

Heir Searching

Cedric Moens

Cedric Moens directs research at Genealogie Decuyper, the probate research firm doing work in Brussels, Belgium. The firm's formidable workload encompasses researching in Belgium and farther abroad, looking for owners of abandoned properties, missing beneficiaries of life insurance policies, and representing heirs traced abroad. All of this work involves the construction of family trees and the accompanying effort of genealogical determinations. Three languages are spoken in the offices. Cedric says, "Belgium is such a small country, having three national languages, in order to be successful, I offer my services in the Français, English, and Nederlands languages."

Heir Research

Heir research is the sole direction of genealogical work at the firm. Cedric explains, "Heir research is the only activity we are exercising. Today we work with more than three hundred different notaries and lawyers. It brings more than enough work for five full-time researchers. We are only working with notaries, lawyers, and the court as a subcontractor. The founder of the business left the French company he was working for to establish his own business in 1942, so we are currently the third generation of professional heir researchers."

Genealogie Decuyper's in-house resources constitute a considerable library just by itself. The firm's website <www.genealogiedecuyper.be> describes its collected works as "vast collections of research data: obituaries, official publications, and a database with a collection of all cases which we have successfully dealt with until now: this comprises more than seven thousand different estates in Belgium and abroad."

The firm's corps of research experts is often required to seek out members of families living in different countries throughout the world. Global connections and communications with worldwide colleagues are necessary in coordinating the several findings of the probate genealogists in determining the most credible and accurate legitimacy of inheritance. The APG network serves Genealogie Decuyper as an important source of diverse practitioners from whom to draw expertise when the research need arises.

A Lot of Surprises

Across the boundaries, inheritance laws and their variances must present obstacles. Cedric downplays the difficulty: "The laws are different, definitively. It does not ease the process, but it is OK."

From the legal terms and stark information on the official documents emerge flesh-and-blood stories. "My favourite client is a friend. As we took the firm over, he was a new notary. Knowing each other from another professional life, our current collaboration is excellent. Our activity brings a lot of surprises: missing children, family secrets, families' wars; the saddest are the ones when children or parents ignore the death of their relative and that we have to inform them."

Cedric is the founder of Professional Heir Researchers Association in Belgium. "We meet three times a year, and I am also member of a French association. I am, in addition, a lecturer in France about heir research in Belgium."

Memories and Golfing

Cedric holds kind-hearted memories of his grandfather: "My paternal grandfather was a teacher. He taught me writing and calculating, and we always played cards together." Cedric's brother works in New York, and his step-brother works in Washington, D.C., offering leisure occasions for visiting the United States. Cedric holds an MBA, lives in the suburbs of Brussels with his wife and two children, and pursues that most universal of opportunities for exercise and recreation: "I am golfing... a lot."

The screenshot shows the homepage of Genealogie Decuyper. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Home, About Us, Beneficiaries, Solicitors, and Contact Us. Below the menu is a large banner image featuring a family of six people. To the right of the family photo is the company logo, which includes a DNA double helix and the text "GENEALOGIE DECUYPER" and "PROBATE RESEARCH SINCE 1942". Below the banner, there is a section titled "Our task as probate genealogy experts is to trace potential beneficiaries of an estate of a decedent without known heirs, to determine their legitimacy, to locate them and to calculate the benefit they are entitled to. All this must enable the solicitor to allocate the estate between the heirs." This section is accompanied by a small image of hands holding a document. To the right of this text, there are two sub-sections: "For solicitors" and "For beneficiaries", each with a brief description of the services provided. At the bottom right of the page, there is a small image of several dominoes.