

Parfitt Cresswell Helped Expose Alarming Systematic Probate Fraud by Criminal Gangs

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- [Parfitt Cresswell](#), a prominent law firm with offices across London, the Thames Valley, Surrey, Sussex, and Kent has uncovered a disturbing pattern of estate fraud using forged Wills. They worked with the BBC on the Radio 4 series "The Grave Robbers" which exposed probate crime and started on 9th July last week. Criminal gangs are stealing millions from beneficiaries and the taxpayer and are evading detection, with ease, due to systematic failures in the probate system. Parfitt Cresswell has written to the Lord Chancellor and a number of MP's to ask that these systematic failures are urgently addressed.

The firm, which acted as Attorney under a Lasting Power of Attorney for a recently deceased client, knew that their client passed away intestate (without a Will). However, they then discovered that a fraudulent Will had been submitted to the Probate Registry. A Grant of Probate was issued without proper scrutiny, allowing the fraudster to access and extract hundreds of thousands of pounds from the deceased's accounts. A further large sum in property was nearly lost, but the law firm intervened in time to prevent the sale.

Simon Steele-Williams, a litigation lawyer at Parfitt Cresswell working on the case, explained; "Our firm was aware that our client had no Will and had never intended to make one. When they died, we paid the inheritance tax due and then applied for Letters of Administration only to discover that a Grant of Probate had been issued against a Will that claimed the estate was under the inheritance tax threshold. An internal investigation revealed glaring inconsistencies in the Will."

The firm successfully secured an injunction to freeze the remaining assets, had the fraudulent Grant revoked, and secured a court order that Letters of Administration be granted to a member of the deceased family. The work was all undertaken at significant risk to the firm and the



Simon Steele-Williams, Litigation Lawyer at Parfitt Cresswell

beneficiaries as they could not be certain of recovering the funds belonging to the estate. Following a number of court proceedings, Parfitt Cresswell managed to secure over 60% of the estate and recovered some funds from the fraudsters frozen bank accounts.



Parfitt Cresswell informed the police at the time the fraud was taking place. They also notified Action Fraud but are not aware of any action being taken against the fraudsters. It is only because of their relationship with the deceased that the fraud was detected.

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*Simon Steele-Williams,
litigation lawyer at Parfitt
Cresswell*

The case highlights what the firm describes as a systemic vulnerability—where fraudsters target estates listed publicly, forge Wills claiming the estate value is below the Inheritance Tax threshold, and liquidate assets before any challenge is raised.

In a letter addressed to the Lord Chancellor, the firm calls

for urgent action including:

- A government-led investigation into fraudulent probate applications;
- Legislative reforms requiring stricter checks on Wills and witness information, particularly for estates publicly listed;
- Collaboration with financial institutions to better detect suspicious activity;
- Adoption of AI and machine learning tools to flag potentially fraudulent applications.

Simon Steele-Williams concluded; “The ease with which fraudsters can currently exploit the probate system is alarming. Without reform, more rightful heirs and HMRC will be defrauded, criminal gangs funded and public confidence in estate administration will be severely undermined.”

This case is not an isolated incident. Similar instances have been documented in the legal press, including in Today’s Wills & Probate. The firm urges the Ministry of Justice to take immediate steps to safeguard estates, support enforcement agencies, and protect lawful heirs.

Following the airing of the first of BBC series on probate fraud the Bona Vacantia list, the official list of people who have died without leaving a will, has been taken offline.

Parfitt Cresswell has offices across the South-east and also trades as Charles Coleman & Co., Colemans, Copley Clark, Jevons, Riley and Pope, Keene Marsland, and Max Barford & Co. They

also host an online business radio show, [Connections Radio](#) and would be interested to hear from other firms or individuals who have experienced similar incidents of estate fraud.

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