carpet or leather beetles. These black or dark brown insects attack leather and animal skins, especially if the skin is untanned or in poor condition. If you do find them, seek expert advice.

At the Conservation

Centre... in our textile department, we examined a pair of leather gloves and found that they had been stiffened with fragments of legal documents. This helped to confirm that the gloves dated from the early seventeenth century.

Leather

Look around your home – you could be surprised at the number of items that are made, or partly made, of some type of hide. Furniture, such as chairs and sofas, leather-topped desks, musical instruments, clothes, shoes and bags – all will benefit from regular maintenance. Otherwise leather may crack and become brittle with age.



Handling

- Leather (except very delicate items) is meant to be handled and the oils from your skin won't damage it. Be careful, however, not to scratch the surface.
- If a leather article such as a bag gets wet, pack it with absorbent material such as tissue paper and let it dry naturally. Don't put it near heat.

Cleaning

- Dust leather regularly. If it is very dirty, wipe the surface with a swab of cotton wool just moistened with white spirit (this solvent won't dry out the natural oils in the leather). Leave it to dry.
- If the leather is modern and in good condition leather dressing can be applied, but it is not recommended for antique leather.
- If the surface of the leather is damaged or repairs are needed, talk to a conservator before you clean it.

Pests

Clothes moths, silverfish, woodworm, and other pests can all cause serious damage. You need to stop these from taking up residence. Avoid pests by keeping dust levels low and storing things where it is cool and dry. Check items regularly for signs of infestation. If you spot any damage such as new-looking small holes, droppings or insects, you may need professional advice.

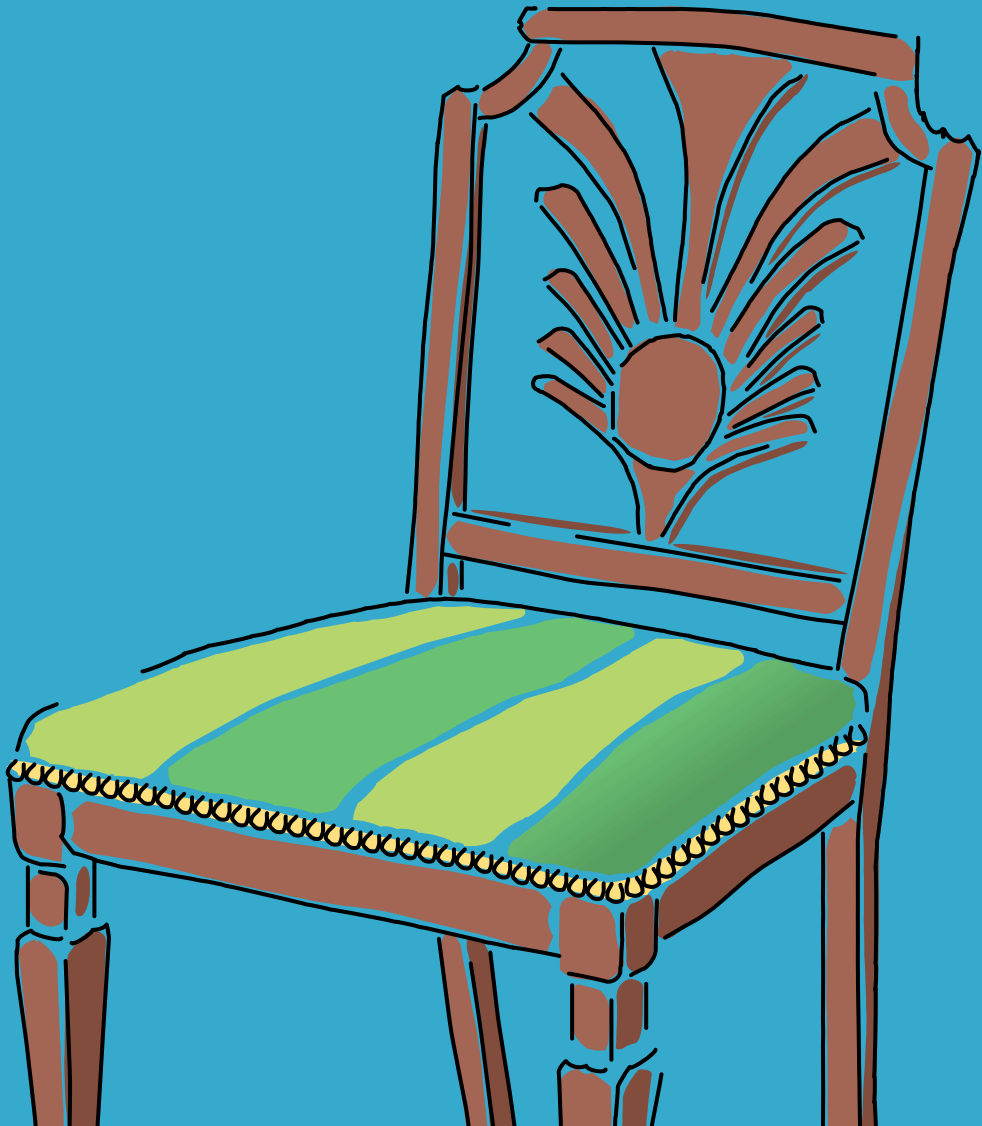
Pollution

Flecks of dust and dirt can have sharp edges that can damage the surface of objects. If you let something get very dirty, it will need cleaning and the cleaning process itself can weaken delicate materials. Regular gentle dusting is much less harmful than an occasional thorough polish! Remember that the drawers and cupboards in our homes can give off damaging vapours. Make sure that there is adequate ventilation around stored items.

You!

However much you love your precious objects, handling them can accelerate decay. Sweat, dirt and grease on your hands can all be damaging, so wash your hands before you touch anything you want to keep in good condition. Handle items carefully so that you don't weaken them, or worse still, drop and break them. Carry fragile items such as paper on a tray or similar support.

Furniture



- Don't put too many clothes into one box as this will crease them.
- Line drawers with tissue or an old washed sheet.
- Check stored garments regularly.

- If you are hanging a long garment, sew tapes to the inside of the waist and loop these over the hangers. This will stop the weight of the garment dragging the fabric and seams.

- Large textiles may need to be rolled around a cardboard tube. Wrap the tube with several layers of tissue first, then roll the textile right side out with more tissue between the layers.

Textiles hate...

dust and dirt, damp, excessive dryness, strong light, rough handling, pests (watch out for moths and carpet beetles!).

I need some help...

how can I keep my granddaughter's christening dress in good condition?

If the gown is new wash it gently by hand with mild liquid detergent and give it a final rinse in cool, clean water. Make sure it is dry before you put it away. If it is old then ask for advice before cleaning it. Then store it as flat as possible, with tissue padding the folds, in a cardboard box, or a drawer lined with tissue.

Storage

- We would recommend always using acid-free tissue and boxes for the storage of textiles. This guards against damage to the texture and colour of your items.
- Keep them away from strong light, which will fade their colour and make them brittle.
- Store them in a place with adequate ventilation to prevent mould growing.
- Don't put them anywhere damp such as in the cellar or garage. You should also avoid placing them near sources of heat such as radiators or in airing cupboards.
- Check stored items regularly for signs of infestation. Small, irregular holes can be a sign that moths have moved in. If they have, seal the item securely in plastic and put it in your freezer for three weeks. Take it out for 2 days without unwrapping it, then repeat the freezing. This will kill moths without damage to the cloth.

For individual items, look at this storage chart.

Clothes (in boxes)

- Fold them as few times as possible and pad the folds with acid-free tissue paper.
- Make supports for hats, gloves and shoes with crumpled tissue.
- Store beaded items flat.
- Make sure boxes have a close-fitting lid.

Clothes (hanging)

- Leave plenty of space around garments so that they don't get crushed and air can circulate.
- Hang them on coat hangers padded with cotton or calico and cover with a cotton cloth.
- Never use polythene covers as these attract dust and restrict ventilation.

Flat textiles (samplers, cushion covers, etc.)

- Lay them flat and protect each layer with tissue paper.
- Store in a box.
- Check regularly for pests.

Although we live in an age of cheap, easily replaceable furniture many of us have pieces that we have inherited, or bought, that we want to preserve. One of the great attractions of old furniture is the way that the wood matures. Light and gases in the atmosphere affect its colour; some dark woods will get lighter and some light woods will get darker.

Your furniture may have a natural finish, or it could be protected with a coat of varnish, lacquer or wax. With care and regular maintenance, the surface of wood will acquire an attractive sheen (patina).

The flaws in furniture can make it more rather than less interesting. Fading and a few scratches and scuffs are to be expected in an old piece, and something that has the glow of frequent gentle polishing looks far more appealing than a piece that has been stripped and repolished to a uniform shine.

Handling

- Handle furniture with care. Although it may appear strong, rough handling can damage joints and chip veneers.
- Always lift furniture – don't push or drag it along the floor. Get someone to help you.
- Remove any loose parts of the piece, such as drawers and glass or marble tops, before you move a piece of furniture.
- Pick up chairs from underneath the seat. Similarly, don't lift a chest of drawers by its top edges but lift it by the middle, and remember to put the drawers back in the same order.

Cleaning

- The best way to keep furniture in good condition is to dust it regularly with a clean, dry duster. If it has a polished surface, buff it occasionally with a duster or soft chamois leather.
- Use plenty of clean dusters. Don't use a duster on top of a cupboard or wardrobe and then use it on the front or sides of the piece. The duster could pick up grit from the top surface that will scratch other surfaces.
- Throw away your feather duster. The feathers can break and scratch the surface.
- To polish furniture, dust with a dry duster first, then with a slightly damp duster. Dry the piece again with a duster and then use a pure wax polish on a clean rag. Apply the polish sparingly and rub it in well, then remove surplus wax with a clean cloth. Buff with a clean cloth after waxing. You only need to use wax polish once a year.
- If your piece of furniture has any cracks or pieces of veneer that have lifted, don't get any wax under these problem areas. Trapped wax will make it more difficult to repair the furniture and glue the pieces back.
- Never use silicone or spray polishes. Although these give an instant shine, they can damage polished surfaces. If spray polish is used frequently, wood can develop a cloudy appearance that will be impossible to remove without stripping and resurfacing.

Textiles

Clothes, soft furnishings, trade union banners, samplers and embroidery are all examples of textiles that you might want to keep because they are particularly important to you.

Textiles are generally made to be used, so they will show signs of wear and tear over the years. Don't expect curtains, carpets and bed linen to last for a long time unless you are prepared to store them permanently in a darkened room.

Textiles are very vulnerable to light, heat, damp, contact with materials that are acidic and pests. Check them regularly and get professional advice from a conservator if you see widespread signs of mould or insect infestation.

Handling

- Wash your hands before you work with textiles. A sharp fingernail or edge on a ring or watch could tear delicate fabric.
- Handle textiles as little as possible. Touching can weaken and dirty them.
- Don't pull or stretch delicate textiles.
- Resist the temptation to try on old clothes unless you are sure they are strong and will fit you.

Cleaning

- When in doubt, don't. Wet cleaning and using unsuitable cleaning materials can cause permanent damage.
- Never wash or dry-clean old textiles until you have talked to a textile conservator.
- Remove dirt and dust by vacuuming. Always use the lowest power setting, and hold the nozzle just above the surface. Use your judgement in deciding which textiles can withstand your high-powered vacuum cleaner. If you have a lot of soft furnishings, you may want to invest in a lightweight 'dustbuster'. These hand-held, battery-operated cleaners are gentler on textiles.

Textiles and leather



Storage

- If you are storing a piece of furniture for a long period, dust it, put a layer of tissue paper on top and round the legs and feet, then cover it with a dust sheet. Make sure it is standing on a level surface.
- Store furniture in dry, cool surroundings. Damp and extreme dryness can both damage the wood.
- Keep items away from strong sunlight, lamps and spotlights, all of which can cause fading.
- Check pieces regularly for signs of infestation. Look for new holes made by woodworm or signs of moths attacking upholstery. If you find woodworm, treat it quickly before it has a chance to spread to other wood in your house. Use a woodworm treatment and follow the instructions carefully. Wear eye protection and work in a well-ventilated room. You may have to repeat the treatment a number of times – woodworm can be a very persistent problem.

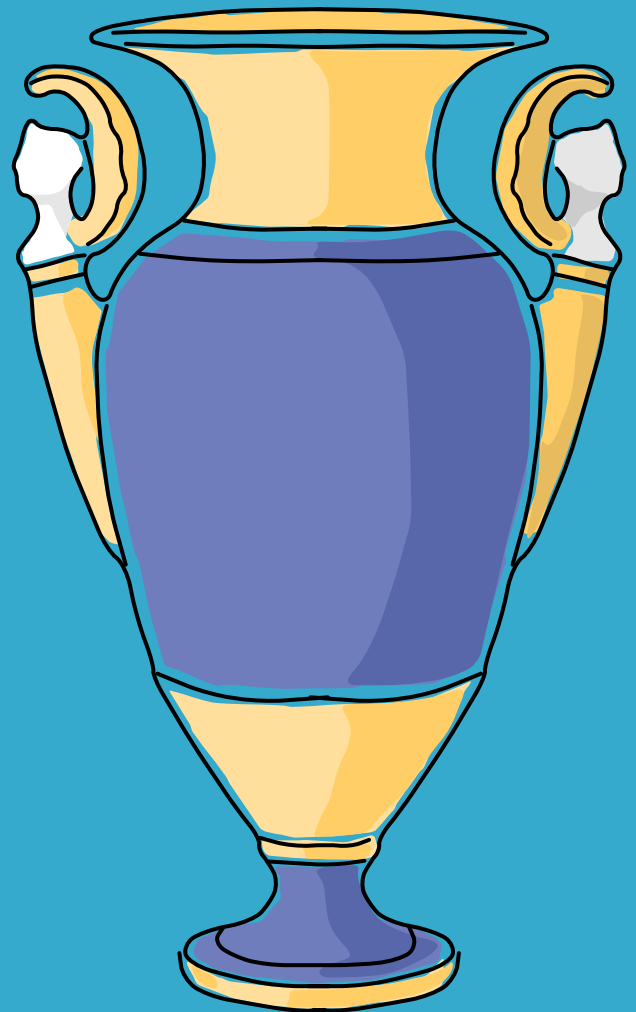
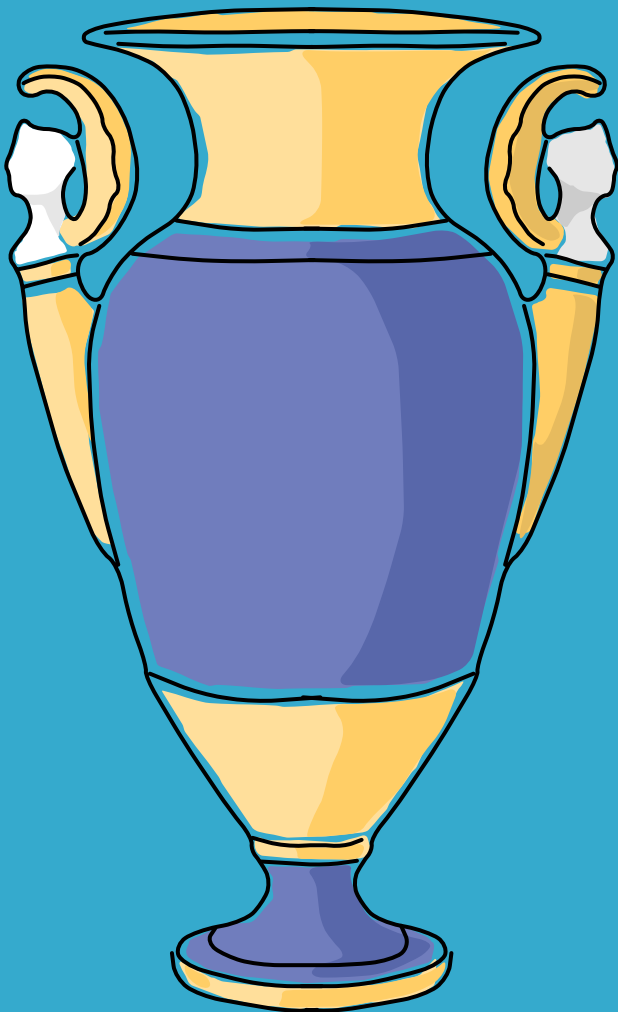
Furniture hates... damp, which can encourage fungus, extreme dryness which will make it split, pests such as furniture beetles (woodworm), rough handling, strong light, high temperatures.

I need some help... I have an old wooden chest in my bedroom. What's the best way to clean the brass hinges and lock?

If you try to make it shiny, brass will look totally out of place on old wood. It should look cared for rather than new. Brass acquires a patina in the same way as wood and you should be careful not to remove this. Dust the piece regularly and polish the lock and hinges occasionally using the same wax polish that you use on the rest of the chest.

Don't use brass cleaner on the fittings because this will make the brass too bright and may leave smears and white marks on the surrounding wood.

Ceramics and glass



It's not just old objects that people want to conserve for the future. You may have a wedding video, or a tape of your child's performance in the school play. You may still treasure the first 7" single you ever bought, or a CD that reminds you of your holidays. These recordings, and their containers, can be vulnerable to damage, particularly from light, heat, humidity and rough handling.

Handling and cleaning

- Follow the handling and cleaning guidelines provided for photographs.
- Do not touch the surface or the edge of tapes.
- Only handle vinyl records by the outer edge.
- Be careful not to knock or drop items. Records, CDs and the outer casing of tapes can be very brittle.

Storage

- Store and use in a clean environment. Small particles of dirt can cause a lot of damage.
- Make sure the environment is cool and dry and avoid direct sunlight.

- Store tapes a few feet away from electrical equipment as they can be affected by the magnetic field.
- Store containers on their edge (like books).
- Rewind tapes after playing and recording. Don't eject them halfway through.
- Put things back in their boxes after use.
- Make a second copy of any particularly important video, film and sound tapes.
- Ensure that records are stored with an inner sleeve and an outer sleeve.

Recordings hate... light, damp, heat, rough handling, finger marks, scratches, sticky tape, rubber bands, mice and insects.

I need some help... I have an old cine-film from a family holiday. Is it safe to play it again?

Cine-film is strong and will not usually be damaged if you play it again. You could have the cine-film transferred to a video tape, which is more convenient, if you want to.

Recordings



The word 'ceramics' refers to items made of pottery and porcelain. Vases, tiles, cups, plates, decorative boxes and figurines are just some of the items you may want to keep. They can easily crack, chip or break on impact – handle with extreme care.

The same principle applies to items made of glass. Even the slightest impact can shatter drinking glasses, vases and ornaments, so treat them gently. The stability of glass depends on how it was made – the glass recipe. If the proportions of the ingredients are wrong, the glass can weaken or become cloudy in appearance.

Handling

- Wash your hands and remove jewellery. Dirty finger marks can be hard to remove and sharp metal could scratch the piece.
- When you handle ceramics or glass, hold them underneath or around the body. Don't lift or move them by the handle, rim or lid. If you are lifting a drinking glass or small bowl, cup the bowl part with one hand and support the base with your other hand.
- For larger pieces such as decorative bowls or vases, get somebody to help you and make sure that you support the piece from underneath.
- Avoid touching any delicate decoration on the surface of a ceramic item. You also need to be particularly careful not to touch any decorative pieces that stick out as they will break off easily.
- Carry pieces one at a time. Don't let two pieces rub together because this will damage the surfaces. Never lift one object over the top of another. If you drop it, you may break both!

- Glass with painted and gilded decoration should be handled as little as possible.
- If a ceramic piece gets broken, wrap each shard individually in tissue paper and keep them together. Take care with the broken edges. Don't label the pieces with stickers or tape. Place tiny fragments in a self-seal polythene bag. You may be able to get it repaired.

Cleaning

- You can dust items very gently, preferably with a soft brush, but don't even think about cleaning any prized or valuable pieces yourself – take them to a conservator and get advice.
- If you need to wash ceramics or glass, use a mild liquid detergent and luke warm water. Only wash one object at a time. Lay the clean piece on paper towels to drain. Dry it by leaving it to stand, not with a cloth.
- You are taking a risk if you wash items that are chipped, are unglazed, have old and flaky glaze, or have been restored before.

Storage

- Keep objects away from heat, the edges of tables, shelves and windowsills, and flapping curtains.
- Don't overcrowd shelves or cupboards since you could damage the surface of items if they rub against each other. Worse still, when you try to remove a piece you could dislodge and break others.
- Make sure that all pieces are completely dry before you put them away.
- Place layers of tissue paper and bubble wrap between individual plates and don't stack them too high.
- Don't stack cups, bowls or glasses inside each other as this can damage decorated surfaces and glazes.
- If you are lucky enough to have a lead crystal decanter, you can use it to serve drinks from, but don't store them for long periods of time. The lead can leak into the drinks and is poisonous to humans!

At the Conservation Centre...

we have completed the conservation of a full length portrait of King Henry the Eighth. It is painted on six oak planks which were glued together and then coated with layers of chalk and animal glue which provided a smooth white surface to paint on. Before starting the painting, the artist drew the figure of Henry in charcoal on the panel. The paint layers include pigments such as cochineal and a bright yellow made of lead and tin.

Henry is now back on display at the Walker in Liverpool.

Frames

Many types of object, such as paintings, certificates, embroidered samplers and photographs, can be framed. If you wish to frame an object, we would suggest that you get some professional advice. Here, we can only give very general hints on how to treat things in frames.

- Avoid resting a frame on one of its corners. Get help to lift large frames.
- Make sure your hanging fittings are securely attached to the wall and can take the weight of the frame.
- If you are storing, rather than displaying, your objects, keep framed and unframed items separate to prevent damage.
- Use glass rather than acrylic sheeting to frame pastel and charcoal drawings. Static from the acrylic will attract particles of pastel and charcoal like a magnet.
- The surface of your object should not directly touch the glass of the frame.
- Dust frames with a clean dry brush. Clean the glass with a damp cloth, but avoid the edges so that the water does not get behind the glass and damage your object.

Oil paintings

Oil paintings are not as common as prints, drawings and watercolours – they can be valuable, and they require careful attention. Sometimes it can be difficult to tell whether your painting is an oil painting, a print or a watercolour. If you are at all unsure, ask a conservator for advice.

Display

Oil paintings are less sensitive to light than other types of painting, but can still fade over time. If you have one on the wall, try to keep it out of bright sunlight. Never hang an oil painting over a heat source such as a radiator or fireplace.

Handling and storage

- Most oil paintings are framed, but if yours is unframed, handle it with great care. Always carry paintings with both hands and make sure your fingers do not accidentally press into the canvas.
- Never try to carry a large painting on your own, or drag it across the floor. Get a friend to help you.

Storing paintings

- Never store your painting flat on its back or front. Lean it at an angle against the wall with the painting facing out, and make sure no-one is likely to trip over it.
- Store paintings in a dark, cool area, away from extremes of temperature.
- You can dust oil paintings very gently with a clean, dry, soft brush, but it is best to ask an expert about cleaning oil paintings.

Ceramics and glass hate... strong household detergents, bleach, washing-up liquid, rough handling, dust, greasy fingers, intense sunlight, extreme temperatures.

I need some help... I have two pretty ceramic plates that I want to hang on the wall. What's the best way to do this?

Check the plates for cracks before you hang them since any flaws could make them vulnerable to breakage. If they are sound, use plastic-coated metal, or Perspex hangers. Metal hangers should be cushioned to prevent scratching or chipping. Get the right size for the plates: if the hangers are too small, they will put pressure on the rim. The arms should reach from rim to rim and the spring should lie flat across the back of the plate. Always remove the hangers if you are putting the plates into storage.

At the Conservation Centre... we have painstakingly conserved a rare mid-18th century London delftware tile panel, which will soon be displayed in our new Craft and Design Gallery at the Walker.

Books and documents



Prints, drawings and watercolours

Works of art on paper come in many different forms, from a child's potato print to a historic engraving of 18th century Liverpool. Drawing materials vary almost as widely, and include pencil, inks, watercolours, acrylics and poster paint.

Light can be particularly damaging to pictures so hang them away from direct sunlight.

Handling and cleaning

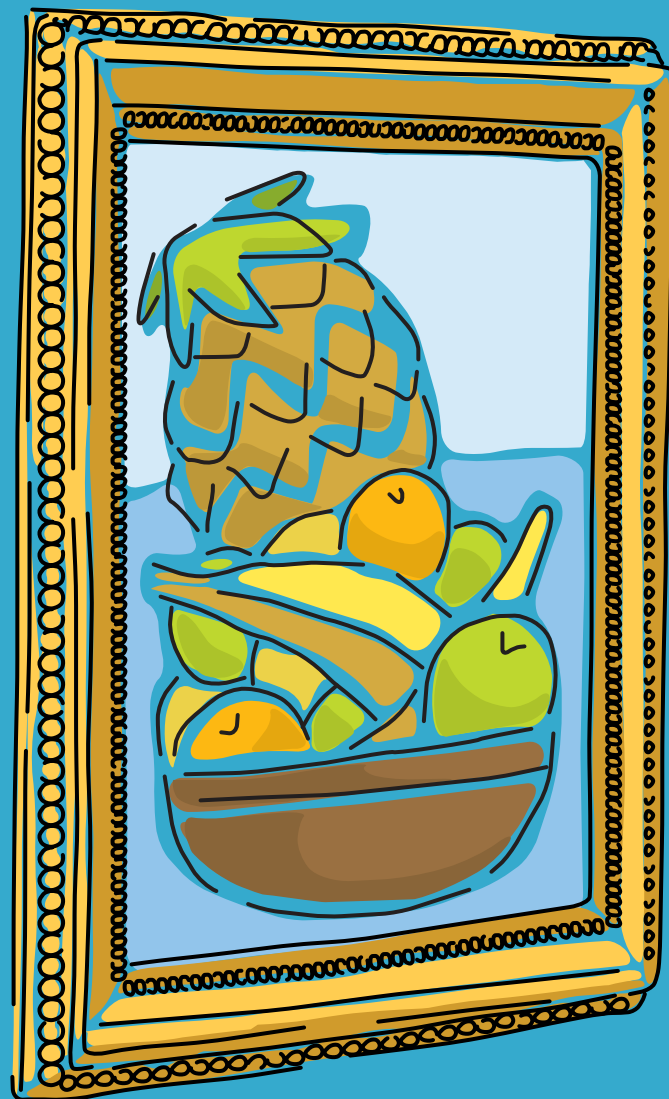
- Follow the same guidelines as provided for photographs on page 25.
- It is best not to try to carry out any repairs yourself. Seek advice from a conservator.
- The materials used can be very fragile, and sometimes pigment can flake off. One of the best ways to protect the surface of a drawing or painting is to have it framed by a professional.
- Be wary of sticking your picture down fully on to a piece of card.

Storage

- Store in the dark in a cool, dry, dust free area.
- Store unframed items in paper folders, or have them professionally mounted and put them in a box.

Prints, drawings and watercolours hate... light, damp, heat, rough handling, dirty finger marks, staples, paper clips, sticky tape, rubber bands, mice and insects.

Works of art



This section looks at the care of books, such as diaries, and documents such as maps, property deeds, old cheques, and letters.

Any item that is made of paper needs very careful handling and storage to avoid damage. Along with poor handling, the main causes of damage to paper are acidity and light. That is why we would recommend that if you are storing any important books or documents, you should invest in acid-free folders and boxes.

Handling

- Make sure your hands are clean and wash them regularly to avoid getting dust and dirty finger marks onto the paper.
- Handle all paper as little as possible. Any contact with the acids in your fingers can speed up the process of decay.
- Keep documents flat, and avoid rolling or folding them if possible. If they need to be rolled, roll them around the outside of a tube, not inside. When unrolling, place clean weights along the edge to prevent creases and tears.
- To remove a book from a shelf, put your hand behind it and carefully push it out until you can grip the middle of the spine – don't pull the top of the spine or the edges of the cover.
- When opening a book, support the covers. Try not to bend them back further than they can comfortably go.

Cleaning

- Books and shelves need dusting regularly to avoid dust and insect damage.
- When you take books off the shelf, keep the covers closed so that dust doesn't fall between the pages.
- Remove all the books from the shelf so that you can clean it and check for signs of woodworm and insects. If the shelf has signs of insect damage, don't put the books back on it.
- Keeping the covers firmly closed, brush along the top edge of the book away from the spine using a soft brush.
- Open the front cover and gently brush away any dust that has fallen inside, from the centre outwards. Don't bend the covers back more than 90 degrees.

- If there is dust inside the pages, you'll need to open each page and brush it separately. It's a slow job, but removing dust by shaking the book will weaken its spine.
- Use a soft duster to clean the sides and the spine.
- Apart from dusting, don't try to clean or repair a book yourself without seeking some advice.

Storing (books)

- Resist the temptation to cram too many books onto a shelf. This will allow air to circulate, and make it easier to remove them.
- Shelve books of similar size together, and make sure they stand straight rather than leaning on each other. Store very large books on their side.
- Damaged books (for example where the cover is detached) are best stored inside a well-fitting box.
- Clean your books and shelves regularly – once a year is usually enough.
- Keep books out of direct sunlight.

Storing (documents)

- Remove paper clips and rubber bands very carefully before storing.
- If staples show signs of rust, remove them by bending the metal ends back very carefully and sliding them out.
- Never use self-adhesive tape or labels on documents. If your documents have been fixed with tape, don't try to remove it yourself.
- Store documents in paper envelopes, and if possible in card boxes. Don't try to cram too many together!
- Clear archival plastic wallets can be useful for storing some types of documents, like wedding and birth certificates.
- Store documents in cool, dark, dry conditions, and check them about once a year to make sure they are not turning brown or being damaged by insects.
- Try to avoid using closed wooden cupboards, as the chemicals in the wood can damage the paper.

Photographs hate... light, damp, heat, rough handling, finger marks, staples, paper clips, sticky tape, rubber bands, mice and insects.

I need some help... I have a photo of my great-grandparents that I'd like to frame and display in my living room. What's the best way to do it?

Displaying old photographs can make an interesting decoration in your home, but it's not always too good for the photographs. Once they are on display, they are vulnerable to dust and fading. Why don't you get a professional copy made of the original and frame that instead? Then you could store the old photo for the benefit of your next generation of family members.

See the section on frames on page 31 for more information.

Cleaning

Cleaning photographs and negatives can be a tricky business and requires specialist skill and products. Take them to a conservator.

Storage

- Keep your photographs in a dark, cool, dry and dust-free place.
- Loose photographs can easily get scratched, torn or damaged, so try to store them in special photograph envelopes. The envelopes can then be kept in photograph boxes. Some of these include ring binders to make album-like storage containers.
- Albums can be bad for your photographs. In particular, do not keep your photographs in self-seal type albums.
- It is better to keep photographs in metal shelves or cupboards rather than wooden ones, as wood can give off harmful chemicals.
- Beware of sticking photographs to anything, like an album page. Use photographic corners instead. If you have photos that have already been stuck to an album page, don't rush to remove them as this may cause damage.
- Store old albums carefully and horizontally, and avoid putting them in plastic bags.
- Remember that the best paper and cardboard storage materials for books and documents will not necessarily be the best for photographs. If you have a particularly special photograph, it is worth asking for advice on photographic quality materials.

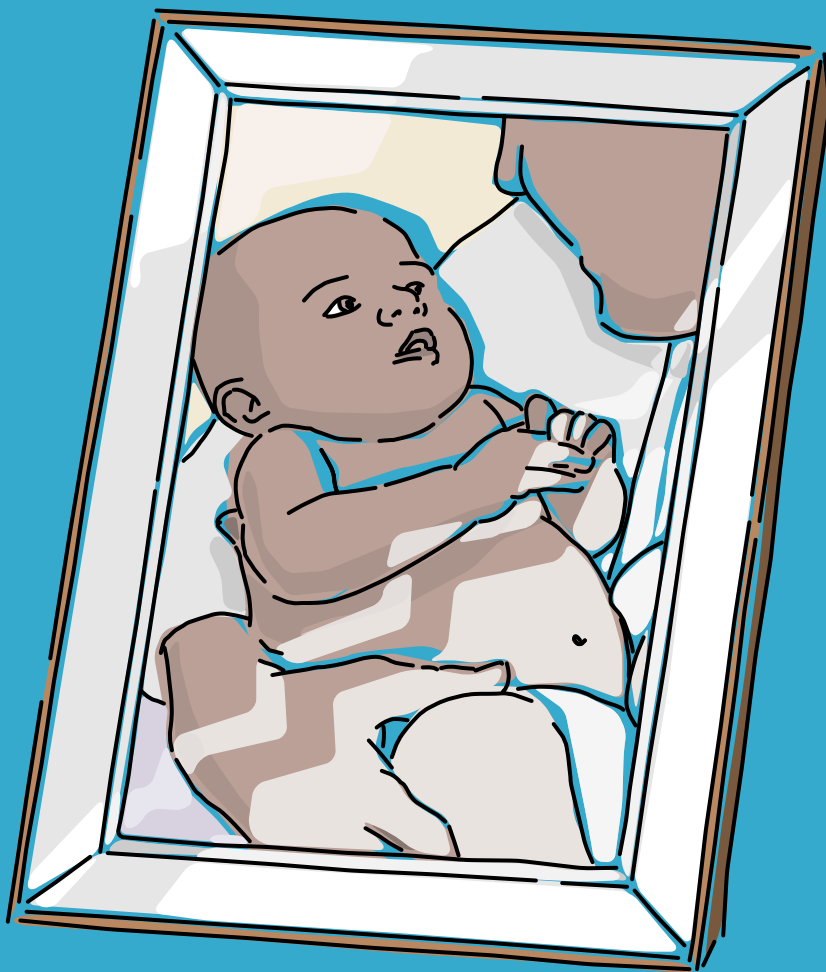
Books and documents hate... light, damp, heat, rough handling, dirty finger marks, staples, paper clips, rubber bands, sticky tape, mice and insects.

I need some help... I've found a pile of old football programmes from the 1930s that belonged to my grandad. They're a bit yellow round the edges but otherwise they seem to be OK. What should I do with them so they stay in good condition to pass on to my children?

You can buy archival plastic sleeves and envelopes, and acid-free card folders and boxes for all types of paper collections, such as your football programmes, or cigarette cards, comics, or newspapers. These will allow the collection to be safely handled and filed, but will reduce wear and tear.

At the Conservation Centre... we are working on the Dachinger collection of drawings. Dachinger was a German internee here in Liverpool. Because of the scarcity of materials to hand at the camp, he was very resourceful, and drew on non-conventional materials such as newspaper and wallpaper. Because these papers are not designed to last, it has been a challenge to decide how best to store and display them.

Photographs



Old photographs of relatives and friends are becoming popular mementoes as more and more people trace their family history. You may also want to preserve photographs you've taken recently so that future generations will be able to see them.

Photographs come in many different forms; black and white prints, colour prints, negatives and slides. They can be printed on to paper, glass or metal. One thing all these formats have in common is that they are very delicate. In this section we can only give you general guidelines, primarily about storing prints. For more detailed advice, talk to a conservator.

Handling

- Always wash your hands before you start touching photographs, and if possible use thin plastic gloves (like a hairdresser!), as even clean hands can leave marks.
- Lift photographs by the edges, or on card supports, and avoid touching the surface so that you don't get greasy fingerprints on the image.
- Don't lean or write on photographs. Make a separate index at the front of your album, or place a note into envelopes.
- Be careful with old photographs which have been stuck on to card and turned deep yellow or brown with age. Old card can become brittle and snap in half very easily.
- For advice on albums, see the section on handling books on page 21.

Unlike many museum conservation departments, we open our doors to the public. Visit us at the Conservation Centre, Whitechapel, Liverpool and we'll take you behind the scenes so that you can see work in progress, explore objects and learn more about conservation techniques.

Get an expert's opinion on how to look after your precious items. Our conservators will examine items and give you advice on how to care for them. Make an appointment for one of our weekly surgeries by telephoning the Information Desk on 0151 478 4999. There is no charge for this service – although all donations are appreciated.

For conservation quality materials, you can visit the Conservation Centre shop.

Opening times

Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm
Sunday 12pm to 5pm

Closed 23, 24, 25, 26 December and 1 January.

Phone **0151 478 4999**

Visit www.conservationcentre.org.uk

You can also find out more about conservation from the following books and websites:

re:source - The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries
www.resource.gov.uk

The United Kingdom Institute for Conservation
www.ukic.org.uk

For help choosing a conservator
www.conservationregister.com

Other museums worldwide have advice to offer. Two useful websites are:

reCollections the Australian Heritage Collections Council
www.amol.org.au/reollections

Canadian Conservation Institute
www.preservation.gc.ca

National Museums Liverpool acknowledges the assistance of Karen Holmes in the development of this publication.

Here at the award-winning Conservation Centre, we unlock the secret history of thousands of objects from Liverpool's museums.

Our conservators work on paintings, ceramics, metals, sculptures, textiles and furniture, using specialist skills and techniques to save items from decay. Wooden totem poles, space suits, two Beatles' gold discs and a mummified crocodile are just a few of the objects that have passed through the Centre.

This book gives advice and guidance on how you can preserve your most loved possessions, how to avoid unnecessary damage to delicate or old objects, and how to store, use and display them. We hope it will help you to care for your favourite things so that you can enjoy them for many years to come.

