

# Family History Online

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Computer specialists enthuse about the AppleMac, this month David Tippey has a look at what is on offer. James Taylor suggests ways of keeping your PC in good order. We also visit the Rootsweb site which contains many genealogical goodies.

## Stay young and beautiful

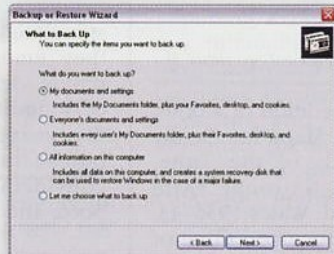
### An introduction to keeping your PC healthy

You know how it is when you eat too much. You get bloated and hardly able to move. So it is with your computer. After a while it too slows down as it struggles under the burden of all those files you've forced it to ingest over the months. In the end it can become very torpid indeed. The only cure is to reduce the load by eliminating some of the now useless files and tidying the rest so that sorting through them becomes less of a chore for your machine.

It's a good idea from time to time to check your hard drive for errors. Click *Start*, then *My Computer*, then right-click the icon for your C: drive, and choose *Properties*. Now choose the *Tools* tab and click the *Check Now* button. Repeat this step for any other hard drives. Applications and files must be closed in order for error checking to fix the problems it finds. Windows XP (the operating system used in most modern computers) will probably report that the disk check will run the next time you restart your system if you've checked *Automatically fix file system errors* on the next screen. Note that finding and recovering bad sectors can take hours if you have a large drive and is a job best done overnight.

Your next task, if your machine is currently working satisfactorily, is to create a new Restore Point (Windows ME and XP only). This takes a snapshot of your computer system from which you can restore your machine's previous settings in the event of anything going wrong (it's a good idea to create a new restore point before installing any new software, too, in case the new installation clashes with existing programs).

The easiest way is to use the System Restore Wizard: click *Start*, then click *Help and Support*. Click *Undo changes to your computer with System Restore*, then click *Create a restore point*. Give your restore point a meaningful name and the job's done. To return to this restore point, from the System Restore Wizard



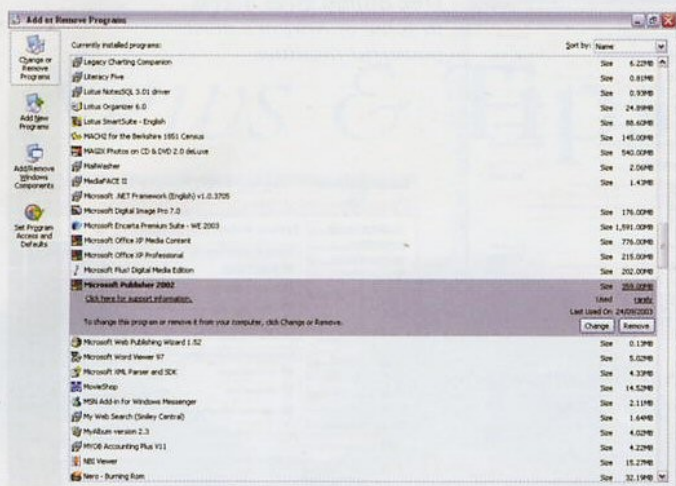
*XP's Backup utility is very flexible over what to save.*



*A London sweep about 1884. To keep your computer clean there are a variety of programs to help you.*

select *Restore My Computer to an Earlier Time*. Then select the date when the restore point was created.

Next, backup as much as necessary from your hard drive. There's no need to save your programs unless they've been subject to updates or service packs that you might find difficult to replicate. You do need to backup your data though, because if you lose that you'll have to create it all over again. This is data like your word-processing files or your family history records. It might be



Permanently remove old installations using Add or Remove Programs



Identifying picture files for deletion is easier if you use thumbnails.

in a sub-folder under the program folder or it might be in a Windows default folder like My Documents or My Pictures. Some programs make their own backup copies automatically; if possible, configure them to save to removable media like a floppy disk or CD-R or CD-RW. Alternatively, archive the default backup folder to CD.

Windows XP Professional has its own backup facility. So does Windows XP Home, except that it isn't installed by default — you have to install it manually. You'll find it on the Windows XP Home Edition CD-ROM in the ValueAdd folder. To use it, click *Start*, point to *All Programs*, point to *Accessories*, and then *System Tools*, then click *Backup*. It's then just a question of following the prompts to select which files to save and where. The built-in backup utility in Windows XP won't backup to a CD-R but does work with CD-RWs, hard drives, and other removable storage.

Your next job is to delete any files you don't need, freeing up some hard drive space. All files fall into one of three broad categories. There are operating system files needed by Windows to do its job, individual program files and data files produced by the program files. Don't delete any files needed by Windows. EVER. The only way to safely delete program files is to uninstall the program. Some come with their own uninstall sub-program. For those that don't, Windows XP Pro (but not Home Edition) has its own *Add or Remove Programs* routine, which is found in the *Control Panel* under the *Start* button. Scroll down to the program you want, click *Remove*, and it's done. You can't get it back.

Removing data files is more straightforward. Find the file to remove, highlight it, right-click and select *delete* and that's it. To select more than one file, hold down the *Ctrl* key while right-clicking those files you want to delete. Deleting files merely moves them to the Recycle Bin where they stay until pushed out by later deletions. You can get them back if you're quick. To delete selected files permanently, press *Shift* while right-clicking.

You can change the storage capacity of the Recycle Bin. On the desktop, right-click *Recycle Bin* and then click *Properties*. Move the slider to increase or decrease the amount of disk space that is reserved for storing deleted items. You can do this globally or use different Recycle Bin settings for different drives (if you have more than one). Note that if you delete an item that is larger than the storage capacity of the Recycle Bin it will not be saved. It will be permanently deleted.

There are some files that, if left, will accumulate on your hard drive but can be difficult to track down individually, such as leftover temporary files, internet cache files and unnecessary program files that you can safely delete. You can use Disk Cleanup to delete some or all of those files. To run Disk Cleanup click *Start*, point to *All Programs*, point to *Accessories*, point to *System Tools* and then click *Disk Cleanup*. The *More Options* tab offers you several more cleanup choices. The *System Restore Cleanup* option in particular can clear lots of disk space by erasing old restore points.

Deleting files will leave gaps on your hard drive. The next time you save data or install new software these gaps will be filled first, leading to fragmented files all over the drive, some split into two or more segments. This slows down data retrieval, leading to a slower computer. Defragmenting rearranges each file's components into a single continuous block for faster access and leaves empty spaces as one contiguous chunk.

To run XP's Disk Defragmenter select *Start*, then *All Programs*, then *Accessories*, then *System Tools*, then *Disk Defragmenter*. Highlight the drive that you want to check and click the *Analyze* button. If your drive needs to be defragmented — more red than other colours — click the *Defragment* button. Some files, like those associated with the operating system, can't be moved.

Defragmenting, which can take some time, needs at least 15 per cent usable free space on your hard drive. If you have less you will need to delete some less-used files first (and think about getting a bigger hard drive).

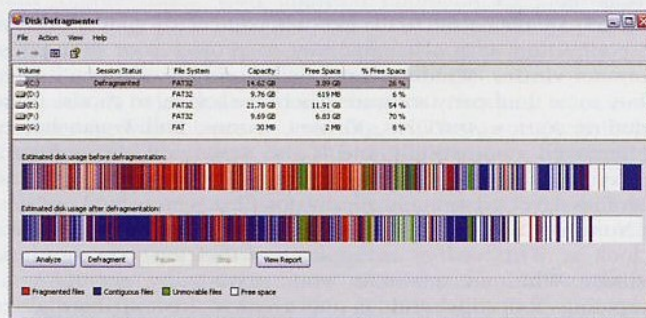
You can protect your computer whilst connected to the internet by installing a personal 'firewall'. Personal firewall protection is especially useful for users with 'always-on' connections such as ADSL broadband or cable modems, but works with 'dial-up' services as well. Personal firewalls work in the background to protect the system from malicious computer code by controlling internet connections to and from a user's computer, filtering inbound and outbound traffic and alerting the user to attempted intrusions. A firewall won't necessarily prevent or eliminate viruses.

Windows XP comes with an integral firewall but you do have to switch it on. Click *Start*, point to *Connect* to and then click *Show all connections*. Alternatively go to the *Control Panel* and click *Network Connections* from there. You may only have one connection, but each that you have should say 'Firewalled'. If not, right-click on the connection icon, click *Properties*, select the *Advanced* tab and check the box for *Protect my computer and network*.

Finally, to scrape the last ounce of speed from your machine, get rid of



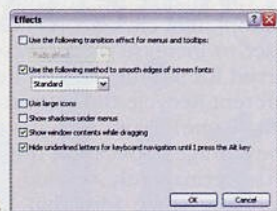
Use Disk Cleanup regularly to keep your computer quick.



Before and after defragmentation results in far fewer fragmented files and a faster machine.



Protect your internet access by enabling XP's firewall.



Disable as many effects as you can for a faster machine.



Norton AntiVirus offers a full range of facilities to protect your machine.

One Button gives access to some of Norton's most powerful facilities.



XP's visual effects. First, right-click any part of your desktop (except an icon) and select *Properties*, then the *Desktop* tab to remove any background graphics (select *None*). From the *Screensaver* tab, also select *None*. From the *Appearance* tab, select *Effects* and uncheck all except those you cannot possibly live without. Now go to the *Control Panel* and click the *System* icon. Under the *Advanced* tab, click *Performance Settings*. Here you can enable or disable many visual effects, saving memory and speeding up operations. You can select for appearance, which enables them all. Selecting for performance disables them all, which tells you everything you need to know. You can also select effects individually if there are some you consider essential.

If you're hesitant about using XP's built-in tools, you can buy 'utility' software that does the same thing. One of the better-known names in utility software is Norton, which offers a range of facilities to help with looking after your computer. Some of these can be bought individually, but you get a better bargain (and more facilities) if you buy them bundled in Norton SystemWorks.

*Norton Disk Doctor* does the same thing as XP's disk check feature but with an easier interface. *Norton Speed Disk* not only defragments your hard drive but optimises all its files by rearranging them in order of use, improving performance. *Norton Doctor* can monitor your drive's fragmentation levels, notifying you when it's time to run Speed Disk. Norton CleanSweep, building on XP's Disk Cleanup, removes old software applications and other unnecessary files and can log details about software installations for easy uninstallation later. CleanSweep incorporates a Backup Wizard that creates a compressed backup, which you can keep on your hard drive or move to external storage like a CD for safer keeping.

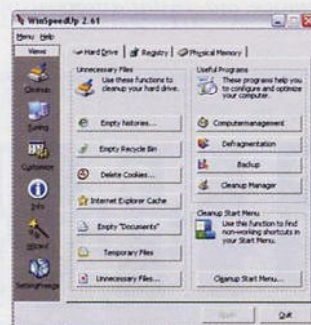
If you want to backup your entire hard drive, *Norton Ghost* creates clones, or exact disk images, of the drive, which you can restore to your hard drive. Ghost can also backup to (multiple) CD/RW and DVD-RW drives. However, it is a pretty sophisticated piece of software and you might find a simpler program easier to use.

Like XP's System Restore, *Norton GoBack Personal Edition* restores your computer to a previous working state after system crashes, failed installations and other serious problems. It also continuously monitors your hard drive activity, automatically creating safe points.

Norton's Web Cleanup deletes files left over from internet sessions including cookies, cached files and history logs, as an alternative to Windows Disk Cleanup. You can choose which files to remove.

If you are connected to the internet, particularly with an 'always on' connection, it is also important to protect your PC against computer viruses. Windows can't help you here and you'll have to buy some third-party software. There are several to choose from, including *Norton AntiVirus*. Viruses, worms, and Trojan horses are removed automatically and it also scans and cleans instant message attachments, incoming and outgoing email messages and other files. LiveUpdate automatically downloads protection updates.

Norton is not the only utility software. You might also like to look at *WinSpeedUp*, an application that lets you tune and optimise Windows, maintain your privacy by erasing your computing 'footsteps' and, in the process, free up hard drive space. The program empties the recycle bin, deletes cookies, resets the history and documents lists, erases your Internet Explorer cache and deletes temporary and other unnecessary files.



WinSpeedUp gives you precise control over tuning your computer.

In addition, you have one-click access to XP's built-in tools like Disk Check and Defragmentation.

Norton SystemWorks 'standard' package costs £64.99 and includes Norton AntiVirus, Norton Utilities, Norton Password Manager, Norton GoBack Personal Edition, and Norton CleanSweep.

[www.symantec.com/region/reg\\_eu](http://www.symantec.com/region/reg_eu)

WinSpeedUp and the similar XP Tuner come from Phoenix Software and cost £19.99 each.

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



Wash day on a Victorian country estate