

Bogus Websites Helping Criminals Steal Millions from Deceased Estates as Will Fraud Surges.

Criminals are exploiting bogus websites to steal millions from the estates of deceased people, taking advantage of ongoing weaknesses in the wills and probate system, legal experts have warned.

Leading probate firm [Fraser and Fraser](#) estimates up to £2 million has already been pocketed by organised gangs exploiting weak security measures to collect proceeds from deceased persons' estates.

The firm is urging the government and police to urgently intervene to prevent further fraud.

Neil Fraser, Partner at Fraser and Fraser, said: "Despite widespread public attention this year, the wills and probate system remains dangerously easy to exploit.

"Organised criminal gangs are continuing to play the system in England and Wales to deceitfully profit from people who have passed away, and almost nothing is being done to stop them.

"Even more concerningly, we are now aware of a raft of copycat websites displaying details of unclaimed estates. These sites threaten to undermine the steps already taken to address this urgent problem. They are totally irresponsible and should be taken down immediately."

The warning comes almost three months after an investigation, aided by Fraser and Fraser, uncovered evidence of "systemic" will fraud preventing rightful heirs from receiving inheritance from their relatives.

The revelations [prompted the government to unpublish a central list of unclaimed estates](#), known as Bona Vacantia, in July.

However, Fraser and Fraser has now uncovered evidence of multiple copycat websites replicating this information, including full names and dates of death of the deceased – data which the firm warns will facilitate further fraud.

"Even without the official Bona Vacantia list, it is easy for criminals to produce a fake will using only basic research and access to public records," Neil continued.

"The problem is less about the availability of information, and more about a lack of safeguards in the application process for grants of probate, which relies heavily on trust.

"We are highlighting this situation not to aid would-be fraudsters, but to emphasise the need for meaningful action."

Specialising in probate genealogy, commonly known as “heir hunting”, Fraser and Fraser has matched thousands of beneficiaries with deceased relatives, featuring prominently in the BBC television series *Heir Hunters*.

More recently, the firm has sought to raise public awareness around will fraud, supporting investigative journalists to expose the scale of the problem.

Fraser and Fraser has proposed an action plan to reform the wills and probate system, including:

- Stricter identification and background checks for non-family members seeking to benefit from a will
- Mandatory in-person or video interviews for those applying for a grant of probate
- Enforcement action against websites publishing the details of unclaimed estates
- A dedicated task force comprising police, the Ministry of Justice and Action Fraud to investigate the scale of will fraud in England and Wales.

Neil concluded: “In an age of sophisticated cybercrime, authorities need to do more than the bare minimum to prevent this type of crime, which is having a devastating impact on families who have lost a loved one.

“Banks and other financial institutions rightly have safeguards in place to prevent fraud. It should not be easier to plunder the estate of someone who has died than to empty your own account.”

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About Fraser and Fraser:

- Originally founded in 1923, Fraser and Fraser is the UK’s first genealogy tracing firm
- Based in Hatton Garden, London
- Specialising in international genealogy tracing, as well as public sector and individual cases.

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