

## The Probate Service

### Where there's a will, there's a way

#### IRON MOUNTAIN'S STORAGE EXPERTISE IS MAINTAINING HISTORIC RECORDS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Imagine the reading of a last will and testament, and instantly images of stuffy wood-panelled offices, piles of paperwork and aged parchments filled with legal jargon spring to mind. However, the world of wills has come a long way. Now it's a matter of typing a name into a PC to find out more about your ancestry. The demand for historical information such as wills has exploded in the past ten years, with genealogy becoming big business and a popular pastime. If you've ever wondered what Princess Diana, Charles Dickens and Darwin left in their wills, or which relative your great-great-great-grandfather left his worldly belongings to, the Probate Service will be your first point of call.

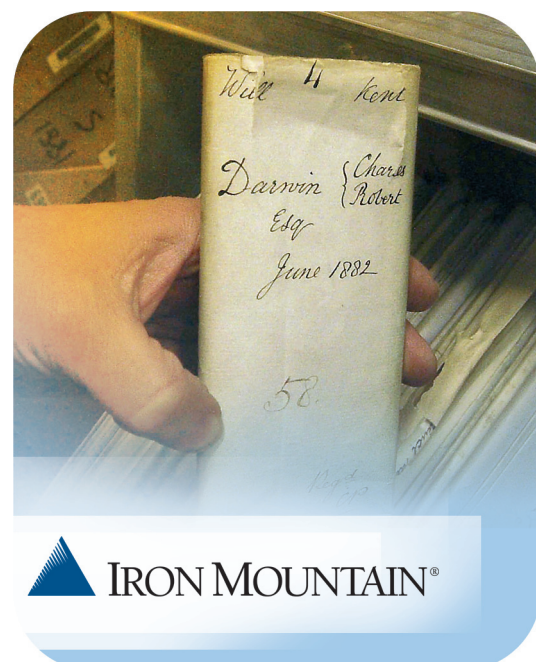
The Probate Service is required by law to store all wills that have been validated following a citizen's death. The records, which date back from 1858 and stretch over 38 km, will continue to grow indefinitely. Therefore, the Service needs a secure, expansive storage facility for these documents.

As well as providing storage facilities, the Probate Service must also provide access for citizens. Wills become public property after they have passed through probate and members of the public can request a copy of any will they choose to read.

Previously, the storage services were extremely fragmented, and there were no scanning services available. Probate documents were stored in District Registries throughout England & Wales, making retrieval difficult.

A large quantity of documents were also stored in the basement at Somerset House, where at high tide, some rooms were prone to flooding. Not only were some of these sites unsuitable for storing fragile documents, but the Service needed a single site which would protect the documents in the years to come.

In order to create a high-tech, secure storage centre, the Probate Service worked with Iron Mountain, the world leader in outsourced records and information management services. Iron Mountain built a specialised facility costing over £4 million in Birmingham to house all wills in England & Wales. The Probate Records Centre houses all wills in BS 5454 conditions suitable for storing historical documents and is the only commercially built facility in Europe to comply with the standard. The standard ensures that the documents are kept at suitable temperatures and humidity to ensure their preservation.



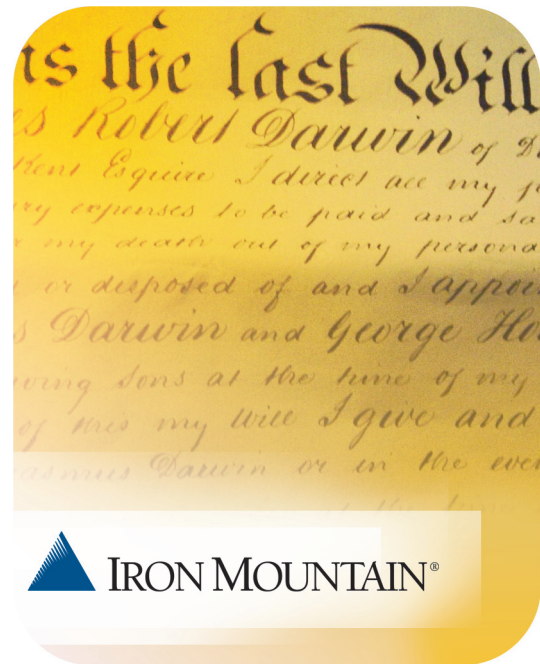
Iron Mountain employs 29 staff at the centre who retrieve wills following requests from the public, made via any Probate Registry in England and Wales. The centre provides an enhanced scanned copy of the requested document to the Probate Service, which is forwarded to the customer at a charge of £5 made by the Probate Service.

Staff at the centre currently deal with an estimated 3,200 retrievals per week. Neil Bryan, Iron Mountain's contract manager for The Probate Records Centre believes that this number is set to rocket over the next few years and comments:

“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. Interestingly, most wills are only requested once, as an individual is only likely to trace their own family tree. However, famous people's wills are requested over and over again, as people seem to be fascinated with what celebrities have left for their loved ones. In particular, the wills left by Princess Diana and John Lennon are the most popular.”

“The safe storage of Probate Records is a crucial part of the administration of Probate,” said a spokesperson from the Probate Service.

*“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.”*



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Third Floor, Cottons Centre  
Tooley Street, London  
SE1 2TT, United Kingdom

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