



# Practical Preservation

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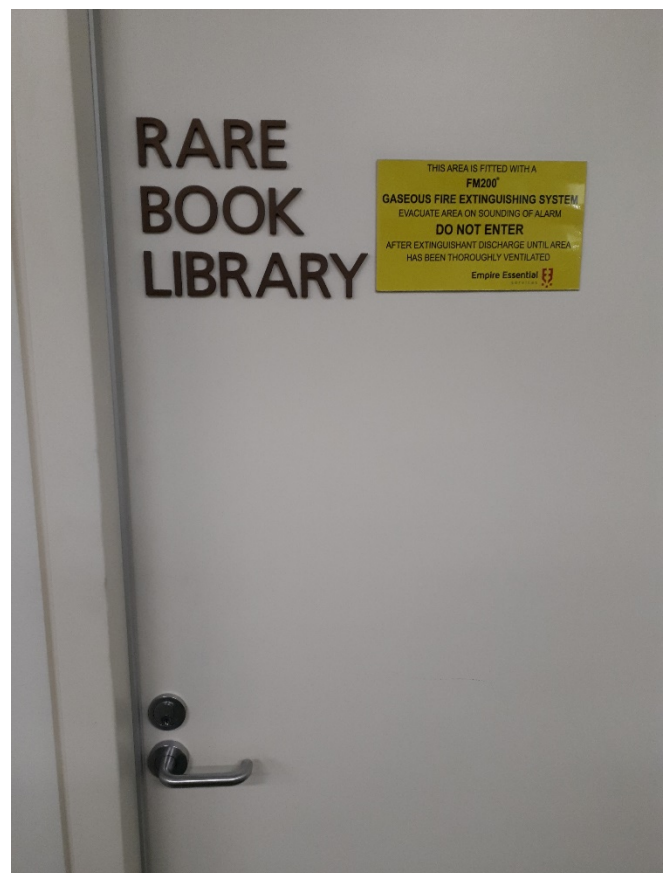
This presentation will cover preventive preservation and enclosures for books, newspapers, photos and paper documents, with an emphasis on special collections. I won't have time to cover disaster recovery or any other kind of format. A lot of this is common sense, so it may sound a bit like I'm stating the obvious.

## The Storage Environment

Secure, stable shelving, off the floor. Separate from kitchens, bathrooms, exposed pipes, drains. There should be an integrated pest management program in place – our Library is treated for pests regularly as part of the building maintenance. A chemical fire suppressant system, which releases a gas that sucks the oxygen out of the air, is preferable to a sprinkler system. In the event of a fire, most of the damage is caused by the water! Doors to special collections storage areas should have a 2-hour fire rating.

## Atmospheric Conditions

Stability is the key, avoiding fluctuations. High temperature and humidity levels can cause mould to grow. Low humidity levels can cause paper, leather and vellum to become brittle. When temperature and humidity levels fluctuate sharply, moisture is absorbed and released, causing stress to the items.<sup>1</sup> Ideally, a specialist temperature and humidity control system is in place for storage of special collections. General collections are managed well by regular air conditioning, and good insulation. A digital hygrometer-



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<sup>1</sup> National Archives of Australia. *Standard for the Storage of Non-Digital Archival Records*. Version 2.1, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/NAA-standard-for-the-storage-of-archival-records.PDF>

thermometer can be used to monitor the environmental conditions. Temperature should remain between 17 and 23 degrees, and relative humidity around 50%, plus or minus 5%.



## Pollution

Particulate pollution includes dust and mould spores. It is eliminated by good air filtration which is monitored and cleaned regularly. Gaseous pollution includes fumes caused by new paint, polish or carpet. If you're redecorating, or moving into a new facility, schedule a gap of a couple of weeks before moving in your collection. Leather is particularly affected, red rot (when the leather sheds red dust) is caused by gaseous pollution.

## Light

Avoid direct sunlight, and ideally have interior lighting with UV filtration. LED lighting is good because it doesn't give off heat. Archives and special collections should not have any exterior lighting whatsoever.

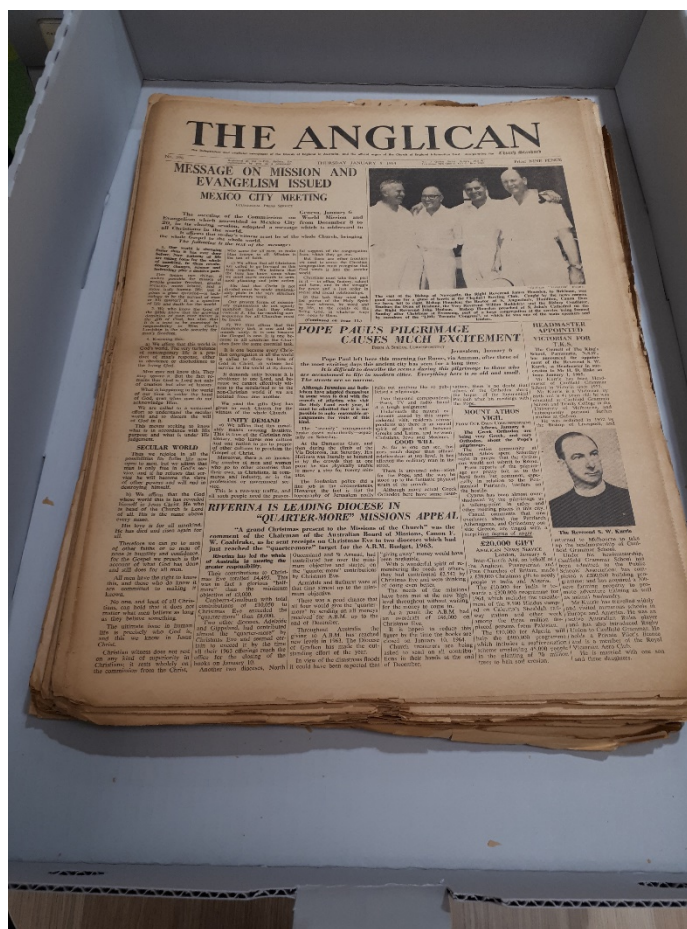
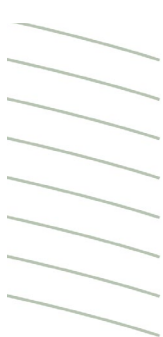


## Enclosures

- a) Books – if a book is damaged in any way, or it has a fragile binding, then there are several options available: you can create a dust jacket out of Mylar™, which is polyester film and an archival quality plastic. This protects the boards and the spine from being touched, or from rubbing against other books on the shelf, while allowing the spine to remain visible. You can also use acid-free cardboard to create a phase box, which encloses the book and offers maximum protection.



- b) Newspapers – old newspapers are notoriously fragile, as they were printed on cheap and acidic paper. They are extremely light sensitive – when I want to include a news clipping in a display, I always use a facsimile. Many libraries have old newspapers bound, which provides the protection of a solid cover and spine. Loose issues are best kept in an acid-free box, which is large enough for them to lay flat, without crushing the edges.



- c) Pamphlets – again, these are often fragile, printed on poor quality paper, and need individual enclosures. I store them in acid-free envelopes, laid flat in acid-free boxes. You could also store them in Mylar™ or polypropylene sleeves.
- d) Photos – Colour prints are very light sensitive, and all photos are susceptible to damage from fingerprints. They are best kept in Mylar™ or polypropylene sleeves, stored flat in folders or boxes. Any storage medium for photographs needs to be identified as having passed the Photographic Activity Test (PAT). This is indicated in the catalogue of an archival supplier. This means that the enclosure has been scientifically tested to make sure it is compatible with the materials used in photographs.

## Barcodes and Ownership Markings

When issuing a barcode for a rare book, I never stick it on the book itself, I get a strip of acid-free paper, and stick the barcode on the strip, and then fold the end over so that the barcode (essentially a sticker with

plastic and glue), is not coming into contact with the paper. The call number is written in pencil. I only use pencil when writing on barcode slips or envelopes, never ink.

## Handling

If you heard my talk at the 2018 conference, you might remember I quoted my preservation lecturer at university saying, you should only wear white gloves if you are Mickey Mouse or a band leader! When handling books and paper documents, clean dry hands are the best. If a book has red rot or disintegrating leather, I like to wear medical nitrile gloves to protect my hands from the book. When handling photographs, nitrile gloves are essential to prevent fingerprints on the photo's surface. Handling a book is mainly a matter of paying attention to the book – how far will it comfortably open, do you need a pillow to rest it on or a snake weight to hold it open.



## Further Resources

The main source of information I have used for this presentation is the National Archives' Standard for the Storage of Non-Digital Archival Records.<sup>2</sup> It has a very helpful table at the end, showing the correct storage environment for a wide variety of formats, and a table for storage in tropical and sub-tropical regions. There is also State Archives of NSW Standard on the Physical Storage of State Records.<sup>3</sup> All of our boxes, enclosures and acid-free papers come from Archival Survival in Victoria.

<sup>2</sup> National Archives of Australia. *Standard for the Storage of Non-Digital Archival Records*. Version 2.1, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/NAA-standard-for-the-storage-of-archival-records.PDF>

<sup>3</sup> NSW State Archives and Records. *Standard on the Physical Storage of State Records*. Retrieved from: <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/standard-the-physical-storage-state-records>