

## INTRODUCTION

## COMPUTER SCIENCE

Welcome to Computer Science, the section of *Your Family Tree* where we concentrate on using technology to help you research, preserve, publish and share your family history...

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Make recordings of your relatives as they talk through your family history. As well as being useful, interviews make great records of the past

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## COMPUTER SCIENCE

## DIGITAL VOICES



Record new interviews, clean-up old recordings and store sound files in your family history software – it's easy; here's how...



Many memories and research leads are locked in the minds of relatives, especially older ones, and the best way to free them is with a one-to-one discussion. Recording the sound of a great-aunt or a second cousin talking about their experiences can really bring family history to life. But how do you transfer recordings to your PC for editing and storing and what can you do about old interviews currently trapped on cassette tapes?

Interviewing someone has never been easier. It's best done using a microphone and recording device, so you can concentrate on asking the right questions and steer the conversation, gently of course, in the direction you're interested in.

If you're planning to record a series of interviews, the best device to invest in is a digital voice recorder. They won't break the bank – even for a good one (we paid around £40 for the Sony ICD-P320 from [www.dabs.com](http://www.dabs.com)), are simple



**RECORDER:** Sony's ICD-P320 is an affordable digital voice recorder offering good features and voice quality

to operate and are designed to work in tandem with your PC.

The ICD-P320 digital voice recorder is capable of recording over 32 hours of conversations, which can be split into 396 separate recordings and stored in one of four folders. It's incredibly simple to operate – just insert two AAA batteries, set up the date and time and you're ready to go. Place it between yourself and your interviewee, press the red record button and start the interview. Once complete, press Stop and the recording will start to play back (just press Stop again to cancel this). The volume control on the side of the device controls the playback volume and has no effect on the recording, and there's an erase button that needs to be pressed twice before the currently selected recording is deleted.

Transferring digital recordings to your PC is simple – the three-step walkthrough over the page reveals how it's done. The only drawback with the ICD-P320 is that you can only save the recording as a WAV file. Although this ensures the recording is at its original quality, it takes up a lot of hard drive space (100 minutes consumes around 1GB), however, there's an easy solution.

It's possible to convert this file to MP3 format, which produces a file one tenth the size with a small drop in quality (not a problem with voice recordings). To do this, you'll need to install the program *Audacity* from the coverdisc and then follow the second step in the six-step walkthrough to add MP3 support to it.

Once done, choose File > Open, browse to and locate your recording

## STEP-BY-STEP: RECORDING AN INTERVIEW

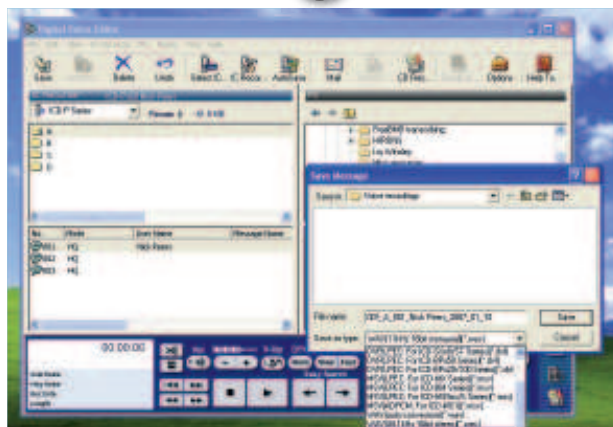
### Digital voice recorders make recording and storing conversations easy



**[1]** Digital voice recorders are incredibly simple to use, just place the recorder in a convenient spot between yourself and your family member and press the record button before commencing your interview. Once the interview is complete, press the Stop button and your recording should be automatically saved.



**[2]** Assuming you've already installed the software that came with your digital voice recorder, connecting it to your PC is simply a case of plugging in the supplied cable to both your digital voice recorder and a spare USB port on your computer. Your PC should display a message telling you it's been connected.



**[3]** If you have a Sony voice recorder, you may be prompted to enter a username and enable AutoSave (recommended) when opening the program. Once done, select your recording using the left-hand window (press play to preview it), then select the folder you wish to save it to in the right. Choose IC Recorder → Save and save it in the monaural WAV format in the 'Save as type' drop-down menu.

and double-click it. Then select File > Export as MP3 to save it in MP3 format. Once you've converted the file, remember to delete the original WAV file to free up hard-drive space.

### CONVERT OLD RECORDINGS

If you've got old analogue recordings (for example recordings made on a cassette recorder), you can transfer them to your PC too, but a little more work and investment is

**CASSETTES:** You can still pick up cassette recorders to transfer old recordings to PC

**CONNECTING:** If you need any cables, try [www.lindy.co.uk](http://www.lindy.co.uk)





required. First, you'll need some way of connecting the device to your PC; this involves sourcing a cable that plugs into your old analogue device's headphones or line-out port at one end, and your PC's microphone or line-in socket at the other. Follow our six-step walkthrough below, which explains how to convert your old recordings into digital using your PC and a program called *Audacity* (free on the coverdisc).

If you don't have a line-out or headphone socket on your old analogue device or you can't source a cable, simply plug in a microphone to your PC and place it near the speakers of your old device, then follow the walkthrough as if they were directly connected. Be careful not to speak or make any other noise during this process as the microphone on your PC will pick it up and the digital copy will be contaminated.

If your interviews covered a variety of different people and subjects, you

**EVOLUTION:**  
**Tapes seem to have fallen by the wayside over recent years**

**EDITING: The Edit → Trim command deletes everything but the selected portion of your recording**

may wish to divide up your recordings into smaller chunks of conversation dedicated to specific topics. *Audacity* makes this easy – using the mouse you can click and drag over entire passages of conversation, then remove everything else just to leave that part of the interview intact.

### HOW TO EDIT

Start by loading your entire recording and then choosing File > Save Project As. Give it a suitable name and click Save. Now use the play button to pick out the parts of the conversation you wish to keep. You can click the mouse anywhere in the recording to jump to that part of it.

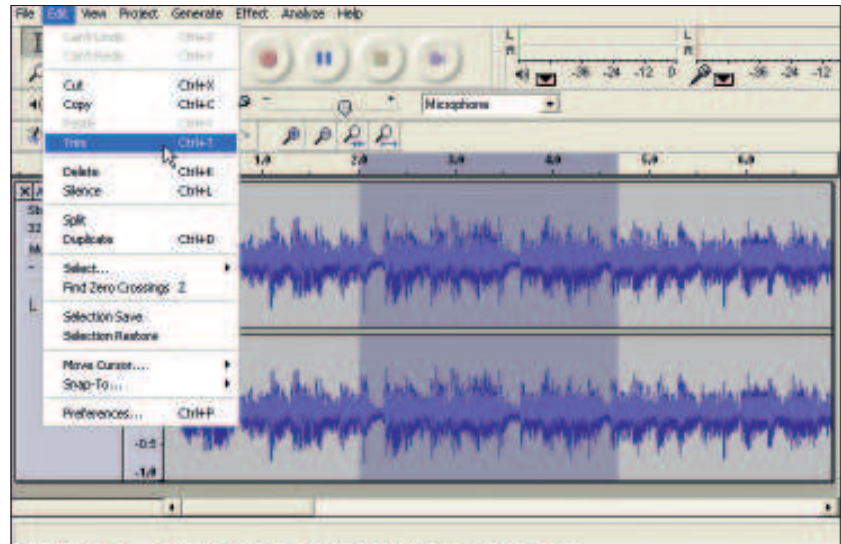
When you reach the point where you want the interview to begin, click and drag the mouse all the way to the left of the entire conversation, so that everything before this point is selected. Press the Delete key and it should

vanish, leaving you with your chosen part of the conversation only.

Now play the interview through to where you want to finish it, or position the mouse roughly where you think it finishes and press play. Once you've reached its end, stop the playback before clicking and dragging the mouse all the way to the right of the recording, to select everything after your chosen conversation has finished. Again, press the Delete key and all that should be left is your edited excerpt.

If you make a mistake, choose Edit > Undo Delete or press Ctrl+Z. Use the magnifying glass icon to select the zoom tool, then click with the left mouse button on the recording to zoom in, or right-click to zoom out (useful if the recording is a long one and you want to see more of it on-screen).

The walkthrough touches on *Audacity's* Effect menu as a means to improve the quality of your recordings.

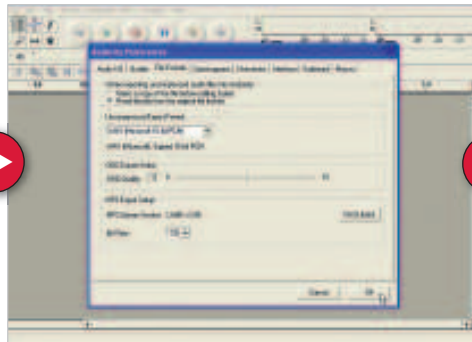


## STEP-BY-STEP: TRANSFER RECORDINGS TO YOUR PC

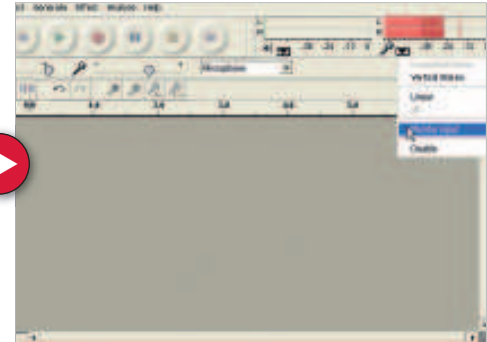
You can capture old cassette recordings using some free software and the right cable



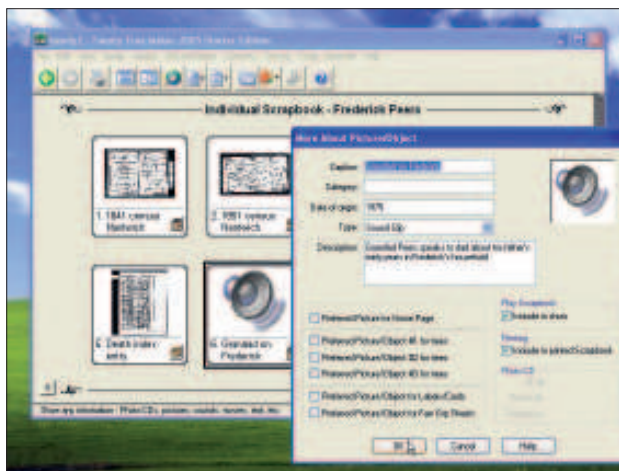
**[1]** You need to connect the headphones or line-out socket of your audio device with the line-in or microphone socket on your PC. Check with your local electrical retailer or visit [www.lindy.com/uk/catalog/14/06/01/index.php](http://www.lindy.com/uk/catalog/14/06/01/index.php) to find the cable you need – typically look for a cable with 3.5mm jacks, and make sure it's able to stretch from your cassette recorder to your PC.



**[2]** Install *Audacity*. Now visit [www-users.york.ac.uk/~raa110/audacity/lame.html](http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~raa110/audacity/lame.html) and download lame-3.96.1 to your PC. Open the zip file, and copy the lame\_enc.dll file to C:\Program Files\Audacity\Plug-Ins. Open *Audacity* and choose Edit → Preferences → File Formats tab. Click Find Library → OK, browse to the Plug-Ins folder and select lame\_enc.dll. Click Open → OK.



**[3]** Select the correct input from the menu under the playback controls – usually Microphone or Line-In. To the right of the playback controls you'll see level monitors. Click the down arrow next to the microphone icon as shown above and choose Monitor Input. Press play on your cassette player. Adjust its volume control so the recording level peaks between -12db and 0db.



Experiment with the different options on offer, but three options stand out: Amplify boosts a quiet recording, while Normalize makes it quieter. Noise Removal helps remove hiss, which can plague older analogue recordings – select a quiet part of the recording where the only sound is hiss, then select Effect > Noise Removal and click Get Noise Profile. Then select the entire recording (press Ctrl+A) and choose Effect > Noise Removal again. Click Preview, then adjust the slider until you're happy, and click Remove Noise.

Regularly save your work using the File > Save Project option. Once you're happy with the quality of the recording, select File > Export as MP3 to save it in a format you can attach to other programs.

### STORING RECORDINGS

It makes sense to file your recordings as part of your family history file. In many family history programs, pictures and sounds can be attached to individuals for use as reference. Different programs

STORING SOUNDS: **Attaching your conversations to family members in Family Tree Maker is simple**

## VOICE-RECOGNITION

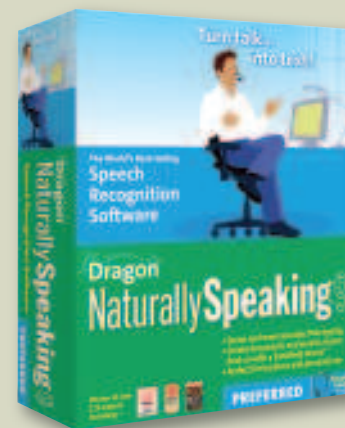
### Convert your interview to print Voice-recognition software can help you to quickly produce a transcript of your conversations

Transcribing interviews by hand can be a slow, painful and methodical process. If you want to convert your conversations into plain text, you might want to consider using a voice-recognition package. The downside is that these are expensive.

The most popular product on the market at the moment is *Dragon NaturallySpeaking 9*, but this costs £149 for the Preferred Edition, which supports transcriptions from MP3 files. Its main rival is *IBM ViaVoice Pro USB Edition*, which costs £99.99, and works with selected handheld digital voice recorders. You can purchase both at [www.nuance.co.uk](http://www.nuance.co.uk), although sadly no trial versions are available for download.

A factor that affects the transcription is the quality of the recording, so it's not really suited for conversations taken from old analogue devices like cassette. The software is mainly designed to work with one voice (yours) and can struggle with different voices and accents – you may find the results aren't worth the inflated cost of either product.

DIGITAL HELP: **Voice-recognition software is expensive**

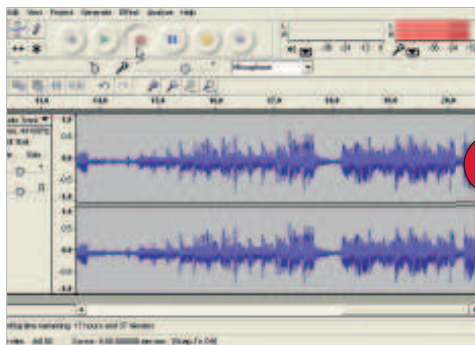


work in different ways, but most should support both WAV and MP3 files.

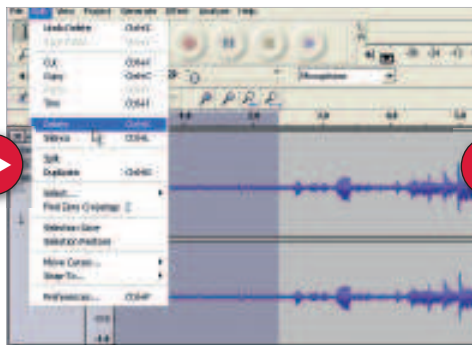
As an example, *Family Tree Maker* users should select the appropriate family member and click the Scrapbook button under their name. Select Picture/Object > Insert Object, choose Create from File and click Browse. Locate and select your audio file and click OK. After a short pause, you should see a speaker icon appear; click this to play the recording.

You can add extra details about the recording by clicking the small drawer icon beneath it, add a caption, category and choose Sound Clip from the Type drop-down menu before clicking OK.

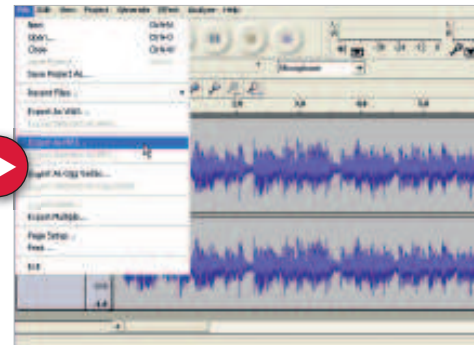
Sound recordings add another dimension to your family history research. And your PC plays an essential role in this – not just by cataloguing your recordings, but by making it easy to edit them, improve the quality and by making them easily accessible. ■



**[4]** Once you're happy with the input levels, return your recording to the beginning. Press the Record button in *Audacity* and press play on your cassette player. When the recording starts, you should see a graph appear like the one above, indicating sound is being recorded. Try to keep your recording down to around 10-15 minute chunks, and click the Stop button when complete.



**[5]** Start by saving your project (File → Save Project). Once done, press the play button to listen to your recording. Chances are it won't be perfect, but first, let's trim out unwanted silence from the beginning and end. Select the quiet parts at the beginning and end in turn using the mouse (click and drag), then press the Delete key to remove them and save.



**[6]** The Effects improve poor recordings. Select a quiet part where the only sound is hiss, then select Effect → Noise Removal and click Get Noise Profile. Then select the entire recording and choose Effect → Noise Removal again. Click Preview, then adjust the slider until you're happy; then, click Remove Noise. Finally, choose File → Export as MP3 to save it to a suitable folder.