

No will hunting

▼ PAPER TRAIL
Matt checks
some old records



MATT SURPRISES LONG-LOST RELATIVES WITH FORTUNES

If someone rings up and says you've inherited a small fortune – don't hang up.

It might be Matt Siddell, co-founder of Kin, which traces the beneficiaries of people who have died without leaving a will.

"I've heard of people like us bringing news of a large payout and being angrily chased away," says Matt.

"People think it must be a scam. It's hard for people to take us seriously at first.

"They can't believe it. We phone them to break the news. If we sent a letter it could be put straight in the bin.

"To suddenly inherit from someone you've never heard of can be a shock – a happy one."

In Britain today, approximately one in three individuals die intestate (without making a will), and the Treasury swallows £25million every year in unclaimed estates.

The subject of a forthcoming Cutting Edge programme on C4 (Secret Family Fortunes), Kin is the brainchild of university friends Matt, 32, and Sasha Buchler 33, who started the business together five years ago.

"We ploughed everything we had into the business and took no

salary at all for the first two years," says Matt. "We are still growing and have to work very hard. Once we've completed a job we are only paid when probate is completed and that can take up to two years."

The pair started with just two desks in the corner of an office in London where they still work – but now they have the whole floor. There can be as many as 30 people working on just one case.

It is mainly graduates working at Kin, who start on a salary of around £20,000. "There's a real buzz and excitement about cracking a

case and no two days are the same," says Matt.

"We had an extraordinary case last week. The chap who died had no siblings, had never married or had any children.

"His mother was an only child and there was just one aunt of the deceased on the father's side of the

family but she had been brought up by another member of the family after the death of her father.

"But she was an aunt of the deceased and this woman's three sons stand to inherit a share of £400,000 from someone they've never heard of. It's wonderful to bring them this news.

"Another time a client requested a copy of a death certificate from New York for his father-in-law who had died there. I got it for him and waived the fee as it hadn't cost me anything.

"Later he needed another copy of the same death certificate – again I waived the fee.

"Soon after we were working on the case of an old man who had died in a house in Clapham, South London, which his parents had bought in the 1930s.

"The house was extraordinary. Everything was original, there was no gas or electricity, piles of old newspapers and a tree growing through the living room. The place was a mess.

"As well as the house it turned out he had £500,000 in savings. We had to trace his family back to 1820. We found relatives in South Africa, the US and the UK and amazingly one of them was the wife of the man I'd given the death certificates to – twice. Her share was about £30,000. I couldn't believe it!

"I love this job, but the team we put together must take a lot of the credit for what we do. They are all hard-working and very smart.

RACE

"We have access to a huge number of records but we still research in libraries, registry offices and archives, and often use our network of highly talented ex-CID officers."

"Our work comes from solicitors, lawyers and ordinary people who find us online after a friend or a neighbour has died intestate."

Kin's fees are deducted from beneficiaries' share of the inheritance. It's often a race against time: trying to track down relatives before rival companies. Probate genealogy has become a highly competitive industry, with more than 50 firms now working in the UK.

Kin is now a significant player, with partners in France, the US, Poland, Austria, Germany, Australia and Canada.

To find out more about the job visit www.kin.co.uk.

KIN are paid for their services in a number of ways including a fixed fee for say finding a last known address or they get paid for the time the spend on a case or a percentage of the amount an heir receives – from 5%.



▲ PARTNERS
Matt and
Sasha