

Guide to Password-Protected Files

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Group Leaders will submit a list of membership numbers of the people who have signed up for their group (and inevitably names and postcodes of those who couldn't remember their number or find their membership card) and receive in return a list taken from the Beacon database of names, email addresses and if needed phone numbers or even addresses. These will normally be sent as Excel spreadsheet attachments to an email. But these attachments will be individually password-protected to ensure that they are dependably unintelligible if they fall into the wrong hands.

The strictures apply to files containing members' details such as addresses and phone numbers, which are subject to the provisions of the GDPR.

Only the handful of people extracting lists of members of groups from Beacon and emailing them as spreadsheets to group leaders will normally need to know how to password-protect an Excel spreadsheet.

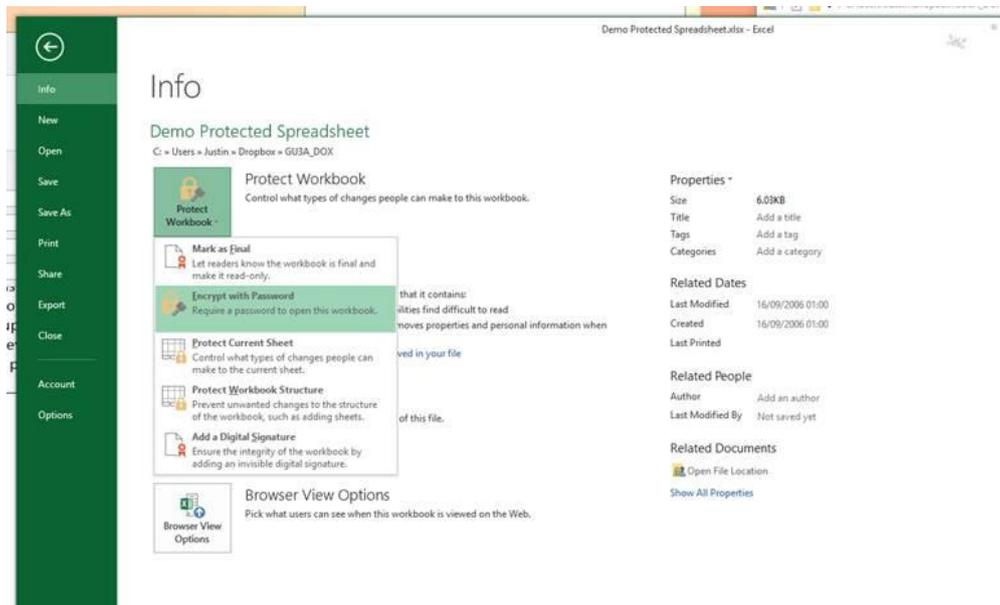
The group leaders will only need to know how to decrypt the email attachment. This is straight forward provided they have been told the password. The password must not be sent by email. The preferred method is an expected text message with no accompanying context. Experience suggests that spellings out over the phone will be frequently misheard, even if the NATO alphabet is used. (Alpha Bravo Charlie Delta Echo Foxtrot Golf Hotel India Juliet et

Let's create a Demonstration of a protected Excel file – it's on the website, on the same page as this guide.

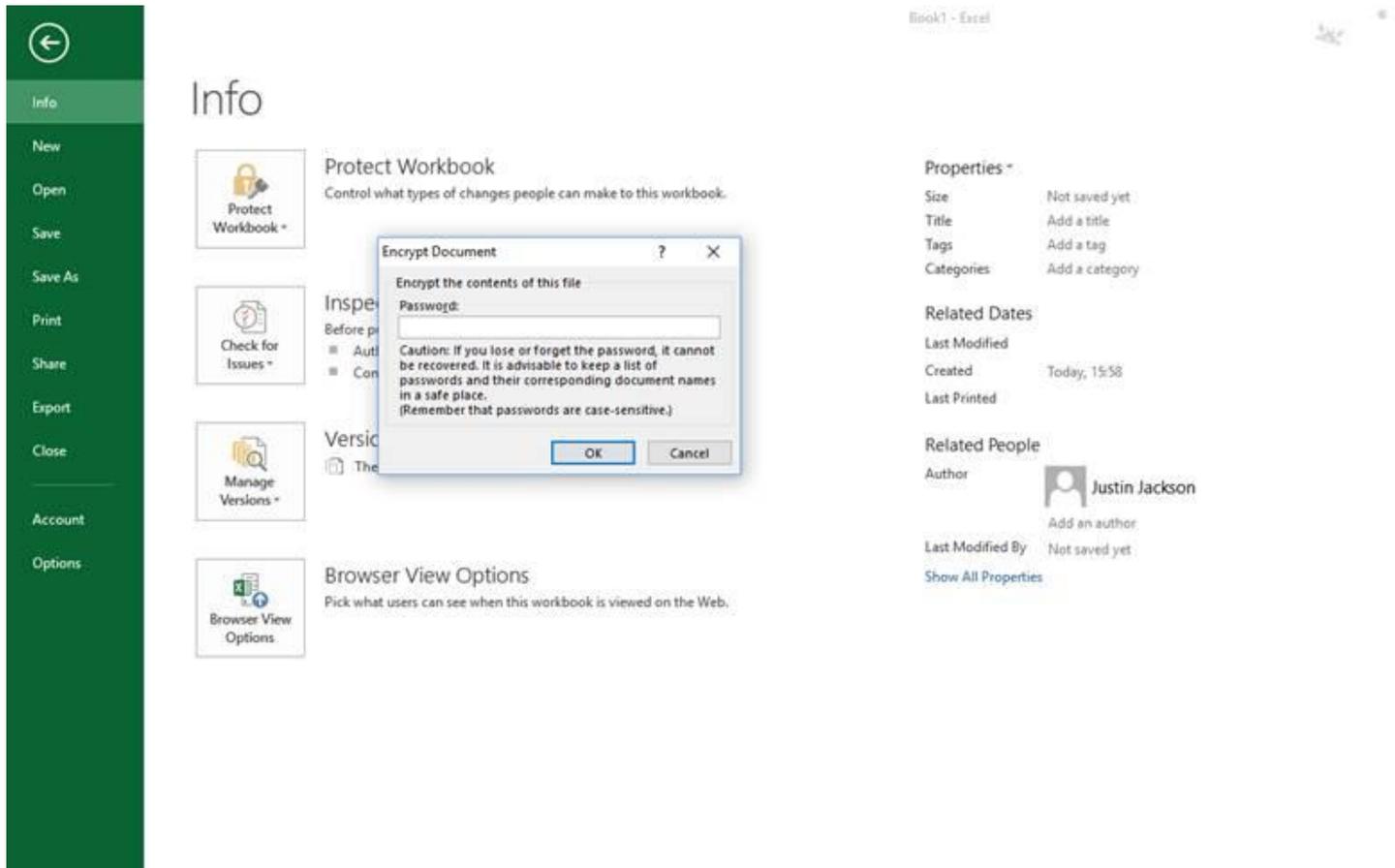
I create the file, add a couple of made-up names, and click on the green file tab, top left. Excel then shows me a screen as below, and I click on Protect Workbook.



From the options shown I select Encrypt with Password ~

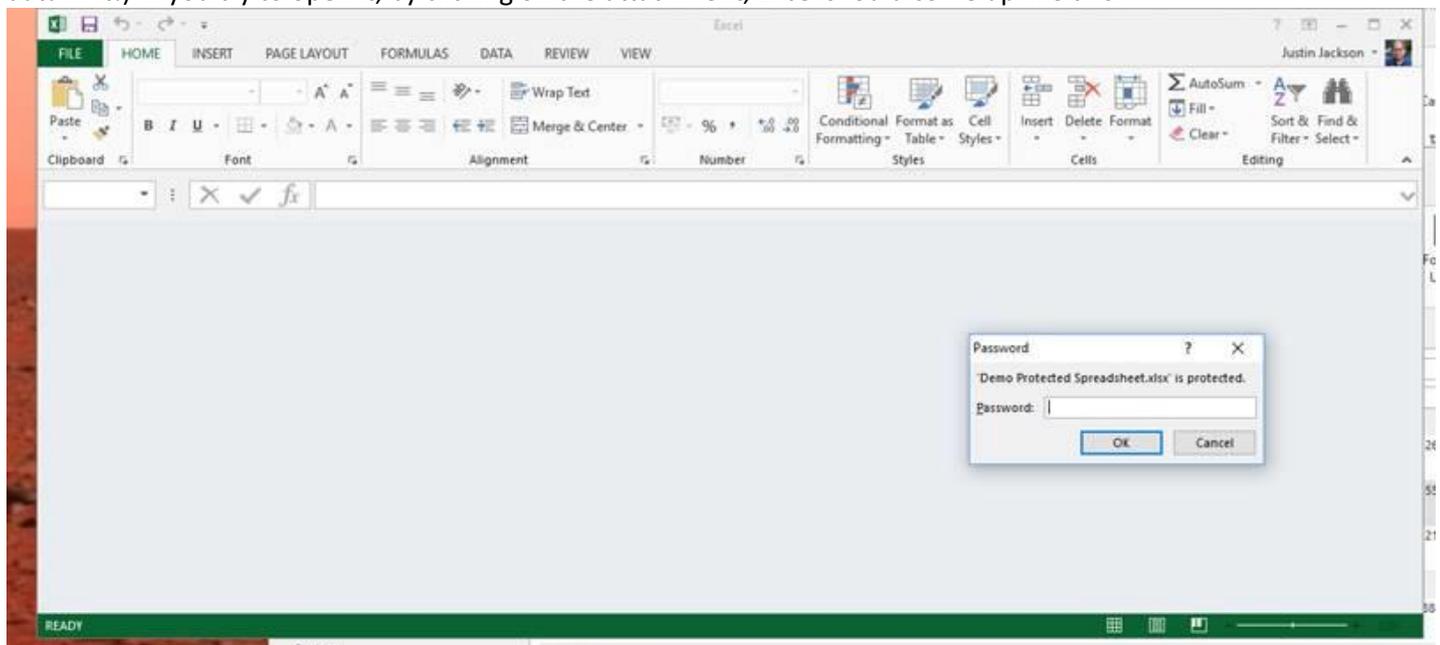


This puts up a little box in which to enter the chosen password that you wish to set for this file. Beware that Excel can be a tad eccentric about where this appears, so it pays to have an uncluttered screen to start with. Normally it looks like this:



The password is requested twice to guard against typos. The file must then be saved.

The attached demo spreadsheet has the password “Demo”. (I’m revealing this in an email because there is no real data in it!) If you try to open it, by clicking on the attachment, Excel should come up like this:

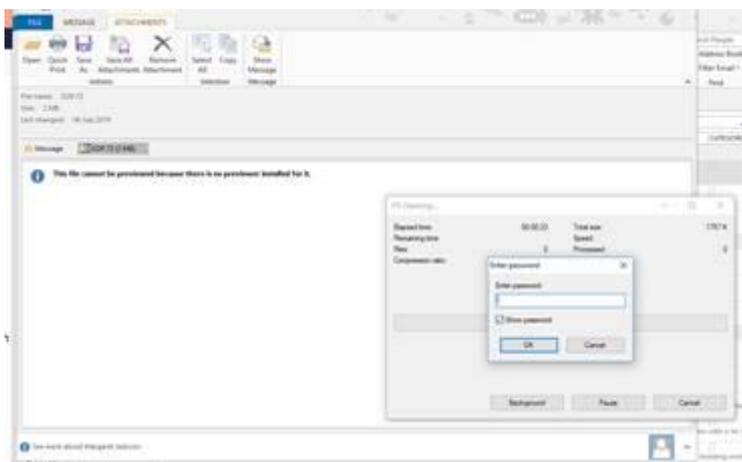
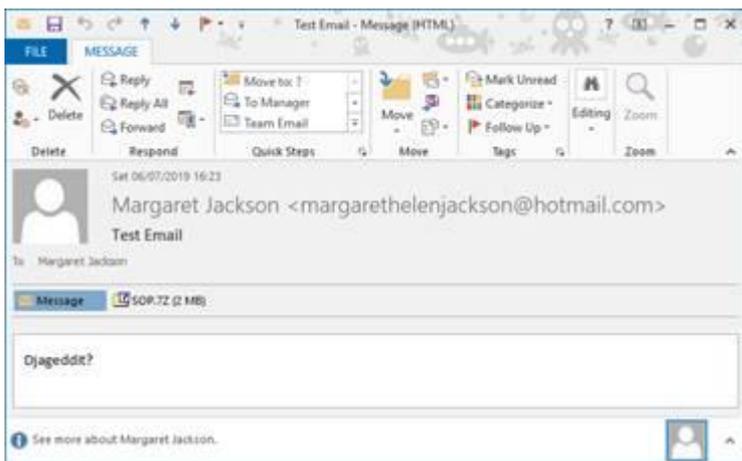


All you need to do is type “Demo” into the box, hit OK, and the spreadsheet will be revealed in all its puerile futility. This is all group leaders will need to do. **Note that password protecting Word documents is very similar, but we have less occasion to use this. Real passwords will be much stronger than “Demo”!**

Now, the only computing environments available to me are Windows and Linux. I cannot be sure what happens on MacBooks, iPads or Android Tablets.

If group leaders do not own devices which support the above scheme, there is a fall-back plan. Well, there are two, and one is to give them a printed list as one might to a group leader who didn't have a computer or more plausibly didn't have a working printer. The other is to put a file which we cannot password protect into a 7-zip archive which we **can** protect.

“What is 7-zip?” You might well ask. 7-Zip is a file archiver with a high compression ratio, but the aspect of interest is that after a file or files (or multiple nested folders of files) have been compressed into an archive file, that file itself can be password protected. So if a group leader's device is too outlandish to handle an **xlsx** format Excel file, and we need to send him a **csv** (comma separated values) file, which is plain text and cannot be password protected, then we put the csv file (or whatever) in a zip archive, encrypt it with a password and send that. 7-zip is AFAIK available on all Windows, Apple, Linux and Android devices. It is freeware, and can be downloaded without charge. The main reservation is that some email providers and email apps may be too ignorant to allow the transmission of files in this format. I have demonstrated that at least there is no problem with hotmail -



7-zip is really easy to use on Windows and Linux: I can't speak for the other platforms.

For more information on 7-zip, see <https://www.7-zip.org/> and if you are really a glutton for punishment <https://m.wikihow.com/Open-Zip-Files-on-Android> !

However, it is to be hoped that few if any people will need to use 7-zip.

Lastly, the foregoing largely assumes the use of Microsoft Word and Excel. It is likely to be increasingly the case in the years to come that these will be replaced by the corresponding LibreOffice tools, since these are free. Fortunately the LibreOffice Writer (replacing Word) and Calc (replacing Excel) both have a "Save with Password" option when a file is saved, so no changes to our procedures will be needed.