Post-death control of Digital Assets

Date: 21 February 2014

Time: 10.15 - 13.05

Venue: Chancellor’s Building, Room 4.16, University of Bath

About the seminar

We all know that we’ll eventually die but very few people make plans for the entirety of their assets, especially digital ones. This CDAS seminar on the post-death afterlife of digital assets will examine how individuals can manage the full spectrum of 21st century property and the challenges posed by the digital world. The speakers will address everything from management of estates to controlling a person’s post-mortem identity. Whether it’s passwords, social networking accounts, or online property, the certainty of death opens up an entirely new world for living next of kin to negotiate after a person dies.

Programme:

10.15: Welcome and introduction

10.20: ‘Challenges posed by digital assets in estate administration’

Andrea Pierce, Head of Legal Services at Kings Court Trust Ltd

11.05: Break

11.20: ‘Digital ownership across lifespans’

Dr. Wendy Moncur, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee

12.05: ‘Digital Assets & Digital Legacy’

James Norris, CEO & Founder of www.deadsoci.al/

12.50: Discussion

13.05: Close
Abstracts

Challenges posed by digital assets in estate administration

Andrea Pierce, Head of Legal Services, Kings Court Trust Ltd – www.kctrust.co.uk

With technology becoming more and more prevalent in our daily lives and more photos, books and music collections moving online, it begs the question – when we die, what happens to the digital trail we leave behind?

As expected, policies differ between companies but several social media websites have already established practices to address such issues. Twitter, for example, deletes the profile of the deceased person upon notification of their death, while Facebook gives family members the option to apply to have the profile memorialised. In the event of death of one of its users, Gmail, on the other hand, requires proof from the next of kin of an email conversation between them and the deceased in order to give access to the account.

Legislation is attempting to catch up with the quickening pace of developing technology and no best practice guidelines have been established as yet so the process of inheritance of digital assets can be a complicated undertaking.

Digital ownership across lifespans

Dr Wendy Moncur, FRSA, Reader in Socio-Digital Interaction, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee

As technology adoption continues to increase across the lifespan, we embrace opportunities to create and share digital content with personal significance: photos, emails, blogs, videos and more. This content is superseding the boxes of memory-laden letters and photos previously stored in our homes. Digital content has the advantage that it can be created, accessed and shared anywhere, at any time. However, it cannot easily be inherited when its creator dies – especially if stored in online accounts. Facilities for users to nominate an inheritor for their digital content are largely absent, and (with few exceptions) lack support in law. Inheritors struggle to identify and access online accounts and their content, a problem compounded when Internet Service Providers’ conditions of use stipulate that accounts terminate on death. Processes of bequest and inheritance are further clouded by the asynchronous nature of virtual and physical death. Users may linger on in a virtual world long after physical death.

If inheritors do gain access to digital content, they are repurposing it. Digital content may be used to evoke the life of the deceased, providing opportunities for shared grieving and the maintenance of continuing bonds with the dead.
Digital Assets & Digital Legacy

James Norris, CEO & Founder of www.DeadSoci.al

Physical assets are heavily intertwined with death and the rituals behind grieving. Assets (in the form of physical possessions) are commonly used as a way for the living to feel connected to the deceased. This has occurred throughout the ages and across multiple societies and religions.

'Digital Assets & Digital Legacy' will explore the very relationship between death, physical possessions and the value innate objects can attain. The increasing value of digital assets will also be investigated. As we spend an increasingly amount of our lives online the blurring of human death, legacy, ritual and remembrance within the digital realm will also be examined.

James founded the end of life tool 'DeadSocial' as a way to self-manage our social networking accounts before we pass away. DeadSocial offers a way for us to bring closure to our digital lives or to extend our relationships posthumously.

Future CDAS events:

Living and Dying in the Fourth Age
24 March, 14.00 – 17.00
University of Bath, 3 East 2.20

One of the great achievements of advanced industrial societies is that most of their members live to a good age. This moves death into the province of old age, yet most research and innovation around the end of life has focussed on untimely deaths, such as from cancer, suicide or death in childhood. This seminar looks at living and dying, often with dementia and other infirmities, in late old age: the kind of dying many people fear after the long life they hope for.

Researchers, students, practitioners, and indeed anyone who is or who anticipates getting old, is welcome!

- Resilience and dementia
  Beatrice Godwin, retired Social Worker and PhD student, University of Bath
- A precarious life: perseverance in living day to day
  Liz Lloyd, Reader in Social Gerontology, University of Bristol
- The Social Construction of Frailty
  Paul Higgs, Professor of Sociology of Aging, UCL
- Choice and compassion at the end of a long life: congruent values?
  Tony Walter, CDAS Director, University of Bath

The seminar is free, please just let us know you are coming by booking your place via our online store.
Social death can refer to the extinction of an individual's social or legal identity/agency, either before or sometime after physical death, and may be self or other inflicted; it can also refer to the death of a social group or culture. Before physical death, it can mean being treated as a thing or commodity, disintegration of social networks, extreme isolation, or forced removal of individuals/groups from their group/land of origin/belonging. After physical death, the deceased's social identity and even possibly agency can be kept alive in a number of ways. The term 'social death', often meaning rather different things, has been developed independently by researchers in a range of fields, including gerontology, dementia, psychology and death studies, but also mental health, the history of slavery, and genocide studies.

Centre for Death and Society (CDAS) annual conferences are not general death studies conferences, but focus varied disciplinary perspectives on a specific topic.

This conference will, we believe, be the first time that scholars and practitioners from diverse fields will meet together to discuss the concept of social death – its utility, conceptualisation, history, and politics. As in previous CDAS annual conferences, our aim is to bring together research and knowledge that has hitherto been somewhat fragmented. Our plenary speaker is Prof Claudia Card, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Scholars and practitioners from around the world are invited to present 20 minute papers that use, consider or critique the concept of social death or that consider the death of social, cultural or personal identity. Abstracts (up to 250 words) to be emailed to cdas@bath.ac.uk by 10 March 2014.

The conference will be held in the centre of the world heritage city of Bath, in the amenable surroundings of the Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution (car-park nearby, Bath Spa station 10 minute walk, Bristol Airport 1 hour). The cost, £55 for a single day, £100 for the weekend, includes lunch and refreshments. There will be opportunities to socialise over a drink on Friday evening or meal on Saturday evening (neither included in price). There is plentiful accommodation nearby, which delegates need to arrange for themselves.

Booking for the conference is now open; please visit our website for further details: http://www.bath.ac.uk/cdas/events/news_0010.html