Caring for your Family Papers
Special Tips for Care and Handling of Paper Collections

Caring for our national collections at the National Library of Ireland is very similar to caring for your important family documents or collections of postcards, sport cards or books. Always remember prevention is better than cure! Here are small steps to help protect your collection from danger or loss and preserve them for many years to come.

Storage
- Keep in safe place - such as a spare room. Avoid storing your collection in a place like the attic or garage which are unsuitable as they can be dusty, damp, too hot or cold and have insects which may eat your collection!
- Place your collection in a storage box, envelope or folder; this will prevent it getting dirty or misplaced. Make sure the box is strong, clean and fits the collection as closely as possible.
- Remember not to overfill or under-fill your storage boxes and never use metal paper clips, pins, staples or rubber bands as these will damage paper very quickly.
- Keep away from strong light, as it will fade colours and cause the paper to become weak and age quickly. Just like you protect your skin from the sunshine, paper items (indeed all organic things) are best kept out of strong light, so close blinds, turn off lights and don’t put items where the sun can shine on them.
- Water can seriously damage paper collections; even damp places can cause mould to break out so store your collection away from risks of flood or leaks!

Handling and Use
- Careless handling can cause irreversible damage to paper collections as items can become torn, creased or stained very easily.
- Wash and fully dry your hands beforehand; dirty fingers can stain things! There are also oils in your fingertips which can stain collections so protective gloves are sometimes recommended for very old and precious items.
- Never lick your fingers before turning the pages.
- When moving your collection, use a portfolio case or carrying box, even a trolley!
- Always make sure you have enough space to view your collection and try not to have drink or food nearby as it might spill over and damage the items.
- Never repair your collection with glues or sticky-tape; this may cause more damage! This is because commercial glues and tapes are for short-term use and degrade very quickly. If you need to repair something valuable in your collection, it’s best to contact a conservator.
- It is best not to mark your items with inks, pens or markers. Instead use a pencil if you must record something as this can be easily removed.
- If you have a very important item, take a photograph copy of it to look at regularly or place it in protective cover. This will limit it being handled a lot.

More about preservation:
http://www.preservation.gc.ca/
This site is aimed at helping you care for and preserve your treasures, heirlooms, and works of art.

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/advice/default.htm
Scroll down the page to Advice and Guidance where you will find a series of printable and easy to understand leaflets which offer advice and guidance on the care of books, documents, and photographs in both public and private collections

More about conservation:
http://www.icriconservation.ie
If you have valuable items in need of repair you should contact a professional conservator working in private practice. On the Institute of Conservationists in Ireland website is a FIND A CONSERVATOR section which lists conservators currently working in Ireland.

http://www.conservationregister.com
Conservation Register provides information on the business's of accredited conservator-restorers in the UK and Ireland. Follow the link to the CARING FOR….section to view fact sheets on the care and conservation of a range of different materials or objects.

Supplier of archival materials:
www.conservationresources.com
www.preservationequipment.com
www.secol.co.uk  - Supplier of a ‘family history starter kit’
www.conservation-by-design.co.uk
www.ote.ie