Exercise: data security

The UK Data Service has described ten situations in which things went wrong with regard to the safety and security of research data. Which precautions could have prevented these scenarios?

UK Data Archive (UK Data Service), *Managing and sharing data. Training resources* (2011), 63-65.

<http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/training.aspx>

1. Unshredded and unanonymised data transcripts are found on the street in a clear plastic rubbish bag. It was too time consuming to shred the large pile of documents with a basic office shredder so they were just thrown into the recycling bin.
2. A senior lecturer stores personal and confidential data on the hard drive of her university computer. She is given a new computer by her department and the old one is given to research students to use in their office. The students are able to access both their personal and her research data.
3. A researcher has their laptop stolen whilst away on a conference trip. Vital research data was kept on the hard drive and was not backed up anywhere else.
4. A researcher sends a set of audio cassettes for transcription in the post. The researcher writes the wrong address on the package and the tapes get lost in the post.
5. Digital audio files are emailed to a transcriber who saves them to his computer desktop and also stores them in his email once received. The transcriber fails to delete the files from his email and from his computer once the transcription is completed and returned to the researcher. He later sells his computer on eBay.
6. A researcher works in a shared office with four other researchers working on other projects. Whilst working on his project the researcher leaves paper copies of the signed consent forms loose on the desk. The other researchers have the opportunity to read through these confidential documents.
7. A transcriber tells her friends and family about the ‘interesting interview’ that she is transcribing, giving details about the name and place of work of the interview participant.
8. A fire at the university destroys a research office and all the paper copies of an important research collection which a researcher was preparing for archiving.
9. Unanonymised data is inadvertently published on a project’s website.
10. A researcher encrypts his data folder, then forgets his password and can no longer access his data.