



Probate Inventories

Background

From 1530 to 1782 every executor had to appoint three or four local men to appraise or value the deceased's personal estate and provide the probate court with a full inventory or list. Inventories are associated with wills or, if a person died intestate (without a will), with the letters of administration which allowed the next of kin to wind-up the deceased's estate. An inventory was not a legal requirement after 1782 but an interested party could request one. This means that fewer inventories survive for the later period.

In Gloucestershire the main series of inventories begins in 1587 and complements the series of wills (see Mini Guide 10 Wills and Probate Records). Wills or Letters of Administration and Inventories are normally filed together but in Gloucestershire they were separated into two series in the late 19th century. This means that some inventories have not survived.

If the deceased owned property in more than one diocese, the inventory would have been submitted to the Prerogative Court of the Archbishop of Canterbury or York, depending where the estates were.

What are Inventories?

Inventories are detailed lists of the personal estate belonging to the deceased so do not include any real estate (land and property). They are often arranged room-by-room.

Their main purpose was to establish the total value of the deceased's possessions so that any dispute over the will could be settled more easily. There can be a lot of variation in the amount of detail included and values could be estimated

What information do they contain?

Inventories are a marvellous resource and can reveal a huge amount of information about the testator's lifestyle, social status, personality and even relationships. They can list personal possessions including furniture, furnishings and clothing, cash, shares, debts owing or owed, crops, livestock, and tools of trade. They provide 'flesh on the bones' for family historians. Local and social historians can use inventories to gain valuable insights into social and economic change

How to find the records

Probate Inventories for the years 1541-1800 have been digitised and indexed by Ancestry. They can be searched and viewed online via their website www.ancestry.co.uk. You can view Ancestry for free from Gloucestershire Archives or any Gloucestershire library.

You can double check whether an inventory exists for a particular person by using our genealogical database. This can be accessed online at <http://ww3.gloucestershire.gov.uk/genealogy/Search.aspx>.

How to find the records

Inventories were created for other reasons and so can also form part of a collection of family or estate records. They were often created to record the contents of a room and their value in preparation for a sale and the amount of detail can vary. Churches were required to make regular inventories or 'terriers' of the property it owned in the parish. These can include church plate and furnishings as well as buildings and land; they form part of parish collections or the diocesan records

To search for these records please use our online catalogue, which can be found on our website: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives. Click on the link which says "online catalogue". Choose the "advanced search" option and use "inventor*" as a keyword (this will find "inventory" and "inventories"). Click on the "findingref" number on the left hand side of your hit-list to view more information about each item.

Find out more

For more information about Wills and Probate Records see Research Mini Guide 10: *Wills and Probate Records*.

You can find more information about wills and inventories proved by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and an in depth overview of wills and inventories on the National Archives website www.nationalarchives.gov.uk