



PROBATE SERVICE

PROVIDING ACCESS TO 150 YEARS OF WILLS

Iron Mountain storage expertise helps Probate Service preserve all wills for future generations, while providing easy access to scanned copies

CHALLENGE:

Coping with an ever-increasing archive of wills stretching back to 1858, while meeting government-imposed access targets

SOLUTION:

Purpose-built outsourced storage facility managed by 29 dedicated Iron Mountain people

VALUE:

The nation's wills are stored in conditions meeting BS 5454, while some 3,200 wills are retrieved against target timescales every week

"There is a statutory requirement to store records in perpetuity. The centre, run by Iron Mountain, has created a secure and controlled environment for the documents, where they can be accessed quickly and easily by the public on demand."

Spokesperson Probate Service

CLIENT

Imagine the reading of a last will and testament. The cinema-fuelled image that springs to mind is of crusty friends and relations in a solicitor's stuffy wood-panelled office. Surrounded by piles of paperwork and shelves of aged books, they're itching to discover what share of the dear departed's estate has come their way. At least one of them has a dark secret.

But that bygone world's changed beyond measure. With genealogy becoming a popular and profitable pastime the demand for historical information from wills has exploded. Today the Probate Service will be your first point of call if you've ever wondered what Princess Diana, Charles Dickens, or Charles Darwin left in their wills – or to which distant relatives your great-great-grandfather left his worldly goods.

Required by law to store all validated wills, Probate Service files would stretch over 38 kilometres if arranged in a straight line. And, dating back to 1858, they will continue to grow indefinitely. As well as providing storage facilities, the Probate Service must also provide access for professionals and citizens. Wills become public property once they have passed through probate and anyone can request a copy of any will they choose.

CHALLENGE

Previously, Probate Service storage was highly fragmented and there were no scanning services available. Some probate documents were stored in twenty-nine District Registries throughout England and Wales while others were stored in the basement at Somerset House where – at high tide – some rooms were prone to flooding. Not only were some of those sites thus unsuitable for storing fragile documents, but also search and retrieval was a difficult and time consuming task.

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"Genealogy has become a national pastime and, as a result, has created unexpected demand for the Probate Service's retrieval offerings. We're seeing a 20 per cent increase year-on-year for retrieval requests."

Neil Bryan Contract Manager for the Probate Records Centre Iron Mountain What the Probate Service needed was a single site that would fully protect its documents in the centuries to come, while allowing cost effective access. It also had targets to meet. Of solicitor, notary, or barrister applications, 95 per cent have to be processed within seven working days of receipt of all necessary information. For personal applications, 85 per cent have to be processed within one month of receipt of all necessary information.

SOLUTION

Working with Iron Mountain a specialised facility was built in Birmingham to house all English and Welsh wills. Called the Probate Records Centre it houses wills in conditions specified in BS 5454 for the storage of historical documents. As the only commercially built facility in Europe to comply with this standard, the new centre ensures that documents are kept at the right temperature and humidity to assure their preservation.

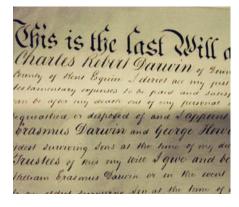
Iron Mountain employs 29 dedicated staff at the centre, dealing with around 3,200 will retrievals every week in response to requests made via any Probate Registry in England and Wales. An enhanced scanned copy of the requested document is sent to the Probate Service. It is forwarded to the customer for a current charge of just £5.

VALUE

"The safe storage of Probate Records is a crucial part of the administration of Probate. There is a statutory requirement to store records in perpetuity. The centre, run by Iron Mountain, has created a secure and climate controlled environment for the documents, where they can be accessed quickly and easily by the public on demand," states a spokesperson for the Probate Service.

Famous people's wills are requested over and over again, as people seem to be fascinated with what celebrities left for their loved ones. In particular, the wills left by Princess Diana and John Lennon are the most popular. However, most common wills are only requested once, as an individual traces their own family tree.

Neil Bryan, the Iron Mountain Contract Manager for the Probate Records Centre, concludes: "Genealogy has become a national pastime and, as a result, has created unexpected demand for the Probate Service's retrieval offerings. We're seeing a 20 per cent increase yearon-year for retrieval requests."



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