

Archiving to do # 4

This is my third of these articles in the series
August 2004

Also available in PDF format from my Web site
www.paradox.com.au/~jcdalton/JCED04

ATD

Archiving_to_do_4.sxw

New Technology

It is now time for me to talk a little about new technology. Using new technology one needs to be able to use a computer. I have been holding off from getting to this facet of archiving because many people do not use or posses a computer. There are other things that can be done outside the world of new technology but I feel it's time I talked about this subject. Of course people who do not use a computer can perhaps get a kind relation or friend to do this work. Also there are professional firms that do such archiving but it is an expensive exercise.

To save/archive/store data on all sorts of new devices. Quite a few people who have a computer now have a CD Writer, aka burner installed on their computer, including myself. I would like some feedback from people who can help or suggest anything in what I have spoken about so far.

More about using new technology later in this ATD #4.

But first I will continue on other subjects.

Restoring Photographs



This is one of our family photographs which was copied from an old photo about fifteen years ago. It was done by a photo lab at the time but I don't know what process was used. The emulsion is terribly cracked which was noticed recently by Maria, our artist daughter. It has hung on a wall in our lounge room since then. It's situated about a metre from a window which doesn't normally have sun shining through due to curtains being pulled over. It's not a bright room with only an incandescent ceiling lamp in the centre, a 60watt incandescent standard about 2mt away and a 25 incandescent lamp on the CTV about 3mt away. Of course not all the lights are on at the same time. So it's not a bright room but the photo has deteriorated over time.



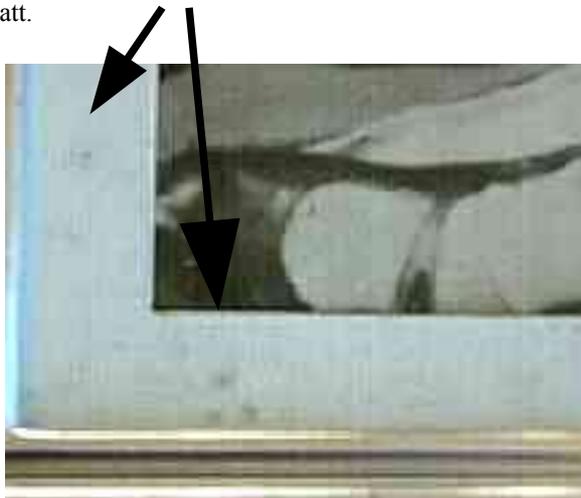
The image shows the cracked photographic material. The card matt in front of it and in a glass frame shows some moisture causing mould which can be seen on the images on the next page.

I scanned this original photo, edited it with The GIMP and printed it and placed it behind a new acid free matt. This restored image is above.

Matt

The matt between the photo and the glass was becoming mouldy so Maria supplied and cut a new acid free matt for us to fit into the frame. See below a close-up of the mouldy matt.

The brown mould patches can easily be seen on the matt.



CD Archiving

I haven't touched on in detail yet the use of new technology to archive data.

As I have mentioned in previous ATDs, data recorded/stored on magnetic tape, photographic materials and all other medium is subject to being lost, lost forever. There are so many reasons, climatic conditions, temperature, magnetic invasion, light, shock and so on. Most of these things are under our control. But the archiving must be done before the data is lost. This time period could be days, weeks or decades. It is up to people to get cracking and do something about it.

We should, no **must** get the data archived so future generations can carry on the archiving.

It is not so well known that the CD-ROM, once touted as indestructible, is proving vulnerable to stray magnetic fields, oxidation, humidity and material decay. But the most serious dilemma for the longevity of digital files is technological obsolescence. New discoveries and advances can cause today's computer systems to become obsolete well before they break down and become unusable. Think of technologies that were once state-of-the-art but are now as old-fashioned as the buggy whip, the 78-rpm record, the 8-track audio tape, Betamax videos, the Brownie cameras (using 127-Size roll film) and the 9cm (3 ½) floppy disk. The 13cm (5 ¼) floppy disk was popular just 10 years ago but how many of us still have the hardware or software to access information stored on those disks? I have a few data files still stored on 13cm disks.

The floppy disk's 9cm successor is now likewise on its way to extinction, with several major computer

manufacturers recently announcing that they no longer include a floppy drive as standard equipment.

Images

As long as you still have the original image file from your digital camera or scanner, it might not matter too much if your printed picture fades over time. Just print another copy! You could keep all your image files on your computer but unless you have a really big hard drive, many Gigabytes, they can quickly fill up your hard drive. Most computers now come with CD-RW drives installed as standard so you can copy the files to CD-R disks and free up hard disk space. CD-R discs are an excellent medium for archiving images and other files. The discs hold a lot of data (650MB or more) and according to most experts should remain readable for many years and are inexpensive. At the time I type this they can be bought for under one dollar. When archiving image files on CD-R discs keep these tips in mind.

Avoid CD-RW discs (rewritable CDs).

They're less stable and more expensive than CD-R.

Use high-grade CD-Rs because they're less sensitive to scratches and other wear and tear than cheaper brands. The cheaper CD-Rs are adequate for routine backups though. The worst CD-R media may last only five years, while name-brand discs should last at least 50 years.

Save photographs in industry standard data formats such as PCX or JPG instead of GIF, BMP or other proprietary formats such as those used by some photo-editing software. TIFF, an uncompressed format, is generally considered the best option because you can still do extensive editing on the image in the future although I prefer PCX.

Make a second copy of each of your CD-Rs and store them at another location, relative, friend etc as protection against a natural disaster.

The type of pen to write onto the CD is in some dispute but certainly not one that had a hard point such as a ball point pen. Some say to use only a felt-tip permanent ink marker. Don't apply adhesive labels to them. The weight of the label can unbalance the disc. The adhesive materials can do harm to the disc's materials despite what some people who say/think CDs are indestructible.

Store your CD-R discs in sealed containers away from bright lights, heat and moisture.

Eventually consider saving your image files on DVD-R discs. They should last as long as the best CD-Rs, are less prone to scratches and will likely replace CD-Rs as the standard removable storage medium.

Keep migrating your files onto more current storage media. Computer standards change quickly and this will be a bigger threat to the effective longevity of your files than any physical deterioration.

Even if the CD-R disc with your family pictures is still good a hundred years from now, who knows if 22nd-century computers will be equipped to read it?

Genealogy – Life Story

Archiving data and genealogy are subjects that are similar in outcome. That is, data that should/must be made and handed onto future generations, history. We are in an age where doing both, archiving and genealogy can be achieved so much easier than in the past, even twenty years ago it was difficult. Now with the aid of new technology so much can be done so quickly.

There is equipment that is not a computer that can do many things but at present the computer is where data finishes up at so that saving the data in digital form can be achieved.

I will talk about these other pieces of “non computer” equipment in a later ATD.

At every chance I get I try to convince people to write their life story, their biography. Some say something like, “... but my life has not been interesting...”. That's hogwash, everyone's life is interesting, to someone else. I know that our children and grandchildren are interested in my life and my life has not been as interesting as some peoples. I have not been a king, a president, a famous sportsman, a famous actor and so on. It took me six (6) years to write my **My Life** book which I began on an old 80386 computer. I only had a greyscale (b&w) scanner during that time so it doesn't contain any colour photographs except on the last page which was 1995.

I'm currently typing in my darling wife's, Marie, life story. I am learning so much of her life as well as happenings I had forgotten after we met.

Genealogy Hints

These are some of my suggestions on how you can preserve your family history.

Purchase and use a video camcorder. Don't just use it for vacations and birthday parties. Be sure to record interviews with senior members of your family. Ask them to talk about their childhood, their families, people they worked with or went to school with. Write yourself a list of questions to ask. Don't forget to create your own autobiography on video if you have one or perhaps can borrow one. It is easier than writing a book.

Buy or borrow a document scanner for your computer and scan everything possible. Make sure you scan and identify the people in all your old photographs. Work on the oldest photos first before they deteriorate further.

Buy CD-ROM writer (burner) for your PC. This is a great way to preserve and share all those documents you have scanned.

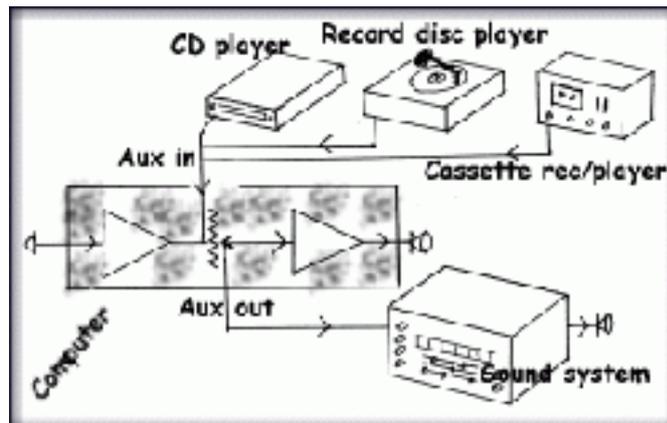
Purchase a digital still camera. You'll take many more photos with it than with a film camera. When you take photos, think of your grand children. Take photos of your home, inside and out. Take photos of your work area, fellow workers and the boss, your children' playmates, the neighbourhood you live in,

favourite places you visit. Be sure to take photos of your children's school and church.

The list is big, anything you can think of even though you may think it is not worth the effort.

Use an audio recording device such as a tape recorder to record conversations at reunions, holiday family get-togethers and so on. I have used a lot of sound that I recorded from the 1960s of weddings, birthdays etc and now are archived onto CD-R. People who are self conscious in front of a camera will talk freely if you can discretely record what is said. The cables and software necessary to get your audio recordings onto a PC are not expensive. Recorded audio takes up relatively little space on your PC hard drive and can be archived to CD-ROM in minutes.

I will be explaining this subject, how to archive sounds from 78rpm, LP, Reel to reel, and other tapes in a later ATDs.



My drawing above is a simple one setting out what people need to do the archiving of sounds. If the reader does not yet have a CD Writer (burner) installed in their computer do not fret. Taking/recording sounds from tapes, records etc has to be done before any CD Writing is considered. The sounds can be edited such as, cutting out sounds not wanted, noise in sounds, giving sounds more bass or treble and so. The sounds are copied from the outside source, tape recorder etc, are saved onto the computer's hard disk. The files can be edited as I just said, edited and SavedAs probably with a different name which are considered as the final file of that sound. This file is what is archived onto CD.

I suggest that people who do not yet have a CD Writer that a year or so could be spent doing the above, that is, getting the sounds off the various media, edited and into the computer. A year may sound a long time but I can assure the reader that doing the above can be very time consuming. Editing thirty minutes of sound can take twice or thrice more time than the thirty minutes.

PDF

I have spoken about PDF in different places in the past so it's time I mention it here.

PDF stands for Portable Document Format.

Archiving format for documents for the foreseeable future.

I have not mentioned PDF in earlier ATDs. Portable Document Format aka PDF has been used for some years and now that we have the Internet more and more

documents are produced in PDF and can be downloaded from many Web sites, even mine. Documents don't just mean text documents such as a wordprocessor might produce but also images, photos, drawings and so on. A PDF file can be Opened, viewed and printed on various platforms, Apple, OS/2, M\$ Windows, Linux and others. Simply put, to ensure that a document can be viewed and read by anyone with a computer it should be produced as a PDF document.

I suggest people should scan valuable or historical documents and SaveAs PDF. No one knows how long PDF data will be able to be viewed/read but one would hope that PDFs will be able to be converted to whatever format will predominate in the future. It is up to future generations to ensure this is done.

Most people using computers have heard of Adobe Acrobat PDF Reader. This views/reads a PDF document which may or may not allow editing of it. This depends what restrictions were put on the document when constructed. In regards to Linux and M\$ Windows platforms, one can use various utilities that integrate with the systems wordprocessor, DTP and so on.

Of course there are excellent software one can use such as Adobe Acrobat Distiller costing hundreds of dollars. One is called PDF Publishing which costs about \$99.00. There are free utilities that will do a similar job, one is PDF995.

Other alternatives are 602Pro suite and more recently OpenOffice.Org (OOO) which are office suites similar to M\$ expensive office suites and applications but OOO is an Open Source Software (OSS) so is absolutely free.

Yes free, no dollars, no pesetas, no euros. Free.



Here are two screen captures of the front page of my ATD #3.

Above in OpenOffice.Org below in Acrobat Reader they both look the same.



Number 2 and 3 of these ATDs I produced with OOO and Exported (SavedAs) PDF and so is this one.

The Portable Document Format is ideal for distributing genealogical and any other documents electronically which is great because of the different formats that genealogical applications use.

Time capsules

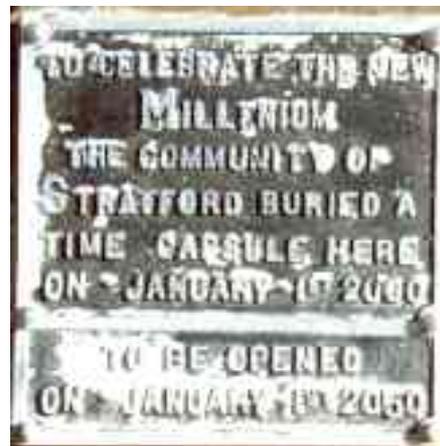
Times capsules are another aspect of archiving data. I did touch on this in ATD #2 because there is some data of myself in a time capsule in Brisbane that is to be lifted in 2064.

I would like to know if anyone has any information about time capsules as these details should be archived by as many people as possible so that they are dug up or opened in years to come. There is one in the City Hall Brisbane in the Brisbane Room.

The one pictured here is in Stratford in Victoria when we visited there in 2004.



This is the plaque enlarged below.



That's all for this ATD. JCED

This "Archiving_to_do_4.sxw" was built up using OpenOffice.Org which I refer to as "OOO". OOO is an Open Source application which is a free Office Suite that I use in Linux Mandrake and MS Windows 98.

The file is Exported as a PDF directly from OOO. John C.E.D'Alton.