

Life on Billionaire's Row where mansions left to wrack and ruin

Bishops Avenue was once the world's most expensive street



(Image: (Image: PA))

Once dubbed "Billionaire's Row", The Bishops Avenue in London was the epitome of luxury, nestled near elite neighbourhoods such as Hampstead and Highgate.

Boasting over 60 grand mansions with a collective worth easily soaring into the hundreds of millions, this street has a rich tapestry of history. While some of these opulent residences are still occupied, others stand empty or have been repurposed into care homes.

The identities of many owners remain shrouded in secrecy, with properties often registered to offshore companies, making tracing ownership without expert accountants a Herculean task. Yet, some notable figures are linked to these estates, including the Saudi Royal family who own a cluster of mansions known as "The Towers", acquired during the 1980s as a safeguard against potential invasion by Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Heath Hall, once the domain of a Czech magnate, has seen its share of celebrity tenants, including Justin Bieber and Salma Hayek. Despite their sometimes neglected appearance, each mansion holds a value in the tens of millions and belongs to individuals whose wealth is so vast that leaving such assets dormant seems inconsequential, reports [the Express](#).

Each property has its unique allure, with one serving as the heavily guarded sanctuary for Salman Rushdie during the time when a fatwa demanded his life. One of the properties was once home to a Nigerian politician. After his death in 2007, it was seized by squatters and subsequently burned down.

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 the filming of the BBC series. It is said to have eight bedrooms, nine bathrooms and is valued at £17 million.



(Image: (Image: Google))

The street has a fascinating and enigmatic history. By the 1930s, it had already earned the nickname "Millionaire's Row", with several mansions already established. Among its first residents was sugar magnate William Lyle, who was an early owner of Heath Hall, which Bieber is reported to have rented more recently for £27,000 a week. The Sultan of Brunei, once the world's wealthiest man, also owned a house here.

However, the identities of many owners remain elusive. 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 motivation for some of the street's property owners, others are driven by a desire for complete privacy. "A gentleman from Russia never leaves The Bishops Avenue. He won't even go around the corner," a local estate agent told Business Insider.

The list of previous property owners here includes a former Lebanese prime minister, the last king of Greece, Constantine II, and publisher and businessman Richard Desmond. Greek-Cypriot fashion tycoon Aristos Constantinou met his end here when he was shot dead, while another ex-owner, known for attempting to stage a coup in Equatorial Guinea, tragically died after falling down the stairs at one of his other London mansions in Holland Park.



(Image: (Image: SWNS.com))

One notable property, Toprak Mansion, is a 30,000 sq ft mansion constructed by Turkish entrepreneur Halis Toprak in the 1990s. It set a record for the highest sale price in Britain in 2008 when it was sold to a Kazakhstani billionaire for £50 million.

The mansion, which boasts a Turkish bath that can accommodate 20 people, was later purchased by a company based in the British Virgin Islands for £66 million in 2013, according to The Sunday Times.

"The Bishops Avenue is so interesting that you could say if it didn't exist it would need to be invented," luxury property consultant Trevor Abrahamsohn told The Sunday Times. He added: "A house starts off being owned by the Savile Row-tailored businessmen with posh voices, and ends up being run by the Mujahideen."

While many of the mansions are now in ruins, others have been developed. Hammerson House opened as a care home in 2021, replacing one of the large homes.

A few doors away, another care home is due to open in 2025 as a luxury complex for older people, featuring 93 flats spread over six storeys.

The Towers, the vast 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.



(Image: (Image: Isabel Infantes / SWNS.com))