

“Massive” Unclaimed Estates Backlog Risks Freezing Out Potential Heirs, Probate Firm Warns.

Almost 100 days after the government withdrew the *Bona Vacantia* unclaimed estates list, hundreds of estates remain off the public record, potentially denying thousands of rightful heirs their inheritance, according to research from leading genealogy tracing firm Fraser and Fraser.

It comes more than three months after the government unpublished the list, following concerns about misuse and the risk of widespread will fraud.

The firm estimates there are now more than 400 new unclaimed estates which remain completely invisible – meaning relatives will not find out they could be due inheritance, or even that their relative has died.

Fraser and Fraser warns that these missing records could have significant consequences for families, particularly in cases where heirs are not actively seeking out estates.

Neil Fraser, Partner at Fraser and Fraser, said: “The withdrawal of the *Bona Vacantia* list has made it much harder for heirs to discover estates that could rightfully belong to them.

“The backlog is now massive, and it is growing almost daily.

“Families are being left completely in the dark, which is both unfair and unnecessary.”

The removal of the list followed an investigation, supported by Fraser and Fraser, which highlighted systemic issues in the probate system that could allow fraudsters to exploit unclaimed estates.

While this action was aimed at preventing misuse, the unintended consequence is that legitimate heirs now face significant complications in tracing potential inheritances.

Neil continued: “We are not calling for the list to be made completely public without protection. The solution lies in striking a balance.

“A secure, access-controlled version would allow legitimate probate researchers, legal professionals, and families to trace heirs while still protecting against fraud and misuse.”

Fraser and Fraser has repeatedly sought to engage with the Ministry of Justice, which administers the *Bona Vacantia* list, to discuss how it could be reinstated with appropriate safeguards.

While earlier approaches have not received a response, the firm has now followed up to offer pro bono support to help the *Bona Vacantia* Division address the growing backlog of unclaimed estates and locate missing heirs during the suspension.

The firm emphasises that the challenge lies not in the availability of information itself, but in the absence of protective mechanisms within the system.

Fraser and Fraser has a long track record in matching beneficiaries with deceased relatives, having helped thousands of families reclaim assets over the past 100 years. The firm has featured prominently in the BBC television series *Heir Hunters*, raising public awareness of probate and estate issues.

“With the right safeguards, the list could be reinstated in a way that protects data while ensuring rightful heirs are not denied what is theirs,” Neil concluded.

“The current situation leaves hundreds of estates effectively invisible, and again, families are losing out.”

Fraser and Fraser is calling for urgent government action to reintroduce the *Bona Vacantia* list with enhanced security measures, potentially including private access for verified legal professionals or controlled public access paired with stronger fraud prevention protocols.

-ENDS-

About Fraser and Fraser:

- Originally founded in 1923, Fraser and Fraser is one of the largest and oldest probate research firms in the UK
- Based in Hatton Garden, London
- Specialising in international genealogy tracing, as well as public sector and individual cases.
- 'Probate Research Firm of the Year' – British Wills and Probate Awards, 2025

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