The National Archives

Wills and Administrations 1383-1858 and Death Duty Registers 1796-1903.

This paid search guide will help you to decide whether to use The National Archives' paid search service.

What information can you find out?

We will always carry out a search of our records to a high standard based on our expertise and professionalism. With any search, there is never a guarantee that you will find the information you are looking for. There are often a number of possible reasons for an unsuccessful search, including the possibility that records were destroyed or lost, or that there are multiple records for individuals with identical names and we have insufficient information to distinguish between them.

Search 1: Will Registers: 1383 - 1858

This is a search in the register of Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills held in record series PROB 11. The registered will was a copy of the original will made by the testator (see search 3). The search does not include administrations (see search 2).

Details contained in the wills vary significantly, but a successful search will reveal some, or all, of the following:

- place of residence
- occupation
- date of Will
- names of chief beneficiaries
- bequests (personal and charitable)
- any personal instructions such as place of burial, or funeral arrangements
- names of executors and witnesses
- date of probate

Only wills proven in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury are held in PROB 11

The wills are filed by date of probate, not by date of death. Probate was usually granted within three years of the death.

Early wills are likely to be in Latin. The grant of probate in wills proven prior to 1733 will also be in Latin; with the exception of those proven during the interregnum (1651-1660).

Search 2: Administration Act Books: 1383 - 1858

This is a search in the Administration Act Books held in record series PROB 6. If a person died intestate, i.e. without leaving a valid will, within its jurisdiction the Prerogative Court of Canterbury would grant letters of administration.

A successful search will reveal some, or all, of the following:

- intestate's place of residence and occupation
- value of estate
- name of administrator and relationship to deceased
- date on which inventory and account of estate had to be returned to the court

Only administrations granted by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury are held in PROB 6

Administrations were usually granted within three years of death. Unless the date of the grant of administration is known a three year search from the date of death is recommended.

With the exception of those granted during the interregnum (1651 - 1660) grants of administration made prior to 1733 are in Latin.

Search 3: Original Wills: 1383-1858

This is a search in the original wills held in record series PROB 10. The original wills were usually signed by the testator, and were occasionally written in his, or her, hand. These original wills can be useful if there are omissions in the registered wills in PROB 11, or if they are difficult to read due to the handwriting.

A successful search will reveal the same details as in the registered wills in PROB 11 (see search 1). In addition some late eighteenth and nineteenth century original wills are endorsed with the date of death

Only wills proven in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury are held in PROB 10.

Before 1600 few original wills survive, and many of those that do are copies. After 1700 the survival rate is considerably greater.

The wills are filed by the year and month of probate, not by the date of death. The date that probate was granted is therefore crucial to this search. The date of probate can be discovered by an online search of the will registers held in series PROB 11 (see search 1).

Search 4: Probate Act Books: 1526-1858

This is a search in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury Probate Act Books held in record series PROB 8. These volumes contain a record of grants of probate made by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.

A successful search will reveal some, or all, of the following:

- testator's place of residence
- value of estate
- name of executor, and relationship to deceased
- name of administrator, if one appointed, and relationship to deceased
- date on which inventory and account of estate had to be returned to the court
- if relevant marital status, and or occupation of testator.

These volumes are arranged by date of probate, not by date of death. This can be discovered by an online search of the will registers held in series PROB 11 (see search 1).

Prior to 1733 the Probate Act Books are in Latin with the exception of those for the years of the interregnum (1651 - 1660)

Search 5: Death Duty Registers: 1796-1903

This is a search in the indexes to the Death Duty Registers held in record series IR 27, and in the Registers held in record series IR 26.

A successful search will reveal all or some of the following:

- address and occupation of deceased
- date probate or administration was granted, and at which court
- name and address of executors and, or, administrator
- relationship of executors, and, or, administrator, to deceased
- value and description of estate
- names of legatees, and their relationship to deceased
- date of a legatee's marriage and, or, death

The death duty registers cover all jurisdictions, including the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.

Not all estates or legacies would have been liable to Death Duty. Criteria for exemption depended on the rules in force at the relevant date, as well as on the relationship of the legatee to the testator, and the value of the estate. Some estates, for example those of soldiers dying on active service, were at certain times exempt.

There are no surviving indexes to the death duty registers for administrations granted between 1864 and 1881. A search of these registers will therefore take longer and is not covered by the standard fee.

Many of the death duty registers for the 1890s were destroyed by fire

What are the charges?

Listed below are our standard charges for each search. However, the fee is likely to be higher than our standard charge if:

- you do not provide us with the essential information we need for a search
- the testator or intestate has a very common surname, and no relevant distinguishing details are supplied
- you want us to search on variations of the testator, or intestate's, name

For the standard fee we will only search for a name as you provide it to us. To search on variants of a name may involve a higher charge.

Search 1
Standard charge: £56.04

Searches 2, 3, 4 and 5
Standard charge: £84.06

What information do we need for a search?

Please send as much information as you can. The following details are either essential or desirable for a search at our standard charge:

Essential	**Desirable**
full name of testator or intestate	place and approximate date of birth, or age
whether will or administration	place of residence at time of death
at least approximate date of death, or grant of probate or administration	occupation
whether probate, or letters of administration, granted for search 5	if known the volume and folio numbers from the indexes in IR 27 search 5
if probate or administration was granted before 1812 the court in which it was granted for search 5	any other relevant details, particularly if the name is a common one

If you would like to request any of the paid searches listed in this guide, please contact us either by completing our online enquiries form or by completing one of our paper response forms.

You may decide, instead, to do the research yourself. For advice on conducting your own research you should consult the relevant research guides, accessible through our online guidance index.

Research guidance

Wills or administrations before 1858

Wills and probate before 1858: further research
Death duties 1796-1903
Death duties 1796-1903: further research