



Frequently Asked Questions

WILLS AND PROBATE

What wills does PRONI hold?

PRONI holds all original wills and letters of administration for Northern Ireland from 1900 onwards. They normally transfer to PRONI from the High Court when they are seven years old.

Almost all original wills and letters of administrations from 1858 to 1900 were destroyed in the fire at the Public Record Office in Dublin, but copies have survived.

Fortunately, before the wills were sent to Dublin, the District Registries had copied most of the information into large volumes, known as 'copy will books'.

PRONI holds the copy will books for the District Registries of Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry, while the National Archives of Ireland hold those that have survived for the other District Registries.

What about pre 1858 wills?

Before 1858 wills were proved and letters of administration were issued either in the Prerogative Court or in the consistorial or diocesan courts of the Church of Ireland (the State Church at the time). Official wills and administrations prior to 1858 were destroyed in 1922, however copies can often be found in family, estate and personal papers and in solicitors' archives. The Name Search application on the PRONI website contains a searchable index of those surviving wills held by PRONI.

How do I search for a will at PRONI?

Using Will Calendars Online

There is a searchable index for wills on the PRONI website covering the years 1858-1968, with a gap from 1920-21. This is the easiest way to

find a will for these dates. You can view the will calendar entry online. Digitised images of entries from the copy will books covering the period 1858-1900 are also available online.

Using Will Calendar Volumes in PRONI

There are bound annual indexes to all wills and admons, 1858–2009 (updated annually), in what are known as ‘Calendars of Wills and Administrations’(simply referred to as ‘will calendars’) and a consolidated index, 1858–1877, on the shelves in the Public Search Room in PRONI. Arranged alphabetically by name of testator (the person who made the will) for each year (one or two volumes per year), these give a brief abstract of the will or admon. Up until 1921 the calendars cover the whole of Ireland and thereafter only the six counties of Northern Ireland.

How do I order the will to view it at PRONI?

You should follow these steps to order out a will at PRONI:

- Locate the will calendar entry, either in the will calendar volumes in the search room or on the PRONI website (as detailed above).
- Note the name, date of probate and the registry.
- Use the electronic ordering system in the reading room to order the will using this information.
- You can look at the document in the reading room.

Can I have a copy of a will?

Yes. PRONI provides a copying service. You can request a paper copy or use the self service camera in the reading room.

Is there a charge?

There is no charge for ordering out a will to view. However there is a charge for copying. See the fees and charges section of our website for details.

Can I have a certified copy?

Yes, PRONI can make a certified copy of a will for you. There is a certification charge of £3.80 per page for this service in addition to the regular copying charges.

What is 'probate'?

Wills cannot take effect until after the death of a person and after they have been proved in a court. The grant of probate authenticates the will and confers on the executors the power to administer the estate of the deceased. The official date of a will is therefore the 'date of probate', that is, the date when it was officially proved in a court. Probate can take anything from a minimum of six weeks up to several years.

What if the will was probated in the last seven years?

If the will was probated within the last seven years it will not yet have been transferred to PRONI. In this case you should contact the Probate Office of the Northern Ireland Court Service to request a copy.

What information is contained in a will?

Wills contain the name, address and occupation of the *testator* (the person who made the will), as well as details of the *beneficiaries* (people to whom the testator left something) and of the property owned (land and goods). Many wills also include the addresses and occupations of witnesses and *executors* (those whose duty it is to see that the terms of the will are carried out) who may also be related to the testator.

What if the person I am interested in did not leave a will?

If a person dies without making a valid will, the court can grant letters of administration (known as admcons) by appointing persons to administer the estate of the deceased. Admcons will contain the name, residence and occupation of the deceased and of the person or persons appointed to administer the estate. Admcons do not survive prior to 1900.

What is an admon with will annexed?

Sometimes a grant of probate cannot be given by the court because there is a legal issue with the will. For example, where one of the executors named in the will has died prior to probate being applied for. In this case the court can grant letters of administration to remedy the problem (such as appointing a new executor) and this admon with a copy of the will annexed is probated.