

Restoring old photographs

Notes and additions after the presentation on 30 July 2026 by Paul Hughes

1. One of the best surveys of various fairly serious software for AI restoration is: <https://lenscraft.co.uk/photography-blog/restore-old-photos/>. This reviews Chat GPT, Photoshop neural filters, Topaz Mosaic and Luminar Neo. Only Ghat GPT is free – the others are either subscription only or a one-off purchase.
2. AI tools like Chat GPT rely on detailed prompts. Vague input leads to hallucinations or downright inaccurate repairs. Rubbish in = rubbish out. Examples of very detailed instructions (prompts) for Chat GPT etc are found in <https://www.eweek.com/news/ai-prompts-restore-old-photos/>
3. There are many automated software packages for restoring old photos. Google 'restoring old photos' and you will get a long list of suggestions. Remini seems to have a good reputation for faces but not landscapes. Photopea might be worth a look.
4. The meeting talked about the challenge of trying to produce a decent image out of the poor quality scan of my wife's grandfather on his camel in Egypt.
The Chat GPT advice on doing this is and the image file are available on the following pages.
Please have a go - using conventional restoration techniques not just automated AI.
5. We'll compare notes at a future meeting. And I can share some surprising findings about the man in the image.

Paul Hughes 31 July 2026.

Chat GPT advice on restoring the Man on the Camel photo

My request was 'Please show me how best to restore this old photo using photoshop 2026'. This is a transcript of a conversation with Chat GPT specifically about restoring the photo of the man on the camel.

To restore this vintage photograph using **Photoshop 2026**, you should combine Adobe's automated AI tools with manual precision retouching. This workflow ensures you quickly erase decades of physical wear while preserving historical accuracy.

Step 1: Duplicate Your Base Layer

Always work non-destructively to safeguard your original scan.

1. Open the image file in Photoshop.
2. Press **Ctrl + J** (Windows) or **Cmd + J** (Mac) to create a copy of the background layer.
3. Right-click the new layer and select **Convert to Smart Object**. This allows you to edit or adjust filters at any time.

Step 2: Leverage the AI Neural Filter

The fastest way to handle the fading, silvering, and paper wear is through the dedicated AI restoration workspace.

1. Go to the top menu and select **Filter > Neural Filters**.
2. Locate **Photo Restoration** under the Beta section and toggle it on.
3. Adjust the sliders in the right panel:
 - **Photo Enhancement (Set to 40-50)**: This increases clarity, rebuilds lost contrast, and balances out the faded sepia tones without over-softening vital textures.
 - **Scratch Reduction (Set to 60-70)**: This automatically targets and clears out the fine white horizontal paper fractures running through the camel and background. Avoid setting this to 100, or you risk losing fine uniform details like the reins or the rider's pipe.
4. Set the **Output** dropdown menu at the bottom to **Smart Filter** or **New Layer** and click OK.

Step 3: Repair Tears and Edge Damage

The top-left corner features a deep tear, and the borders are heavily frayed. The smart AI filter cannot perfectly guess these boundaries, so manual intervention is required.

1. Create a blank new layer on top named "Retouching".
2. Select the **Remove Tool** or **Spot Healing Brush Tool** from your left toolbar.
3. Check the box for **Sample All Layers** in the top options bar.
4. Use a medium-soft brush to paint directly over the missing jagged paper in the top left. Photoshop's contextual engine will blend it cleanly with the sky texture.
5. Clean up the black paper edge remnants at the bottom border using the **Clone Stamp Tool**. Hold Alt / Option to sample a clean sand area nearby, then brush smoothly over the border spots.

Step 4: Final Tonal Balance and Sharpness

To give the image proper depth, you need to correct the faded dynamic range.

1. Click the **Adjustment Layer** icon at the bottom of your Layers panel and choose **Curves**.
2. Select the black eyedropper tool within the Curves properties panel and click on the darkest part of the rider's uniform to establish a true black point.
3. Drag the center of the curves line slightly downward to deepen the shadows on the camel's torso and definition in the desert background.
4. If the AI filter left the textures looking slightly flat, select your top composite layer and go to **Filter > Sharpen > Smart Sharpen** to bring back the crisp appearance of the original paper grain.

If you want, let me know:

- Do you want to **keep the sepia/monochrome tone**, or would you like a guide on how to automatically **colorize** the scene?
- Do you plan to **crop out the uneven card borders** entirely, or rebuild them flat?

I can provide the specific steps for either option.



[Click here for a copy of the Man on a Camel Photo](#)

Note from Paul: Currently we have not been able to locate the original, which we believe is an 8x10 print. All we have is this scan. Chat GPT points out that it needs a better quality original scan to produce a high quality restoration. It suggests scanning at 2400-4800!)