

**BOOK REVIEW**  
**A PRACTICAL GUIDE**

*by*

**H. J. PLENDERLEITH**

(Canberra, Australian National Committee for U.N.E.S.C.O., 1972)

H. J. Plenderleith is the grandfather of conservation and has recently retired from the Directorship of the International Centre for Conservation in Rome. As one would expect, this publication is well written and makes an excellent introductory guide to the care of documentary material. Although the greater part of the information in the publication is available in the second edition of Plenderleith's book (*The Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art*, Dr. A. E. A. Werner joint author), he has brought together all the data relevant to the care of documents in a concise and easily readable manner. Some of the information is slightly out of date but this is to be expected in the fields of conservation and restoration which are at present developing quite rapidly.

The factors likely to affect documents are discussed such as temperature, humidity, moulds and insects and the procedures to be taken to control them. Also the acidity of documents and how to treat it. However, these are essentially conservation techniques (i.e., stabilising an item to prevent it from deteriorating further) and very little information is provided concerning restoration, e.g., removing stains and repairing damaged books and torn documents. There is little mention of the other types of material likely to be found in a library such as parchment and leather book bindings. Also prints and maps which introduce problems such as colouring media.

A common problem in all fields of conservation is that chemicals, materials and equipment detailed in a treatment are very often not available locally. We have this problem in Western Australia and it is the same elsewhere in Australia. It would be even more severe in places such as Western Samoa and Fiji. It becomes very expensive to buy small quantities of chemicals from abroad and as regards local supplies it is sometimes difficult to "match" a chemical or material when for example only trade names are made available. Therefore it would be useful to have listed in the publication local suppliers of the recommended materials. If this is not possible perhaps a chemical company could be encouraged to buy in bulk from abroad for re-distribution throughout the Pacific area. There is already such a company in England that specialises in materials for conservation and restoration.

A criticism is that the introduction to the publication does not emphasise the level or type of person or institution for which it is written. As I see it the publication is directed at libraries and archives which have no conservation facilities, or only very limited ones; Plenderleith's guidelines are essentially concerned with the simple care of documents. If this had been emphasised in the introduction it would have warned the beginner against going beyond the scope of the information in the publication. To do so might produce disastrous results. It is important that the beginner should be aware that such techniques and facilities for restoration do exist, but more harm than good can come from experimenting with restoration techniques on irreplaceable documents.

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