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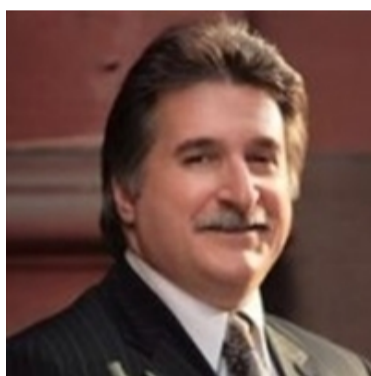


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Ming porcelain collection dispute



By [Charles Ticker](#)

A recent story from the United Kingdom found [here](#) illustrates what happens when siblings cannot come to an agreement on how to divide an estate. The dispute involves the children of Sir Michael Butler. Butler was a former adviser to Margaret Thatcher. The dispute centres around a Ming porcelain collection comprised of over 500 pieces dating back to the 17th century. Butler accumulated the collection over 50 years. He did this while he travelled the world as a diplomat under Thatcher. The collection is known as the Butler Family Collection.

Experts have classified this collection as the most important collection of 17th century Chinese porcelain in the world. It is considered a historical treasure. Many collectors would be very interested in acquiring the ceramic artifacts. It is rumoured to be valued in excess of £8 million.

The dispute involved Butler's four children: Caroline, James, Katharine, and Charles. The two younger children, Katharine and Charles, wanted to keep the collection intact. The two older children, Caroline and James, wanted to have the collection broken up so that they could remove their shares.

Ming collection will be split up

A recent court decision ruled in favour of Caroline and James. As a result, the collection will be divided such that each of the four siblings will be allowed to select 125 pieces. Katharine and Charles insist that Butler's wishes were to keep the collection intact. They believe that the collection has significant cultural and historical value. Butler's widow, Ann Ross Skinner, allegedly also wanted to keep the collection intact. Consequently, Skinner and the two younger siblings are devastated over the court's decision.

Various reports suggest that this dispute was very acrimonious. The parties were involved in many arguments. Given that the court has ordered the four siblings to select 125 pieces each from the collections, it seems likely that the dispute is far from finished. Apparently, Katharine and Charles intend to appeal the decision and to start a petition to keep the collection intact.

The kind of dispute seen over the Butler Family Collection is fairly common. When a person passes away and leaves a will, it is important to be specific on how the assets of the estate are to be divided. Based on the litigation steps taken by the four siblings in this matter, it seems likely that no such plan was in place. If an estate is comprised mainly of real estate, the parties will most likely eventually liquidate the property and divide the proceeds. However, if the estate is comprised of valuable items such as a porcelain collection, specific instructions should be left as to how it is to be handled.

Nonetheless, the Butler Family Collection may have been far more valuable if kept intact. It is a shame that it will be broken up.

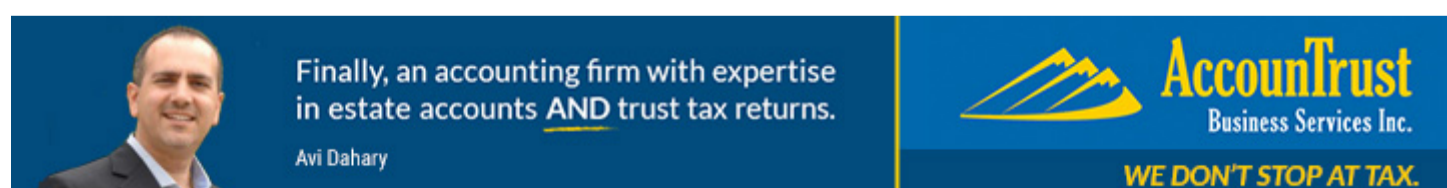
More on this story [here](#).

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