

CORRESPONDENCE

Archival Storage

Mr Colin Smith recently highlighted some of the problems of using an archives box manufactured all in one piece, with a top-opening lid. In New Zealand, the National Archives and most of the other institutions housing archives use a box with a separate lid. The lid fits over the box, providing a tolerance of up to approximately 4 or 5 cm in depth before it affects the box being effectively closed. Handling of files is done in several ways. Large files may be placed in the box as they are, 'top and tailed' if one end of the file is fatter than the other. As the box is placed flat on a table, trolley, etc., for the removal of files, and thus the whole top of the file can be exposed before removal, damage due to handling is potentially less than in removing files laterally from a box.

Another method is to have all the files placed into a folder in the box. The folder is fastened with tapes through eyelet holes tied above the centre of the top file, not at the side of the files. Therefore the edges of the files are protected. The third method is to have files tied in their own individual folders or, if very thin, placed in individual envelopes with a cut-away top to enable file numbers to be read. The use of folders minimises the damage occurring from file pins — both to other files and to the archivists' hands. Ideally, these boxes and folders should be made from acid-free board. Alternatives chosen at the National Archives are a wax-lined board, to inhibit the transfer of acidity from the box to the contents, and a near-neutral kraft paper known as saturating base, an unsized material used in the manufacture of plastic-laminated sink-benches, etc.

Any additional shelf space taken up by the use of folders etc., is surely justifiable in the fulfilment of the aim to preserve the archives. It would be a rare conservation unit that could keep up with work on incoming accessions as well as doing necessary work on archives already held; therefore effective storage materials and careful handling of archives are vital to the preservation of archives.

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