

## Database for deceased estates files across Johannesburg's history

The Microsoft Access database aggregates basic information such as about wealth, debts and kinship, currently across over 600 files. The setting out of kinship is organised, as in the files themselves, to reflect entitlements under intestate succession rules. The complex process of the transfer of property, especially where there is a will, requires complementary qualitative investigation. This will be clear from the sample archival material provided (see data document 13). Files are publicly available in the South African National Archives, or for more recent files at the Johannesburg Central Magistrate's Court or the South Gauteng Master's Office, in these cases with permission.

As is evident below, the database records the names of the deceased. These are a matter of public record but, because some records have been accessed with permission, the database cannot be shared on open access terms. A database restricted to around 500 files from the fully public archives has been shared (383 from the Master of the High Court, and 121 black estates from a separate archive of the Commissioners' Courts – both now in the South African National Archives). Researchers should contact Maxim Bolt to discuss possible work with the longer database.

### Death Notice Input

**Folio (Ref)**

**Deceased First Name**  **Deceased Middle Name(s)**  **Deceased Family Name**  **Maiden name (if female)**

**Deceased Birthplace**  **Deceased Nationality**

**Names and Addresses of the Parents of the deceased.**

**Father's First Name**  **Father's Family Name**

**Father's Address**

**Mother's First name**  **Mother's Family Name**

**Mother's Address**

**Age of the Deceased**  **Years**  **Months**

**Occupation in life of the deceased**  **Or, if a woman, of her husband**

**Ordinary place of residence of the deceased, or, if a woman, of her husband**

**Married or unmarried, Widower or Widow**

**(a) Name of Surviving spouse (if any). First Name:**  **Family Name:**

**and, whether married in community of property or not**

**(b) Name or names and approximate date of death of predeceased spouse or spouses**

Death Notice ID	1st name	Middle name(s)	Family name	Date of Death
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**(c) Place of last marriage:** **Location:**  **Town or Place:**  **District:**

**Date of Death:**

**Where the person died:** **House:**

**Town or Place:**

**District:**



often started long after death. Execution of estates was often initiated because someone needed something from the estate (e.g.: to sell the deceased's property).

It is important to note that archiving in South Africa was highly uneven, with KJB estates for black people dealt with in a much more informal and haphazard manner than MHG files. They often lack even some of the basic information that would ordinarily be included in a Master's Office Death Notice.

**Estate exceeds £300 in value:** This field in the database refers to the fact that the Master's Office has a threshold for a small estate, administered via a simplified process. This in fact changes over time, but the database displays £300 as a place holder for that variable amount.

**Currency:** South Africa decimalised its currency from pounds, shillings and pence in 1961, when it also moved to using the South African Rand. The Rand was equivalent to 10 shillings (half of a pound) at changeover but the exchange rate oscillated naturally from there. The database deals with this change by simply including separate inputs for assets, liabilities and distribution in each currency.

**Total disbursed value:** This cannot accommodate a negative amount. Where estates were insolvent (i.e. when liabilities exceeded assets), the field is blank.