

Boxes for Medieval Charters*

**(Parchment documents with pendant seals are referred to in this article as charters)*

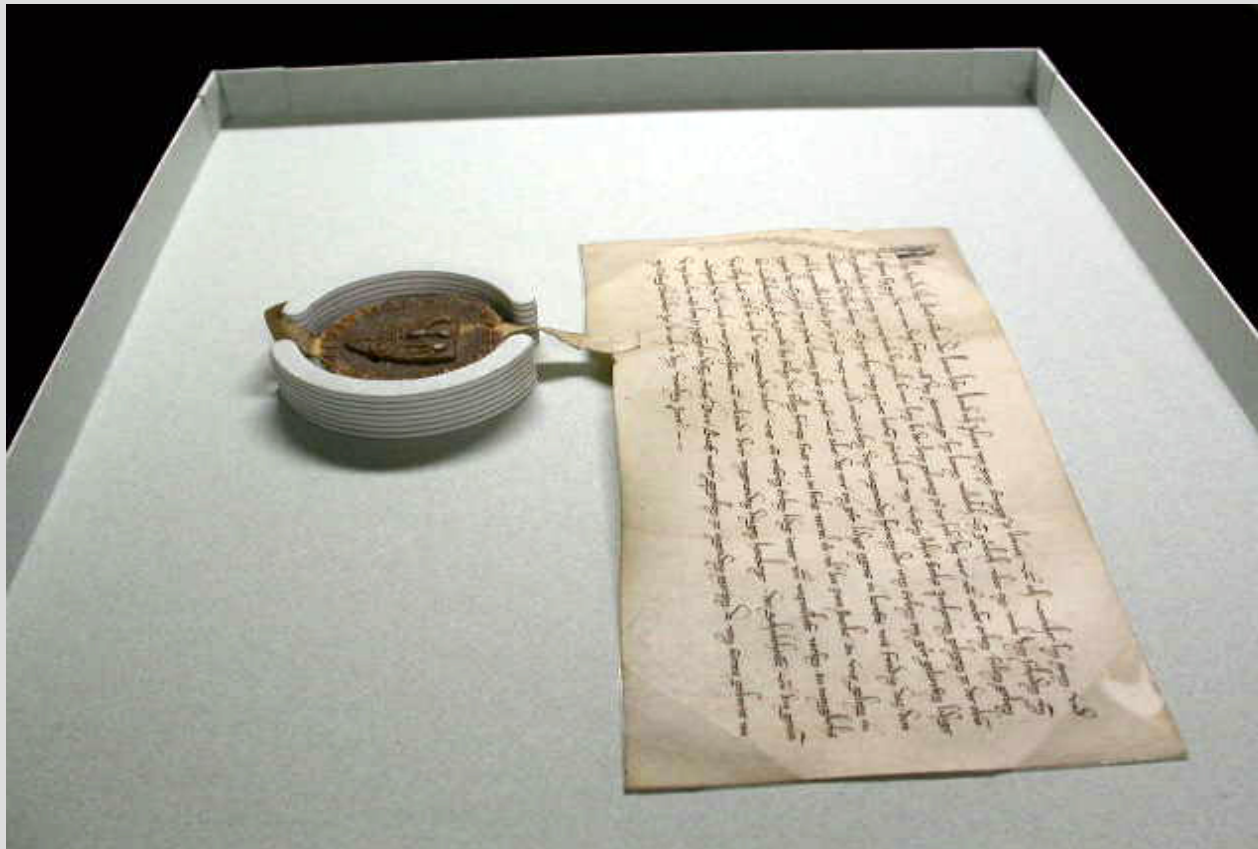
- Efforts to improve storage conditions of medieval charters have shown that it is useless to restore seals attached to parchment documents if subsequently their storage is inadequate and thus causes renewed damage to the seals.
- In Switzerland, to date, charters were mostly stored in envelopes, placed vertically and closely packed on the shelves. This storage method presents particular risks each time a document is consulted, no matter whether the seals have been digitized or not.
- Avoiding pressure is the most important rule to obey in the handling of seals. A big variety of protective devices for seals has already been developed, however, the idea of integrating such devices into the box or envelope in which the documents are stored, gave way to a strategy of conservation covering a wide range of requirements.

- Boxes were made in which the documents were either stored unfolded, or folded once or twice, and the seals protected by a special device so that when piled up no pressure was exercised on the seals. However, the cost implied and, in many cases, the largeness of the collections have limited activities to box charters of particular historic or aesthetic value.
- Since archives are often short on storeroom and have limited financial resources, conservators searched for further innovative solutions for the boxing of charters.
- However, it must be said, that for the time being, there is no boxing system which combines first class storage with low production and mounting costs. The boxes developed by the author do not, apart from one highly cost-intensive storage system, fulfil all requirements of conservation. Nonetheless, the author thinks that it is more important to offer solutions which can satisfy individual needs of archives instead of developing one highly sophisticated system which in the end cannot be put into practice on a large scale.

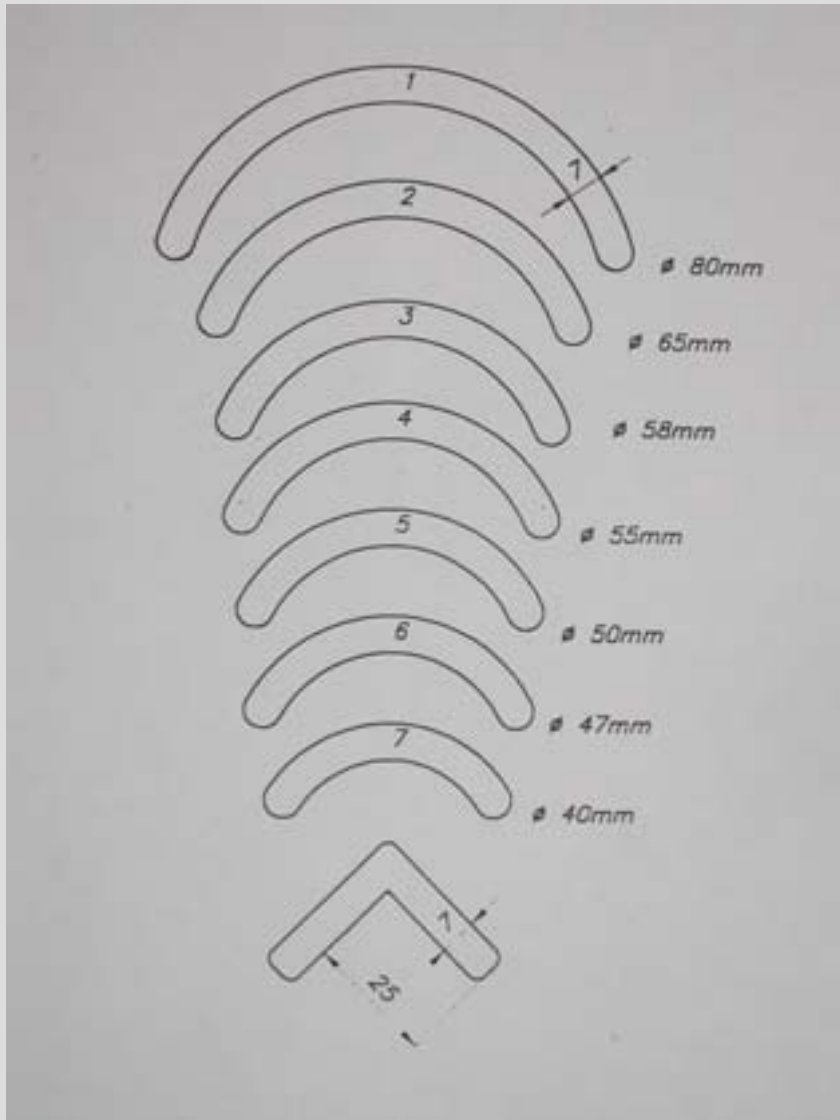
Storage box for one charter

Example no. 1

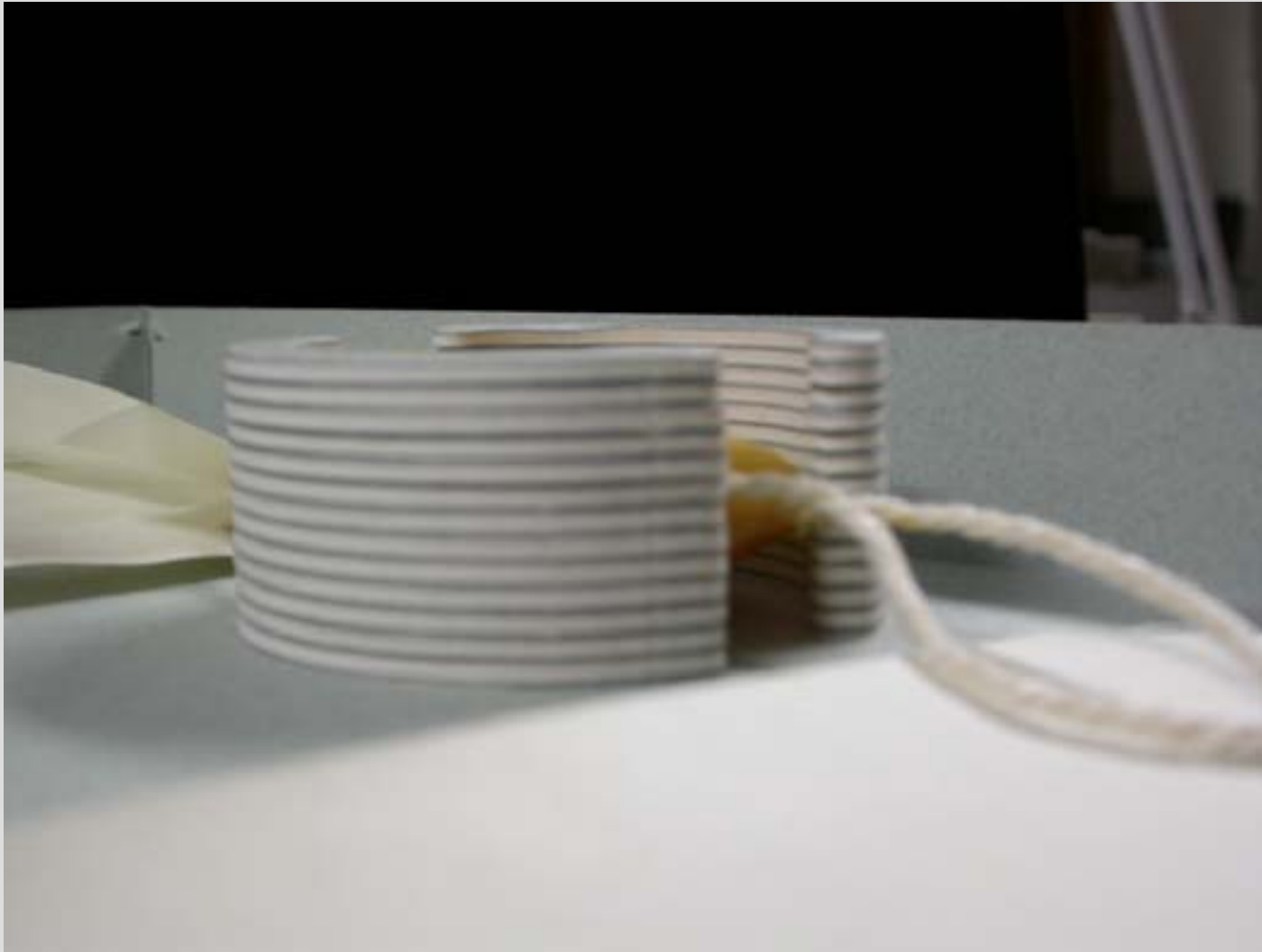
Ideally, one document only is mounted per box. In this example, retained as the best storage method by the author, the corners of the document are mounted with Melinex or acid free paper, the seal is protected by a special container made from cardboard. The time for mounting one document with its pendant seal amounts to 1 1/2 hour if series of over 20 boxes can be made. This time covers all preparative work in connection with the mounting of the document.



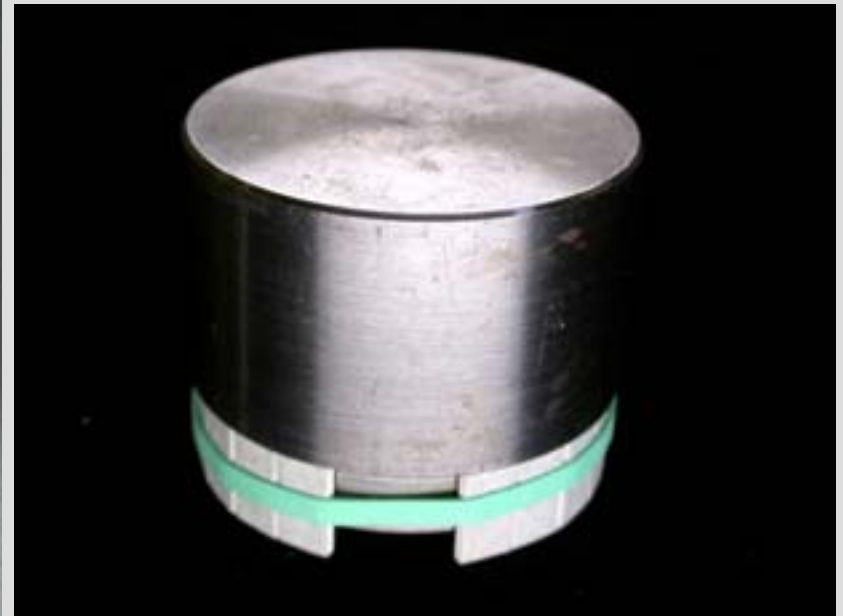
The protective containers for the seals are made of cardboard segments in the form of half circles (7 standard sizes). The single elements are glued with gelatine instead of synthetic glue in order to avoid the formation of an acidic microclimate in the box.



The protective seal container is either higher than the seal itself or, even better, as high as the box itself



Seals too big for standard containers are mounted with the help of creased or semi-cut cardboard strips. To the right an auxiliary device to round the cardboard for the protective seal container.



Edges of the box fastened with inox clips, lined and reinforced with paper.

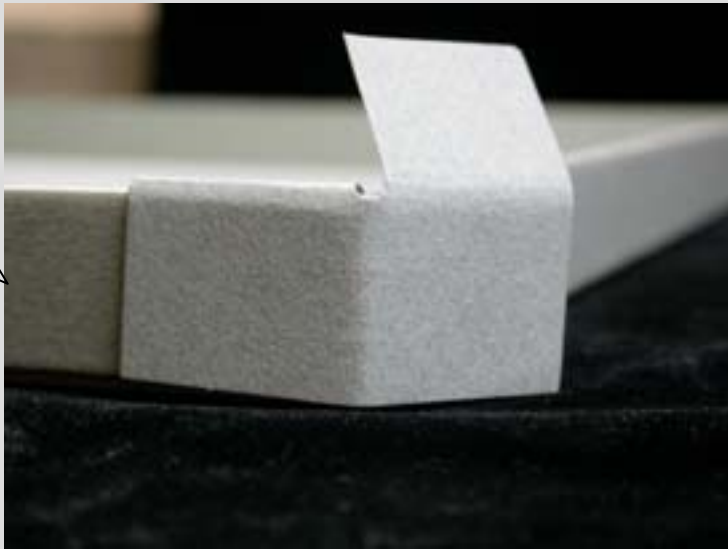
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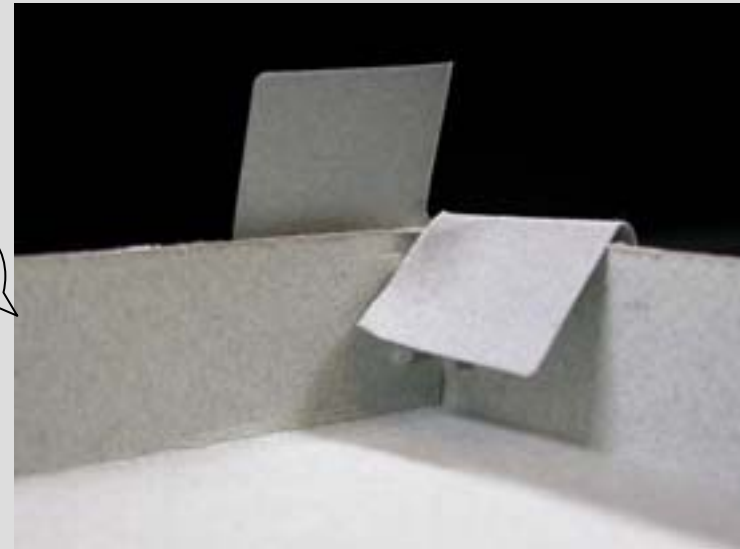
2



3



4



Example of a special shelving system for charters. Boxes of example no. 1 are stored in these shelves without stacking.



Example no 2

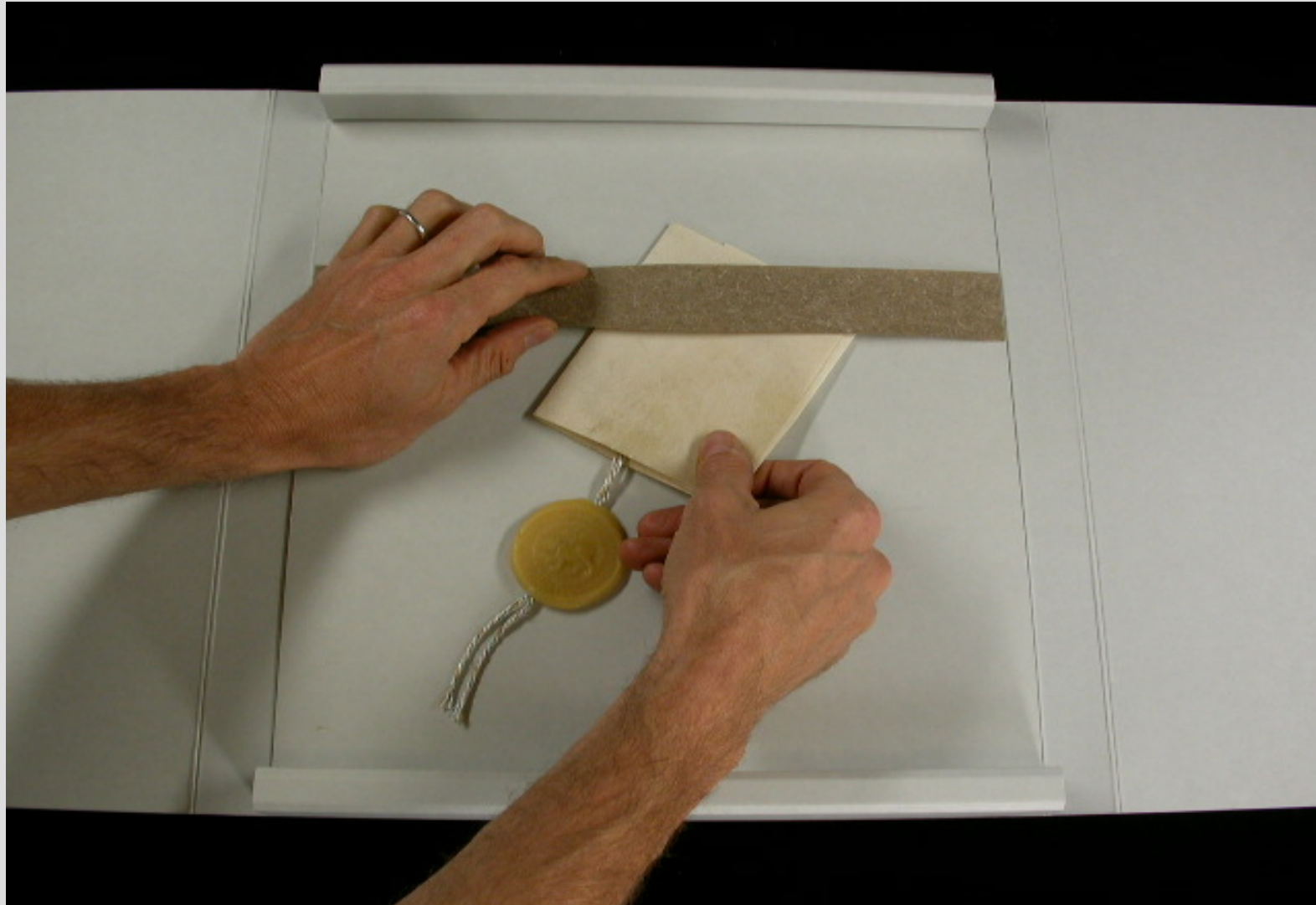
This type of box was developed for a very small archive aiming at saving money for mounting and store the boxes in vertical position in the small storeroom available.





A look at the stored boxes.

The box is made of two overlapping cardboard sheets (four-flap). The documents (one per box) are stored folded, the box being too small to store the document unfolded.



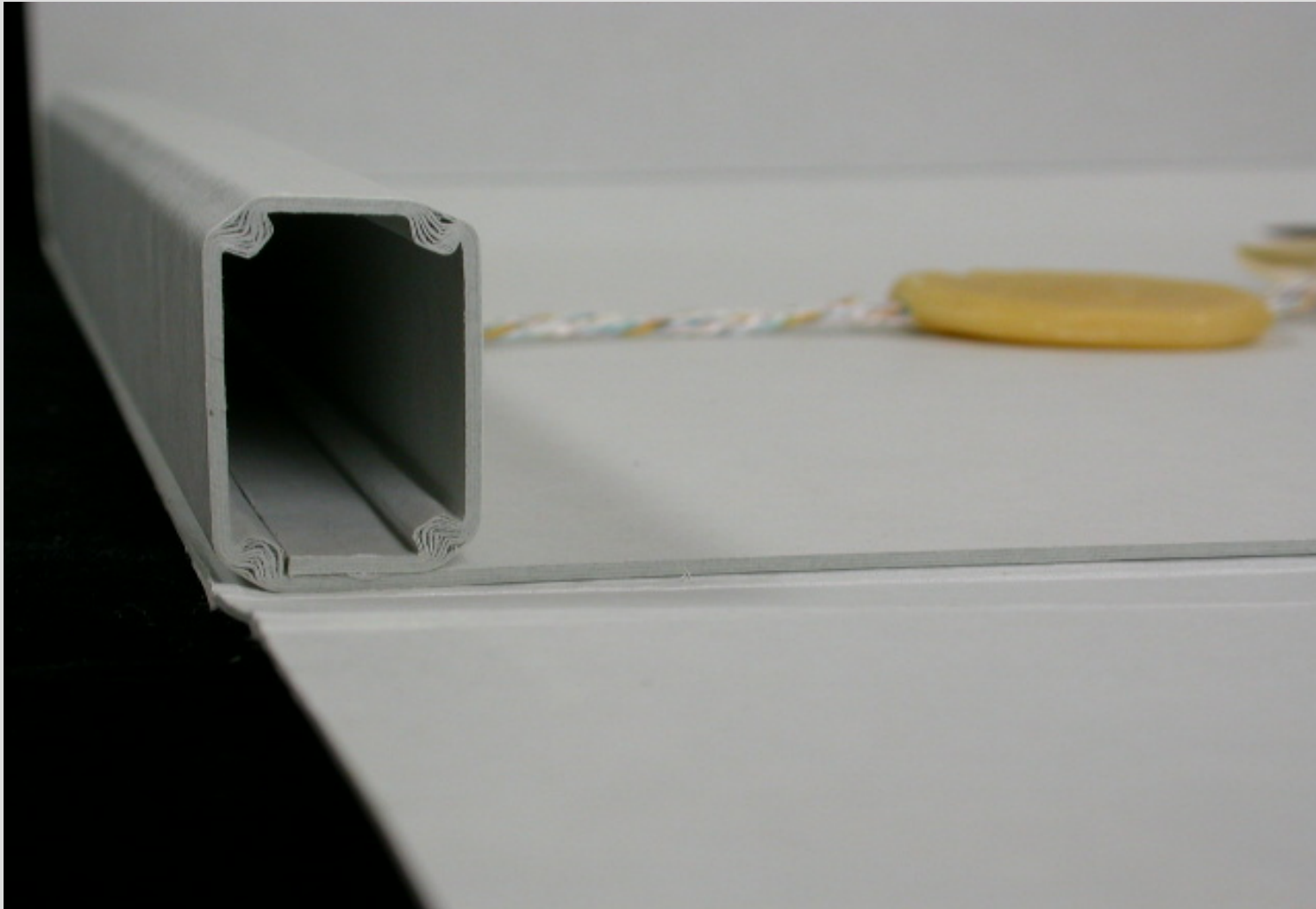
The document is placed under a strip of paper made of tearproof flax. Right and left: the flaps turned in for closing the box. The strip of paper is humidified and glued verso onto the cardboard.



The flaps closing. Horizontal storage is possible, however, not more than three boxes should be stapled. Vertical storage is preferable to avoid shaking of the seals.



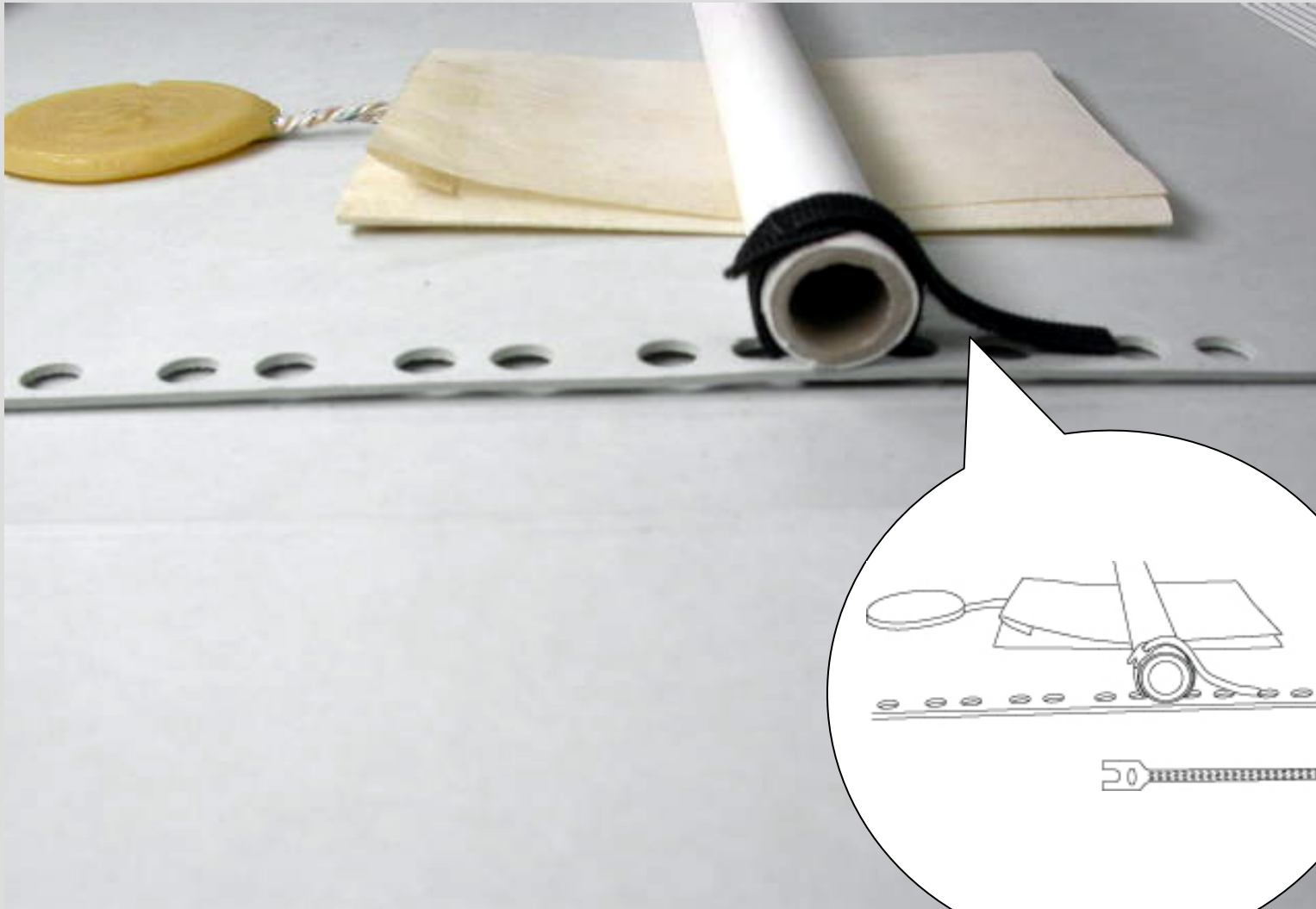
The hollow element at both ends of the inner cardboard sheets gives stability to the box.



The following two mounting techniques for charters (stored in a box of example 2) are shown for the sole reason to illustrate how we developed various mounting techniques. Below the document is held in place by a cardboard tube and velcro fastener. The method cannot be recommended.



Close-up (cardboard tube with velcro fastener)



Another, slightly modified mounting technique: instead of velcro fastener, metal clips were used to fix the cardboard tube. The method cannot be recommended.



Example no. 3

This box was developed in an effort to overcome the old-fashioned storage of charters folded in envelopes, which has been practiced in Switzerland to date. The box has been used for one institute only. Its use is not recommended because it has a couple of disadvantages.



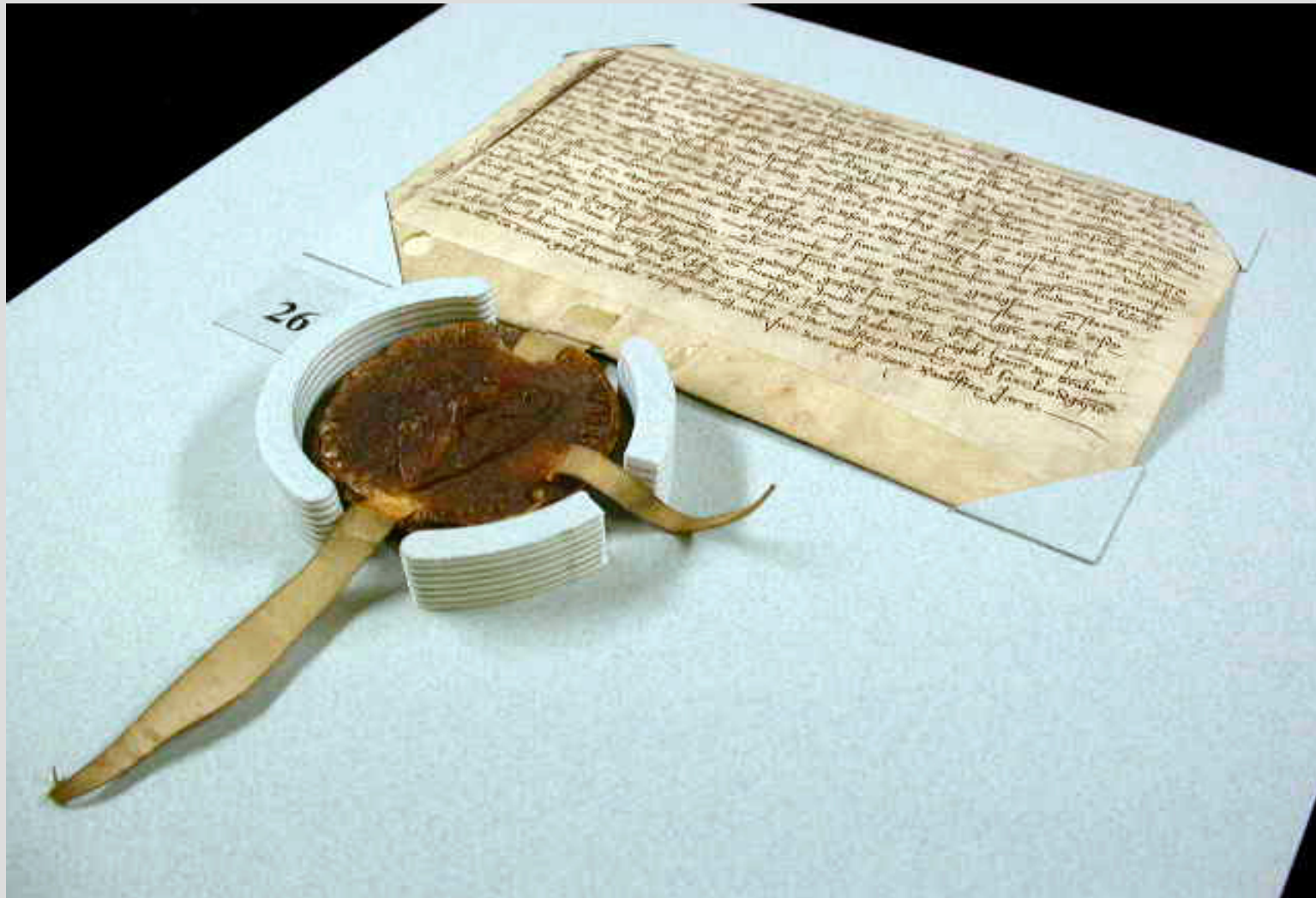
In this box the charters are mounted on four levels of cardboard.



The levels with the mounted documents can easily be drawn out thanks to the half round incision at the front of the cardboard.



The documents can be stored folded or unfolded. However, the mounting technique differs. Below, you see an unfolded parchment document mounted with paper corners. The seal is mounted with a protective container made of cardboard segments like in example 1.



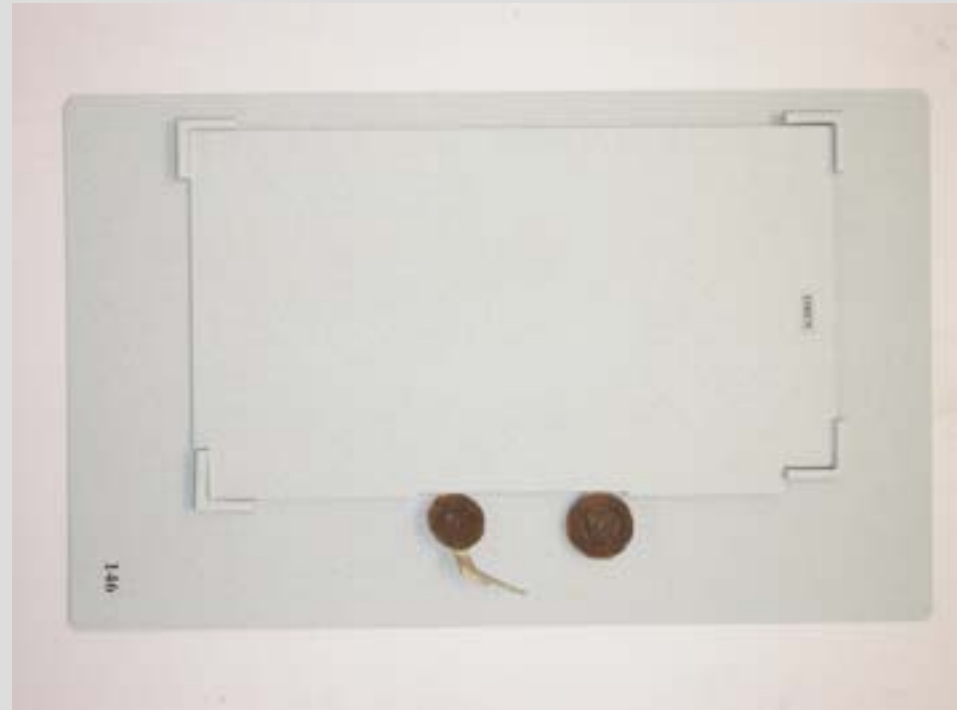
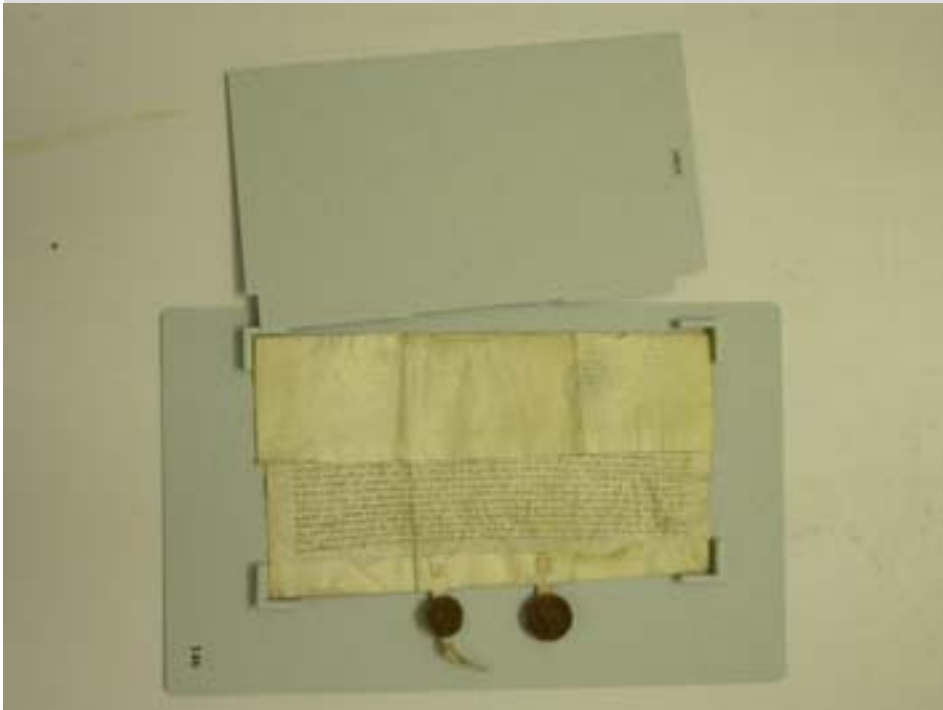
Left: Unfolded charters mounted on one cardboard level.

Right: Folded parchment document kept in place by a cardboard cover fixed by cardboard corners. The cover avoids damaging of the document when it is placed in the box.



Left: the charter before it is covered.

Right: the charter ready to be placed in the box.



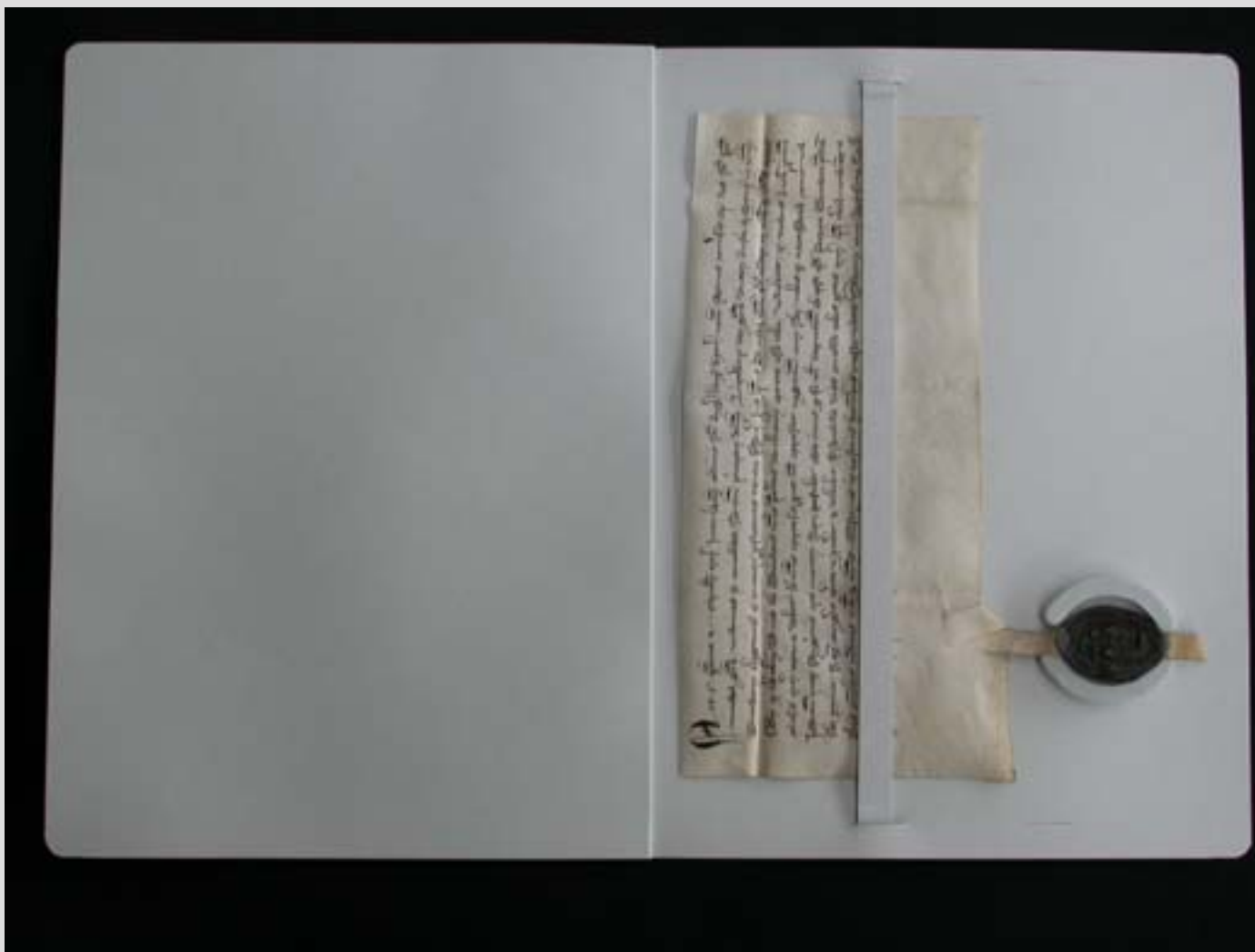
Cardboard strip to keep the seal in place and to protect it from rubbing against the cardboard when the document is placed in the box and taken out again..



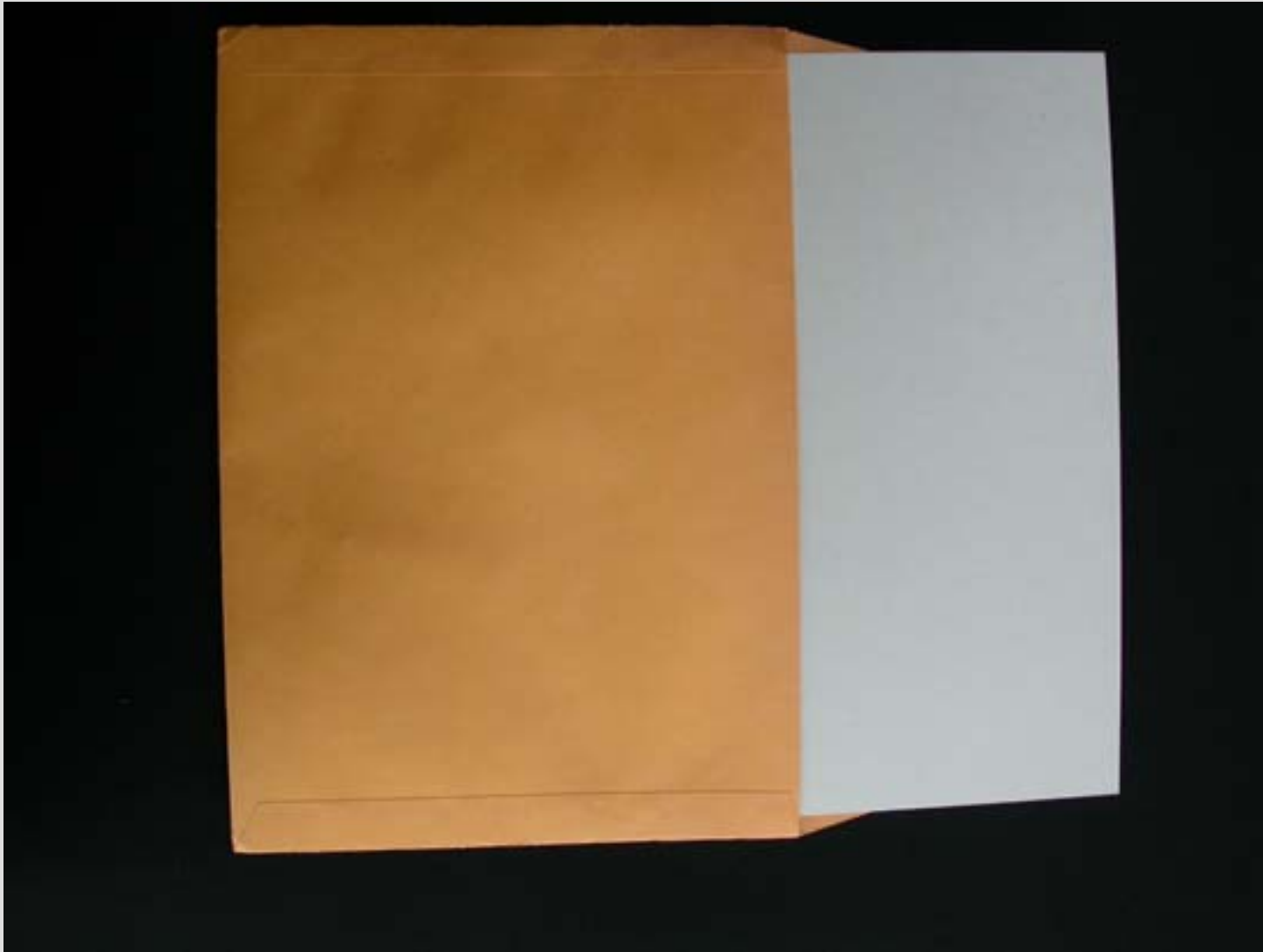
In the following some mounting techniques developed by the State Archives in Berne, Switzerland, are shown. The aim was to reuse old envelopes in which the charters had been stored to date. At a later stage the historians decided to use new and thicker envelopes of permanent cardboard so that mounting techniques had to be modified further.

**Storage systems developed by the State Archives in Berne
(Switzerland):**

The charter is mounted in a cardboard cover. The document is fastened with a lid of cardboard. The development of this technique was aimed at saving cost for boxing.



The closed cover is placed in the ancient envelope and stored vertically on the shelf.



The document is fastened with the help of eight round pieces of cardboard.



Charter mounted on a: four-flap envelope with cardboard edges.
The seal is mounted with the help of creased or semi-cut strips
of cardboard.

