



P R E S S R E L E A S E

CELTIC RESEARCH FINDS HEIR TO €1.9 MILLION UNCLAIMED FORTUNE

A 90 year old great-grandmother is to inherit a fortune of nearly €2 million held in Swiss bank accounts. In an arduous four month search spanning three continents and six countries, Celtic Research and their agents were able to find the sole heir to an unclaimed estate.

“We got an email from one of our European correspondents about a newspaper ad asking for the family of Anneliese Stamm-Benda to come forward. They cautioned us that because of Swiss law, the lawyers couldn’t divulge the size of the estate and there was no guarantee that if we found anyone they’d be accepted by the administrators. It was a gamble to take a job without knowing how much was at stake, but we followed the trail –our minds were simply drawn in and absorbed by the mystery surrounding the case. It’s a little crazy” admits Hector Birchwood, who heads Celtic Research’s investigative unit in London.

Celtic Research is a UK company in the business of locating missing heirs. It has over 30 years experience finding people across the UK, Europe, the US, Canada, Latin America, Southern Africa & Australia. They have just finished filming a pilot episode as part of a BBC daytime television series about their work, due for release in 2006. Previously, they have been genealogical consultants for the UK TV show: “Find a Fortune” and researchers for the US Fox TV series: “Unsolved Mysteries”. Celtic Research is a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists.

Typically, Celtic is informed by attorneys, trustees and similar agencies about the estate of a person who’s died without a will and whose heirs are unknown. It is their job to construct a family tree that leads them to that person’s closest living kin. “It’s a two-way process” says Hector, “Solicitors give us leads and we always have work for them. We resolve problems, but most cases are modest –€2 million is exceptional!”

The information was sparse, but it was thought that the maternal family of Ms. Benda emigrated to the UK. Every line of her father’s family was dead without surviving kin, so only her mother’s family could inherit. “The family was of German-Jewish descent, originating from the most fashionable neighbourhoods of Hamburg. Our first problem was to identify the name of the family. Originally, they were Levi or Levy, but the family changed its name to Lenne or Schüler-Lenne in the 1880s and used all these names with several spelling variants. We had to look at every possible combination” says Hector.

Educated, wealthy and prosperous, the family mingled amongst the Rothschilds and Europe’s high society. “This was our second problem: the world was their oyster –they could be anywhere. During the rise and fall of Nazi Germany they settled in Canada, the UK and Australia, but each branch was dying out...childless. The research was expensive, exhausting and agonising”, recalls Hector.

The break came when they found the last member of the family living with two daughters in Perth, Australia in the 1950s. “Sure, it was 50 years ago, but she *had* children. We knew we’d cracked it, although we still had to find them” says Hector. “Her husband died young, so she could have remarried. Her daughters were probably married too, so their surnames were uncertain. There was not trace of them in Australia, but then our agent found a lady by the same name living back in Germany. They made contact and it was the heir that we’d been searching for”.

Unless a fixed fee is agreed, Celtic does not charge solicitors, administrators for its services, but takes a contingency fee from the money it is able to recover for its heirs. Each heir signs a contract individually with Celtic to agree to this arrangement. “No win, no fee is the best way of doing business” says Hector

The time period to make a claim on the Swiss estate lapsed in September. Celtic had a 6 month wait to learn if their heir had been accepted and it wasn’t until late September that the true value of the estate was released. “Yes, we could have been staring at a couple of thousand Swiss francs, so we’re relieved. It’s not over yet. We have to wait for the tax authorities to take their cut before the money is distributed to our heir –and we don’t get paid till that happens”, laughs Hector.

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