

THE HISTORY OF
CHESTERTONS

Established 1805





*Chesterton and Sons office,
Kensington High Street, 1924*

The History of Chestertons – *estate agents since 1805*

Chestertons is one of the oldest firms of estate agents in the world. First established in 1805 by a man named Charles Chesterton, the firm has continued as one of the most familiar names in property for well over 200 years and is now one of the most respected international property companies.

Charles Chesterton (1779 – 1849)

Charles John Bickerton Chesterton was born in London in March 1779 to Elizabeth and Edward Chesterton, a wholesale poulterer (a dealer of poultry and game) of Leicester Square. Very little is known of Charles' early years, but when he was a young man, he was sent to Kensington – which was at that time a rural area – to establish himself in business and tax records confirm that he was renting in Kensington (the exact address is unknown) by 1801.

Charles thrived in the small village of Kensington during the early years of the 19th century. A local business directory from 1805 – *Holden's Triennial Directory*, which covered the 'Metropolis and Villages Around, – lists Charles Chesterton as following his father's profession as a poulterer, but he was clearly building his reputation as land agent and estate agent as well as it is recorded that in that same year he was collecting rents for William Phillimore (b. 1749) and the Phillimore Estate. 1805 is therefore the date that has been accepted as the founding year of Chestertons, although it appears it is likely to have been a few years earlier.

One of the earliest surviving newspaper advertisements to show Charles Chesterton operating as an estate agent appeared in the *London Courier* in 1817 for property in Southampton and Hampshire, and 'For Particulars enquire of Mr. Chesterton, High Street, Kensington, Middlesex'. It appears this may have been property belonging to the Phillimore family in Hampshire, revealing he also acted for the family outside of London.

The Phillimore Estate covers a wide area of Kensington, to the north of the High Street towards today's Notting Hill, and when William Phillimore inherited the estate in 1779 it covered almost 60 acres.

At this time, William began to see the value of the land for housing, rather than farming, and by 1788 new leases were being granted for new terraced houses fronting the High Street. However, the construction of the new terraces (known as Lower Phillimore Place (between Hornton Street and Argyll Street) and Upper Phillimore Place (west of Argyll Street)) took a while to complete and some of the last houses were not occupied until 1816.

It is thought that when Charles Chesterton began working with the Phillimore Estate he would have been directly involved in the new Lower and Upper Phillimore Place. In fact, sometime during the early 1800s Charles Chesterton moved into one of the new houses at No.6 Lower Phillimore Place.

Arthur Chesterton (1815 – 1902)

Charles Chesterton married Sophia Blackett in Marylebone parish church on 3rd August 1810 and had four children: Charles Arthur, Hubert, and Elizabeth. Of the four children, it appears that only Arthur followed his father in the family business (Charles became a 'commercial traveller'; Hubert went into the civil service and Elizabeth married William Spencer Godfree, gentleman and wine merchant), and in the 1830s, he became the first of the Chesterton family to officially call himself a 'house agent' and 'estate agent'.

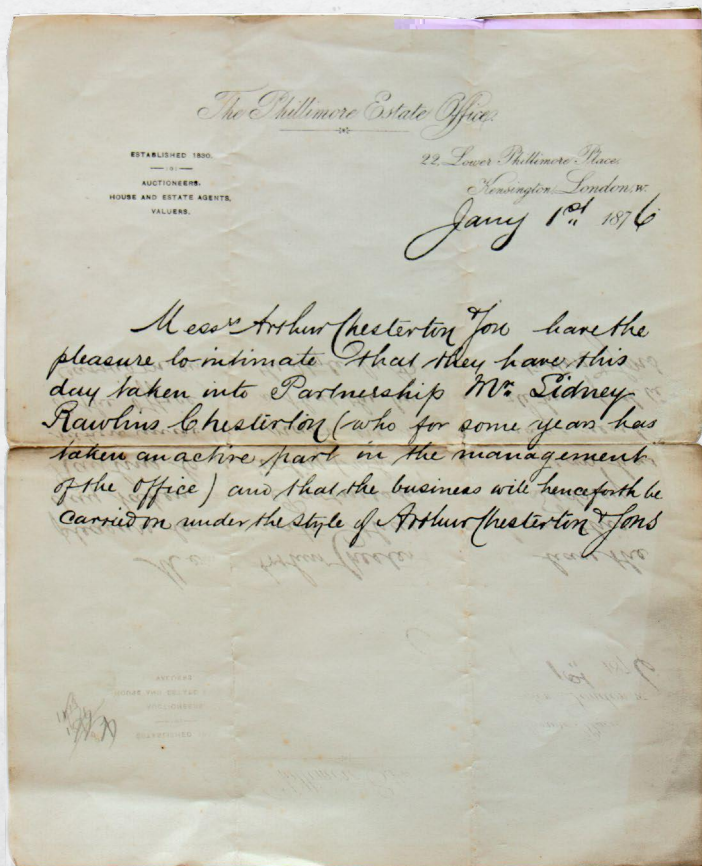
Regular property advertisements for Charles Chesterton's business began to appear in several newspapers during the 1830s, including a six-bedroom house in Kensington Terrace advertised in the *Morning Post* in May 1830 and a family residence with stabling and greenhouse in Vicarage Place, overlooking Kensington Gardens, advertised in the *London Courier* in February 1830. In both cases the particulars could be requested from 'Mr Chesterton, 6 Lower Phillimore Place, Kensington'.

KENSINGTON-TERRACE.—To be LET,
Furnished, or the LEASE and FURNITURE of a
comfortable FAMILY HOUSE to be SOLD, the residence
of a General Officer, containing six bed rooms and dressing
room, large dining and drawing rooms, each 29 feet 9 by 19 feet,
a breakfast room, and suitably convenient offices; stabling may
be had if required. Apply to Mr. Chesterton, 6, Phillimore-
place, Kensington; or to Messrs. Snell, 27, Albemarle-street,
Piccadilly.

By the 1840s, Arthur was taking on a more prominent role in the business and advertisements appeared for 'Mr A. Chesterton, house agent, Kensington' in *The Times* in August 1841 and 'Mr Arthur Chesterton, House and Estate Agent, No.2 Terrace, Kensington' in the *Morning Post* in August 1842. Charles finally handed control of the business over to Arthur on his retirement in 1846.

Chesterton and Sons

Arthur Chesterton and his wife, Susan, had several children, but it was Edward, the eldest, and Sidney who played key roles in the development of the firm during the late 19th and into the early 20th centuries.



Edward joined his father in the business during the 1860s, prompting Arthur to change the company name to 'Chesterton and Son'. The 1861 census records Arthur Chesterton as 'Estate and House Agent' and Edward, then 19 years old, as 'clerk in auctioneer's office', presumably his father's. The first reference to 'Messrs Chesterton and Son' appeared in London newspapers in 1867, including *The Times* in January 1867 advertising the auction of No.32 Upper Phillimore Place.

A short time later, another of Arthur's sons, Sidney Rawlins (b. 1851), joined the firm to create 'Chesterton and Sons'.

The 19th century saw enormous growth in the population of London, and with it many new streets and houses spreading across the capital. This provided a lot of potential business for Chesterton and Sons – by now a respected and well-established firm of estate agents offering surveying and auctioneering services in Kensington.

By the end of the 1870s, Arthur Chesterton passed on more of the business to his sons and by the time the census was taken in April 1881, Arthur was living in Barnes in south west London, recorded as 'retired estate agent'. He died in April 1902, at the age of 87.

Meanwhile, Edward, recorded as 'auctioneer', was living in Warwick Gardens with his wife and two sons, Gilbert and Cecil; and Sidney, recorded as 'auctioneer and house agent', was living in Earls Court Road with his wife and three sons: Frank, Sidney James and Frederick.

The sons of both Edward and Sidney would go on to have prominent careers, but it was only Sidney's son, Sidney James, that continued with the family firm and followed in the footsteps of his father, grandfather, and great grandfather before him.

G.K. Chesterton (1874 – 1936)

Gilbert Keith (known as G.K.) Chesterton, the eldest son of Edward Chesterton, tried working in his father's office for a few weeks but decided it was not for him and decided instead to pursue a career in writing. He was a high profile and prolific writer, publishing not just novels and short stories, but also letters and reviews. Today, he is perhaps best known for his Father Brown stories, which have been adapted for television several times, but also for his Christian writing, critical essays and social commentary.



Gilbert Keith (G.K.) Chesterton

11	Ware C ^d Street no 11 th Col Ware	16	7 1 3	7 1 7	29/7/11	223	7 1 3	7 1 3	50/11/11	8
13	Waterloo M ^d Weymouth	15	7 1 3	7 1 3	8/7/11		7 1 3	7 1 3	25/11/11	14
14	Hughesley Chas Chestnut Hill Weymouth	20	9 8 4	9 8 4	26/4/11		9 8 4	9 8 4	26/11/11	12
15	Nicholson Sir Richard	15	7 1 3	7 1 3	3/4/11	225	7 1 3	7 1 3	26/11/11	8
16	Barter Mr Mary Jane no 11 th Col Ware	20	9 8 4	9 8 4	6/4/11	226	9 8 4	9 8 4	11/11/11	11
17	Hughes Miss	15	6 2 5	6 2 5	8/5/11	217	6 2 5	6 2 5	8/11/11	12
18	Outingford W ^d	20	9 8 4	9 8 4	28/3/11	219	9 8 4	9 8 4	2/11/11	11
19	Hughes W ^d Weymouth	10-10	4 18 10	4 18 10	3/4/11	226	4 18 10	4 18 10	13/11/11	16
20	Lancaster A ^d & C ^d no 11 th Col Ware	20	9 8 4	9 8 4	31/3/11	221	9 8 4	9 8 4	2/11/11	8
21	Harvey M ^d Weymouth	10-10	4 18 10	4 18 10	20/3/11	220	4 18 10	4 18 10	2/11/11	9
23	Moxon M ^d Weymouth	21	9 17 9	9 17 9	5/4/11	226	9 17 9	9 17 9	9/11/11	10
24	Barter Miss & Richard no 11 th Col Ware	1	17 8	17 8	7/4/11					
25	Bayley C ^d	21	9 17 9	9 17 9	27/5/11	218	9 17 9	9 17 9	20/11/11	8
26	Miss Anna Weymouth	1	17 8	17 8	18/4/11					
27	Moxon M ^d	5	2 7 1	2 7 1	5/4/11	226	2 7 1	2 7 1	7/11/11	15
28	Haughton William Weymouth		10 11 5	10 11 5	10/11/11		10 11 5	10 11 5		
29	Lancaster Captain Weymouth	20	9 8 4	9 8 4	7/4/11		9 8 4	9 8 4	29/11/11	15

Cecil Chesterton (1879 – 1918)

Gilbert's younger brother, Cecil, also gained a highly-respected reputation as a writer and journalist. It is believed that on the birth of his brother, Gilbert responded that 'now he would have someone to argue with' and apparently this is exactly what happened, with the two brothers famous for their debates and arguments. The Oxford Dictionary of Biography states that Cecil 'was destined to join the family estate agency, and qualified as a surveyor, but by 1901 he had turned to journalism'. In 1916 he joined the army, serving throughout the remaining years of the First World War but became ill shortly after his marriage to Ada Jones (b.1869) and died in France in December 1918.

7 10 7 8 4	✓	7 1 3	30/3/12	95	7 10 7 10 9	✓	7 1 3	5/10/12	173	County One (Open 20978) £2500 (London Lane)
7 10 7 8 4	✓	7 1 3	12/4/12	103	7 10 7 10 9	✓	7 1 3	12/10/12	178	
7 10 7 8 4	✓	9 8 4	2/10/12	112	7 10 7 10 9	✓	9 8 4	20/1/12	178	
7 10 7 8 4	✓	7 1 3	28/1/12	93	7 10 7 10 9	✓	7 1 3	4/10/12	173	Low Don, 1600000 £2000 Ladyday 25000
7 10 7 8 4	✓	9 8 4	12/4/12	103	7 10 7 10 9	✓	9 8 4	10/10/12	176	Low Don, 1600000 £2000 (17000) (London Lane) £299
6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	6 2 5	27/1/12	92	6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	6 2 5	3/10/12	171	(London Lane) £299
6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	9 8 4	28/3/12	93	6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	9 8 4	2/10/12	171	
6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	4 18 10	2/4/12	98	6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	4 18 10	16/10/12	160	
6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	9 8 4	28/3/12	93	6 2 5 6 2 5	✓	9 8 4	8/10/12	172	
4 18 10 4 18 10	✓	4 18 10	27/1/12	76	4 18 10 4 18 10	✓	4 18 10	2/10/12	171	
9 17 9 9 17 9	✓	9 17 9	28/3/12	93	9 17 9 9 17 9	✓	9 17 9	7/10/12	177	North British Metropolitan Bank 4310200 £1176
18 10 18 10	✓	18 10	17/4/12	104	18 10 18 10	✓	18 10	11/10/12	170	London Lane £299
9 17 9 9 17 9	✓	9 17 9	27/1/12	91	9 17 9 9 17 9	✓	9 17 9	11/10/12	170	London Lane £299
18 10 18 10	✓	18 10	20/1/12	107	18 10 18 10	✓	18 10	11/10/12	170	London Lane £299
2 10 2 10	✓	2 7 1	28/3/12	93	2 10 2 10	✓	2 7 1	7/10/12	174	
11 10 11 10	✓	11 10	11/4/12	97	11 10 11 10	✓	11 10	2/10/12	174	
9 8 4 9 8 4	✓	9 8 4	14/4/12	104	9 8 4 9 8 4	✓	9 8 4	2/10/12	174	

After the death of her husband Ada Chesterton became well-known for her investigative journalism and once even spent two weeks on the streets of London to gain greater understanding of the plight of homeless women in London. She also became well known for her philanthropic works and established a refuge for homeless women called 'Cecil Houses', named in honour of her husband, which still continues today as Central and Cecil Housing Trust and was made an OBE in 1938. She died in 1962 at the age of 94.

Frank Sidney Chesterton (1877 – 1916)

Frank Sidney Chesterton, the eldest son of Sidney Chesterton, became a partner in Chesterton and Sons but is best remembered as an architect, designing several buildings in London and the surrounding counties. It has been said that Frank Chesterton had 'considerable promise' and he has been compared to the renowned 20th century architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens. Frank designed several houses on the Phillimore Estate in Kensington, including new houses along the east side of Hornton Street, Nos.12-54, in 1903. In collaboration with J.D. Coleridge, he also designed Hornton Court along Kensington High Street in 1905.



Kensington High Street, 1924

In 1907 Chesterton and Sons moved its offices to the newly completed Horton Court, and the Kensington branch of Chestertons remains there to this day. Frank served as Second Lieutenant with the Royal Field Artillery, but he died from wounds fighting in the Somme offensive in November 1916. It has been said that if he had survived he potentially would have gone on to have become a celebrated modern architect.



Lower Phillimore Place, 1904

By Order of Executors.

7057

Particulars and Conditions of Sale
OF THE VALUABLE

FREEHOLD INVESTMENTS

in the best Position of

KENSINGTON HIGH STREET

LOT 1.

One-Half Share

in the MODERN

Freehold Shop Property,

No. 29,

KENSINGTON HIGH STREET.

Let to Messrs. W. Hill & Son, Ltd. (the well-known Bakers), on Lease at

Per £500 Ann.

LOT 2.

One-Half Share

IN THE

Freehold Shop Property,

No. 31,

KENSINGTON HIGH STREET.

Let to Messrs. Fullers, Ltd. (the well-known Confectioners and Sweet Manufacturers), on Lease at

Per £450 Ann.

£4500

To be offered for Sale by Auction at the MART, E.C.,
by MESSRS.

CHESTERTON & SONS

on Thursday, 4th May, 1911,

At TWO o'clock precisely.

Particulars and Conditions of Sale may be had at the Mart; of HARCOURT G. BARNARD, Esq., M.A., 160, York Road, Lambeth, S.E.; and of the Auctioneers,

116, KENSINGTON HIGH STREET, W.;
1, CADOGAN PLACE, S.W.;
52 and 53, CHEAPSIDE, E.C.

Telephone Nos. 450 Kensington and 204 Western.

James Wakeham & Co., Ltd., Printers, Kensington.

Sidney James Chesterton (1879 – 1938)

Sidney James, second son of Sidney Chesterton, was the only one of the younger generation of Chestertons who went on to work in the family business. The 1901 census reveals that at that time he was 22 years old and an 'estate agents clerk' and was living with his parents and his brothers in Pembroke Road.

In the same year, The London Gazette, announced the retirement of Sidney's uncle, Edward Chesterton (the father of Gilbert and Cecil Chesterton) in the 'business of House and Estate Agents, Surveyors, Valuers, and Collectors of Rent, under the style or firm of Chesterton and Sons...on 31 December 1900'. Sidney then became a partner and continued the family business into the new century with two partners, Charles Frederick Slater, and William Henry Wells, until his sudden death in 1938.

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chesterton and Sons continued to thrive in London and in 1895 the company opened its first office outside of Kensington: No.51 Cheapside in the City of London. This was quickly followed by additional offices in Chelsea at No.15 Sloane Street, and No.1 Norbury Parade in Norbury, Surrey, the first branch outside of central London.

The late Victorian and Edwardian period also saw several prominent employees join Chesterton and Sons. These former employees, directors, and partners all played significant roles in developing the strength of the Chesterton name, but also in the formation of prominent institutions in estate agency and surveying.

William Henry Wells

William Henry Wells joined Chesterton and Sons in 1897 after being introduced to the firm by G.K. Chesterton. In 1917-1919 he served as President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and President of the Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' Institute, and it was also in 1919 that he helped found the College of Estate Management (now the University College of Estate Management).

With Chesterton and Sons, he also worked as the surveyor for the estates of the Marquis of Salisbury, in both London and Lancashire. In addition, he served as Commissioner of Income Tax in the West End, was on the board of management for the West London Hospital, and was a special constable. Sir William H. Wells had a distinguished career and given the long list of accomplishments, it is no surprise that he was described as 'an astonishingly energetic man'.

Henry Weston Wells (1911 – 1971)

William Wells' son, Henry Weston Wells, joined the firm in 1931, and quickly rose through the ranks to become partner in 1934. In 1943-1946, he became Chief Estates Officer of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and was one of the chief architects of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. During the post-war period he continued to serve on many committees during an immense time of rebuilding and planning for the future of British housing. In 1965, Henry Wells was elected President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyor, and was knighted in the birthday honours list the following year. His son Henry also joined Chesterton and Sons in 1959.

Geoffrey Blake

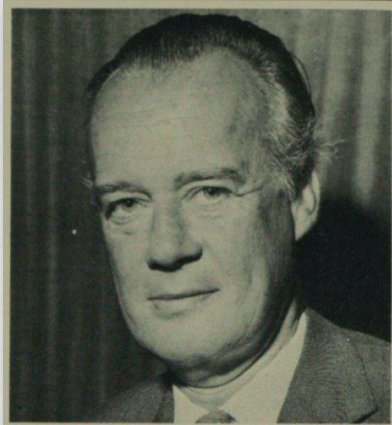
Geoffrey Blake joined Chesterton and Sons in 1923 and by 1933 had risen to become partner and in 1938 was promoted to senior partner. Geoffrey was heavily involved in the Chartered Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' Institute (given Royal Charter in 1947) and was elected president in 1955. In 1965, Geoffrey Blake also conducted the public enquiry into the proposal for Stansted Airport in Essex.

Sir Oliver Sidney Chesterton (1913 – 2007)

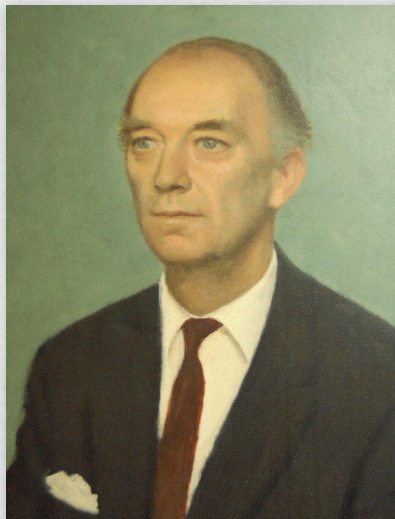
Oliver Chesterton, son of architect, Frank Sidney Chesterton, was the last direct descendant of Charles Chesterton to work for the family company, joining the firm in 1931, when only 17 years old.

Oliver became a senior partner in 1945 and alongside his colleagues, continued to build the reputation of Chesterton and Sons in post-war Britain. During the 1960s, he took on several additional roles, including President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (1968) and Commissioner for the Crown Estate (1969 – 1982). In 1969, Oliver Chesterton was knighted in the Queen's birthday honours list and became the first master of the newly established Worshipful Company of Chartered Surveyors in 1977.

One of Chestertons' longest serving employees, who is still with the company today, remembered that Sir Oliver Chesterton was 'an accomplished and witty speaker and was known for often making jokes about his fellow partners'. Sir Oliver continued as senior partner at Chesterton and Sons and it was only in 1980, the company's 175th anniversary year, that he retired after over 45 years with the family firm.



HENRY WESTON WELLS, 55—Knight.
Chairman New Towns Commission since
1964, at Ministry Town and Country Planning
1943-6, partner of Chesterton and Son.



Oliver Chesterton

A new age – Chestertons in the post-war era

The period after the Second World War was a time of enormous change in England, with the country suffering from extensive bomb-damage and facing an enormous amount of rebuilding. This time was also defined by changes to planning, architecture, and with it, the role of estate agents and surveyors.

Chesterton and Sons was at the forefront of much of this rebuilding and planning across different parts of the country. This included the involvement of Sir Henry Weston Wells and Sir Oliver Sidney Chesterton on several planning commissions, as well as both serving as presidents of the RICS, but also taking on the management of several London estates, including the Phillimore Estate, the Church Commissioners Estate in Hyde Park (appointed in 1955), the Brompton Hospital Estate and the Day Estate in South Kensington, as well as developments in the Barbican and Hampstead Garden Suburb, to name just a few. At one time, Chesterton and Sons managed almost 750 acres across London.

The post-war period also saw Chestertons acquiring several other estate agents including the included the historic Mayfair firm, Grogan and Boyd (founded in 1826), in 1958; Hunt & Steward, a prominent Westminster firm of architects and surveyors, in 1965; Hallett Fox & White in 1964.

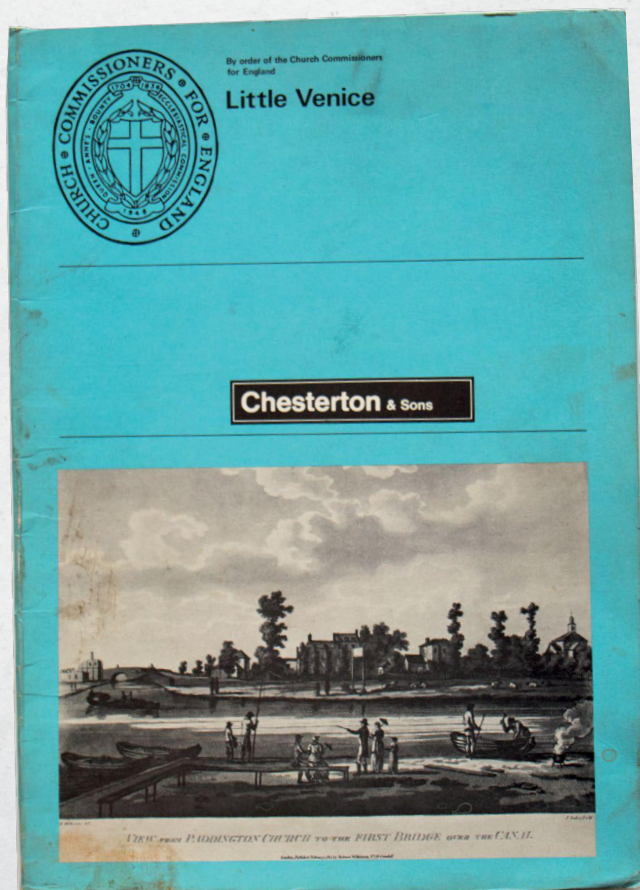
Sir William Henry Weston Wells

Following the footsteps of his father and his grandfather before him, William H.W. Wells also joined Chesterton and Sons in 1959 and became partner in 1965. He worked with the firm at a time of great change and oversaw several significant alterations in the running of the firm, as well as managing the company through the ups and downs of the property industry in the latter part of the 20th century. He became managing partner of Chesterton and Sons in 1984 and oversaw the incorporation of the firm in 1991, creating Chesterton plc. of which he was chairman from 1992 to 1997. Sir William Wells continued his involvement with the firm and served as President of Chesterton International plc. from 1998 to 2004.

A new name and a grand expansion

After over 100 years as 'Chesterton and Sons', the company officially changed its name to 'Chestertons' in 1972 and opened a new head office at No.75 Grosvenor Street. The business expanded rapidly during the 1970s and 80s, with new offices in Notting Hill and Queen Street in the City of London (1979) and New York (its first international office) in 1981. In 1984, a new head office was opened in Brook Street, Mayfair, and the following year new offices opened in Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester and Singapore.

A significant change took place in 1986 when Chestertons' residential business was sold to Prudential. After this sale, this part of the business was renamed 'Chestertons Prudential' while the remaining part of the business traded as, Chesterton International, further expansion took place in the following years, including the merger with Colliers Bigwood and Bewlay in 1987; a stake in Collier Petty in Hong Kong, which became known as Chesterton Petty; the part-acquisition of Hendersons in Australia; and new offices in Leeds, Southampton, Milton Keynes, and the burgeoning London Docklands in 1989.



Continued expansion and change

Chesterton International's expansion continued into the early 1990s with new offices opening over the UK and across the world. In 1992, it merged with De Groot Collis, which brought with it significant commercial offices in Holborn, the City, and the West End, as well as residential offices in prime positions in Chelsea and Knightsbridge. On 23rd June 1994 Chesterton International was listed on the London Stock Exchange, valued at £51million.

Meanwhile, the residential part of Chestertons that had been held by Prudential since 1986 was first sold to the Woolwich in 1991 and became known as Chestertons Residential; and then in 1996 it was bought back by Chesterton International plc.

Further mergers took place during this time, including Elliot Son & Boyton in Birmingham and London, along with Guest Shaw in Manchester, and other businesses in Nottingham, Leeds and Edinburgh. In 1993, an alliance was made with Binswanger Inc. in the United States to create Chesterton Binswanger International, and in 1994 Chesterton also expanded into facilities management with the acquisition of Consolidated FPM Group.

Chesterton International acquired further businesses during the mid-1990s, with the acquisition of commercial interests of Bell Ingram, with offices in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Glasgow in 1995, as well as purchasing the facilities management section of British Gas and Workplace Management in 1996.

Challenges and a new beginning

By the late 1990s, Chesterton International had become one of the largest and most recognised property firms in the world with 158 offices across 36 different countries. However, the new millennium brought with it some very difficult times for many property companies and Chesterton International was not immune. In 2003 the company was acquired by Phoenix Acquisitions Ltd, de-listed and reverted to being a privately owned business.

In the spring of 2005 the company was split up, and part of the business – which included 16 branches in London – was acquired by Mercantile Group. Under this ownership, the business focused on the flourishing London market and steadily grew its reach across the capital to 21 branches by 2008.

In 2009, to bolster its presence outside of London, Chesterton acquired the highly-respected country agent, Humberts (established in 1842), and the business was re-branded as Chesterton Humberts. However, in 2014, the business de-merged to form two separate businesses: ‘Chestertons’ covering the London and international markets and ‘Humberts’ covering the UK country markets.

Chestertons today

Chestertons has grown to become one of the largest and most respected estate agents in London, with over 30 branches across the capital. In 2023, Chestertons became the only agency in London to have its properties featured on Forbes Global Properties, reaching buyers from over 440 worldwide locations.

Researched and written by Melanie Backe-Hansen, February 2018

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