



Preserving & Caring for Lodge Records

Why is it important to look after Lodge records?

Lodge records provide a permanent record of proceedings at meetings and include information about former members. They help to form the corporate memory of the organisation. Sadly, if this information disappears answers to questions such as why, who, when, where and how may be lost forever. Over time these records also provide unique information about local communities and may be of interest to those researching local history.

Although rules on preparing Lodge minute books are included in the Book of Constitutions under Rule 95, this guidance now provides specific advice on how to care for all Masonic records.

Why are Lodge records at risk?

Secretaries are the officers responsible for looking after the records of a Lodge. If the meeting place of the Lodge cannot offer space, storage of records in domestic situations can lead to damage and loss. Banks or other commercial storage facilities charge for storage, which may be unsuitable for paper-based records because of variable temperatures, or at risk from damp or water damage.

Loss or damage to Lodge records is usually preventable. It is important for Lodges to maintain and regularly check an inventory of their records.

Why does paper disintegrate?

Early Masonic certificates and some volumes are made of parchment. This is robust and will withstand considerable bad treatment. However most Lodge records are made from card or paper, and the quality of these can vary significantly.

Paper began to replace parchment as the preferred medium for documentation just as Freemasonry began to emerge in the late seventeenth century. Usually expensive and of good quality, paper was made initially from cellulose fibres derived from rags. As record keeping and levels of official bureaucracy and literacy expanded in the nineteenth century, the demand for cheaper paper escalated. Poor quality wood pulp papers, which contain lignin that converts to carboxylic acid, replaced their more expensive, rag counterparts.

Bulking materials were often added to wood pulp and the mix treated with various chemical catalysts to accelerate fibre disintegration. Bleaching agents were added to improve appearance. Therefore paper fibres include high acid concentrations, which accelerate self-



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destruction over time. Poor-quality paper, such as newsprint, ages to yellow or brown tones and pages split and disintegrate.

Various preservation methods prevent further deterioration. Damage can never be reversed entirely but specialist paper conservators can repair many documents. However, prevention is always better than cure.

How can we prevent damage to records?

Damage occurs when paper is stored in unsuitable conditions. Temperature fluctuations and exposure to heat, damp and pollution can accelerate its self-destruction and raise the risk of mould and pest damage.

Wherever possible, records should be stored in clean, dry (but not too hot) areas away from direct sunlight. Fire prevention measures should be considered and filters attached to air vents can eliminate harmful pollutants. The British Standard for storing archives recommends a stable relative humidity between 45-60%, with an average mean temperature between 16-19°C, but achieving these levels often requires specially designed storage facilities.

How can we protect records from further damage?

If providing a stable storage environment is achievable, placing volumes and papers in acid-free boxes can enhance the long-term preservation of records. Loose papers can be placed in acid-free folders within boxes, and items such as photographs and certificates placed in inert polyester sleeves.

Volumes too large for boxes should be stored flat on shelves, wrapped in acid-free paper. Metal, roll-edge shelving provides the best storage for boxes; do not stack more than two or three high. Documents damaged by surface dirt or smoke can be cleaned with care using smoke sponges or soft brushes. Always wear a mask when brushing mould spores and insects from documents. Replace metal paperclips and pins with brass paper clips that do not rust. Remove rubber bands and polythene pocket wallets. Handle fragile items with care – use thin cotton (not latex) gloves and wash hands regularly, especially when looking at photographs.

How can we find specialist help?

For help on coping with water-damaged documents, storage and repair contact an Archivist. Advice is also available from:

ARANZ: Archives and Records Association of NZ

PO Box 11-553,

Manners Street, Wellington.

<http://www.aranz.org.nz>



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General email: general.enquiries@dia.govt.nz
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What records should be kept?

Minute books
Signature books/Attendance registers
Declaration books
Membership registers/Record books
Lodge committee minute books and associated records
Account books
Clearance certificate counterfoils
Correspondence files
Annual returns
Collections of summons
Photographs and photograph albums
Lodge of Instruction: minute books, membership registers, account books
Petty cash records, comprising cheque stubs, invoices, etc should be destroyed securely after seven years. Retain a copy of all year-end Annual Reports and Statement of Accounts.

Can anyone help look after our records?

The Grand Lodge Library and Museum does care for significant historical records including some for the records of erased Lodges but space to care for records is precious, especially for records of active ones.

As compliance with recommended standards for archive storage is difficult to achieve, one solution recommended, is for Lodges to deposit records with their local museum. The reason for this is that the Lodge is a part of the local history and anyone doing historical research will try the local museum first before looking to any national based facility. Check first that the local museum will catalogue the records and make them available for public research. Ask too about the minimum closure periods to protect the Data Protection rights of members. Also check their protocols on records being withdrawn on loan enabling them to be consulted by Lodge members in the repository's search room.

Depositing such records represents a valuable contribution by freemasons in providing additional resources for local history. Busy Secretaries could then refer requests for genealogical information about former members to local record offices.



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How can digitisation help?

Some Lodges have decided to digitise their records – this helps to preserve fragile, original records. Digitisation can offer searchable access to records if bespoke software technology is applied to index images. Digitising records before conservation or depositing them with local record offices ensures continued access for members to information. Do not destroy the original records – use digital versions as surrogate copies.

Storing images and documents, such as Lodge minutes, on CD ROMs and other electronic storage devices, creates unexpected problems. Information and images recorded in digital formats must be managed actively, not passively, to ensure they remain accessible over time. New versions of software (such as Excel, Word etc) and hardware (a disc, laptops, hard drives etc) may cause documents created in older formats to become unreadable or obsolete.

Digitised data must be stored on discs of good quality and migrated every five years to avoid damage such as digi-loss. Update or migrate records written in older software programmes to the latest version on a regular basis to ensure they can still be read. Preservation guidance also suggests copying data in alternative formats as a back-up for digital storage.

How should Lodges record minutes and other records?

Few Lodges now maintain handwritten minutes but many continue to use bound minute books, which remain in use for many years. Word-processed minutes, together with summonses, copies of accounts and reports, are attached to pages. As a result, book blocks distort and separate from covers, overfull volumes are difficult to store and transport and they become vulnerable to damage. Self-adhesive tape, pins or glue used to attach sheets can damage pages or disintegrate over time, resulting in the loss of loose sheets.

Documents created by laser printers are more robust than those created by jet printers, whose inks may not be stable. Try the following test – if ink smears when a damp (not wet) cloth is run over a sample test page it is unstable and therefore not permanent.

Two recommendations for the maintenance of good minutes:

1. Slim line skeleton minute books into which minutes printed on permanent paper can be glued.
2. Minutes printed on permanent paper can be kept securely in a 4-post lockable binder and then bound into volumes.

In addition:

- Only glue such as Pritt stick or an inert cold-water, starch-based paste should be used for pasting loose sheets into minute books (powder to which water is added).
- Self-adhesive tapes, such as Sellotape, or other solvent-based adhesives should not be used
- Brass paperclips not metal pins should be used
- Each page of loose-leaf minutes should be initialled by the Master and Secretary.

