

PHOTOGRAPHS

# Preserving your Past

Tips from Derbyshire Record Office on how to look after your family photographs ...



We all have photographs, negatives, slides, maybe even film that are precious to us as they link us to our own and our family's past. This leaflet explains how they can get damaged and what you can do to keep them safe.

## Handling

Avoid touching the image side of photographs or the film of negatives. The easiest way to handle photographic material safely is to have it suitably packaged; otherwise only touch the edges.

## Temperature

All types of photographs, photographic negatives, slides and film are best kept in cool conditions. The warmer the room, the quicker images will fade and film will disintegrate; below 16°C is best.

## Light

Light is a very destructive force, which weakens paper and fades photographs, inks and colours. It is vital to store all items out of light and to try and reduce the amount of light they receive when they are being looked at. It is important to remember the irreversible damage light does when considering framing photographs in order to display them; it is always better to display a copy.

## Damp

If photographic material is stored in damp conditions it will develop mould, so keep your images in a dry place, well away from any water sources.

→ **If you do find mould has started to grow, please be very careful as mould is dangerous to your health.** Wear rubber or vinyl gloves and a face mask when handling mouldy material and ask a paper conservator for advice.

## Self-adhesive tape

Don't be tempted to fix tears by using self-adhesive tape, as the adhesive will stain the photograph. Clear packaging will allow you to handle your photographs without increasing existing damage.

## Water

If photographs get wet, it is important to dry them out quickly without using heat: spread them out on top of absorbent material (e.g. kitchen towel) in a well-ventilated area, image side up. If photographs have stuck together, submerge them in a bucket of clean cold water and contact a conservator. Material on film can also be dried out on absorbent material or even hung up on clothes lines. Regularly change the absorbent material and leave the images to dry for at least a week. Wet photographs that are not dried out properly will develop mould, so get advice from a paper conservator if you're not sure what to do.

## Packaging

Ideally each photograph should be placed in an archival quality polyester sleeve; this can become expensive but is certainly worth doing for your most precious images. If using an album, avoid those with self-adhesive properties and use photo corners to avoid direct contact with adhesives; better albums to use are those whereby the photographs slide into plastic pockets. There is also archival quality packaging available for all forms of negatives and films. Small amounts can be obtained from the **Derbyshire Family History Society** ([www.dfhs.org.uk](http://www.dfhs.org.uk)) and the following suppliers all have an extensive range of archival quality packaging solutions:

- Conservation by Design ([www.conservation-by-design.co.uk](http://www.conservation-by-design.co.uk))
- Conservation Resources ([www.conservation-resources.co.uk](http://www.conservation-resources.co.uk))
- Preservation Equipment ([www.preservationequipment.com](http://www.preservationequipment.com))



## Cellulose nitrate

Pre-1950s negatives and film are often on cellulose nitrate, which is a highly flammable material. When cellulose nitrate degrades it gives off toxic fumes and can self-ignite; it should only be stored in appropriate cold storage. If you think you may have cellulose nitrate at home, contact your local fire officer for advice – **do not throw it in the bin**. More information about the dangers of cellulose nitrate can be found on the website of the Health and Safety Executive, [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).

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Please don't ever try to repair damaged photographs yourself, as this is very likely to result in more damage occurring.

Find a qualified paper, book or photographic conservator on:

[www.conservationregister.com](http://www.conservationregister.com)