



Fraser and Fraser marks 50 years of probate research

Founded in 1969, Fraser and Fraser has unique experience in the fields of genealogy and international probate research, meaning the firm is particularly well equipped at finding missing beneficiaries to unclaimed estates.

When Nathan and Simon Fraser established their partnership in 1969, society was at a crossroads. Divorce rates were on the rise, emigration was increasingly an option for Britons and families were becoming more scattered than they had ever been in the past.

Finding missing beneficiaries was an increasingly challenging task, but the pair focused their expertise as genealogists and probate researchers to overcome such obstacles and to ensure Fraser and Fraser would become one of the best-known firms in the sector.

In 2007 leadership of the business was taken over by the next generation of Frasers, Andrew, Charles, Neil and Philippe. And, while the firm's passion for research and willingness to innovate remain the same as they always have been, its methodologies have evolved with the digital age.

Technology has transformed the business, speeding up the search process, simplifying communication and helping to reduce costs.

Partner Neil Fraser said: 'Over the past 50 years the firm has always focused on leading the way in the probate research industry. Throughout that time we've been dedicated to providing professionalism in everything we do, while delivering an increasingly diverse range of services and ensuring customer satisfaction across the board.'

While the firm has embraced the benefits of the Internet revolution, it still recognises the value of traditional forensic methods, from painstakingly sifting through physical archives, to making door-to-door enquiries to unearth a hidden clue.

Over the course of 50 years Fraser and Fraser has built up an international network, an extensive public sector business and a wide-ranging portfolio of services. Not only does the firm work closely with legal professionals in areas such as asset search and property management, it has been appointed by councils, for example Birmingham and Thanet, to search for family members of deceased individuals.

Neil Fraser added: 'Our team approaches every case with the same high levels of energy and determination, while our long experience guarantees exceptional knowledge, accuracy and efficiency on all cases, whether they are UK-based or international.'

In recent years the probate research market has seen further changes. Whereas 20 or 30 years ago researchers might be tracking down distant relatives such as cousins once or twice removed, today they increasingly find themselves looking for near kin, such as brothers, sisters and children.

That development has been sparked by the rapid societal change in recent decades. While email and

social media platforms may offer the technology to stay in touch, the reality has been different, with families increasingly vulnerable to break up and dispersion.

Against this demographic backdrop, the firm has also been a key player in calling for regulation of the probate research sector. It was instrumental in the establishment of the Association of Probate Researchers (APR), a voluntary, self-regulatory organisation established to protect both beneficiaries and solicitors from the activities of hobby genealogists and amateurs with little or no legal experience or expertise.

Since 2016 all of Fraser and Fraser's UK and US case managers, in addition to partners Andrew and Neil Fraser, have been regulated by the APR.

Case study

The wartime sailor who never came home

Aleksander Olesen was known as a bit of a loner; a man who kept himself to himself and who seemed in no hurry to make many friends in the Californian town where he lived.

Those few people with whom he did pass the time of day knew little or nothing about Aleksander's family. They could guess from his accent that he had grown up somewhere in northern Europe and they knew from his occasional stories that he had travelled the world, but that was about all the light they could throw on the life of this softly spoken bachelor.

When he died Aleksander left an estate worth more than \$120,000, but no will. It was at this point that international probate researchers Fraser and Fraser were called in to see if they could discover any heirs who might be entitled to a share of the proceedings.

Our international team discovered that Aleksander had been born in 1924 in Nysted on the Danish coast, 150km south of Copenhagen.

The only boy among seven siblings, he was drawn to the sea from an early age, preferring to go exploring on small boats than spending time at home with his sisters.

In his mid-teens he took a job as a merchant seaman, sailing on both British and Norwegian ships during the Second World War. It was dangerous work and many Danish sailors never returned home when hostilities ended in 1945. Among them was Aleksander. His family made enquiries as far as they could, but shipping records for the period were confusing or incomplete and they had to accept that their son and brother had been lost at sea.

Of course, that wasn't the case, and Aleksander had in fact begun a new life in America.

And, 70 years after he had seemingly vanished without trace, he had a large extended family back in Denmark. Indeed, Fraser and Fraser's researchers discovered that not only were two of his sisters still alive, but that he had nine nieces and nephews, with a total of 19 family members entitled to a share of his estate.

This was a complicated case that spanned two continents and a lengthy time period, made more complicated by spelling mistakes on certificates and Danish parish records that switched frustratingly between maiden and married names. The biggest challenge, however, was convincing Aleksander's sisters that their long-lost brother had been alive for all those years without once getting in touch.

Had it not been for Fraser and Fraser's dedicated team and international expertise, these heirs might never have been found. With offices in seven countries and working relationships with numerous other leading genealogists worldwide, the firm is recognised as a leader in international probate research, in addition to our UK-based work.

Our extensive and varied experience means that irrespective of who you are looking for or where they might be, we can provide a solution. Contact us on 020 7832 1400 or visit www.fraserandfraser.co.uk for more information.

Names, dates and places in this article have been changed to preserve client confidentiality.





Research and Estate Administration Services

50 years of providing specialist research and estate administration support services.

Tracing missing beneficiaries is the heart of our business. Through expert knowledge and with international connections, we can find the missing next-of-kin and assist with all aspects of estate administration with speed and accuracy.

Contact us today to see how Fraser and Fraser can assist you.

fraserandfraser.co.uk
or call: 0207 832 1400

FRASER  FRASER
GENEALOGISTS AND INTERNATIONAL
PROBATE RESEARCHERS