Guide to Handling: Photographic Material on Paper or Card

Correct handling of special collections materials will aid in their preservation.

Plan Ahead
1. The majority of photographic material is kept in cold storage. It takes 24 hours for the material to acclimatise to reading room conditions. Please bear this in mind when organising your visit and contact the Reading Room in good time.

2. A sheet of mount board will have been placed in your working area by staff. Place the photograph you are consulting on this so you can use it to move it around your work area. This provides additional support and reduces the risks associated with direct handling.

3. Photographic material is particularly susceptible to damage through handling. Please wear nitrile gloves at all time when handling photographic material.

Moving Material
4. It can be tempting to leaf through a pile of photographs until you locate the one you are interested in. However, even if done carefully, this can result in the extension of tears or cracking of a brittle emulsion layer. Instead, work through the pile by removing the top photograph and placing it face downwards, photograph by photograph, one on top of the other, until you reach the one you are interested in.

Consulting Material
5. Some photographs are stored in protective enclosures. Please view photographic materials through their protective storage enclosures. If you need to remove the item from its enclosure please ask staff.
6. If you do need to hold the photograph directly, then do so using both hands to support it evenly.

7. Do not attempt to flatten prints that have curled around the edges, or realign creases as you may inadvertently cause more damage to the print.

8. If viewing the back of a photograph take care not to move it across the table while the emulsion is facing downwards. Use the support provided.

9. Photographic material is very sensitive to light. If you are not consulting the item, please protect from light by covering it with the sheet of card provided by the staff.

10. If two items are found to be stuck together, or a photograph is stuck to its enclosure, do not try to separate them. Instead please alert staff.

11. If you find anything that causes you concern, or you inadvertently damage an item, please inform staff so that the problem can be rectified or the item scheduled for repair.