

Contentious Probate Update 2026

Our Wills & Trusts team are delighted to invite you to their annual contentious probate conference

The seminar aims to bring practitioners up to speed with all the latest developments in the world of contentious probate.

It is principally targeted at solicitors who are (or would like to be) involved in contentious probate work, but it would also be of interest to non-contentious lawyers, will writing firms and professional executors.

The conference will be chaired by Jody Atkinson and will conclude with an interactive session led by Alex Troup KC.

A proportion of all ticket sales will be donated to



Thursday, 1st October



9:30am-4:25pm



**Sandy Park,
Exeter**

Topics include:

- The elements of the non-contentious probate rules which can assist when dealing with a potential probate claim
- Deeds of Variation: understanding their status and enforcement
- Case update on executor/trustee removal
- What to do when it appears a party may lack the mental capacity required to conduct litigation and other related issues
- The ordering and use of DNA evidence in inheritance disputes and kin inquiries
- Electronic Signatures and Informal Dealings with Land
- Trustee Proceedings and Joinder

Programme



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	Registration and welcome refreshments
9.30 - 9.40am	Introduction from Chair Christopher Jones, Barrister, St John's Chambers
9:40 - 10:00am	Sponsor talk
10.00 - 10.30am	Making the most of the Non-Contentious Probate Rules 1987 Daniel Soar, Barrister, St John's Chambers Daniel will be discussing elements of the Non-Contentious Probate Rules which can provide useful tools for dealing with commonly encountered issues within probate claims and may even help avoid the need for litigation.
10.30 - 11.00am	Deeds of Variation: understanding their status and enforcement Jack Pankhurst, Barrister, St John's Chambers Jack will consider deeds of variation, their drafting, and precise legal effect. Jack will also discuss a recent case which demonstrates how the contractual nature of Deeds of Variation (in comparison to wills) can affect the enforcement avenues open to those who benefit under them.
11.00 - 11.20am	Break and refreshments
11.20 - 11:50am	Case update on executor/trustee removal Abha Pandya, Barrister, St John's Chambers
11.50 - 12.20pm	What to do when it appears a party may lack the mental capacity required to conduct litigation and other related issues John Dickinson, Barrister, St John's Chambers John considers the case of A Local Authority v JB [2021] UKSC 52, the role of the litigation friend and the practical approach to addressing mental capacity concerns.
12.20 - 12.50pm	Trustee Proceedings and Joinder Oliver Wooding, Barrister, St John's Chambers Oliver will look consider issues facing trustees when applying for the court's assistance and approval on matters, and in particular who should be joined in order to ensure the best protection for the trustees.
12.50 - 1.50pm	Lunch

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12.50 - 1.50pm	Lunch
1.50 - 2.20pm	The ordering and use of DNA evidence in inheritance disputes and kin inquiries Michael Clarke, Barrister, St John's Chambers Michael will consider when and how a party to an inheritance dispute or kin inquiry may be ordered to provide DNA evidence of parentage and how the result and other DNA evidence available may be used by the Court in determination of the dispute or inquiry.
2.20 - 2.50pm	Electronic Signatures and Informal Dealings with Land Christopher Jones, Barrister, St John's Chambers Recent decisions of the appellate courts reflect a growing judicial engagement with the realities of modern communication when assessing whether property interests have been validly created or disposed of. Christopher will consider the approach of the courts, reflect upon the key lessons for busy litigators and contemplate where the law may go next...!
2.50 - 3.10pm	Break and refreshments
3.10 - 3.50pm	Trusts in the world of probate Alex Troup KC, Barrister, St John's Chambers Alex will lead an interactive seminar looking looking at nuptial trusts, constructive trusts, secret trusts and probate laches.
3.50 - 4.25pm	Q&A session

Barristers

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Highly esteemed on the Western Circuit for its expertise in traditional and chancery work.”
Chambers Uk 2025



Alex Troup KC
Year of call: 1998

Alex is exceptionally talented, calm, and has a really good manner with clients. They trust him and he puts them at ease. He has lots of gravitas and great court presence.” Chambers UK, 2026

Alex is Head of our Wills & Trusts team and is recognised for his impressive chancery practice. He is the only silk ranked in private wealth outside of London in the High Net Worth Guide 2025. Alex specialises in contentious probate, trusts and administration of estates, as well as property litigation. He is instructed in disputes over the sale of agricultural land, as well as proprietary estoppel claims. Alex is also adept at handling Court of Protection work and excels in cases concerning statutory wills, contested deputyship applications and lifetime gifts. Alex acts as a mediator and as a representative at mediations.



John Dickinson
Year of call: 1995

John is exceptionally good on details and has a frightfully good head for figures. He can be a silent assassin.” The Legal 500, 2026

John is a barrister specialising in wills and trusts work including administration of estates matters. He has extensive experience in resolving all aspects of inheritance related problems, both through court proceedings and alternative dispute resolution. John's work includes claims under the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependents) Act 1975, contentious probate claims, removal of personal representatives, undue influence, rectification of wills, proprietary estoppel and constructive trust claims. For the fourth year running he has been identified as one of the five barristers 'ranked in Band 1' as a leading professional adviser to the Private Wealth market (outside London), where he is featured in the High Net Worth Guide 2025.



Christopher Jones
Year of call: 2004

Christopher is very good at esoteric points of law. He is a very able lawyer, good on his feet at trial and has excellent client care skills.” Chambers UK, 2026

Christopher is a chancery and commercial specialist with particular emphasis on trust litigation and advice, contentious and non-contentious probate applications, real property litigation (particularly in relation to easements, restrictive covenants and contracts for the sale of land) and commercial and agricultural landlord and tenant disputes. He also regularly advises on professional negligence claims, particularly in relation to claims against solicitors, accountants and tax consultants in relation to negligent conveyancing and tax advice as well as being a trained mediator. Christopher is consistently recommended as a leading junior in Chambers UK and Legal 500.

Barristers



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Abha Pandya

Year of call: 2007

Michael has a great depth of technical and tactical knowledge. He is excellent with clients and is calm, considered and commanding in court.” Chambers UK, 2026



Michael Clarke

Year of call: 2009

Michael has an extensive wills & trusts practice, and regularly advises on the construction of wills, challenges to the validity of wills, claims in respect of mutual wills, applications to remove or replace personal representatives, applications for directions in the administration of estates, breach of trust claims (particularly in respect of but not limited to estates), proprietary estoppel and constructive trust claims and claims under the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependents) Act 1975. Michael is able to draw upon his experience as a senior associate teacher of trusts at the University of Bristol (which continues) and is able to advise upon the tax aspects of wills, trusts and estates having previously practiced as specialist tax solicitor and chartered tax adviser.

Oliver is very experienced and a pleasure to work with. He has a very good client manner, is commanding in court and tactically minded.” Chambers UK, 2026



Oliver Wooding

Year of call: 2009

Oliver's wills and trusts practice spans all contentious and non-contentious matters. He advises upon and acts, both as advocate and mediator, in disputes involving the validity of wills, claims under Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependents) Act 1975, the removal of executors, construction of wills and trust documents, and for rectification of wills and trust documents.

Oliver has experience in claims for rectification of wills, mutual wills, and invalidity claims based on testamentary capacity, lack of knowledge and approval, and undue influence.

Barristers



Daniel Soar

Year of call: 2016

Daniel is ferociously bright, extremely conscientious and wholly reliable.” Chambers UK, 2026

Daniel has a broad wills and trusts practice encompassing both contentious and non-contentious work. He has experience advising on the proper construction of wills, their formal and substantive validity, will challenges based on lack of capacity, want of knowledge and approval, and undue influence. Daniel also frequently advises in relation to claims for provision pursuant to the 1975 Act. As part of his probate practice, Daniel frequently advises on and appears as advocate in contentious probate litigation concerning will challenges and claims under the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975. He also acts for beneficiaries and personal representatives in disputes regarding the administration of estates, dealing with applications for the removal of executors or Beddow applications, for example.



Jack Pankhurst

Year of call: 2021

Jack is an absolutely standout barrister who conducts himself in a way that far exceeds his year of call. He is pro-active, thorough, and incredibly detail-oriented.” The Legal 500, 2026

Jack has experience of a wide range of wills and trusts work, including both contentious and non-contentious matters. Jack has experience of advising and/or providing representation in respect of the validity and construction of trusts; perpetuity periods; the purposes of an apparent charitable trust; the construction of wills and challenges to their validity; 1975 Act claims; applications for the removal of executors and trustees; TOLATA matters; various issues relating to alleged delay in the administration of trusts and estates; and costs, including personal representatives' costs protection.