



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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ARCHIVES

Thomas Jefferson who helped draw up the American Declaration of Independence said "History by apprising men of the past, will enable them to judge the future."

Many lodges possess a great number of historical documents such as minute books, Installation cards, Lodge histories; and it is a matter of considerable regret that so many of these records lie to-day, neglected and half forgotten in the most inhospitable and unsavoury conditions. These records often contain not only valuable information relating to the Lodge itself but also to Freemasonry generally. Some Lodges may be unaware of the exact nature of the records in their possession and may not be aware of the special care that is needed to ensure their preservation.

Mould spores are always present in the air and are capable of lying dormant for long periods until environmental conditions are favourable. Mould and mildew are recognisable by the powdery colonies of spores which they form on infected materials. Leather, starches, glues and cellulose fibres in paper are particularly susceptible to mould attack. If allowed to flourish Mould can cause severe staining, obliterate images and even reduce paper to a crumbling pulp.

The most important single factor affecting mould growth is humidity. Hence the most effective way to prevent mould growth is to insure that the relative humidity remains stable. Other factors encouraging mould growth include, dust build-up, warm conditions, darkness, and bad ventilation. The combination of these factors is a certain recipe for disaster. Good housekeeping procedures will go a long way to preventing mould growth. Ensure that valuable items, Minute books etc. are kept in well ventilated areas, clean and free of dust.

The best way of preserving our history is to house these records minute books Installation cards etc in the controlled atmosphere of the Grand Lodge Archives, where they will be cared for by a trained archivist and will be available for consultation at a moments notice. Unfortunately there have already been instances where the only existing records of our early history have been lost either as a result of fire or water damage or simply because they have been mislaid, lost, or inadvertently destroyed.

Much of our early history has been retained by Lodge Secretaries and when these men pass on, this history is often mistaken for "old rubbish" by the widow and is relegated to the garbage tip. Most of the records that still survive have already begun to deteriorate it will not be long before they too will be lost to us, if we do nothing to halt the decay process, by housing this history in the controlled environment of the Archives.

There is little doubt that unless we take steps now to preserve a record of our day to day activities when, by the passing of time these activities become history, no record of them will be available.

Unless we act now to halt this decay there will be no history for us to use in the future and our early history will be lost to us, we must take steps to-day to halt the decay of our early historical records

by housing them all in the controlled environment provided by the Archives.

Since the setting-up of the Archives in 1991 The Archivist and his helpers have stored and recorded both on card and computer, over 300,000 articles of Masonic Memorabilia and have recorded the whereabouts of many thousands more; everything has been recorded both on reference cards and on computer disk, and can be located in a matter of minutes.

A controlled environment is probably beyond the means of most Lodges and, until these records can be lodged in the Archives on the 3rd floor of the Masonic Centre we need to take a look at what can be realistically provided by those Lodges, with out undue cost.

The environment in which we store our records is critical, there must be adequate humidity, lighting and air purity should be kept within reasonable limits.

We need to encourage the discontinuance of the use of plated steel staples, because of the damage that can be caused by rust. Instead we should use monel metal or stainless-steel staples, or better still, cotton stitching.

Great care is needed in the use of adhesives and adhesive tapes methyl-cellulose is considered the best adhesive for use with paper though P.V.A. is also considered suitable. Cellulose tape, commonly known as 'Scotch Tape' or 'Cello tape' should never be used for repairing or attaching anything to paper as these tapes become brittle with age and the rubber resin adhesive leaves a yellow brown stain, which is almost impossible to remove, the adhesive on the tape eventually dries out and the tape falls off. Polyethylene and polypropylene tape, commonly known as 'magic repair tape', uses long-lived long lived acrylic adhesive which does not oxidise with age and which is claimed not to discolour.

The ink in ball-point pens is spirit based and will fade, sometimes, within a few months. This also applies to felt pens. In making lasting records it is desirable to use a permanent ink, rather than a ball-point pen.

There is a natural tendency for us to consider that information recorded on paper will be more or less permanent, but unfortunately this is not the case. Unless paper is specially treated it starts to deteriorate from the moment of its manufacture.

The use of wood in place of linen and rags, as a main source of fibre in paper production, since about 1850 has been identified as the most probable reason for the increased rate of deterioration observed since then, wood fibres, being shorter than those of linen or rag result in a weaker physical structure, in addition impurities in the pulp and chemicals used in the manufacturing process can also leave a residual acidity in the paper, making it more prone to deterioration.

The problem of halting or at least significantly retarding the deterioration of our Lodge records is one of considerable magnitude since most of them are likely to be on unstable paper which is

frequently of poor quality. It is not only hand written records that are in danger but also those that are typewritten or are copies which has produced an image that is easily erased by contact with other surfaces.

Ideally one would like to preserve all our important documents. The embrittlement, discolouration, spotting or 'foxing' and the disintegration of paper are all evidence of acids in both the paper and inks used.

The preservation of documents is a specialised field too costly and too specialised to be undertaken by Lodges, most of whom have neither the expertise nor the money to undertake such an expensive conservation project and apart from the current Minute book, all Lodge records should be housed in the Grand Lodge Archives; under the care of an experienced Archivist and his helpers.

Grand Lodge has always saved records, simply by not throwing them away, but no effort seems to have been made to store them in a regular or systemised manner, in 1990 it was decided that this haphazard method should be regularised and I was selected to be the first Grand Lodge Archivist. Since the Archives were established late in 1990 I have collected, preserved, documented and provided access to this valuable collection of our Masonic Heritage.

The Archives, which are housed on the third floor of the Masonic Centre, now faces an enormous task. I now have over 3000 enclosures housing thousands of historical Masonic Documents any one of which is available at a moments notice.

It is only in the last 80 or 90 years that a conscious effort has been made to preserve things. Prior to that most things lasted because they were durable and no special effort or method was necessary to preserve them.

Early markings were made by hammer and chisel on stone, and even paper, which was made by the Chinese about four thousand years ago, was made largely from vegetable matter and was kept for most of its life in a dim environment; lasted for hundreds of years. Even before that animal skin was used and we have to-day, quite a number of these that have lasted, without any special effort to preserve them, for over two thousand years.

In fact the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, were merely placed in glass jars to preserve them from destruction by insects. The scrolls were then hidden in caves to prevent their being discovered by the Romans circa. 300 B.C. - well over two thousand years ago.

Of course, there have always been collectors, or hoarders, people who saved things because they were either valuable or unusual. These were kept in museums or libraries; but all things are gradually destroyed by ^{the} Ultra violet rays in sunlight or by insects. Most inks, unless properly cared for will turn into glue; and paper, unless it is kept away from these U.V. rays and housed in an atmosphere of about 43% humidity give or take about 5% will either become brittle or develop "foxing", those dark spots or mould that appear on some pictures.

Before the advent of the fluorescent tube, most items of this nature could be kept away from the direct rays of Sunlight. The degrees of Ultra Violet light being Darkness, Oil lamps, Incandescent light, Daylight, Fluorescent light, and Sunlight.

Paper made by the old process will remain in reasonable condition for quite a long time, provided it is protected from insect infection, many books, have the edges of their pages painted with gold paint, or dyed Red, black or even yellow, as a protection from this. That is one reason why many Bibles and valuable old books, usually have their edges painted, most frequently Gold.

Today however paper is made by an acid process and will deteriorate and turn yellow in a very short time, at the cheap end Newspaper left exposed to daylight will begin to turn yellow and become brittle in about two weeks and even writing paper, which is of a much better quality will begin to show signs of yellowing after a couple of months.

The term ARCHIVES designates the organised body of records produced or received by a business or private entity in the transaction of its affairs and preserved by it.

Although the institution of Archives and something of archival administration may be traced from antiquity, Archives as they are understood today, date from the French Revolution. It was not until 1840, however that the practice was developed and National Archives were established in Europe and elsewhere. Archival administration in Australia really came into being only at the start of World War two, and was complicated by the fact that prior to the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1901 each State had performed its separate archival function and that many libraries, in the absence of Archives had taken over, somewhat imperfectly, the preservation of earlier activities.

Although there had been a Chair of Archival Science at the University of Mainz as early as 1790, modern specialised training in Archival Science may be said to have begun with the establishment in 1821 of the 'Ecole National Des Chartes' in Paris.

After World War two the trend was towards School training. The Dutch and Bavarian schools were revived and the English developed University Courses for Archivists.

International measures, especially during war time, have been developed to the protection of Archives. During World War Two. Neutrals and Belligerents alike took measures to defend them, and although entire collections of Archives were wiped out, the Allied Armies particularly, published numerous lists of Monuments, Cultural Buildings, Fine Arts, Museums and various Archival Services which were to be respected and where possible, safeguarded and only in instances of dire need were any of these properties to be endangered from attack.

During the occupation of Germany each of the western Allies continued to protect and restore these institutions and much of the looted art and archives formed part of the programme of restitution and rehabilitation.

At a very early date a commission of Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives was established.

Although Professional associations have been formed in a number of countries; there are very few handbooks on the subject. In some countries, notably Spain, Belgium and Poland; Archivists have united with their neighbours, the Librarians and Museum Curators, and have formed combined organisations, which have proved very successful; and recently in Australia we have co-operated with America in instituting an International Congress of Archivists.

At home the Australian Society of Archivists, was formed in 1975 in response to the growing number of Archivists in this country and to the increasing demand for Archival skills in recent years. The Society was incorporated in 1982 and publishes a quarterly newsletter.

The Society also functions as a medium for the exchange of ideas and for the co-operation between Archivists and the users of Archives, and between Archival institutions.

Outside the profession, it seeks to promote an understanding of the nature and value of Archives, and thereby to encourage the efficient and responsible use of archival records. The Society seeks to further co-operation with organisations with complementary interests, such as Historians, Librarians and Museum Curators.

Included among its members are a few professionally trained archivists who have given great assistance and encouragement to the Society.

By 1982 people had become aware of the importance of Archives and a new spirit of enthusiasm developed, one problem however was that some of the people appointed to care for archives had only rudimentary knowledge of procedure.

Many Archivists in Australia to-day are pioneers. They have been appointed by their superiors to set-up an Archive, not merely to succeed someone who has finally retired or died. This is a much more intricate situation, but it is far more interesting and challenging.

I have set-up a system of records, which has proved most successful and which enables me to locate any article in my possession in a matter of minutes, I have divided a reference card into several columns, each item or Lodge has a card on which is noted the location of the item.

In addition I have, in co-operation with Arthur Astin, designed a data-base on which all my records are now on diskette and can be accessed through the computer in the G.L. Library.

Many of the photographs in my possession I have framed inexpensively by the French method of 'passe-partout'; at present I am still sorting out, and housing records that go back to the formation of this Grand Lodge in fact I have the original Presence Book, of the Formation meeting, it is recorded under 'G. (for Grand Lodge) as being in box XX 3. Church services are all in box No 78.

For example I have a Card for the late Most Wor. Bro. V.C.N. Blight his history is in box No 48 his Regalia is in the Museum, and I have a note "See also Lodge Excalibar, in box No 240." Photographs of most of the Grand Installations are situated on the third floor of the Masonic Centre, Sydney. I'm sure I have given you some idea of my system.

I'm not interested in 'things' (I pass these on to the Museum) I'm interested in the history of Freemasonry in N.S.W.

Please let me have any Installation Cards of bygone years which you may have and send me a fresh one each year. Also, I would like to have your Lodge's Minute Books and Presence Book (All except the one in use) for safe and proper keeping. Remember, I do not throw anything away.

So far I have recorded over 300,000 items, and I'm nowhere near the limit because the task of preserving our heritage is a never ending one. I promise that I will record & safekeep anything entrusted to me by any one of you. Any authorised reseacher may then access these items at any mutual convenient time.

If you possess or hear of any Masonic Memorabilia, please let me ^{HAVE IT} for safe keeping in the Archives. Grand Lodge has provided a safe, temperature Controlled, storage so that our heritage and the history of our Craft, and our Lodges can be preserved, and we should now take full advantage of this.

Whatever we do, we must do it now.