

Challoner House, Clerkenwell Close: A Brief History

Those of you who frequent Clerkenwell Close, probably pass Challoner House every day. It's the one with the leafy display of ivy and the distinctive Victorian arched windows. You may not know that it was built in the late 1860's for Knight & Hawkes, type founders when Clerkenwell was buzzing with printing and engraving industries but it is rather apt that the building is currently occupied by Rooks Rider Solicitors, a firm of solicitors who must have used a considerable amount of type over the years.

The firm dates back to a time when documents were mostly written by hand. It began in 1761, about a hundred years before Challoner House was built, when John Beardsworth put up his name plate at 13 Chancery Lane. John Edward Rase Rider joined the firm in 1886 when they were at 8 New Square, Lincoln's Inn. Meanwhile, the Rooks part of the firm was started by John Galsworthy in 1839 at 87 Upper Stamford Street, Lambeth.

John Galsworthy was the second cousin of another John Galsworthy, the much more famous author of *The Forsyte Saga*. It is thought that Soames Forsyte, Galsworthy's main character in "The Man of Property" and subsequent novels may have been based on Edwin Henry Galsworthy, the nephew and business partner of solicitor John Galsworthy.

George Arthur Rooks was admitted as a solicitor in 1863 and initially practised at 26 Moorgate Street. He was joined by William Crook and George Kendrick in 1866 and the firm gradually changed and expanded until the merger with what was then Rooks & Co in 1977. The combined Rooks Rider Solicitors practised at 8 and 9 New Square, Lincoln's Inn for a number of years before moving to Challoner House.

And who exactly was Challoner? Sir Thomas Challoner, courtier and gentleman of the Privy Chamber was one of the favourites of James I and was appointed governor to the king's heir, Prince Henry. He lost this position on the death of Prince Henry in 1612 and thereafter suffered several legal and financial problems. He may have found it ironic that a firm of solicitors now practises on the site of his mansion where he resided at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Today Rooks Rider Solicitors has both a local and international presence and provides legal services in [Corporate Affairs](#), [Dispute Resolution](#), [Employment Matters](#), [Leasehold Enfranchisement](#), [Real Estate](#) and [Wealth Planning](#).

Who knows if there are not some files in the office somewhere for the ghosts of type founders and courtiers?

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