

The Will Of Melita Jackson

By **Alexander Baron** - Aug 5, 2015



Heather Ilott, a mother of five, will use the money to buy a home in Ware, Hertfordshire (Credits: Champion News)

5
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Melita Jackson died in July 2004 leaving a considerable sum of money. You might therefore have expected her estate to have been dispersed many years ago. Alas, it was only last month that what was (hopefully) the **final court hearing** relating to her last will and testament was held. The reason for that, briefly, is that Mrs Jackson disinherited her next of kin, her daughter who had married against her wishes. Instead she left everything (bar £5,000 for the BBC Benevolent Fund) to three animal charities with which she'd had no association and apparently did not care for. That was surely an act of spite, and there was not much charity exhibited by these august bodies who fought an eleven year legal battle to keep every penny of her near half million pound legacy, much of which will now be subsumed by court costs, for at the Court of Appeal on July 27, the **RSPCA**, **RSPB** and **Blue Cross** were represented by a City law firm and a QC. Mrs Jackson's daughter had *pro bono* representation.

The full judgment as appealed from the Family Court can be found on the [BAILII website](#), but it is worth mentioning the salient points. Heather Jackson was born posthumously; the death of her father, Melita's husband, led to a substantial windfall, and it is likely Melita had high hopes for her daughter. Those hopes were crushed when at the age of 17 she eloped, or as good as. She married her lover, Nicholas Ilott, nearly 5 years later, and not only do the couple have five children but they are still together today.

Heather Ilott made a number of attempts to reconcile with her estranged mother, none of which were successful. Melita Jackson shutting her daughter out of her will may have been mean spirited, but no reasonable person could argue that it was an irrational decision. Fortunately for Heather, the Court of Appeal decided she was entitled to £164,000 from the estate. This is a lady who is if not in dire straits then certainly needs this money more than the animal charities, one of which, the RSPCA, is no stranger to such [hearse-chasing litigation](#).

There has been much [ill-informed talk](#) about this judgment trashing inheritance law, but this is simply not the case. There is scope for this in the *Provision For Family And Dependants Act* 1975, an act that was first enacted in 1938. It is a shame that Melita Jackson refused all attempts to reconcile with her daughter and apparently died hating her, and it is truly shameful that animal charities, so-called, did not attempt to come to a reasonable accommodation with Heather Ilott. If they had done so, they would still have picked up a tidy sum, and would not have been landed with a massive bill of costs.