



Comhairle Contae **Lú**
Louth County Council

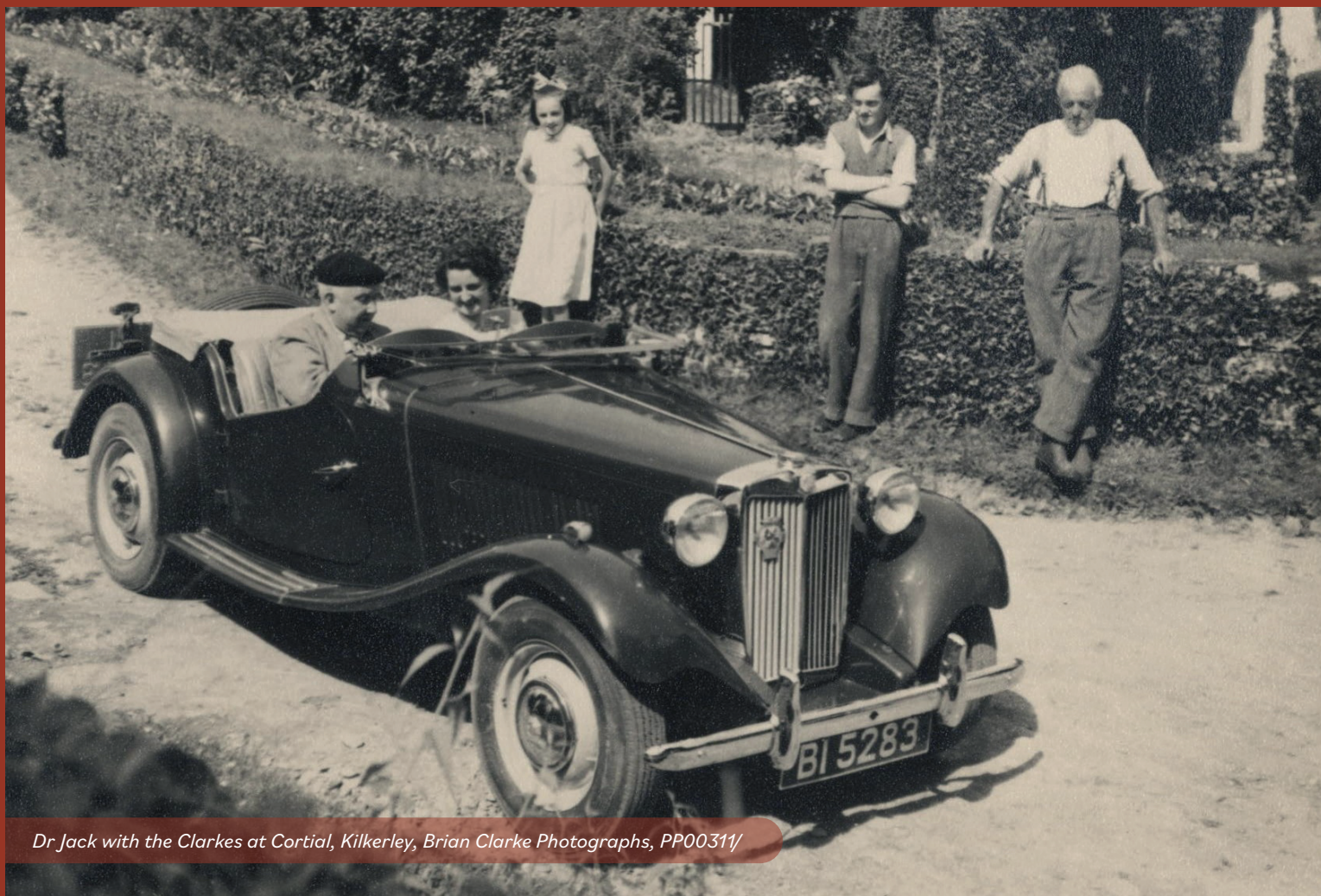
ARCHIVES

SÉIRIÍS CARLAINNE CHONTAE LÚ



LOUTH COUNTY ARCHIVES SERVICE

Caring for Your Family Archives



Dr Jack with the Clarkes at Cortial, Kilkenny, Brian Clarke Photographs, PP00311/

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All archives and images used in this publication are from the archive collections of Louth County Archives Service. Archives are protected by copyright and should not be reproduced without permission. We acknowledge the support and generosity of many individuals and organisations that have donated or deposited archive collections in the County Archives. These collections are of cultural, historical and social importance to our county and can be preserved whilst enabling present and future generations to have access to them.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Where to store your family papers	3
What to store your family papers in	4
Documenting the box contents	5
How to care for and store...	6
Papers	6
Maps and Plans	7
Books	8
Photographs	9
Dos and Don'ts	11
Conservation materials	11
Conservation advice	11
Donating archives	12
Preparing archives for donation	14

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has family or personal archives. These may include birth, marriage and death certificates, photographs and albums, letters, diaries, legal documents, property deeds, maps and plans, certificates of exams or awards, passports and licences, newspaper cuttings or articles, scrapbooks, postcards, leaflets and other ephemera that are important to us. Your family or personal archives are unique and irreplaceable and for this reason, you should treat them with care.

There are two types of damage that we have some control over: environmental and physical. Environmental damage occurs because of how or where documents are kept. Physical damage occurs because of how they are handled. This

guide will essentially deal with environmental and physical damage. A third type of damage, chemical, is to do with damage from within the document due to its make-up such as cheap acidic paper. Exposure to dampness, mould, insects, direct sunlight or too much heat can easily damage documents, as can bad handling, having dirty hands, or consuming food or beverages near documents.

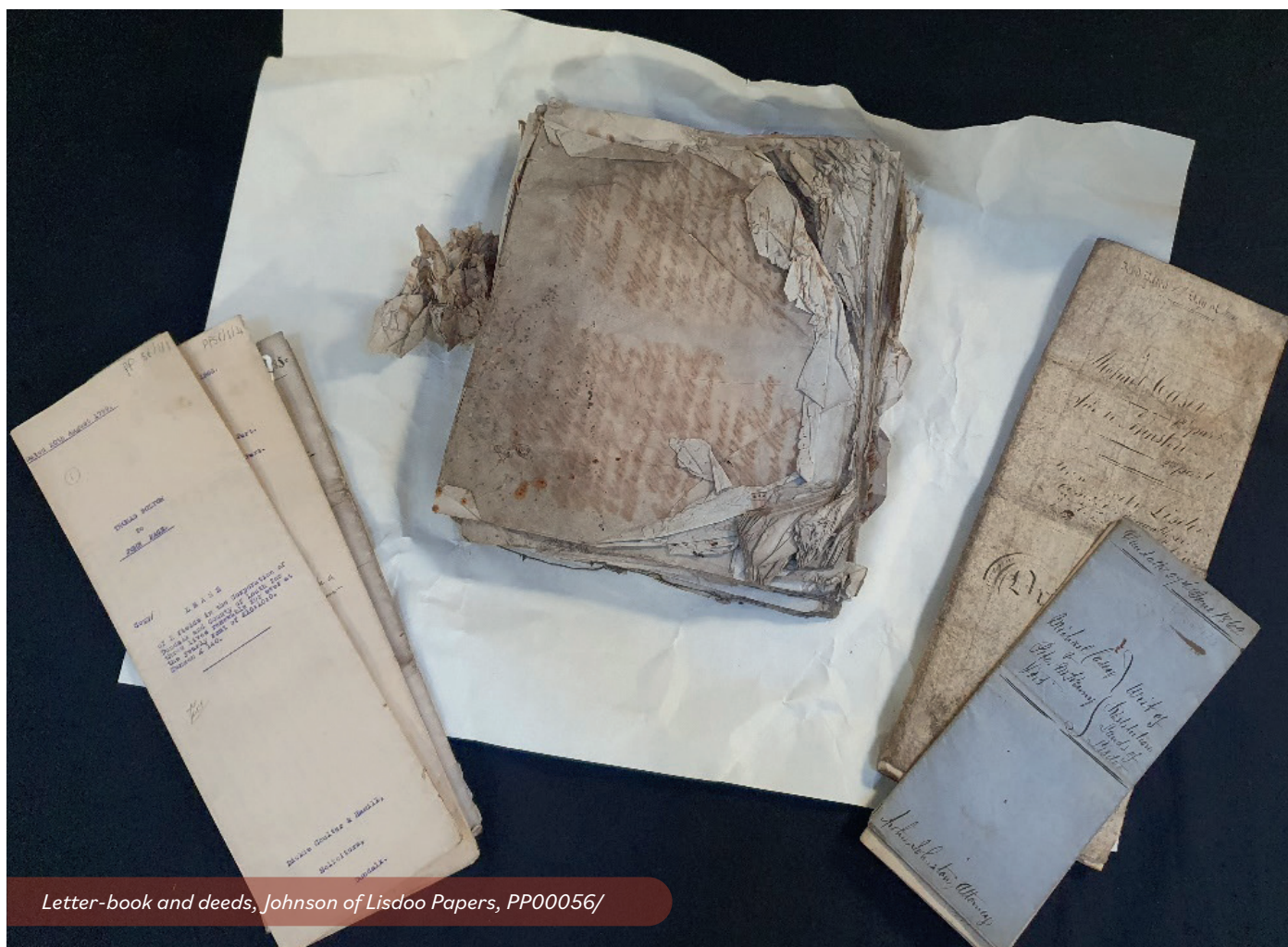
This guide includes some advice and guidelines on caring for your family archives such as where to store them and how to care for them and if you or your community group have a collection that you would like to donate to the County Archives, there is a note on preparing archives for donation.



WHERE TO STORE YOUR FAMILY PAPERS

It is recommended to store archives in a constant temperature between 13-18°C and 45-60% relative humidity, which is a measurement of how damp or dry the air is. In other words, for archives in our homes this means a cool dry place. Attics, basements and sheds should be avoided as they can get cold and damp in winter and hot and dry in summer. A suitable place might be in a dining room, a bedroom, or a spare room. Windows,

pipes and potential sources of leaks or floods should be kept at a good distance if possible. Direct sunlight damages documents and should be avoided. You should aim to keep the storage conditions stable and consistent as fluctuations can cause damage. A high relative humidity supports the growth of mould, while a low relative humidity can be too dry and cause brittleness in paper.



Letter-book and deeds, Johnson of Lisdoon Papers, PP00056/

WHAT TO STORE YOUR FAMILY PAPERS IN

Good storage materials are important for protecting your papers against dust, light, improper handling, movement of papers, unforeseen damage or items getting lost. They also support fragile documents. Whilst it would be ideal that any storage or packaging material in contact with an original document be of archival quality*, this is often not feasible for everyone at home. Instead try to use a good quality box that has a base and lid and is of a size that the documents can fit into without being squashed. Avoid metal or tin boxes as these will corrode and damage the documents and avoid wooden boxes as these can have adhesives. Make sure to clearly label the box and store it flat inside a cabinet or drawer deep enough to hold it without any catching.

If you have fragile documents, protect them inside a paper folder which can be made from an A3 or A4 sheet of paper folded in half. You could also place inside the box any silica gel sachets that you get when you buy certain products such as shoes, to absorb any excess moisture or you can purchase an indicating silica gel. If you find when you check your box that the silica gel is hard and solid, then it has absorbed moisture and you need to replace it or store your box somewhere else with less moisture in the air.

*Archival quality material is sometimes referred to as conservation quality material. This means it is acid-free and if it is not clearly stated, the product is not likely to be of archival quality. If you are not sure, approved suppliers can supply details of what their product is made from. Products may include acid-free folders, boxes, paper or board for making folders and boxes or enclosures for wrapping or protection. Whilst being able to use archival quality material may not be achievable in the short-term, it is something you could try to obtain in the future.

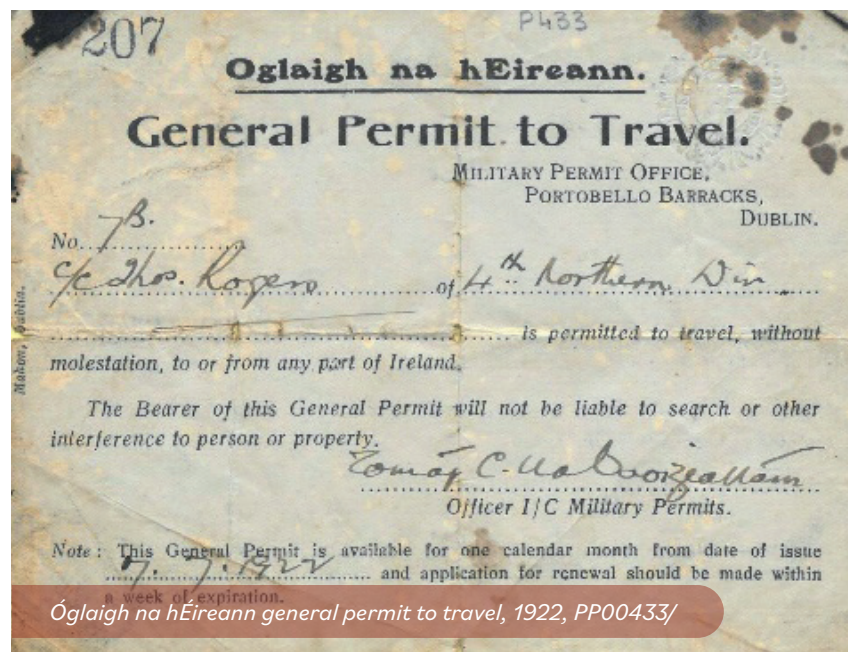
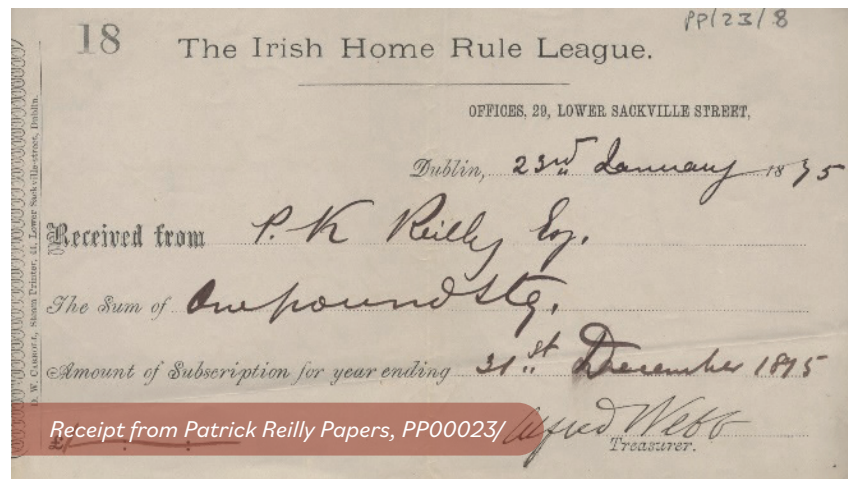


Great Northern Railway (Ireland) hand-bills, PP00258/

DOCUMENTING THE BOX CONTENTS

Be sure to make a list of what is in the box with relevant names, places, and dates. If dates are not known, include approximate dates in square brackets to indicate uncertainty. You could also note why you are keeping an item if it seems more unusual or note its importance. Making a list is important for keeping items organised and this will help in their preservation. It will also help others know what documents are there. You can place the list inside the box and you may keep a second copy as a backup. If there are letters which are precious to you or handwritten notes on the backs of photographs, you could write or type up a copy of it. This transcript can act as a preservation security copy.

You could also make a copy of your documents by photographing them. Copies can be used for display, to give to other family members, for handling purposes while the original is preserved or for keeping as a security copy. Remember to photograph the back of documents that may have notes on them such as photographs.



HOW TO CARE FOR & STORE: PAPERS

- Handle items with clean hands as the text can be obscured. Natural oils on the skin can also cause dirt from hands to become ingrained into the paper making it very difficult, if not impossible to remove. So wash your hands first and if they become dirty, wash them again.
- Store items in a cool, dark place that is free from insects and damp and where the temperature and relative humidity are fairly consistent. Sharp fluctuations in either of these can cause mould to grow and damage the papers. Ensure there is a free circulation of air.
- Store items flat rather than folded to avoid damage.
- Remove all the following from your papers as these cause damage: steel paper clips, staples, pins, rubber bands, and pink legal tape. If necessary, use inert plastic paper clips or brass paper clips to hold papers together.
- Remove dry mould spores by lightly brushing off with a soft brush in a well-ventilated room or outdoors. A face mask should be worn when doing so to avoid inhaling mould spores.
- Do not use Sellotape as this only breaks down in time, leaving a residue and further damage.
- Ensure items are stored in polyester pockets, paper, folders, and boxes of archival quality

where possible. Envelopes and folders that are not of archival quality contain acid which can cause paper to deteriorate over time.

- **Newspapers** should be stored flat in a folder or box away from other items as they can be highly acidic. Newspapers and posters are made from low-grade paper and degrade quickly and become brittle.
- **Photocopies** should also be stored in acid free paper / folders as this will help to stop acid migrating from the paper. Photocopies should not be stored in plastic wallets as the plastic breaks down in time and will lift the ink off photocopies.
- **Old Faxes:** Because of the chemicals in the early fax paper that came on rolls, photocopy faxes onto acid-free paper and throw the originals away. You will probably need to photocopy at the darkest setting.

Turning Fragile double-sided documents: Place it on a sheet of card so that you can read one side and when you need to read the other side, place another sheet of card on top of the document. The carefully turn everything over and remove the new top sheet of card.

HOW TO CARE FOR & STORE: MAPS AND PLANS

- If they are small, they should be stored flat.
- Large maps or plans should be rolled around, not in, a cardboard tube with a diameter of

at least 7.5cm or 3", after first "sandwiching" it between layers of acid free paper or inert polyester.



'The Moorings', Dundalk, architectural plans, PP00207/

HOW TO CARE FOR & STORE: BOOKS

When being open and closed, dirt and dust can be introduced to the pages of a book. The covers are there to protect these pages. To keep your books in good condition:

- Keep books out of direct sunlight and away from direct heat.
- Do not store books in areas of high humidity such as conservatories, near airing cupboards or places where condensation forms.
- Do not allow books to be touching cover to cover. This will cause the covers to rub. Separate them using acid free archival quality paper or board.
- Store large or heavy books on their side so that the text block does not tear away from the covers.
- Dust books with a soft haired brush or use a low suction vacuum cleaner regularly to avoid a build-up of dust and dirt on areas like the spine.
- Books can be boxed for protection; try to use archival quality that fits exactly the book's dimensions.
- If any pages are loose, keep them in the original order. If the board is loose, hold it in place by wrapping it in clean linen or use unbleached linen or cotton tape 2cm wide if available. Tie the knot on the side to prevent damage.
- Remove any bookmarks or foreign materials as these can cause staining due to the paper or inks used. If they are important, note their location, remove them and keep them safe in an envelope.
- Use a bookmark to follow the text, rather than fingers which may darken the print.
- When removing a book from a shelf, avoid handling it by the top of the spine; always grip it firmly around the middle. To do so, you may need to push in the books on either side of it.
- Open books carefully and only as far as the binding will allow without force. Do not force open the cover of a book if it is stiff – many books with a stiff structure may not open beyond 90 degrees. Use a pillow or cushion to support the book. Close books when not in use.
- Turn the pages of a book with great care to avoid tearing and do not lick your fingers to turn a page.

HOW TO CARE FOR & STORE: PHOTOGRAPHS

- When handling photographs, never touch the emulsion side of the photographic image. If possible, wear cotton lint-free gloves or use clean paper to handle the photograph. The oil on our hands is impossible to remove.
- Avoid the readily available photo albums for storage, especially those with sticky adhesive pages. Use polyester pocket albums instead.
- Use a pencil to identify photographs.
- If you can control the temperature and relative humidity, black & white photographs should be stored ideally between 11°-15°C and a relative humidity between 30-40%, whereas between 8°C - 12°C is advised for contemporary colour prints and film. It should be kept consistent. Humidity above 60% speeds deterioration while very low humidity can cause prints to crack, peel or curl, as it promotes chemical change in the photographic image. Therefore, keep photographs away from attics and basements and areas where there is a risk of fire or flood.
- Photographic material should not be exposed to any rapid changes. There should be gradual acclimatisation to room temperature, which should be lowered again gradually after use.
- Light levels should also be controlled – photographic material should be kept away from daylight particularly when in storage and artificial light should be kept to a minimum. Viewing time should also be kept minimal. Continued exposure to light will result in the image fading.
- Avoid exposure to anything containing sulphur dioxide, fresh paint fumes, plywood, cardboard, and fumes from cleaning supplies. Photographs should be stored in proper enclosures of an archival quality e.g., plastic or paper materials, which are free from sulphur, acids, and peroxides. If the relative humidity cannot be controlled consistently below 80%, plastic enclosures should not be used because photographs may stick to the surface of the plastic.
- In particular, avoid acidic paper envelopes and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic, rubber bands, paper clips, and poor-quality adhesives such as pressure sensitive tapes. Buffered enclosures are preferred for deteriorated photographic prints on poor-quality mounts.
- Use a puffer or a very soft brush to clean photographs. Take great care not to use anything firmer that could scratch the emulsion surface.
- For good preservation of photographs, make a copy and keep the original properly packaged and stored.



Builders at Lennon Melia Terrace, Dundalk, 1947, PP00168/



Friary National School class photograph, 1931, PP00272/

DOS AND DON'TS

- **DO** protect documents and books from food, drink, and dirt.
- **DO** ensure that the table you use is clean and clear with enough space to open documents without risk of damage.
- **DO** wash your hands before handling documents.
- **DO** store items flat and in archival quality (acid-free) products where possible.
- **DO** ensure that the temperature is reasonably stable in your storage area.
- **DO** use a pencil if making notes.
- **DO** seek the professional advice of a conservator if any item requires repair.
- **DON'T** handle items more than is necessary.
- **DON'T** expose items to direct heat or light.
- **DON'T** store items in attics or basements which are susceptible to damp or rapid temperature fluctuations.
- **DON'T** use plastic bags, polythene or PVC plastic envelopes as these contain plasticizers and degrade.
- **DON'T** use Sellotape or other pressure sensitive tape as it damages archives in time.
- **DON'T** use newspaper to wrap documents in as it is very acidic.
- **DON'T** attempt any repair yourself - you could further damage the item.

CONSERVATION MATERIALS

The Archives Service can provide addresses of suppliers for acid-free paper and folders, archival paper clips, etc if required.

CONSERVATION ADVICE

If you have important items in need of repair, you may wish to ask a paper or book conservator for advice. The Institute of Conservator-Restorers in Ireland have a 'find a conservator' page on their website: <https://www.icriconservation.ie/>

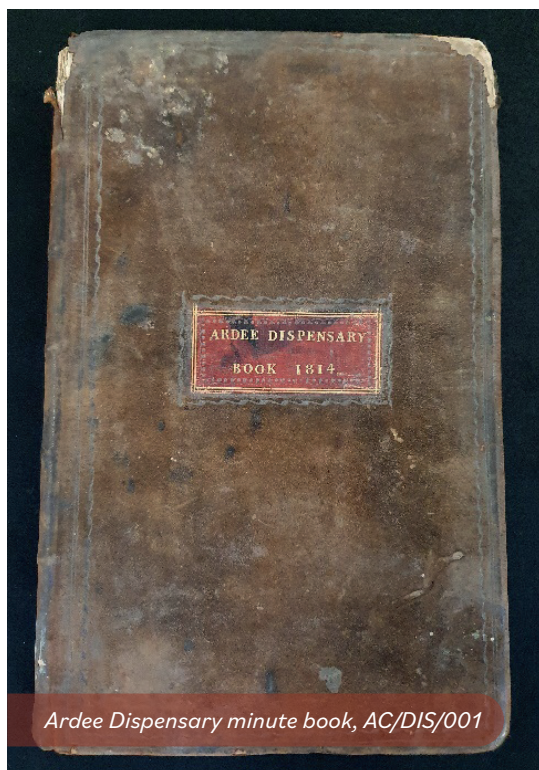
It is important not to allow people to eat or drink near documents and to ensure that table-top surfaces are clean and dry before placing archives on them. If hands are clean and dry before handling, gloves are not required. Otherwise wear clean cotton, nitrile, or latex gloves.

DONATING ARCHIVES

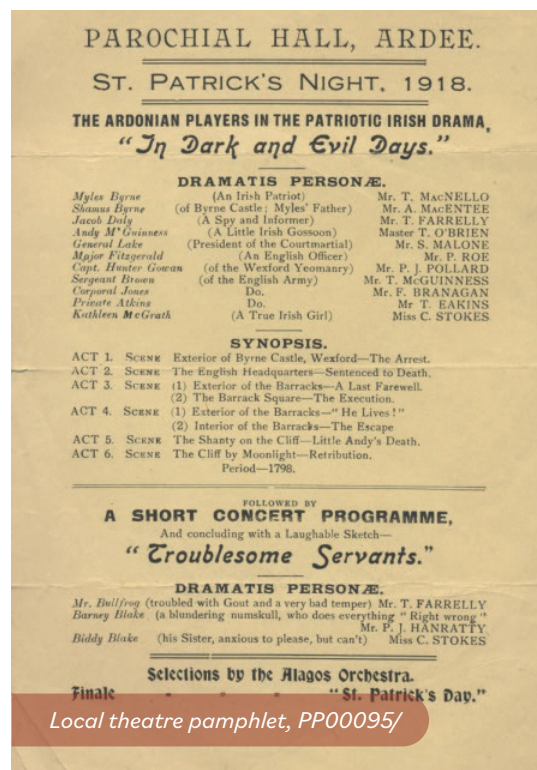
The County Archives is interested in acquiring archives and records that relate to all aspects of the development of County Louth. The Service welcomes such archives from community groups, clubs or societies, individuals, organisations, national schools, election campaigning, solicitors or other businesses. If you or your community group has a collection that you would like to donate, please contact the service. Our local archive collections are of social and historical importance and through preserving them for the future we are creating unique and valuable research sources for the study of Louth and its people.

Donating to Louth County Archives ensures that the archives are:

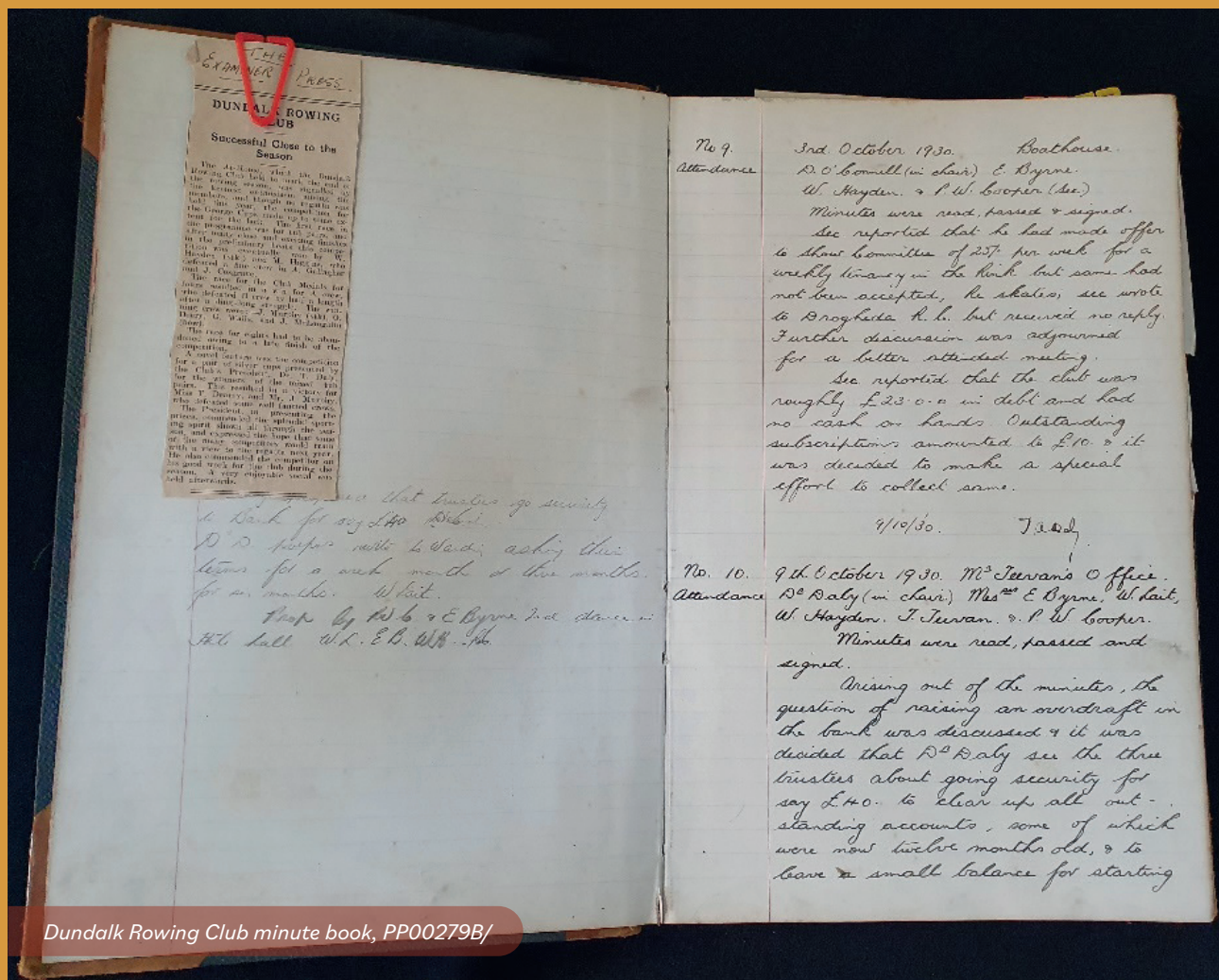
- Kept in secure storage with good environmental conditions.
- Catalogued and arranged in accordance with archival standards.
- Assessed for conservation problems that can be treated as resources allow.
- Protected from alteration ensuring the integrity and reliability of information is safeguarded.
- Preserved permanently and protected from any future accidental or intentional destruction.



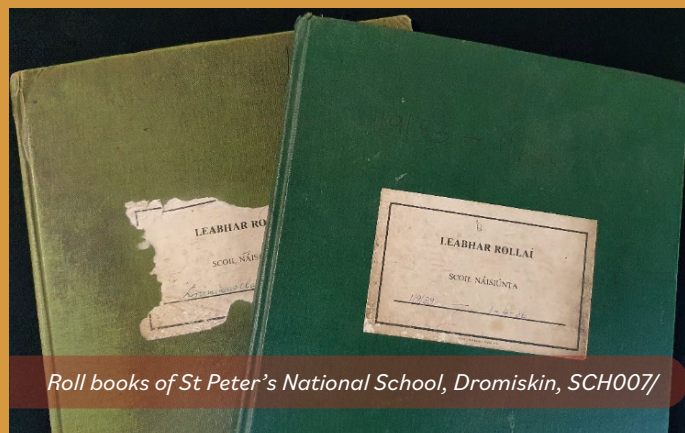
Ardee Dispensary minute book, AC/DIS/001



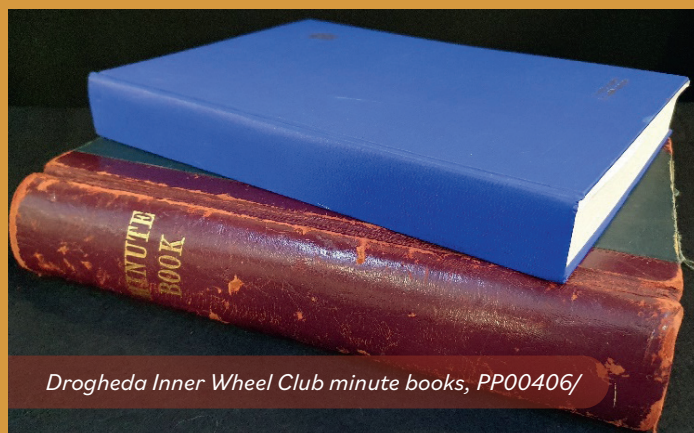
Local theatre pamphlet, PP00095/



Dundalk Rowing Club minute book, PP00279B/



Roll books of St Peter's National School, Dromiskin, SCH007/



Drogheda Inner Wheel Club minute books, PP00406/

■ PREPARING ARCHIVES FOR DONATION

It is important to keep the archives in the order in which they were placed by the organization or individual that created the archives, if this still exists, as it can help a researcher to understand the context and the relationship between the documents. If you are unsure if they are still in their original order, it is best to retain the existing order as it is. Archives created by one organization or branch of a club should also not be intermixed with those of any other.

You can prepare your archive collection for donation by making a list of the items. Briefly describe each item, e.g. minute book of (name club) or accounts book of fundraising committee, or group of letters from A to B about (name topic). Remember to include dates and where you are uncertain about a date, put it in square brackets. For photographs include names from left to right where possible. Remember to keep the physical photographs (and all the other archival items) in the same order as in your list. This list will be of great assistance in knowing what you have and in assessing if it is suitable for donation. When it is completed, you can place your items in packaging and boxes as per the guidelines in this booklet. You can give a copy of the list of items to the County Archives when you donate your collection. It will be consulted by the Archivist when accessioning the collection and when writing up the final descriptive list or catalogue.

■ CONNECT WITH A NEIGHBOUR

You could telephone a neighbour and have a chat about the history of the club or organization that the archives relate to. You could talk about when it first started and how that came about, who was involved, or events that were held. Make some notes and include this with your list of items. Please only retrieve archives from storage or a community building when the COVID-19 restrictions allow and always adhere to the Government's health and safety guidelines if you are working together with a neighbour.

Included throughout this guide are photographs of items from archive collections that have previously been donated to the County Archives. We hope you enjoy caring for your family archives.