

INSIGHT



Office celebrates five decades
of client excellence.



INSIGHT

50 years in London

Our London office enjoyed a belated 50th birthday party in September at London's famous Leadenhall Market, with partners and employees attending with their guests. The highly anticipated celebration had been postponed from 2022 due to the pandemic.

London OEP Dipen Sabharwal, who succeeded Melissa Butler as OEP at the beginning of 2022, says: "The evening was fantastic. It was a great chance to get together and celebrate all we've achieved in London across five decades.

"It was particularly nice that our people could bring along a guest to share in the celebrations, which gave the evening a family feel.

"In a way it was fitting that we had to delay the event until our 51st anniversary, representing the fact that we were not only reflecting on the past, but also looking forward to what we'll achieve in the decades to come."

Dipen is confident that those coming decades will bring continued success, despite the challenging global and local outlook. He says: "The global economy is of course facing some uncertain and turbulent times, not least in the UK, but the breadth of our offering, wide expertise of our team and the fact we work on so many cross-jurisdiction, global projects in a very global city that is still the second largest financial center in the world, means we are brilliantly placed to rise to the challenge.

"Our 2025 Strategy will be crucial in achieving this. Having firmly established ourselves in the top tier in London with critical mass in each key practice area with an unrivalled cross-border capability, we now need to focus on how we distinguish ourselves through our client experience and create clear blue water between us and the competition.

"That is particularly important because clients often run to quality in a crisis, turning to their most trusted partners. This means we must build on our reputation and to provide a distinct client experience that truly sets us apart."





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DIPEN SABHARWAL, OEP, LONDON

Challenges and triumphs

The London office has certainly flourished in recent years, breaking revenue and profit records and winning multiple awards.



Highlights have included the office’s successful representation of Richard Usher in a high-profile case in New York and our work on the Nacala rail and port project in Mozambique and Malawi, the Avast IPO and takeover, and Play IPO. All these successes were achieved despite the perfect storm of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, remote working and a growing workload.


Melissa Butler, who as OEP between 2018 and 2021 navigated the office through this hugely challenging period, says: “The pandemic was of course incredibly difficult for everyone. Not least we had to adapt quickly to remote working and then develop a hybrid model that would work for our people, clients and the Firm.

“It was wonderful how people supported each other during such a challenging time for everyone, but we really prioritized trying to keep everyone connected and demonstrating how much we genuinely care.

“That was something I wanted to focus on during my time as OEP anyway – to build on our culture and employee value proposition. Ultimately, law firms are nothing without their people, and London has great people, so we want to put them first.

“The great thing is that, over recent years, we’ve become one of the top choices for new talent. From the days when we were not considered a match for the magic circle firms, we’re now either neck and neck or ahead of them in many respects.

“By demonstrating that we truly live our values can only help us attract and retain the best people.”



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MELISSA BUTLER, PARTNER, LONDON



Established in the elite

Melissa took over as OEP from Executive Committee member Oliver Brettle who, between 2008 and 2019, led the office through the global financial crisis into a period where the London team became intrinsic to the Firm's 2020 Vision.

The 2020 Plan for London included growing our partnership substantially – something it achieved by adding 89 new partners.

The office also strengthened in areas including leveraged finance, M&A, private equity, project finance, disputes (both litigation and arbitration), FRI, and capital markets.

Oliver says: "In those years, we made enormous strides to establish ourselves within the global elite in London as well as globally.

"We've enjoyed strong growth in profitability, revenues and the size of the team while always focusing on the part we play within the Firm.

"It gave me great pride recently when a client remarked without prompting: 'wow, what you people have achieved in London is just amazing'. What's incredible is that we've achieved this while being diverse, entrepreneurial and retaining our challenger mindset, which is part of our DNA and endorses our values of pioneering, united, human."



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OLIVER BRETTLE,
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER

Humble beginnings

The rapid growth and success of the London office is even more remarkable given its origins in 1971.

Our first offices were at 66 Gresham Street with an initial team of two partners, Jim Hurlock and Lee Lundy, plus two secretaries and a receptionist.

By 1980, the office had grown to 10 people, but was held back by regulations meaning it couldn't hire solicitors who practiced English law, partnering with English law firms and employing English-qualified barrister Francis Fitzherbert-Brockholes in the meantime.

Even so, the office broadened and expanded into new areas and received a huge boost when the government announced dramatic regulatory reforms, called the Big Bang, that ended many restrictive practices in the City of London in 1986.

The 1990s brought further breakthroughs in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, as the Firm expanded its European footprint into Central and Eastern Europe

Most significantly in London, a change in the law permitted English solicitors to become partners in overseas law firms, enabling the London office to become a fully-fledged, broad-ranging English law practice from November 1993.

This necessitated a move to larger offices, with the team spread across several sites with the biggest hub at 7-11 Moorgate. By 2000, the office had expanded to 55 lawyers, moving to its current home, Old Broad Street, in 2003 to accommodate such rapid growth and bring the various London locations it occupied together.

Partner Nicholas Greenacre, who joined the Firm in London in 2005, says: "What's great about the London office is that, despite so much growth, it's retained its essential, thoroughly international and diverse character, which is what attracted me in the first place.

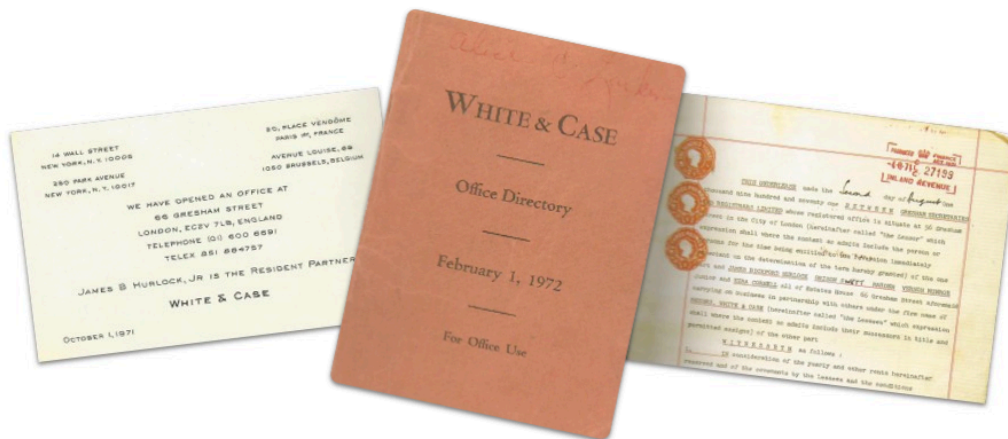
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NICHOLAS GREENACRE,
PARTNER, LONDON

"I'm particularly proud of being part of Melissa's team helping the office through the pandemic, keeping in close touch with our people and consulting on significant decisions."



"And, although it might seem like a small thing, I've loved the way that Broad Street Kitchen (our restaurant area) has become such a focal point, providing a relaxed meeting place where we can chat to people and host clients so they can experience the friendly atmosphere of the office."

"Looking ahead, many of us will be moving early next year to a new working environment featuring an open, neighborhood concept, which will make us even more collaborative."



"I love that we can offer clients all that the magic circle firms promise and more, but with an unrivalled global platform. It is a powerful combination."

DI YU, PARTNER, LONDON

Partner Di Yu, who recently joined the Firm from magic circle firm Slaughter and May, says: "For me, joining White & Case made sense because the Firm holds a unique place in the London market as a truly global full-service firm, compared to other US firms and the magic circle."

"I love that we can offer clients all that the magic circle firms promise and more, but with an unrivalled global platform. It is a powerful combination."

Dipen concludes: "As someone who joined the Firm in London in 2004 when it was spread across four offices with 100 lawyers, it's been incredible to see us quadruple in size and to have been part of that journey."

"I remember what a huge moment it was for the office to move to Old Broad Street when everyone was brought together. The new office seemed so big at the time. So, it's incredible to think that, as OEP, I'll now be overseeing further expansion."

"Of course the growth we've achieved wouldn't have been possible without the support and trust of our clients, so I'm excited to see what we can achieve as we focus even more on the client experience in our 2025 Strategy."

"The timing of the strategy couldn't be more apt. Firms that differentiate themselves by making clients feel protected and understood will really make their mark in these difficult economic times."

London timeline

1971

The office opens at 66 Gresham Street with just two lawyers

1972

The London office makes a profit of US\$54,000 in its first full calendar year

1975

The Bankers Trust London branch begins working the London office expands to Europe and the Middle East

London timeline

< 1972
The London office makes a profit of \$54,000 in its first full calendar year

1975
The Bankers Trust's London branch begins working with the London office as it expands into Europe and the Middle East

1977
The office generates more than US\$1 million in revenues

1980
The team grows to 10 people

1984
The office represents the Bankers Trust on a pioneering issue of floating rate notes by the World Bank

London timeline

< 1984
The office represents the Bankers Trust on a pioneering issue of floating rate notes by the World Bank

1987
Karen Fagerstrom becomes the office's first woman lawyer

1990
At the beginning of the 90s, the team consists of 12 people

1993
The London office is permitted to employ English-qualified lawyers for the first time

1994
The office wins a landmark matter for Qatar's first liquified natural gas project, winning the project ahead of magic circle firm Clifford Chance

London timeline

< 1993
The London office is permitted to employ English-qualified lawyers for the first time

1994
The office works on a landmark finance matter for Qatar's first liquified natural gas project, winning the project ahead of magic circle firm Clifford Chance

1996
To differentiate itself from its magic circle rivals, the London office offers trainees the promise of a six-month assignment seat to another office

1999
The London office enters a new millennium with 11 times the number of lawyers (55) it had in 1989

2000
Former London associate and partner Duane Wall becomes Managing Partner, replacing incoming London Partner Hurlock

London timeline

2000

Former London associate and partner Duane Wall becomes Managing Partner, replacing inaugural London Partner Jim Hurlock

2003

The team consolidates at 5 Old Broad Street and begins work on the US\$20 billion Sakhalin 2 LNG project

2008

Oliver Brettle becomes OEP

2011

The London office works on the restructuring of €206 billion of debt held by the Greek government – the largest ever sovereign debt restructuring at the time



London timeline

2012

The London office works on the restructuring of €206 billion of debt held by the Greek government – the largest ever sovereign debt restructuring at the time

2017

The office leads the largest ever successful project financing of infrastructure development in sub-Saharan Africa – the Nacala Corridor project

2018

Melissa Butler becomes OEP

2020

The office hosts the Global Partner Meeting for the first time



London timeline

2020

The office hosts the Global Partner Meeting for the first time

2018

Melissa Butler becomes OEP

2022

Dipen Sabharwal becomes OEP

