

Recovering Historical Documents From Snapshots And Volume Shadow Copies

This guide for UK lawyers details how historical document states can be recovered from Windows Volume Shadow Copies, server snapshots, and cloud platform version histories. It covers the layers of data preservation, methods for differencing, common mistakes, and when to engage a digital forensic expert.

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SNAPSHOTS & SHADOWCOPIES · A GUIDE FOR UK LAWYERS Recovering Historical Documents from Snapshots and Volume Shadow Copies The Time Machine Already Running on Your Client's Systems: and How to Read It Before It Prunes COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB

§ ABOUT THE AUTHOR PREPARED BY COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB E-DISCOVERY TEAM

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Speak to a forensic examiner, not a salesperson. INSTRUCTTHELAB
NEWENQUIRIESEMAILE - DISCOVERY

Questions and answers

How far back do these layers really go?

Per layer, per configuration: platform version histories can span a document's whole life (subject to limits and trimming); storage snapshots follow their retention ladder: commonly weeks to a year; shadow copies are the wildcard, from days to a year depending on disk pressure; and backups (guide 49) reach deepest at the coarsest grain. The honest answer is the inventory: an afternoon's work that replaces speculation with a dated list, and the first thing to commission.

Can deleted version histories or snapshots be recovered?

Sometimes the content, usually the fact: platform audit logs record version deletions with account and date; snapshot removals log at the appliance or hypervisor; shadow-copy clearance leaves command traces. Content-wise, the other layers frequently hold the same generations (a trimmed Share Point history rarely outruns the share snapshots and the emailed counterparts), which is the architecture table's point: history tampering tends to curate one shelf of a library while the others keep lending.

Is a document recovered from a shadow copy or snapshot admissible like the original?

It is disclosed and proved like any electronic document, with its provenance stated: which layer, which dated state, collected how, hashed when. Properly collected, its evidential position is strong precisely because the preserving system acted automatically and before the dispute; the challenges that succeed target sloppy recovery (restored over live data, unhashed, undocumented), not the concept. Hence the laboratory-collection discipline through out this guide.

The other side's disclosure shows only final versions. What should we ask for?

The §11 requests: version histories with authorship for the named documents; audit records of version deletion or trimming; snapshot inventories for the hosting shares; and confirmation of suspension. Then read the answers as evidence: platforms keep versions by default, so absence has causes: settings, trimming, migration: each checkable, each with its own audit trail, and each more informative than the silence it replaces.

Do Macs and non-Windows systems have equivalents?

Yes: APFS local snapshots and Time Machine series on Macs (guide 42's structure-not-carving point), ZFS/Btrfs snapshots on the appliances and servers guides 43-44 cover, and the same platform version histories wherever the documents live in cloud services. The three-layer question is asked identically; only the tool names change: and the preservation email adapts its verbs, not its logic.

What single habit should our team adopt from this guide?

Make "what history layers run, and when do they prune?" a standard early question in every document dispute: alongside the custodian list, before the preservation letter goes out. It costs one conversation with IT, it shapes the letter's most valuable paragraph, and in a meaningful fraction of cases it is the difference between arguing about what a document says and proving what it said: the entire trade of this guide, available for the price of asking. cflab. uk ·

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