



# Restoring your old photographs

It's easy to save your family photo archive digitally and improve them at the same time, for everyone to enjoy

**Restore** It's never been easier to save and enhance your family photographs

**I**t's a familiar situation for family history researchers worldwide. Many of us have precious collections of photographs dating back decades or more, all stored away in a shoebox, cupboard or attic somewhere. A lot of these photographs are unique, and often there are other members of the family who would be interested in having copies.

Unfortunately, plenty of these photographic collections are deteriorating. Over time photographs can get damaged, fade

or diminish in other ways – so now is the time to save them.

Here we'll explain how you can scan your own photographs and store them on your computer, as well as the basic techniques you can use to make improvements to your photographs by using free software.

If possible, you should repair and salvage as many old photos as you can. This means future generations can see your images clearly and in true depiction.

There are a number of reasons why your photos may begin to

worsen, even if you've carefully stored them away. Deteriorating photos from past decades could be the result of the inks and photo paper used in the past, as they weren't of archival quality. This can result in fading and degradation of your pictures; even if they haven't been exposed to sunlight, moisture or natural disasters.

## Storage techniques

Restoration, retouching and editing services can enhance the quality of your deteriorating photos and you can now have copies made to CD or DVD, for long-term storage. This means you can view, share, catalogue or print images – free of spots, stains or blemishes.

If you wanted, you can even add colour during the enhancement of your black and white photographs.

In addition to this, you can achieve a better brightness, contrast, detail and clearer focus or sharpness as part of the photo editing process.

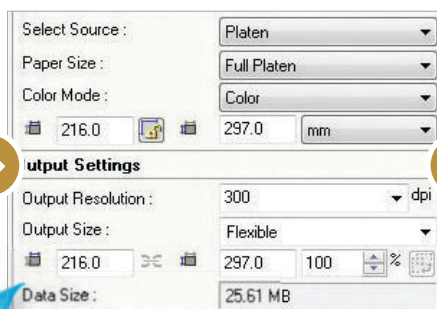
One of the most important reasons for saving your old photos is that they contain important and sentimental memories.

# Step-by-step: Scan your photos

Copying your photographs is easy when you follow certain rules to get the best results



**1** Check your photos and the scanner glass for dust and dirt. Gently remove any loose marks or fingerprints with a lint-free cloth.



**2** Set options to scan the photos in colour, even if they are black and white. Set the scan resolution to a minimum of 300dpi, 600dpi (dots per inch), or higher, if your original photo is small. Switch off any 'auto-enhance' options on the scanner if you're planning to send the scans to be professionally restored.



**3** Position your photo face down on the scanner glass and select 'pre-scan' or 'preview' to see a rough version. Crop the previewed image leaving a little space around the edge. You can crop accurately yourself later. Scan the image and save as a jpeg file in a folder on your PC.

If you've ever experienced a natural disaster, such as a flood or fire, you will know how heartbreaking it can be to lose all of your photographs from years gone by. When you restore and save your old photographs on your computer they will be safe, not to mention convenient to view and easily portable. You no longer need to worry about their destruction in a basement or attic.

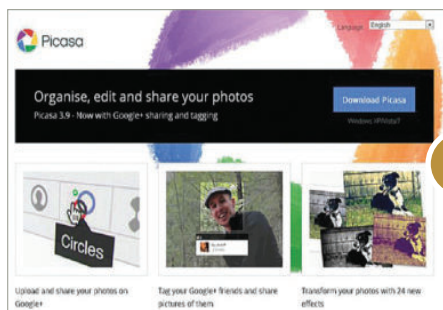
As part of your family history research old photos can provide historical links or possible clues about your ancestors. When rebuilding your family tree, it's possible to determine certain aspects of your ancestry, such as weddings, landmarks of geographical nature and other important occasions. Enhancing your old photos may reveal details you previously may have missed.

In certain cases, there may be celebrity status in your photo collection, and photographs of archival quality can be historically and monetarily significant, especially if they show Royal or famous ancestors. You could be sitting on a national treasure and be unaware of it.

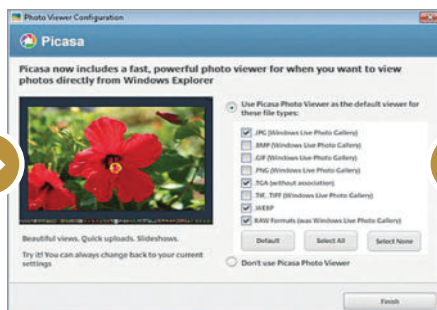
One major benefit of saving your photographs is that you'll be preserving your family history.

# Step-by-step: Edit family photos

Use the free program Picasa to rejuvenate your old pictures



**1** Download Picasa (<http://picasa.google.co.uk>) to your PC. From this link click 'download Picasa'. Click 'run' when asked to run or save file and click 'run' when asked to run or save software. Always remember to agree to the terms and conditions. Install to the default 'destination location' and click 'finish' to complete.



**2** Allow Picasa to search your entire computer for pictures. Picasa will then search for all the photographs and put them in date order in the folders they're stored on the Picasa program. At the next and final screen you have the option as to which types of file Picasa will look for, and an option to use Picasa as your default photo viewer.



**3** Select the folder where your scanned photographs are located. If you have a lot of folders just type some relevant word from the name of the folder in the search field top right of the Picasa window.



Once your photographs are digitally copied you can store them on your computer, organise them into categories, as well as share them with family and friends electronically. You can add titles, descriptions and names to the images so that future generations will have all the information.

It's a great shame when older relatives have passed away leaving photograph collections of their families going back generations, yet nobody knows who many of the people are; meaning that vital information is lost forever.

## DIY changes

You can do much of this work yourself, but for really damaged photos that you're unable to tackle, use a professional photograph restorer such as Photographs Forever ([www.photographsforever.co.uk](http://www.photographsforever.co.uk)), which will provide photo restoration, retouching and editing services to enhance and salvage deteriorating photos. Don't forget; a quick online search will provide other restoration firms that may well suit your specific needs.

Once the photograph has been scanned into your computer you'll be able to edit it by improving colour, contrast, cropping, removing blemishes, creases, and other damage that may have been caused by water or smoke from a fire.



**Choices** Picasa has over 30 built-in special effects. At any time you can choose to save an image as a new file when you've made all your adjustments

Consequently, the end product is actually better than the original ever was.

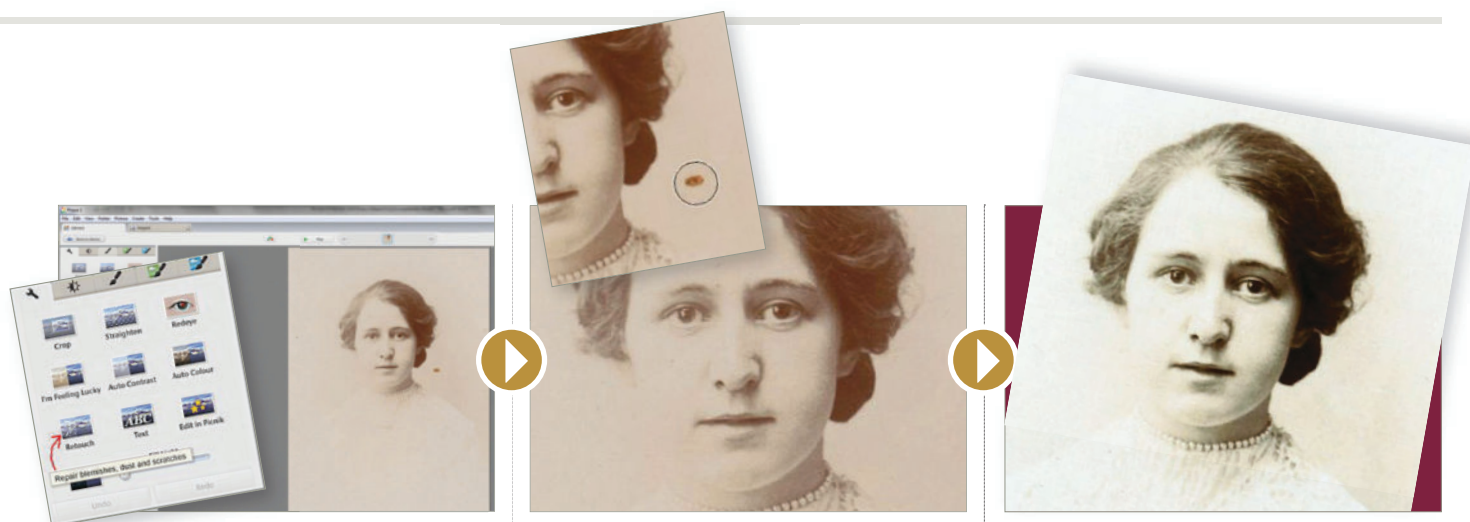
It's surprising how much you can do yourself with free software readily available such as Picasa (<http://picasa.google.co.uk>). This is an excellent free program that's an image organiser and viewer for organising and editing digital photos, plus has an integrated photo-sharing website. It's also user-friendly and easy to work with. It leaves your original images in their original locations on your computer. Also, after editing your pictures using Picasa, the original

pictures remain unchanged – and where you left them.

There are many photo editing software packages, such as Photoshop, with highly specialised tools for restoring pictures.

These are expensive and require a high level of skill in order to use effectively.

Many family tree software programs allow you to upload electronic images to attach to the person on the family tree. For family historians, the benefits of restoring old photos may be considered priceless. Apart from your photos looking better, any



**4** Double-click on the photograph you want to edit. On the left of the screen there are tools to enhance your picture. The first tools tab allows you to crop, eliminate red-eye, set auto-contrast or you can select 'I'm Feeling Lucky' and Picasa will process the image as it thinks fit. This is where you can also add titles to your photos.

**5** Use the retouch tool to eliminate dust spots and other marks. Select the size of the brush you require, click on the spot you want to get rid of and then move the brush to a clear place that has a similar background. Click again and your spot is gone and blended invisibly.

**6** Select the sun icon from the tools tab, to adjust brightness, highlights, shadows and use fill-light to make the picture how you want it. Adjust colour temperature on this same tab. Use the dropper tool to select an object in your photo that is black or white and it will automatically adjust the colour balance.



## GLOSSARY

### Learning the lingo

Some terms you will come across in photo software packages

- ✦ **ARCHIVE QUALITY PAPER** This is alkaline paper that won't deteriorate over time. Archival papers must meet national standards for permanence. The expected life of archival paper is more than 100 years.
- ✦ **COLOUR BALANCE** Colour balance changes the overall mixture of colours in an image and is used for colour correction; generalised versions of colour balance are used to get colours other than neutrals to also appear correct or pleasing.
- ✦ **COLOUR TEMPERATURE** Light isn't always what it seems. Our eyes are very forgiving, so when we move from place to place everything seems normal in terms of colour. So, for example, when moving from a bright daylight environment to a room lit by a candle all that will appear to change, to the naked eye, is the light level. Yet record these two situations using colour film and the first will have a blue hue and the latter will come out with a heavy orange cast.
- ✦ **CONTRAST** This refers to the brightness ratio of the lightest to the darkest part of an image.
- ✦ **CROP** You do this to reduce the edges of an image to exclude unwanted portions of the photograph.
- ✦ **DETAIL** In this instance, detail means any small section of a larger area of a photograph magnified to show what the eye would not otherwise distinguish.
- ✦ **FOCUS** The clear and sharply defined condition of an image.
- ✦ **HIGHLIGHTS** Areas or spots in a photograph that are the most strongly illuminated.
- ✦ **RED-EYE** The red-eye effect in photography is the common appearance of red pupils in colour photographs of eyes. It occurs when using a photographic flash very close to the camera lens (as with most compact cameras), in ambient low light.
- ✦ **SCANNER** This is an electronic device that generates a digital representation of an image for data input onto a computer.

**Expert** Photoshop software can give your precious photos a professional finish

► small photos, which have been restored and scanned properly, can often be significantly enlarged, making them suitable for framing. So, a family photograph with all its nostalgic detail can be enjoyed by everyone.

Prints made from your restored images using Photobox ([www.photobox.co.uk](http://www.photobox.co.uk)) are made using the latest technology inks and archive quality paper ensuring they won't suffer the same deterioration fate as early photographs, which due to the chemicals used, were affected by the atmosphere over a period of time. You don't have to limit your restoration to prints.

What about saving your old 35mm slides that you haven't shown for years, either because you don't have a projector and screen any more or the lamp is blown?

You can also preserve negatives digitally as the scanning software can be set to reverse the image to a positive one.

Once restored, you won't need to be quite as concerned about storing the originals as you'll now have readily viewable images either on your computer screen, television or as modern prints and

tastefully framed enlargements. A restored and enlarged image is a great gift idea for those 'difficult to buy for' family and friends – and guaranteed to be totally unique!

So, there are lots of benefits to scanning and restoring your pictures, so why not get started?

As mentioned, you may need professional restoration for extremely valuable or damaged photographs, but don't forget it's entirely feasible for you to create some great results with a basic scanner and free software. ■

## CONTACTS

### Photobox

[www.photobox.co.uk](http://www.photobox.co.uk)

### Photographs Forever

[www.photographsforever.co.uk](http://www.photographsforever.co.uk)

### Picasa

<http://picasa.google.co.uk>