

Care of Photographs & Digital Prints

The strands of our history are woven into the tapestry that is our heritage



Photographs are a unique visual history which document Parish life and work including those Ministers and Lay people who have faithfully served over the years. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that we do our utmost to ensure the survival of such a fragile and unique visual resource.

Any special Parish event demands the obligatory display of photographs and ephemera. A well-kept and maintained Parish photographic collection will always provide you with a valuable resource for a wonderful display which will be appreciated and enjoyed by all – and more importantly, in the future.

Images from rural and city parishes may document not only Church life but also the social life, work and environment of the wider rural and urban community around it, the Church often being the focal point of such communities and of those who lived within its bounds. In some cases, photographs can also record events and activities where little or no written record survives.

If you hold and choose to retain a parish photographic collection you are the custodians of a unique resource that by its very fragile and intrinsically unstable nature will always demand your constant care and attention.

Placing your collection in the Presbyterian Archives for preservation and protection is an option that we encourage. We follow International photographic preservation standards. There is no mandatory charge for this service and the ownership of the images remains with the parish.

Purpose of this Guide Sheet

This guide sheet is designed to give you easy to follow basic and cost effective guidelines on how to ensure that you can slow down the inevitable deterioration of photographs and assist in preserving this valuable resource for the future. The normal life expectancy of a colour photograph, under normal storage conditions, is just 50 years with a black and white photograph at over 75 years. Many factors such as handling, environment, and even the quality of the original developing and printing of the image can affect the ultimate permanency of each image, some colour prints have not even lasted 20 years.

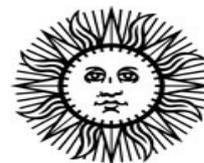
Applying basic storage and handling guidelines will however greatly assist in the preservation of your Parish photographs. These guidelines are also useful for the care and preservation of personal photographic collections.



Rev & Mrs Dalrymple in the Puerua Manse Library, c.1900-10

Many Factors Affect the Stability and Permanency of Photographs

- ❖ Exposure to light
- ❖ Chemical reactions
- ❖ Humidity and temperature
- ❖ Inappropriate storage
- ❖ Inappropriate handling
- ❖ Risk of fire/water/insects/vermin
- ❖ Unqualified attempts at preservation





Effects of Individual Factors

Exposure to Light

- ❖ All photographs will eventually fade if exposed to light due to the harmful effect of ultraviolet light. Colour photographs, digital prints and polaroids can fade very quickly under light due to unstable chemical processes and dyes.
- ❖ Photographs, especially colour images, should never as a rule spend more than 3 months on display and never in direct sunlight. Even artificial lighting will cause noticeable fading over a reasonably short period of time.
- ❖ Place a copy on display and save the original for posterity.

Chemical Reactions (Fading, Yellowing & Silvering)

- ❖ Photographic images may yellow and/or fade, crack and even flake. A 'mirror' like shine and/or mould spots/staining can also appear. These (often inevitable) chemical processes are usually hastened by inappropriate storage conditions, especially damp and humidity.



An historic 1883 image of Dunrobin Church showing the irreversible effects of fading and mould spotting.

Humidity & Temperature



- ❖ Inappropriate storage temperatures hasten adverse chemical reactions in photographs.
- ❖ Photographs, slides and cine film should be kept in a ventilated, dark, cool, dry, storage area. The storage area should not be exposed to excessive extremes of heat and cold or sudden extreme changes in temperatures. Normal room temperatures are best (13° to 25°max), neither damp or humid and thus prone to mould growth, or excessively dry which will cause images and negatives to become brittle.
- ❖ Small safes are not recommended storage areas for photographs due to poor circulation of air.

Inappropriate Storage

- ❖ Photos placed loose in boxes are prone to damage from mishandling and may be stored in direct contact with acidic materials such as cardboard which can be very harmful to photographs. Old brittle photos when stored loosely have no support against the risk of cracking. Place them in acid-free albums or in acid-free photographic enclosures. Board mounted photographs should be stacked with issue between each to prevent scratching on the image.
- ❖ Framed photographs should, if at all possible, be taken out of their frames. Old frames can harbour dust, dirt, mould, silverfish, insects and borer and the lignin in wood frames can stain photographs.
- ❖ If a photograph has stuck to the glass, do not attempt to remove it but seek advice from the Presbyterian Archives as regards appropriate storage.
- ❖ Photographs in original albums are often best left as they are.
- ❖ Photographs in plastic albums with adhesive or magnetic type pages should always be removed if this can be safely done without damaging the prints. Photographs should never be placed in these albums – they are very acidic and harmful to photos. **Be warned!**

An image of George W. Guthrie showing the effects of water & damp



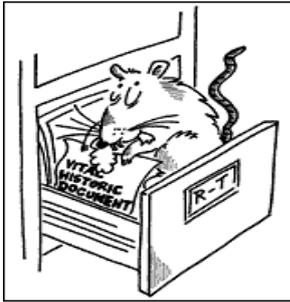
- ❖ Use of rubber bands, paper clips (of any kind), glue, blue tack, sellotape, velcro pads or any adhesive directly on photographs should be avoided as they cause irreparable damage. Use photo corners whenever possible.
- ❖ Panoramic photographs which have been stored flat or in picture frames should never be rolled up as irreparable creasing and cracking will almost always occur.
- ❖ Avoid damp and/or humid storage conditions.
- ❖ Avoid proximity to harmful pollutants such as smoke from open fires, dust, gas heaters, and even photocopiers.

Handling Photographs

- ❖ Photographs should not be handled with bare hands as the natural grease on hands damages images and will leave permanent marks which are not always initially visible. Use soft cotton gloves (we can supply ordering details) or carefully hold images by the edges.
- ❖ Original images should never be left out for public perusal. Original photos used in Parish displays should be covered with non-adhesive clear plastic or behind barriers. It is unfortunately human nature to touch photographs as we endeavour to point out people or objects - all damage is cumulative!
- ❖ Photos in original albums are often placed on opposing pages and can rub and catch on each other as the pages are turned. View with great care or use an acid-free liner between pages (such as acid-free tissue) but ensure that the added thickness added to albums does not cause stress on the album spine.
- ❖ Do not attempt to separate images which have stuck together nor attempt to unroll and flatten out rolled up images if the image is at all likely to crack or crease. Seek professional guidance.
- ❖ Do not write on the back of photographs. Writing will always leave clearly visible marks which appear quite obvious on the image side of modern glossy prints. Write details on sheets of good quality writing paper and fold around each photo. When placed in an album transcribe the details onto the album page.
- ❖ Photocopying is harmful to photographs however laser printing and scanning carries less of a risk if kept to a minimum.
- ❖ Glass plates negatives, slides and cine film require special storage. Contact the Archives for further advice.



Risk of Fire/Water/Insects/Vermin



- ❖ In the event of a fire or water sprinklers being actuated, is your collection as secure as possible?
- ❖ Photographs and albums can also be subject to attack by silverfish and mice. We have the tell-tale 'evidence' to prove it!

Unqualified Attempts at Preservation

- ❖ Torn loose prints should not be taped together if it can be avoided and then only with archival grade document repair tape. Usually they are best left as they are but placed in an album.
- ❖ Sellotape on photos will leave permanent stains and/or a sticky residue.
- ❖ If absolutely necessary, lightly dust dirty images with a soft clean cotton cloth or brush lightly with a camera lens cleaning brush to remove dust and mould, however test a small portion first if possible. Do not use a damp cloth or any chemicals. If in doubt, seek professional guidance first.

Photographic Collection and Preservation Guidelines

- ❖ Appoint a person to be responsible for taking and gathering parish photographs
- ❖ Actively canvass your congregation for parish related photographs to add to your collections
- ❖ Complete a detailed inventory of parish photographs. Gather as much information as possible about each photograph, such as why they were taken, names dates, location etc. Involve others in this information gathering project, you will be surprised at the interest generated.
- ❖ Place photographs in archival grade albums or enclosures. Plastic 'pocket' albums are acceptable for short-term storage only unless made from "melinex" or "Mylar" which are chemically inert.
- ❖ Is your photographic collection adequately and securely stored in a dry cool environment?
- ❖ Photographs should be stored in boxes with firm lids to avoid the accumulation of dust, however air vents at the side will allow air to freely circulate.
- ❖ Laminating original photographs can hasten their deterioration and should always be avoided.

- ❖ Brittle photos (if not in albums) should always be placed in acid-free enclosures to support the image.
- ❖ If a photographic copy is offered to you, endeavour to tactfully obtain the original instead. Each time an image is copied some detail and/or resolution is lost.

Tips for preserving digital photos

- ❖ Back up your digital photos in case the original files are lost.
- ❖ Keep your photos in JPEG or preferably TIFF format.
- ❖ Label CD-ROMs and disks clearly and systematically.
- ❖ Store CD-ROMs and disks carefully. Have a dedicated space for the storage of your computer disks. Make sure this is away from light, heat, moisture and magnetic fields.
- ❖ Check files, CD-ROMs and disks regularly to ensure they are still readable.
- ❖ Get prints made of the best photographs. Digital photos are no substitute for the real thing which you can hold and pass around.



Displaying photographs

It is possible to prolong the life of a photographic image by following several simple guidelines:

- ❖ If photographs are to be on permanent display always use a copy and save the original for posterity.
- ❖ Use acid-free materials to give greater protection when framing your photographs. It is helpful to seek advice from a professional framer
- ❖ Avoid hanging photographs in direct sunlight or near heating units as images fade and/or deteriorate more quickly.
- ❖ Hang photographs in places where they will not be knocked or bumped.

For further information:

Contact Donald Cochrane – Curator of Photographs

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Presbyterian Archives Research Centre
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Technical information in this guide sheet has been obtained from a number of published and Internet sources.