Recovering Previous Versions Of Cloud Documents

Cloud platforms automatically retain document version histories, complete with attribution and timestamps. This guide details how these versions are kept, what can destroy them, and how to forensic all y preserve, collect, and interpret this crucial drafting record for litigation and investigations.

e-discovery.uk, Computer Forensics Lab. Published 2026-08-31.
https://e-discovery.uk/library/recovering-previous-versions-of-cloud-documents

CLOUD DOCUMENT VERSION S · A GUIDE FOR UK LAWYERS Recovering Previous Versions of Cloud Documents The Drafting History Share Point, One Drive and Google Drive Keep Without Being Asked COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB

§ ABOUT THE AUTHOR PREPARED BY COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB E-DISCOVERY TEAM ESTABLISHED 2007 · LONDON ISO 17025-ALIGNED PROCEDURES VERSION-HISTORY COLLECTION AUTHORSHIP & CHRONOLOGY ANALYSIS CPR PART 35 EXPERT REPORT S FULL CHAIN-OF-CUSTODY DOCUMENTATION

§ CONTENTS In this guide 01 Executive summary 02 The problem in plain English: the file is a frame, the history is the film 03 How platforms keep versions: Share Point, One Drive, Google Drive and DMS systems 04 What kills history: limits, retention, copies, moves and migrations 05 Preserving and collecting versions forensic all y 06 Reading the ladder: authorship, chronology and the shape of drafting 07 Versions in dispute: authenticity, disclosure scope and production 08 Source architecture: where else the evidence lives 09 Worked examples 10 Common mistakes and technical limitations 11 Questions to ask · Suggested wording 12 Checklist and red flags · When to involve a digital forensic expert 13 Frequently asked questions 14 Glossary · References · Disclaimer · How a specialist laboratory can assist

§ 01 · ORIENTATION Executive summary THE HEADLINE POINT: CLOUD PLATFORM S KEEP A DOCUMENT ' SVERSIONLADDER AUTOMATICALLY, ATTRIBUTEDANDTIMESTAMPED: PRESERVEITBEFORELIMITSAND RETENTIONPRUNEIT, COLLECTITWITHTHEHISTORYINTACT, ANDREADITASTHE DRAFTINGRECORDITIS

§ 02 · FIRST PRINCIPLES The problem in plain English: the file is a frame, the history is the film

§ 03 · HOWVERSIONSAREKEPT How platforms keep versions: Share Point, One Drive, Google Drive and DMS systems

§ 04 · WHATKILLSHISTORY What kills history: limits, retention, copies, moves and migrations

§ 05 · PRESERVATION AND COLLECTION Preserving and collecting versions forensic all y

§ 06 · READINGTHELADDER Reading the ladder: authorship, chronology and the shape of drafting

§ 07 · VERSION S IN DISPUTE Versions in dispute: authenticity, disclosure scope and production

§ 08 · THEWIDERMAP Source architecture: where else the evidence lives EVIDENCE VERSION DOCUMENT PLATFORM INTERNAL LADDER METADATA AUDIT ATTACHMENT S / CACHES + PLATFORM LOGS SENT COPIES LOCAL BACKUPS END POINT COPIES

§ 09 · IN THE WILD Worked examples EXAMPLE1 · THEINDEMNITYTHATLEFTAT23: 4 EXAMPLE2 · THEMIGRATIONTHATFLATTENEDTHELADDER, AND THE BACKUP THAT DID NOT EXAMPLE3 · THEEXPORTTHATFORGOTTHEVERSIONS

§ 10 · WHEREITGOESWRONG Common mistakes and technical limitations Common mistakes Technical limitations

§ 11 · INTERROGATORIES & DRAFTING AIDS Questions to ask · Suggested wording Ask your client Ask your opponent Ask your e Discovery / forensic provider

§ 12 · QUICK CONTROL Checklist and red flags · When to involve a digital forensic expert The version-history checklist Red flags When to involve a digital forensic expert

§ 13 · COMMON QUESTIONS Frequently asked questions Are prior versions really "documents" we have to disclose? The version history on our key document is missing. Does that look bad? Can the platform tell us who made a specific change? We only have the document as an email attachment. Is that enough? How far back do version histories go? Do drafts carry privilege the final does not?

§ 14 · REFERENCE Glossary Sources and authoritative references DISCLAIMER

§ HOW A SPECIALIST LABORATORY CAN ASSIST Working with Computer Forensics Lab Speak to a forensic examiner, not a salesperson. INSTRUCTTHELAB NEWENQUIRIESEMAILE - DISCOVERY

Questions and answers

Are prior versions really "documents" we have to disclose?

They are documents; whether they fall within scope is an issues-and-proportionality question answered in the DRD (§7). Where a document's date, authorship or content history is in issue, its ladder is usually squarely relevant; for the bulk of a corpus, agreed limits are normal. What is not acceptable is silently producing finals only because the export defaulted that way.

The version history on our key document is missing. Does that look bad?

It looks like a question, and the audit log usually answers it: version limits, migrations, moves and copies flatten ladders innocently every day (Example 2), while user-initiated version deletion during a dispute is logged and looks exactly as bad as it is. Establish the cause from the records before anyone characterises it, in either direction.

Can the platform tell us who made a specific change?

To the account that saved the version containing it, yes: diffs localise the change to a rung, the rung names the account and time (§6): with co-authoring caveats (several editors in one session) and the guide 105-107 disciplines joining account to person. Example 1's 23:40 deletion was attributed exactly that way.

We only have the document as an email attachment. Is that enough?

It is a snapshot with a date bracket, useful for hash-matching and for proving a state existed: but it has no ladder. Find the original platform location and collect there (§5); the attachment then corroborates the rung it matches. Collecting only copies is the most common way a case loses history it never knew it had.

How far back do version histories go?

As far as limits and retention allowed: potentially years for lightly edited files, potentially days for heavily co- authored ones under a low version cap (§4). The answer is per library and per file, established from settings and the ladder itself: and where the platform has pruned, §8's alternates (backups, sent copies, audit logs) extend the reach.

Do drafts carry privilege the final does not?

They can: a draft prepared for legal advice, or reflecting it, attracts privilege on its own merits regardless of the final's status: and the reverse: which is why versions are reviewed per guide 91's segment discipline before production, not assumed to share the final's coding. A privileged draft produced unreviewed is guide 92's subject. cflab. u k · e-disc ove r y. u k

Source: https://e-discovery.uk/library/recovering-previous-versions-of-cloud-documents. Free to read and share with attribution to Computer Forensics Lab, e-discovery.uk.