

# Inside 'Billionaire's Row' where mansions lie abandoned on world's 'most expensive street'

The Bishops Avenue is home to dozens of enormous mansions worth hundreds of millions of pounds. But today, many of the homes look abandoned and in a state of disrepair.

By **Ketsuda Phoutinane** Deputy Trends Editor & **Steffan Rhys** 14:50, 9 OCT 2024



**The magnificent Heath Hall** (Image: SWNS)

Once dubbed "Billionaire's Row", Bishops Avenue, nestled near London's exclusive neighbourhoods of Hampstead and Highgate, has been steeped in opulence.

Its history is as rich as its residents, with over 60 immense mansions collectively worth hundreds of millions. While some grand dwellings are occupied, others stand desolate or have been converted into care homes.

Ownership of many mansions shrouded in secrecy, linked to companies in offshore tax havens and nearly impossible to identify without expert accountants.

Renowned figures are amongst the elite property holders, reports the **Express**. Among them are the Saudi royal family who bought a lavish set known as "The Towers" during the 80s to evade potential conflict with Iraq.

Heath Hall, a prestigious home owned by a Czech magnate, housed celebrities such as Justin Bieber and Salma Hayek, is another of the prestigious estates.



**The Bishops Avenue was the most expensive street in the world — now several mansions lie empty** (Image: Google)

Despite neglect, the homes command prices in the tens of millions, owned by the immensely wealthy who can afford to leave them unattended. Each home boasts its story; for instance, one served as Salman Rushdie's fortified refuge, encompassing around-the-clock police protection after Iran issued a death warrant against him.

One of the properties was once home to a Nigerian politician. After his death in 2007, it was taken over by squatters and subsequently burned down.



**One house was destroyed by a huge fire in 2022** (Image: London Fire Brigade / SWNS)

Another house, owned by an asset manager, was the site of one of London's largest robberies in 2006, with items worth £2m reportedly stolen.

A further property is used as accommodation for contestants on *The Apprentice* during filming of the BBC series. This house reportedly boasts eight bedrooms, nine bathrooms and is valued at £17 million.

The street's history is both intriguing and enigmatic. By the 1930s, it had already earned the nickname "Millionaire's Row", with a few mansions already established.



**The Bishops Avenue is known as Billionaires' Row** (Image: SWNS)

Among its early residents was sugar tycoon William Lyle, a previous owner of Heath Hall, the estate which Justin Bieber is said to have rented more recently for £27,000 per week.

The Sultan of Brunei, once the world's wealthiest man, also owned a property here.

However, the owners of many other houses remain untraceable. Business Insider reports that 60% of the properties are owned by "hard-to-scrutinise shell corporations registered in foreign tax havens like the Bahamas, Panama, and the British Virgin Islands".

While concealing their wealth is clearly a motive for some of the street's property owners, others are driven by a desire to hide completely.

"One gentleman from Russia never leaves The Bishops Avenue. He won't even go around the corner," a local estate agent told Business Insider.

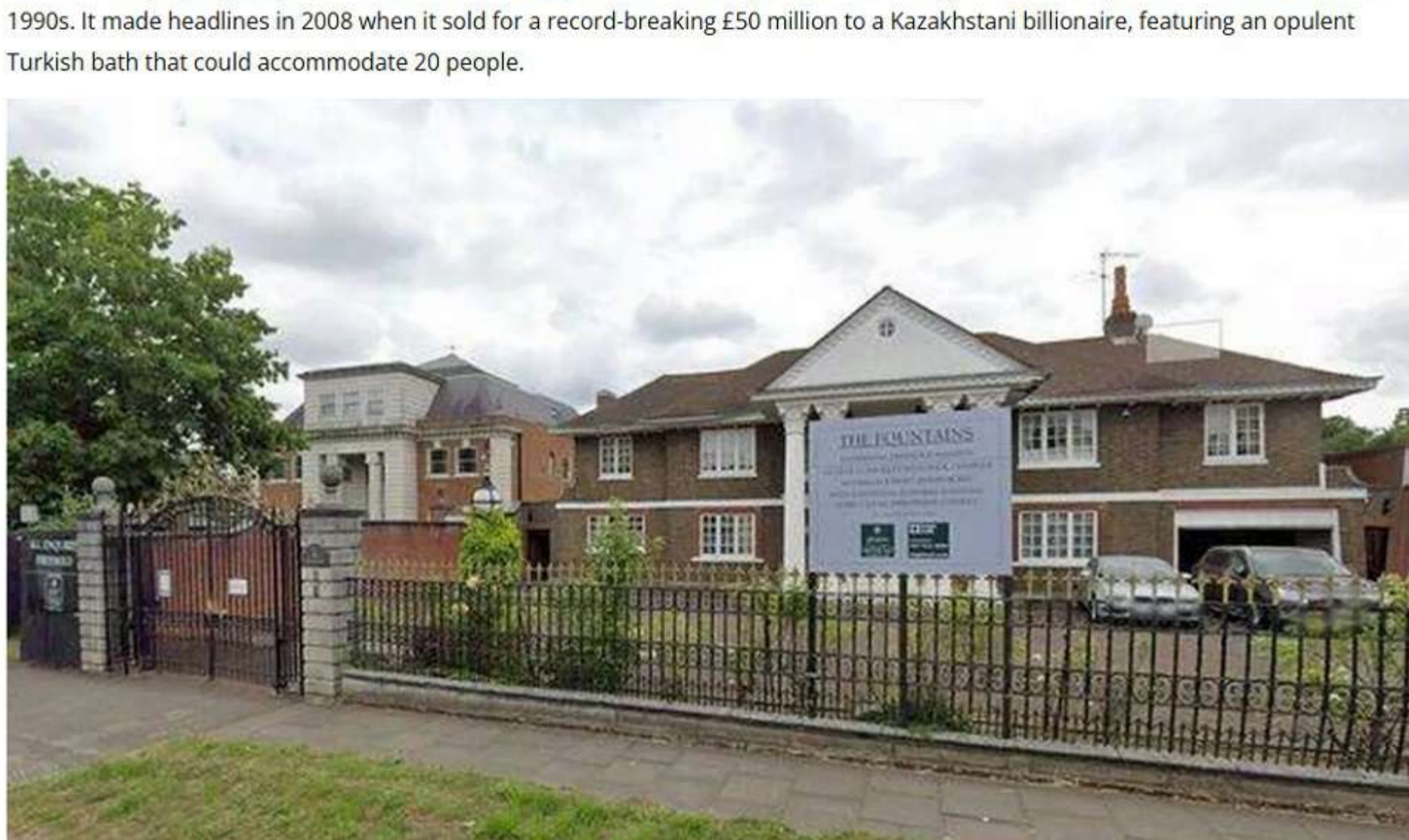


**This 10-bedroom house had already been empty 10 years when this photo was taken in 2016** (Image: Isabel Infantes / SWNS.com)

This exclusive street has been home to an array of intriguing individuals, including a former Lebanese prime minister, the last king of Greece, Constantine II, and publisher and businessman Richard Desmond.

However, its history is also marred by tragedy, such as the shooting of Greek-Cypriot fashion tycoon Aristos Constantinou and the freak accident that claimed the life of a former owner who attempted to orchestrate a coup in Equatorial Guinea.

One notable property, Toprak Mansion, boasts an impressive 30,000 sq ft and was built by Turkish entrepreneur Halis Toprak in the 1990s. It made headlines in 2008 when it sold for a record-breaking £50 million to a Kazakhstani billionaire, featuring an opulent Turkish bath that could accommodate 20 people.



**The Bishops Avenue is an extraordinary mix of dozens of mansions, some lived in, many empty** (Image: Google)

The property changed hands again in 2013, being purchased by a British Virgin Islands-based company for £66 million. Luxury property consultant Trevor Abrahamsohn remarks, "The Bishops Avenue is so interesting that you could say if it didn't exist it would need to be invented," adding, "A house starts off being owned by the Savile Row-tailored businessmen with posh voices, and ends up being run by the Mujahideen."

While some of these grand mansions have fallen into disrepair, others have been redeveloped. For instance, Hammerson House was transformed into a care home in 2021, and another luxury care home is slated to open in 2025, featuring 93 flats across six storeys.

The Towers, the colossal collection of properties purchased by the Saudi Royal family in the late 1980s, have now been sold to a developer. The reported aim is to transform them into luxury flats.