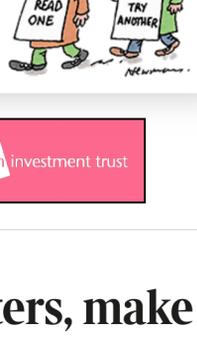


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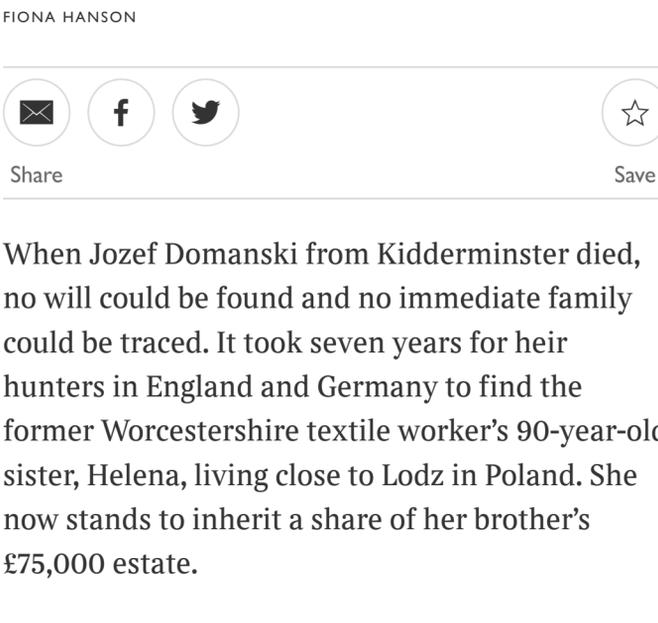
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INHERITANCE

Don't rely on heir hunters, make a will

Carol Lewis

September 28 2019, 12:01am, The Times



When Jozef Domanski died, it took heir hunters seven years to find his next of kin

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When Jozef Domanski from Kidderminster died, no will could be found and no immediate family could be traced. It took seven years for heir hunters in England and Germany to find the former Worcestershire textile worker's 90-year-old sister, Helena, living close to Lodz in Poland. She now stands to inherit a share of her brother's £75,000 estate.

The Domanski case is not an anomaly. The International Association of Professional Probate Researchers, Genealogists and Heir Hunters (IAPPR) reports that more than 156 UK-based Poles have died intestate in the past two years — a 55 per cent increase on the previous two years.

Danny Curran, the chairman of the IAPPR and founder of Finders International, the company that tracked down Domanski's sister, says: "There have been four waves of Polish immigration to the UK since just before the Second World War. The largest number arrived when Poland joined the EU in 2004, so we are seeing a mix of individuals, of all ages, who have died and are struggling to find their next of kin.

"There are many reasons why wills may not have been made. During the war many thought they would return home soon after, but did not. During subsequent waves of immigration many did not return for fear of the Soviet regime," he says.

"Poland also has the disadvantage of having had so many records destroyed and this has hampered tracing next of kin."

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Curran wants the Polish ambassador in the UK, Arkady Rzegocki, to encourage Poles in Britain to make it easy to find wills, while the IAPPR is working with German and Polish probate genealogists to help to find relatives.

Domanski was separated from his family when he was 14. He was sent to Germany by the Nazis in 1940 and was liberated by the Allied forces in 1945 when he travelled to England. He managed to get in touch with his sister during the Cold War years, but was afraid to visit and they lost touch in the 1980s. He died intestate aged 86.

October is Free Wills Month, when many solicitors will draw up or update a simple will without charge. Check the list at freewillsmoth.org.uk.

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