

The history of Hillyer McKeown in a nutshell

The firm began in 1958 as Charles Roberts & Co. founded by Charles (“Charlie”) Roberts. Phil Jones (Philip Edward Jones) who was later to become Senior Partner joined the firm a few years later from Cornish Forfar, a Liverpool firm where he had been ‘Articled’.

Phil had great family connections in the Bebington area and so when Walter Hurst (also previously of Cornish Forfar) joined the firm in 1964 a site in Bebington became the Wirral office.

During the 1960s the firm employed John Hillyer and Barry Travers as articled clerks and they stayed with the firm. Keith Jackson joined the firm in 1969 (from Moorcrofts Owen Dawson in Liverpool) as an Assistant Solicitor and became a Partner about a year later.

Charlie Roberts left the firm in 1971 but not without having presided over the training of Jenny Clayton who also later became a Partner. (You will notice later that somewhat bizarrely, years after Jenny left the firm, her husband Martin Clayton joined as a Partner.)

The firm was renamed Philip Jones, Hillyer & Jackson after the three Partners who remained in 1971.

Philip Jones, Hillyer & Jackson

Barry Travers became a Partner in 1973.

Phil McKeown who would later become Senior Partner joined the firm straight from university in 1974 and was ‘Articled’ to Keith Jackson having obtained his articles as a result of both Phil and Keith having a keen interest in hockey and cricket. During Phil’s articles Keith was the captain of the Lancashire Hockey Team which was then immensely successful. Phil played for the Cheshire Hockey Team. The rivalry between Lancashire and Cheshire was immense and every Boxing Day brought the culmination of the Northern Counties Hockey League fixture between Lancashire and Cheshire.

Phil’s memory suggests that he was the happier of the two on Boxing Day evening!

Having completed his articles Phil was assigned to the Bebington office and became a Partner in 1977. Walter Hurst and Phil McKeown managed and grew the Bebington office.

Philip Jones sadly died suddenly in 1985 which was a huge blow to the firm. His initial drive, enthusiasm and towering personality had been pivotal for the firm’s initial growth.

Jonathan Korff joined the firm in September 1978 having already set up his Oyster farm (and put together the rudiments of a golf swing – which today remain unchanged!). He had trained at Mason & Moore Dutton and became a Partner in 1983.

David Wright joined the firm in 1984 having completed his training at Walker, Smith and Way and became a Partner in 1987 and Helen Smart joined the firm shortly later and thereafter also became a Partner. Helen specialised in Magistrates’ Court work, firstly in criminal law and subsequently in child care matters.

As the years progressed the firm had other Partners in Nigel Tomlinson who specialised in Matrimonial Law and later Personal Injury work. Mark Davies developed an insolvency department before leaving for Manchester.

Hillyer McKeown arrives in the 1990s

In May 1998 the name changed to Hillyer McKeown following a merger with the Heswall firm of Hilton Blyth Porteous & Co. As a result Peter Wise, Janet Goldthorp and Nigel Merrick became Partners in the enlarged firm of Hillyer McKeown.

The firm continued to practice from two offices in Chester and the Wirral offices in Bebington and Heswall as a result of the expansion a further office was added in Chester in 2002.

Steven Harvey who had worked at the Bebington office for the firm shortly after qualifying as a solicitor (but then left to face the bright lights of Liverpool and Manchester) then returned to the firm in 2002.

His specific brief was pulling together all the firms company and commercial law offerings which had up to that stage been spread between four offices. Continuing growth meant that space was at a premium and there was an administrative problem of having three Chester offices.

The 'wish list' was to own and occupy large commercial premises in Chester City Centre with adequate car parking; the firm achieved this and moved to Murlain House.

Steve Harvey became a Partner in 2006 and was joined by Sarah Bayley, Victoria Jones, Justine Watkinson, Lindsey Kidd, Joanne Shelley and Duncan McAllister.

Hillyer McKeown since 2010

In October 2011, Hillyer McKeown acquired D P Roberts Hughes and Denye Solicitors which had been operating in Hamilton Square, Birkenhead since 1964. That firm was formed by Don Roberts initially as D P Roberts and Co. before Geoff Hughes and Jim Denye joined as Partners. DPRHD had offices across the Wirral and North Wales before consolidating operations in Birkenhead and Ellesmere Port in the mid 1990s. This 2011 acquisition resulted in Ian Millington joining as Partner, overseeing Hillyer McKeown's Wirral offices in Hamilton Square. The enlarged Hillyer McKeown Group now has offices in Chester (Head Office), Wirral & North Wales.

Hillyer McKeown today

More recently, Hillyer McKeown has undergone massive adjustments which reflect the changing marketplace and a push to put client service at the centre of its activities. The firm gained ABS accreditation in 2014 taking in its first non-legally qualified Partner (Richard Burnett) at the same time.

Due to continued growth the firm moved the Head Office in Chester from Murlain House to the purpose built, open plan Gorse Stacks House in June 2015. This central office space reflects the contemporary nature of Hillyer McKeown.

In September 2015, the firm opened a Liverpool office at The Tempest and in March 2017 due to continued growth and the need for more space to expand, Hillyer McKeown moved to larger premises in the iconic Exchange Station.

Ambitious growth plans continued with the launch of diversified services (a suite of complementary services to support growing business) HM Creative in 2015 and HM Business Growth 2016.

Hillyer McKeown continues with the tradition of providing expert advice, while adapting to the needs of clients today for an efficient, cost-effective and personable service.