

THE DEVON WILLS PROJECT

More copies of Devon Wills and Administrations found and indexed

The Devon Wills Project (DWP) continues to be a hive of industry, and, as a result of excellent work done by our kind volunteers, several major tasks have now been completed. The results – several indexes, some brand new, and others that have not been available online before – are now viewable on

<http://genuki.cs.ncl.ac.uk/DEV/DevonWillsProject>

1) An index of the Estate Duty copies of wills proved in Devon between 1813 and 1857 has been available for some years now – and is included in our index (as source **IRW**). However, other than by going to The National Archives in Kew, there has been no easy way of finding out whether any of one's Devon ancestors who died intestate during those 45 years had their estates administered by relatives. That has now all changed. Just over 6000 administrations of Devon intestates were granted in Devon during that period – an index of these can now be viewed in our source called **DDR2**. The index entries record no more about the intestate's family than the names and relationships of his/her administrators. However the original records do occasionally show how and between whom the administrators distributed an estate. Your ancestor may be one of the lucky ones.

2) A few years ago The National Archives made available online Estate Duty Wills and Administrations proved or granted between 1796 and 1812, covering the whole country. You may well have tried to find an item in their index and failed. If so, you should perhaps try again in our index of these items (our source **DDR1**). It was found that the original index contained a very large number of transcription errors and omissions, mostly due to difficulties in deciphering the handwriting of the clerks who compiled the ledgers. A thorough check of the Devon entries in this source has taken place, and our index to this source is hopefully a considerably more accurate record of what is in fact available.

3) Many readers will know of the 22 volumes of will abstracts compiled by Miss Olive Moger before 1942, copies of which can be viewed at the Westcountry Studies Library (WSL), Exeter, and the Devon Record Office, Exeter. We are getting close to completing our index of these abstracts. Eventually there will be about 11,750 entries in this source (**MOGA**). Sadly, by no means all of those are actual abstracts of wills. Miss Moger occasionally made long lists of all the wills of Devon people with a particular surname, only making abstracts of those wills she considered necessary to her researches. BUT, because no indexes of wills proved in two Devon courts (the *Archdeaconry Court of Totnes* and the *Peculiar Court of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter*) survived the Blitz, these lists of wills compiled by Miss Moger often show that someone did indeed leave a will, even though no copy or abstract has survived. So, even the lists can be valuable, while Miss Moger's abstracts themselves are an absolutely invaluable (perhaps hitherto under-used) resource for Devon family historians.

4) A less spectacular collection but also of huge value are the two volumes of will etc. abstracts compiled by C.A.T. Fursdon in the 1930s, these two volumes being held in the Devon and Cornwall Record Society Library (upstairs in WSL). The volumes contain in total a little over 1250 items, and our indexes of these appear as sources **FURG** and **FURW**. A number of the entries in these two indexes are in fact neither wills nor administrations nor inventories. So, why have we included them? These items are executors' accounts, in which the executor of a will listed all the beneficiaries and the amount each received. Thus, they are just as useful as wills for providing family information, as well as a little social history.

5) Another index has been compiled from close on 1000 items found at The National Archives. The most well known testamentary items held at The National Archives are of course the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) wills and administrations. All the Devon related PCC wills are already included in our index (our source **PROB 11**) and a gradually growing number of PCC administrations are included too (our sources **JHW** and **ACA**). However, The National Archives hold many other testamentary items – particularly inventories – in other document classes. Among other items are documents created during Chancery and Exchequer law cases about disputed wills. Our index of all these types of items is by no means complete yet, but with the help of TNA staff it is growing steadily (our source **TNA**).

6) We are close to completing the task of creating the first comprehensive online index covering all the wills held at the three record offices in Devon – this will be the subject of a separate report in due course, as will our work on the Society of Genealogists' collections.

If you look at our website, you'll see that other sources have now been completely searched and added to our index, while others are still in progress. One of the most interesting collections of entries can be found in a list we call **MISC**. It now contains over 3000 testamentary items, culled from a huge and an amazingly diverse number of sources from all over the world.

You will notice on our website that our 'consolidated' index – combining all our sources and currently comprising over 150,000 entries – is remade periodically, rather than being updated continuously. By the time you read this article it should have been freshly remade. We sincerely hope that the Devon Wills Project will help you to locate copies – previously unknown to you - of the wills or administrations of your Devon ancestors. Do please let us know if you have an unexpected success – it gives us encouragement! AND, we are still open to receiving more offers to help us gather items for the index, if you have the time.

The Devon Wills Project is a collaboration between the Devon Record Office, the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, the Devon Family History Society and Genuki/DEVON.

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