

## Goddard Probate records 1858-1957

After retirement, the late Peter Goddard of Canada spent much of his time in libraries collecting “Goddard” birth, marriage and death records, mostly for the period 1837 to 2003. These records have been available to members on the Goddard Association website in the form of searchable spreadsheets, for some time. In addition, he had photographed the records for English and Welsh Goddards, for the period 1858-1957, from the “National Probate Calendar”, the annually issued index for probate of wills. Every year from 1858, volumes of short summaries of grants of probate and of letters of administration were created, in alphabetical order by surname. For each grant of probate, these include the name, address, and occupation (or other description) of the deceased, the place and date of the death, the date on which probate was granted with the value of the estate, and the names of the executors. These images of the Goddard probate index records have been available, on request, from our research coordinator. I have now converted these photographs into the written word, attaching each record on to the “Goddard Probate Index (1857-1958)” (members section GAE website), and released this enhanced file

This collection contains summaries (not the actual documents) of the vast majority of Goddard probate cases in England and Wales between 1858 and 1957. It effectively forms an index to their wills and probate records for this period.

The individual files in this database may not include all existing Goddard probate records. Please note that, apart from one or two exceptions, neither Peter, nor I, have included variants on the name of “Goddard” in this file, although they are seen within the Calendars. Use caution when assuming that any database is a complete set of records - even for the places and time periods listed. Due to the legibility of the original sources, there are gaps in the records, including partial sentences, cut-off words, and other omissions. The computer software spell checker can highlight most of the glaring spelling mistakes but it cannot help with numbers. If a date, or asset value, is of particular importance then it should be verified with the original probate record from the Probate Office, not just the photo image of the Probate Calendar.

Due to the nature of the records and because the records were originally compiled by a third party, it is difficult to absolutely verify the completeness and validity of the data.

These same “National Probate Calendar” images of the probate indexes from 1858 to 1966 can also be searched online at “[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)”, however this is a “paid-for” service costing £12.95/month, at the time of writing.

The background to this data file is that “Probate” for a will is a legal document. “Receipt of Probate” is the first step in the legal process of administering the estate of a deceased person, resolving all claims and distributing the deceased person's property under a will.

The “Court of Probate Act 1857” transferred responsibility for the granting of probate, and letters of administration, from the ecclesiastical courts of England and Wales to a new civil Court of Probate. It created a “Principal Probate Registry” in London and a number of district probate registries. This act came into force in January 1858.

There are three categories shown in this list, “*Probate*”, “*Administration*” and “*Administration (with Will)*”. Where a person dies leaving a will appointing an executor, and that executor validly disposes of the property of the deceased within England and Wales, then the estate will go to probate. However, if no will is left, or the will is invalid or incomplete in some way, then administrators must be appointed.

A quick glance through the the “Transcription” attached to each record shows some of the Goddards died at railway stations, on the golf links, several at hotels, some in battle, and a few at sea.

When it comes to occupation or status, several “administrators” were referred to as “Company Director” a popular term, but not very informative, neither were the job descriptions for the “underlooker” or “overlooker” and the quaint function of “painist” defies interpretation. But, perhaps this is one of the very few printing errors found in the Calendars, and that the word should have been “pianist”.

By far the most popular Goddard trades were associated with the production, or sale of alcoholic beverages, closely followed by those purveying religious tracts.

For those “administrators” who are worried about what will be written about them in some future Calendar here, from The Times web site on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014, is some food for thought:-

*“Which would you be happier doing - serving pints or serving God? Helpful advice on how to make those difficult life choices is on hand.*

*The Cabinet Office has been looking at the relationship between different jobs and levels of life satisfaction, and publicans, it turns out, are in the unhappiest occupation of all. They are closely followed by brickies and debt collectors.*

*The happiest workers, the research suggests, are vicars and priests. Members of the clergy enjoy the most satisfying lives - but farmers and fitness instructors are pretty jolly too.”*

It is too late for me to become a happy vicar but, I do fancy a pretty fitness instructor!

Brian Goddard of Newbury