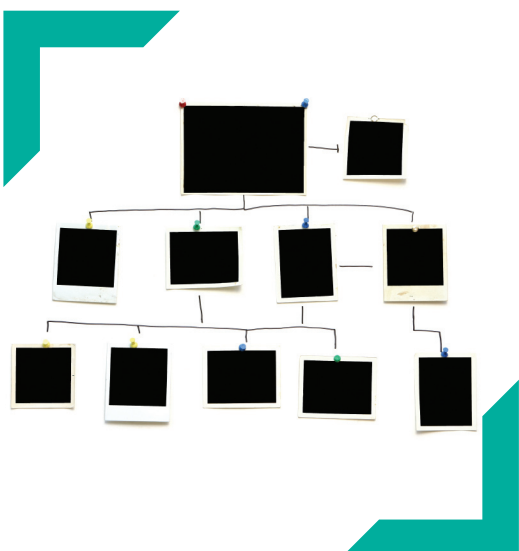


Logging onto the internet and looking up the address of someone with an unusual name or perhaps locating somebody when you have a rough idea of where they live is easier than ever before but as a practising probate solicitor what do you do if you need to find the beneficiaries to an intestacy? What if the deceased was born 90 years ago and survived all his/her brothers and sisters? What if he/she was an only child and the families of the aunts and uncles need to be found? That is assuming there were no half-blood siblings! What if the deceased was born in the Ukraine but now that part of the Ukraine is Poland? How are you ever going to locate the families of 12 aunts and uncles born in the 1880s and 1890s? With a professional, and ethical, responsibility to find all the beneficiaries, it is important to hire the right help and with a good team of probate genealogists, such a challenge is achievable.

Closer to home

Of course, it is not only the international cases that can be problematic. Many English and Welsh cases demand the skills of a team of experienced genealogists. With certain common names in Wales such as Jones, Williams, Davies, Evans, Thomas and Lewis it is more than likely that searches will need to be carried out at local register offices rather than relying on the central indexes of births, marriages and deaths (BMD) supplied by the General Register Office (GRO). Using a professional search agency, you will not only have access to the necessary resources and databases required to get the job done but also the expertise and experience necessary to complete it quicker. The best firms may have bespoke databases enabling you to find UK and overseas BMD and immigration records that you would otherwise not be able to access.

Finding lost or unknown individuals overseas can be much more complicated than searching in the UK. Most countries in Continental Europe for example have no central register of BMDs like those supplied by the English and Welsh GRO. Instead it is necessary to go to the town hall or local court to carry out searches. In France there are 96 districts, but 181 courts that might need to be checked.



It is not unusual for parts of a family to be traced through several different countries before living relatives have been located. At the outset there is no way of telling whether or not one of the aunts or uncles emigrated to Australia 100 years ago. Top firms will have established relationships with partners of the same calibre in jurisdictions overseas enabling global tracing to be carried out through this network.

What's in a name?

The culture of names varies from country to country. For example In Bali, Indonesia the firstborn is given the name "Wayan", the second is "Made", the third is "Nyoman", and the fourth is "Ketut". If there is a fifth child, he or she is often called Wayan Balik literally translated to Wayan "again". Balinese people are often given a new name after death making research in this jurisdiction even more complicated. In China over 50% of the population have one of nine surnames, Chen (or Chan), Lin, Huang (or Hwang, Hwong) and Li being the four most common and over 90% of the people have one of only 50 surnames.

The records in some countries have been lost or destroyed, the most obvious example being Polish records, where over 90% of the archives' content was lost during World War II. Much of the National Archives of India sits below ground level and has been badly affected by floods. Consequently, the timber in the buildings has become infested with termites and records are under constant attack.

In spite of these setbacks it is often surprising how much progress can be made from next to no information. Legal adoption began in England and Wales 1 January 1927. Prior to this date people raised by families other than their own were not formally adopted. Consequently if they die intestate under the English and Welsh rules of intestacy, the estate passes to the birth family; bad news for the family who raised the deceased but potentially very good news for the blood relatives! However, with little or no information about the birth parents of the deceased it is often a huge challenge to find the correct heirs.

One of the toughest cases we ever did was that of Silverman, worth approximately £165,000. The deceased was born in Sri Lanka and her parents born in Russia. We were unable to obtain copies of any of their birth certificates added to which the family kept changing their names; Pasha became Bessie, Lazarus became Laurence, Myer became Meredith. All of this made the family very difficult to find but we still managed to identify the right family and eventually traced heirs as far afield as France, South Africa, America, New Zealand and Australia. All members of the family were found and the case was 100% wrapped up.

Matthew Siddell, Director, Kin.

E-mail: matthew.siddell@kin.co.uk / www.kin.co.uk

Matthew Siddell goes climbing in the vast forest of family trees

Kith & Kin

