Office profile in two parts: London

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The partnerships of W. W. Deloitte (1845-1897) and Lord Pledger (1897-1946) span 101 years, separated approximately by the turn of the century. In 1905, William Pledger, the last of the outstanding triumvirate whose names figure in the title of the firm, became senior partner. The same year the offices were moved to 5, London Wall Buildings. For years thereafter memories continued to be haunted by recollections of 4, Lothbury, the firm’s location for the previous 48 years, just as they doubtless will of London Wall Buildings since the move from there to 128 Queen Victoria Street in September, 1964.

As recently as 1941 a former member of the staff, Harold E. Gibb, recalled the entrance to the old office at Lothbury: "...a narrow doorway which looked down Princes Street, and a long dark wooden passage led to some stairs which, in turn, led to the office itself. The general office and the partners’ rooms were on the ‘first floor’ and there were two floors above.

"...There was only one telephone which was in a little alcove adjoining the general office. The number, I remember, was Avenue 705. It was considered quite an adventure to speak over it. Whoever was asked for had to be summoned and fetched, for ‘extensions’ were unknown and of course there were no lifts. There were, however, ‘speaking tubes’ connecting some of the remote rooms with the general office. Great experience and much care was needed to handle these labour-saving devices, for the innocent and unskilled was apt to receive a mouthful of dust and air from one of his youthful colleagues playing a trick at the other end and who usually managed to remain anonymous.

"...Of Mr. J. G. Griffiths, I recall his ever courteous manner and dignified bearing, his saying on one occasion—‘We treat you all as gentlemen—we expect you to behave as gentlemen’; and in a lighter vein, coming up to us in the General Office—‘If you’re not busy, pretend you are’—a piece of advice I have often passed on to others. Mr. J. G. Griffiths would not have smoking in the office on any account and even outside it was frowned upon—well, perhaps a cigar or even a cigarette, but a pipe, never.”

The move to London Wall Buildings, although on the edge of the City, placed the offices pleasantly in Finsbury Circus, a situation still calm and quiet except when a brass band plays in the Circus gardens on Wednesday mornings. (“Circus” is a term we use, derived from the Latin circus meaning circle, to describe the circular area at the intersection of streets.) The gardens
have never been built on. In Roman and medieval times they were a dumping place for rubbish tipped over the City wall.

Perhaps I should explain that by “the City” we mean the ancient core around which has grown urban and suburban London, sprawling over 700 square miles. The City covers only one square mile, the area of the original Roman City. Its medieval system and traditions are preserved over by the Lord Mayor. Analogous to your financial headquarters, “Wall Street,” it includes the great commodity exchanges, money markets, banks, and the London Stock Exchange. Thus, when we say that our practice is based primarily on London, it is “the City” to which we refer.

London may be very historic and interesting, but in many respects it is not the easiest city in which to work. Few people attempt to drive to the office; most have to use some form of public transport which, as is common in all large cities, tends to get overcrowded during rush hours. Again, owing to the size of London, many people prefer to live some distance from the centre and avoid the more closely built-up areas. Most railway termini are outside the City, and journeys from home to the office over an hour’s duration are quite normal.

Office hours have not altered appreciably—a reduction of half an hour daily by closing at 5:30 instead of 6, with an interval of one hour instead of 45 minutes for lunch. The office is not officially open on Saturday mornings, compared with the old rule that “Work permitting, the office will be closed at 2 o’clock.” The habit of smoking at work, unheard of in earlier days, is now the subject of a request to “refrain from smoking in the corridors, at public inquiry counters and in the cashier’s and general office during office hours.”

Delay in rendering Time Reports has always been a source of complaint, and even William Plender and P. D. Griffiths, John Griffiths’ brother who became partner in 1898, were among the offenders. To Mr. Plender the firm wrote: “We must ask you to furnish to the Time Ledger keepers your time summary for March without further delay,” and a telegram to P. D. Griffiths read: “Extremely surprised at inatten-

tion to application for time summary. Must have it by morning.”

Though serving articles of apprenticeship in England dates back to medieval guild practices of the thirteenth century, it had not been customary for accounting before the middle of the nineteenth. Mr. Hollebone, who had come on the staff at 16, was probably the firm’s first articled clerk; Mr. Deloitte undertook to instruct him in accountancy for five years for a premium fee of £. 499, a sum approximating what a university education would have cost. In those days, abilities showed up and were recognized at an early stage. Hollebone became a partner at 22, Dever at 26, and Griffiths at 24; Lord Plender, at 35 and after 13 years on the staff, was relatively old.

The practice of serving articles has continued to the present day and is a requirement for sitting the examinations of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the length of time varying from three to five years depending on formal educational attainments. But profound changes have occurred. Whilst up to 1945 Deloitte charged a premium of 500 guineas (about $2,500 in those days), this practice has been abandoned and salaries are now paid to articled clerks. Accounting is not regarded as a formal educational discipline in this country. Considering that articled clerks normally join the office without any knowledge or experience of accounting at all and are given periods of study and examination leave, the salaries are not unreasonable. There are today more than 120 articled clerks in London Office.

Delay in submitting his Time Report did not apparently retard the career of William Plender (photo page 9), whose rise in the profession The Accountant described as almost meteoric. He was knighted in 1911 and became Baron Plender of Sundridge in the County of Kent in 1931. He was the third partner of the firm to become President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants (Messrs. Deloitte and Griffiths had preceded him), which office he occupied for the two years 1910-12 beginning at the early age of 49. He was elected again for the Jubilee year 1929-30, and presided at a banquet in the Guildhall to commemorate the fiftieth anniver-
London


Below: At old inn in Putney, near London, after work at International Computers & Tabulators, Ltd., D. Sheppard, supervising senior, and articled clerks J. Hawksley (l.) and R. Collingwood (r.) enjoy a glass of "bitter" ale.

sary of the granting of the Royal Charter. Since then three other partners, Sir Arthur E. Cutforth, Sir Russell Kettle*, and I have filled that office, so that six Deloitte partners have been President for ten of the Institute's 85 years, a record of which Deloittes are very proud. Also since its founding there has always been one partner, sometimes two, on the Institute's Council.

Besides the six Deloitte partners, four former members of the staff who left to set up in practice have reached the chair, and others have distinguished themselves in other fields. S.J.L. Hardie was appointed chairman of the National Steel Board when the industry was nationalised after World War II; Lord Salisbury has served in several Cabinets and been Leader of the House of Lords; Viscount de l'Isle has been Secretary of State for Air and Governor General of Australia, to mention only a few since it is impracticable to name them all.

When Lord Plender died in 1946, The Accountant referred to him as the outstanding figure in the world of accountancy. The Times emphasized his service to the nation and the community:

"Throughout his career he served his country with untiring zeal, his services being particularly valuable during the 1914-1918 war and the years which came after it, when the skill of accountants was especially in demand. Whenever it was a question of figures and their meaning, his sane and sober counsel was available and his high reputation for solid common sense and sterling honesty gave weight to his opinions and decisions."

The reference to service during the war had in mind "his amazing list of activities," particularly his serving without remuneration as controller of the alien German, Austrian, and Turkish banks when they were taken into custody. Apart from professional engagements for the government, Sir William's voluntary services during the first war were prodigious, and he was made a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire in 1918.

Many of our present clients were attracted to the firm by Lord Plender's reputation in the early part of the present century. Among these are the two tobacco giants, Imperial Tobacco Co. Ltd. and British American Tobacco Ltd., the London Underground, which in 1903 began construction of a network of tube railways under London and has since merged into the London Passenger Transport Board (another client), and the Bank of Ireland. In the public utility field the Port of London Authority has been a client since its formation in 1909, and we are auditors of the South Eastern Gas Board and of London Electricity Board, successor to former client companies who were nationalised. Other important and interesting clients include the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Vickers group (who produced the Viscount aircraft and the V.C.10), British Aircraft Corporation, who now build the latter aircraft, and the biggest shipping group in the world—the Peninsular & Oriental Steamship Co.

In the late 1800's British capital was developing enterprises all over the world, and staff members were often abroad investigating propositions and then servicing client affairs overseas. In Russia before the revolution of 1917 they penetrated to the Urals and the Caucasus, and the firm kept fur coats and caps in storage to equip the staff on these visits. One partner visited Singapore on behalf of the Colonial Office in connection with the purchase of the docks and foreshore for a naval station. While still on the staff Lord Plender visited nearly every capital city in

*The author is indebted to Sir Russell Kettle's history, Deloitte & Co., for historical detail and perspectives in this series of articles.
London

Homeward-bound R. J. Bird, supervising senior, buys paper before descending to subway (“the drain”) between the City and Waterloo Station.

Europe and also Montreal and New York. (It was on a night train journey between the latter cities that, being unfamiliar with American habits, he put his boots out in the corridor to be cleaned. The next morning they had disappeared and he had to walk from the railway station to a cab in his socks.)

The increase in the amount of overseas work led to the establishment of many offices in North and South America, Europe, and South Africa. The London Office staff now seldom have overseas work. One of their few annual examinations overseas takes them to the tropical heat of the Sudan to audit the Sudan Gezira Board, which supervises the vast nationalised cotton industry.

Deloittes opened their first overseas office in New York in Wall Street in 1890, and in 1907 conducted on behalf of the United States Government an examination of the Postal System. The American business was maintained for some sixty years, during which time offices were opened in Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Los Angeles in addition to New York. During this time, also, our associations with Haskins & Sells were formed and grew stronger, culminating in 1952 in the merger of Deloittes offices in the U. S. into H&S, and H&S offices in London and Paris into Deloittes. The drawing together of the two firms was described in the Spring 1964 issue of H&S REPORTS.

With the advance of the second half of the century and our move in 1964 to Queen Victoria Street at the extreme southwest of the City, we have lost our view of the pleasant park at Finsbury Circus. In its stead we have gained on our north side a view over a permanent open space and on to St. Paul’s Cathedral. From the south side one can on a clear day look off to the rolling Surrey Hills some ten miles away. While this is not encouraged as a pastime, I find it pleasant on occasion, and thought-provoking. My thought at this time contains the hope that the spirit which has animated past and present generations of those associated “with Deloittes” will long continue.