



Memory Keepers Guide for Photos



Young At Heart Choir, 2002. Donated by Anna Rogalina

Are you a memory keeper?

If you are looking for ways to share your important photos and keep them safe for the future, Port Phillip Heritage Centre is here to help.

A snapshot of a loved one can become a family treasure as years go by, a bridge from one generation to the next. But a digital photo can be a tricky thing to keep safe!

The coating of a CD can flake off; a cloud storage service can go out of business; water can spill on your hard drive. Digital files require both software and hardware to access, and when either become obsolete (like Adobe Flash Player, or a floppy disk) you will lose access to them. The tips in this guide can help you to ensure future access to your most important images.



Wells Family on Holiday, St Kilda Beach, 1935

STEP 1: Consider your goals

The answers to these questions will help you make a plan.

- What photos are most important to save first?
- What is the size of this project? Every photo you own, or just one specific photo album?
- What information or context about these photos is important to capture?
- Do you want to give other people access to these photos too?

STEP 2: GATHER ALL MATERIALS TO BE PRESERVED

- Identify all the places where your photos are stored. While you're on this search, you might consider also looking for important documents, video, and audio.
- Check for materials on computers, laptops, cameras, phones, social media, scrapbooks, and photo albums, VHS tapes, CDs, DVDs, USB drives, old phones etc.
- Ask others who care about these materials if they have related items they can contribute to the project.

STEP 3: IMPORT MATERIALS INTO YOUR COMPUTER

Transfer all of the digital files from your devices onto your computer. Also transfer photographs or other materials you've newly scanned or digitized, like VHS tapes using the convertor in the Heritage Room of Williamstown Library.

Tips for scanning

- Clean your scanner glass with rubbing alcohol and a clean microfiber cloth (ask for these at the library desk).
- DPI (Dots Per Inch) affects image quality. A higher DPI creates a more detailed image (and also a larger file, so keep an eye on the available storage space left on your drive!).

Our recommended settings are:

- Photos and documents: 600 dpi
- Photographic slides and negatives: 1800 dpi
- Save the files as TIFF or high-quality JPEG. This will be the Master copy and are large files. You may also want to create a lower-resolution copy for sharing on social media or emailing.

• It is **essential** to establish a file naming convention **before** you begin to prevent a backlog of unorganised content that will lead to misplaced or lost data! Name your files in a consistent and descriptive way. Consider a numbering system that will make file names sort into an order you want within a folder. Include the date, location, person, event, or other keywords. This will help you find images quickly when looking at a big list of file names and ensure the most important information about them does not get lost. Some examples of good file names are “1996-01-03_Claudia_Birthday” or “Rome_2019_001.”

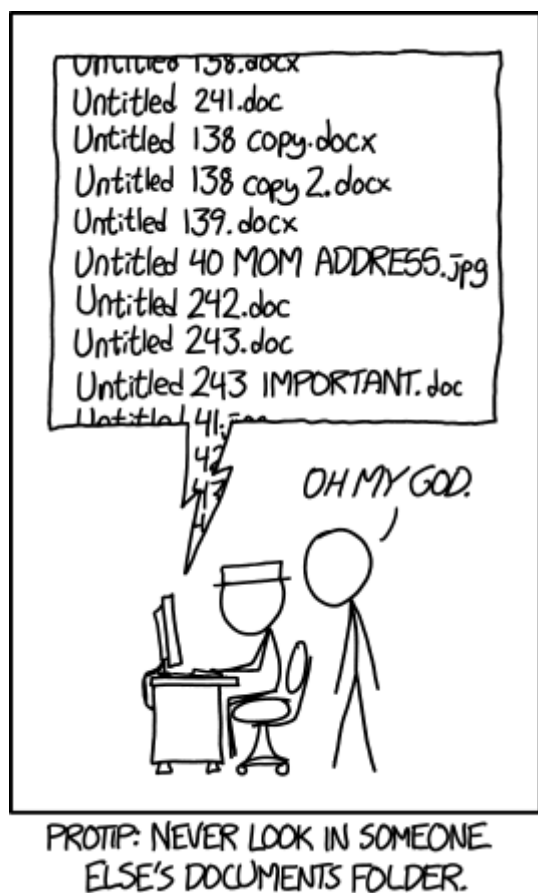


Image:xkcd. "Documents." Shared under CC-BY-NC License.

Pro-tip. You can add further metadata to each file such as location, date, time.

• The Port Phillip Heritage Centre has a scanner you can use for free to do this work. You can book in advance from the library website: [Port Phillip Library Service Library](#)

STEP 4: DECIDE WHAT IS IMPORTANT

- If you've uploaded the contents of your camera or smartphone, delete any files that aren't meaningful. Think back to the goals of your project.
- If you have multiple copies of the same file, delete duplicates and keep the highest quality version.



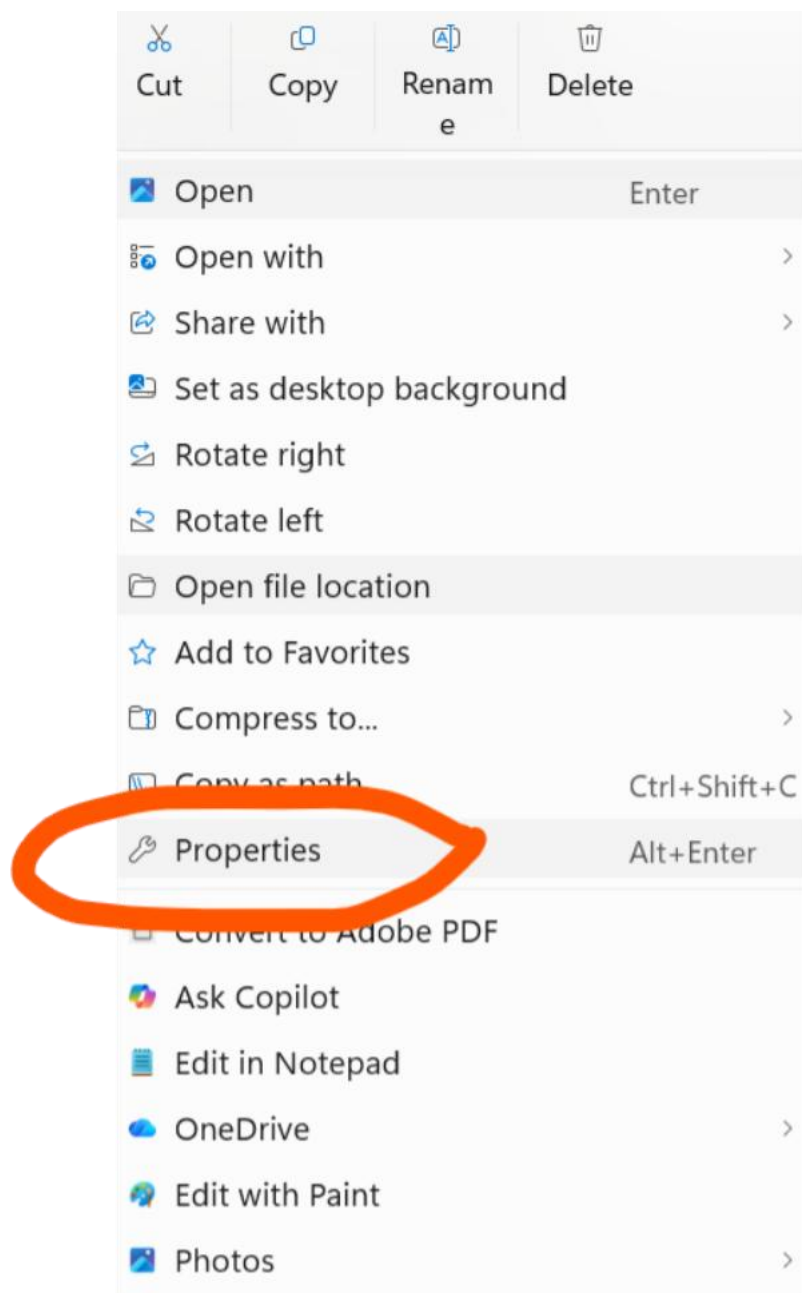
Peace Wagon in Stokes Street, Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society

STEP 5: DESCRIBE WITH METADATA

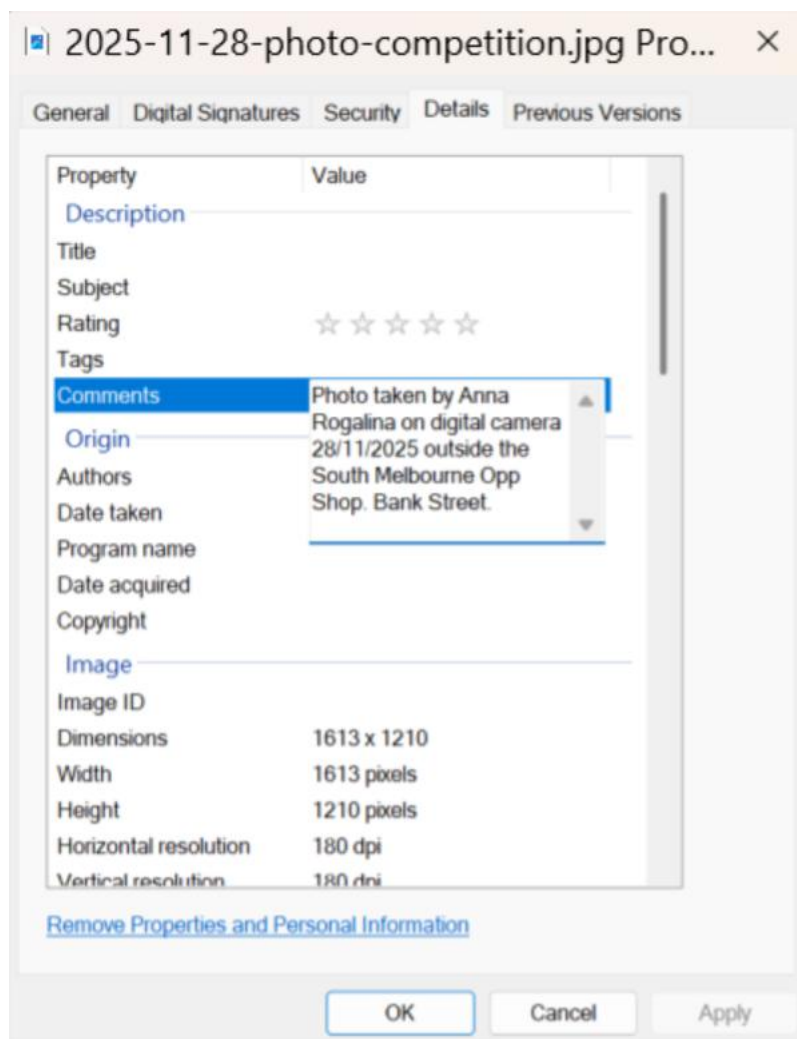
You can embed information about the image directly within the photo file itself. This metadata stays with the image even if it is copied, moved, or shared, helping to preserve important contextual information over time.

Adding metadata makes images easier to identify, search, and reuse in the future, especially in shared drives or collections. It also helps prevent images from becoming “orphaned” from their stories, ensuring they remain meaningful and useful to anyone looking at them in the future.

Right-click on one of your finished files and select **Get Info (Apple)** or in Window as shown below.



In the **Details** tab (Windows) or **Comments tab** (Apple) add the "Who, What, Where, and When" of your file - who took the picture, who is in the picture, when it was taken, where it was taken, etc.



STEP 6: COPY & BACKUP YOUR FILES

- Create and save at least two copies of your files.
- Follow **the 3-2-1 rule**: Keep 3 copies of each file, save them in 2 different storage media (ex: in a cloud storage folder and on an external hard drive), and keep 1 set of copies offsite. You can keep your most important information safe from fires and floods by storing it in a couple places.
- “What is the cloud?” Services like Google Drive and Dropbox maintain servers worldwide that store the files we upload to store with them. When someone stores a file “in the cloud” it just means they are using one of these services instead of saving it to the hard drive on their own computer at home.
- Copy your digital files to a new storage drive every 5 years. Technology changes quickly and this will ensure that your copies remain accessible.



A Port Melbourne Shed, Heath Street. 2025. Donated by Anne Callaghan.

STEP 7: SHARE YOUR WORK

Great job! You've created your own digital archive of photos and other materials that are important to you and the people you care about. Here are steps you can take moving forward:

- Invite others who care about these pictures to contribute to your archiving project.
- Make a reminder in your calendar to open your files a few times a year to make sure your software is still working and the files are where they should be.
- Make sure any cloud storage services you use are accessible and subscription payments are renewing properly.
- Replace external hard drives every 5-7 years.
- Consider donating a copy of your photos to your local public library or historical society. If you'd like to archive your photos with Port Phillip Libraries Community Collection, talk to Heritage Centre staff.



Park Towers residents display from countries of origin, 2004. Donated by Anna Rogalina

STEP 8: STORAGE FOR YOUR HOME ARCHIVE

Storing your personal items can be done effectively at home if you follow some basic steps.

Items should be kept in cool, dry, dark conditions. The ideal temperature for storing paper based items is around 20 degrees Celsius with 50 per cent relative humidity.

Paper based items should be housed in archival quality storage containers. These can be purchased from specialist archival suppliers, but suitable less expensive alternatives can also be used.

Below are some suggestions for a range of storage options:

Inexpensive

- Clear plastic document sleeves available from stationary shops or newsagents.
- Oven bags, and zip lock sandwich bags from the supermarket are excellent alternatives.
- Food grade plastic containers also make good storage boxes because they seal tightly enough to keep insects and water out.

More expensive

- Archival quality photocopy paper for inserts and interleaving.

- Plastic 'display books.'
- Polypropylene expanding document file (may have 'PP' and recycling number 5 stamped on it.)
- Polypropylene ring binder (may have 'PP' and recycling number 5 stamped on it.)
- Sturdy plastic crate with a lid.

Professional

- Acid-free and photo-safe folders and wallets.
- Acid-free and photo-safe storage boxes in cardboard or polypropylene.
- Acid-free and photo-safe albums in cardboard or polypropylene suitable for documents, photographs and negatives and slides.
- Polyester ('Mylar' or 'Melinex') document sleeve.

Storage environment

The area you use to store your records should be cool and dry. The cooler the better, however, cold temperatures often mean damp conditions, which need to be avoided. High temperature and moisture levels will cause documents to deteriorate rapidly. The ideal temperature for paper storage is around 20 degrees Celsius with 50 per cent relative humidity. Avoid storing your archives in an attic, the shed, or under the house. Use an area inside the house that stays as cool as possible but doesn't get damp and generate mildew. A space with no external walls is best – like a hall closet or linen cupboard.

The advantage of this kind of space is that changes in temperature and humidity are less dramatic – the surrounding rooms act as a buffer, smoothing out the highs and lows in the outer rooms. Of course, these kinds of cool, quiet places are also where insects like to live. If you use these spaces you should check every few months to be sure silverfish or other insects haven't moved into your collection. Silverfish will eat the paper and any starch-based adhesives that might be on your records. Instead of using moth balls or insect strips, store your collection in something that insects can't get into like a box with a tight-fitting lid, or zip lock plastic bags.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material [Home - Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material](#)

This is the professional organisation for Australian conservators. Their website is a great resource for information about collection care. It includes a visual glossary of different types of damage and deterioration, as well as a directory of conservators in private practice within Australia.

Australian Society of Archivists, *Keeping Archives*, [Keeping Archives](#)

A useful guide for archivists which covers the key archival principles of original order and provenance

Digital Preservation Coalition, *Digital Preservation Policy Toolkit* [Digital Preservation Policy Toolkit - Digital Preservation Coalition](#)

National Archives of Australia *Preserving Information* [Preserving information | naa.gov.au](#)

An extensive range of fact sheets

State Library of Victoria, *Conservation Guides* [Conservation guides | State Library Victoria](#)

Conservation experts have produced a series of information guides to help you care for and conserve your books, newspapers, artworks, paper documents and photographs. These cover topics from pests and mould to storage and framing.

PORT PHILLIP HERITAGE CENTRE

The Port Phillip Heritage Centre is here to help you be the best memory keeper you can be. We provide training and materials for anyone wanting to create oral history interviews, photographs, or other records of their neighbourhoods, families, and communities. Come to meet us at one of our free programs or workshops including our monthly [Scan and Save Workshops](#) to learn more about Port Phillip's rich history and how you can be part of preserving it.

PLEASE BE IN TOUCH!

Email: localhistory@portphillip.vic.gov.au

Phone: 03 9209 6795

[Make an enquiry or appointment](#)



Adapted from the Queens Memory Project <https://queensmemory.org/>