

21 February 2024

Ministry of Justice  
Will Storage consultation  
Postpoint 5.25  
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### **Open consultation: Storage and Retention of Original Will Documents**

The Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) is the world's largest association of professional genealogists, representing over 2,000 members in forty countries, including 110 members in the United Kingdom. The APG Board of Directors wishes to respond to the Ministry of Justice consultation on the storage and retention of original will documents.

APG is concerned by the recent proposal by the Ministry of Justice of the United Kingdom to destroy original copies of wills held by their archive 25-years after digitization (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/storage-and-retention-of-original-will-documents>). While APG applauds the initiative to digitize and make accessible the wills held by the Ministry of Justice, APG does not support the destruction of these valuable documents, as there are real risks in digitization. Wills provide a valuable glimpse into the networks, lives, and families of citizens and residents of the UK and the former Empire. They are of immense genealogical value and oftentimes paint a picture of the people being researched. Not only that, wills provide valuable data for social and economic history, telling the stories of the commonfolk and luminaries alike. The destruction of the original wills will effectively put three centuries of history at risk; in particular, the history of those often forgotten.

Digitization is not a panacea even though it is an important tool for preservation. Digitization requires immense investment in server infrastructure and IT resources in perpetuity, ensuring that files do not corrupt or become deprecated. Digitization without retaining the originals is an extremely risky endeavor. There will be inevitable accidents in the digitization process, where documents aren't digitized properly such as blown out or blurred scans and cut off documents, or even, missing entire pages or entire wills. Destroying the originals after digitizing is, quite literally, courting disaster.

APG urges the Ministry of Justice and Parliament to reconsider this proposal and find a solution that will preserve and make accessible these valuable pieces of British and global history. The UK has a proud history of archival practice. APG is confident that there are solutions that can meet the needs of the Ministry of Justice and the global genealogical and historical research communities in preserving these documents in perpetuity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Boeren', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Boeren  
President, Association of Professional Genealogists