



Guide No. 7 Preservation and storage of records and archives

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This handout provides advice and guidance on storing records and archives in the care of a meeting and preserving them for as long as they need to be kept. As a rule, older records and archives should be deposited in a local repository, and a meeting should keep only recent documents of its own, its committees and meetings (see *Guide 9 Depositing archives with appropriate repositories*). This guide concerns mainly paper records, for electronic records, see *Guide 6 Electronic records*.

Summary of guidance

- Awareness of the factors likely to harm documents and good practice in their physical care, storage and handling will help to maximise their life expectancy.
- A meeting's older records and archives should be deposited in a local record office.
- *British Standard 5454: Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents* (2002) is the most important standard for the care of archives in the UK

1. What is preservation and why is it important?

Preservation can be defined as any action that can be taken to prevent damage occurring, for example by storing documents in a suitable environment, and packaging them in an appropriate way. Awareness of the factors likely to harm documents and good practice in their physical care, storage and handling will help to maximise their life expectancy.

British Standard 5454: Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents (2002) is the most important standard for the care of archives in the UK and is the standard to which record repositories aspire.

2. Strongrooms, deeds boxes, chests and filing cabinets.

In the past, many meetings had a strongroom safe, deed box or chest to house records securely. If your meeting house has a strongroom, then this should be used for storing records and archives until they are either transferred to an appropriate repository or destroyed. Before you store records in the strongroom, you should check that there is no damp or mould and that it has good air circulation.

Many modern meeting houses do not have a strongroom. In this case, it is good practice to keep records in a lockable steel cabinet which is accessible only to the Custodian of Records or Clerk.

Friends with records in their homes are responsible for ensuring they are kept safe and secure and that they are passed on to the right Friend when their responsibility changes. It is important to label records as being the property of the meeting so that they remain the property of the meeting in case of future queries, illness or other situations.

3. Environmental conditions

Humidity, temperature, light and air pollutants all contribute to the deterioration of records and archives.

The most important factors are that the place of storage should be:

- Weathertight – make sure windows and doors fit securely.
- Watertight – do not store records or archives near plumbing pipes, sinks or toilets.
- Cool and dry – there should be good air circulation.
- Free from damp.
- Clean and free of dust.
- Not subject to fluctuating changes in temperature – do not store records near sources of heat or where temperatures are likely to fluctuate dramatically.
- Not exposed to natural or strong light – records should be stored out of direct sunlight.

3a. Relative humidity and temperature

It is good practice to monitor readings of relative humidity and temperature using monitoring equipment (see *Guide 12 Records equipment and suppliers*)

Storage conditions that are damp will encourage insect pest activity and the growth of mould, while conditions that are too dry will cause records and archive materials to become brittle. If the documents are subjected to sudden fluctuations in humidity then the rapid loss and absorption of moisture can cause structural damage which will contribute to the overall deterioration of the material. The temperature can also affect deterioration because chemical reactions are faster in warmer conditions. The ideal storage environment is:

- temperature range 16-19°C and a
- relative humidity level between 45-60%

Within these ranges, conditions should be stable.

3b. Air quality

A lack of air movement can lead to pockets of stagnant air where mould can grow more easily. It is therefore recommended that archives and records storage areas should be well ventilated and that where possible documents are stored away from the floor and ceiling.

3c. Light

In archive and records storage areas it is preferable to have as little constant light as possible to reduce direct damage to the documents through fading.

Sunlight is particularly damaging due to its intensity and the corresponding rise in temperature accompanied by localised drying of the air.

When designing a new strongroom or choosing rooms in an existing building, windows should be avoided where possible. Light coming through existing windows can be reduced by the installation of blinds which will also provide shade from direct sunlight. Ultraviolet light is the most damaging and can be excluded by installing special filters over windows.

Electric lighting should ideally be switched off when not in use and positioned at least 50cm above shelving to avoid localised heating and drying of documents.

3d. Improving the environment

There are a variety of means for controlling the environment so as to achieve the parameters recommended in this guide and in BS5454.

Environmental control need not involve expensive equipment – the key to safe storage of an archive is to ensure that the environment is stable and that extreme conditions are avoided. Several simple measures can be taken without needing specialist expertise:

- The most effective way to achieve a stable environment is to ensure that the storage room, and ideally the building as a whole, promotes stability. Thick walls, few or no windows, and a solid roof will go some way towards insulating the storage environment from changes in the outside environment. Where possible do not leave doors or windows open, and switch off lights when they are not in use.
- Ideally archival quality boxes should be used to store documents. Storing documents in boxes not only reduces their exposure to light, but can also provide some protection against sudden fluctuations in humidity or temperature. (For further information on storage of documents, see section 4 below)
- Try to avoid storing documents on the floor or against an external wall because these areas may be damp. Open shelving is preferable because it allows air to circulate.

3e. Mechanical control methods

Where budgets allow, there is a range of mechanical means of control which can be used, from the use of fans and heaters, to air conditioning units and building management systems. For any environmental control system, maintenance of the equipment and monitoring of the resulting environment are both essential.

- Air conditioning systems are probably the most frequently used means of control, and can be very successful.
- A dehumidifier can be used where high humidity is a particular problem, however, these must be regularly maintained to avoid leaks and floods.
- A fan can improve ventilation of a room, helping to prevent pockets of stagnant, damp air from developing.
- Central heating systems result in undesirable storage conditions because they produce a warm, dry environment. Central heating systems can be adapted to achieve more suitable conditions. Please contact a specialist.

4. Storage of archives and records

Equally important to environmental control are the methods and materials used for storing archives and records.

Do:

- ✓ Ideally use acid-free, archive quality boxes, folders, envelopes and card for storing archives and records. Avoid using old envelopes, brown paper or newspapers as wrappers. . If you want to use clear folders, make sure they are made of polyester, such as Melinex™ and Mylar™.
- ✓ Use close fitting boxes or folders, thus protecting papers from the effects of changes in temperature and relative humidity while shielding them from light and dust.
- ✓ Where possible keep volumes, boxes and files off the ground. Ideally they should be on shelves that start at least 150mm off the floor.
- ✓ Where possible use either brass paper clips that do not rust or unbleached cotton tape.
- ✓ Clear labelling of archives and records, boxes and folders will reduce the amount of handling. Archives and records should be labelled in pencil (see section 4 of *Guide No. 4: Creation to curation of records*)
- ✓ Where possible store bound volumes flat.
- ✓ Where possible store large or fragile documents or maps flat. If room is not available, they can be rolled and stored in acid free cylinders or cloth bags, or wrapped in acid free paper.
- ✓ Store loose papers and documents in archival boxes or folders.

Don't:

- × Use PVC folders or coloured translucent plastic folders
- × Fold papers to fit them into a folder or box; instead place them in a folder or box that suits their size.
- × Use steel paperclips, staples, sticky tape or rubber bands to hold papers together. They corrode and tear paper. Rubber bands perish.
- × Use sticky tape (Sellotape™). Over time, sticky tape becomes opaque and messy, or dries out and stains papers. Don't use sticky tape or 'magic tape' for repairing documents.
- × Use 'post-it' notes; if the note is important and needs to be kept then transcribe it onto a piece of clean white paper.

For a list of conservation suppliers who can supply all the archival quality materials mentioned, see *Guide 12 Records equipment and suppliers*.

5. Disaster planning

See *Guide No. 10 Disaster preparedness*.

6. Further advice

For further advice on managing records and archives you can either write to the Friends House Library, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ, telephone 020 7663 1135 or send an email to library@quaker.org.uk

Guides in this series

- Guide No. 1 The job of the Custodians of Records
- Guide No. 2 Meetings' records and their retention and disposal
- Guide No. 3 Legislation affecting records and record-keeping
- Guide No. 4 Creation to curation of records
- Guide No. 5 Minutes and supporting papers
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- Guide No. 14 Frequently Asked Questions

All guides can be downloaded from the Britain Yearly Meeting website www.quaker.org.uk/Library on the Support for Meetings page or requested from the Library.

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