

# Preserving Digital Records

## Guidance for Donors and Depositors

### Introduction

This guidance is for anyone considering donating or depositing digital records with Gloucestershire Archives. It aims to answer FAQs relating to the transfer of digital records to the Archives. It also provides some 'top tips' on how best to manage digital records in your care. It includes a short glossary of key computing and archival terms.

Gloucestershire Archives collects, preserves and provides access to records which are of historical significance and record everyday life for the counties of Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire. Digital records have the same potential to become valuable historical resources as paper-based records. Many of the new collections received by Gloucestershire Archives include both digital and paper records.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1 What type of digital records does Gloucestershire Archives collect?

Gloucestershire Archives collects records based on the archival value of their content. If you have records you wish to donate or deposit, please contact the Collections Management team to discuss this and to book an appointment for transferring the records to our care.

Contact details: tel. 01452 425 295 or email [archives@goucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:archives@goucestershire.gov.uk)

#### 2 Can Gloucestershire Archives preserve all types of digital material?

Gloucestershire Archives can preserve the following types of digital material:

- ✓ Images
- ✓ Word processing files
- ✓ Simple spreadsheets
- ✓ Audio Visual files
- ✓ Sound files

However, we are expanding the type of digital records we can preserve, so if you have material that falls outside this list, e.g. a complex database, email inbox, website, please contact the Collections Management team.

**NB:** As part of the preservation process we make a copy of the original material. We cannot do this if your files contain anti-piracy or copy protection technology. Please remove copy protection prior to donating/depositing digital records with an archive.

### **3 Does Gloucestershire Archives accept old/obsolete file formats?**

Gloucestershire Archives prefers to receive digital records in the file formats they were created and used in, even if that format is now obsolete. Please do not change formats in order to transfer the records. We ask this as there is a risk of loss of structure, e.g. page layouts changing, which may be vital to understanding the information presented. Once the digital records are in our care we may create access formats (i.e. formats that are accessible in the current software environment) but we will also retain the original version for archival purposes.

### **4 How do I transport/transfer my digital material to Gloucestershire Archives?**

We currently have processes in place to receive digital records via:

- ✓ CD/DVD (please note that capacity of one DVD is not more than 4.7 GB)
- ✓ USB pen-drive
- ✓ Email (please note that we cannot receive emails larger than 10MB)

If you wish to transfer records in any other way (e.g. floppy disc, an entire hard-drive) please contact the Collections Management team.

When transferring digital records, please note that we prefer to receive:

- records within the **file hierarchy** they are stored in (presuming that is how they are organised), as this aids their identification and our understanding of their context of use (i.e. if individual or multiple digital records are stored within e-folder/s then please copy them to a CD/pen-drive within their folder structure);
- records that are **named consistently** and in ways that clearly identify them (e.g. 2001\_Minutes, 2002\_Minutes, etc.).

If your e-records are not clearly labelled and organised, please get in touch and we can advise how best to proceed.

### **5 Should I delete my copies of donated/deposited material after I have transferred them to Gloucestershire Archives?**

We recommend that you do not delete your copies of the files until we have verified that there are no problems with the copies and we have successfully transferred the records to our Digital Archive. We will confirm this in writing within 20 working days of receiving your records.

### **6 Can Gloucestershire Archives provide advice on looking after digital records?**

For general guidance on managing digital records see the *Top Tips* section below. In addition, see the short glossary of computing and archival terms, also provided below. If you have any questions not covered in this guidance please contact the Collections Management team.

## Top Tips for Managing Digital Records

### 1. Name records clearly

- ✓ Name your files in a consistent and clearly identifiable way, e.g. '2011\_07\_Minutes', '2011\_Minutes08', etc. This is important as digital records can only be viewed by opening/running them and if a file becomes inaccessible (e.g. the format becomes obsolete or corrupts) the name may be the only way you can identify it.
- ✓ Use 'version control', i.e. name your files to reflect their status, e.g. '20110605\_Reportv2', '20110512\_Reportv3', '20110520\_ReportFinalVersion'. This is useful as digital records can only be viewed by opening/running them and if versions are not clearly labelled there is a risk a file may be misidentified, e.g. the wrong version of a record may be used or deleted.

### 2. Organise records

- ✓ Organise your records in a file hierarchy, e.g. create folder for *Church Minutes* and sub-folder for 2011 and a sub-sub-folder for *January, February*, etc. This is important both because it allows you to find your digital records and because it tells you about the relationships between records. In the paper environment a single note book might contain all your notes on a subject, but in the digital environment this same information is likely to be spread across a variety of files.

### 3. Limit access to records

- ✓ Limit access to your digital records to manage the risk of files accidentally (or maliciously) being changed or deleted. A simple thing you can do is password protect your PC to ensure only authorised users have access. It is also possible to require a password to allow access to a specific file or to not allow editing. Limiting access is particularly important if your records include personal or sensitive information. **Please remove password protection prior to donating/depositing digital records with an archive.**

### 4. Store records on 'live storage'

- ✓ Store your files on your hard-drive – this is 'live storage' in that your computer runs regular background checks on data integrity and should flag up problems. A common alternative is storing files on 'static' storage (e.g. CD, Pen-drive), but this is a risky approach as static storage media may deteriorate and problems will go undetected until you try to access the material. There is the added risk that static storage medium may become obsolete (e.g. floppy disc) and it could prove difficult to find a computer that has the appropriate input device (e.g. floppy disc drive).

### 5. Back-up your records

- ✓ Make copies of your key records, i.e. back-up. This is important as unlike paper records digital material has to be 'perfect' to be comprehensible. It is not possible to open a corrupted digital file in the way it is possible to read a paper document that has been partially damaged. There are simple options available, such as copy to static media (for short term back-ups), 'cloud storage' or using a portable hard-drive. It is advisable not to store back-ups in the same location as your primary files.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Archival value:** The ongoing usefulness or significance of records, based on the administrative, legal, fiscal, evidential, or historical information they contain, justifying their continued preservation.<sup>1</sup>

**Back-up:** A batch of copied digital files stored in a different location than the primary files for the purpose of managing the risk of losing the primary files due to e.g. hard drive failure, file corruption or an onsite disaster. The retrieval of backed-up files is called restoring

**Born-digital record:** A record created in digital form, i.e. it started life as a digital record. This is as opposed to records that are digitised versions of paper-based records

**Cloud storage:** Storage which is hosted by an online provider. The term 'cloud computing' refers to services which can be accessed online, e.g. GoogleDocs provides online word-processing software.

**Copy protection:** is any effort designed to prevent the reproduction of software, films, music, and other media, usually for copyright reasons.

**Digital archive:** Monitored, backed-up, secure/access limited storage to support long term preservation and access of digital records. In this way, it fulfils the same role in a digital world as a traditional archival strong room for paper-based records.

**Digital preservation:** 'The series of managed activities necessary to ensure continued access to digital materials for as long as necessary. Digital preservation is defined very broadly as all of the actions required to maintain access to digital materials beyond the limits of media failure or technological change.'<sup>2</sup>

**Digital record:** 'A record created, and/or maintained, by means of digital computer technology. It includes records that are born-digital or have undergone conversion from a non-digital format.'<sup>3</sup> The term is often used interchangeably with 'electronic record'.

**Folder:** A computer folder is a graphical representation to support user management of computer files.

**File:** A computer file is a piece of digital information, which is recognised by a computer and presented and interpreted as one unit. It can usefully be regarded as the digital version of a paper document.

**Live storage:** Storage that is on a live system, e.g. a computer hard-drive. This is as opposed to **static storage** medium like CDs, DVDs or pen-drives, where the data cannot be monitored and checked without inserting the media into a computer input device, e.g. CD drive.

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<sup>1</sup> SAA Glossary: <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/index.asp> <accessed 23/07/2011>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.