

# Andrew Grant's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



**AT THE HELM:** Andrew Grant is celebrating four decades of being at the forefront of the estate agency business and is now one of the most familiar names across a wide area.

## 40 years of building an empire based on trust

When Andrew Grant opened his first office, he had one philosophy: To make every client feel as though he was dealing only with them

**O**N April Fool's Day 40 years ago, a young estate agent with a shock of unruly hair and a burning ambition opened his first office in Worcester. The date was singularly inappropriate, for Andrew Grant is no one's fool.

If, in those far off days, he sometimes gave the impression he couldn't afford a comb, that would have been a mistake. What he actually couldn't afford was the time to run it through his hair.

He was in the fast lane long before the phrase became general currency and even now, getting an interview with him is like trying to catch the wind.

You might have thought marriage and two lively sons would have slowed him down a bit. It may have done, but not so that you'd notice and, as his business is now generally considered to be the largest independent estate agency in the Midlands, his "hands-on" approach requires extraordinary effort.

Add to that all his charity

work and the mind simply boggles.

The Andrew Grant empire, based around "headquarters" in Foregate Street, Worcester, now covers nine residential offices, an office in London and a separate department in Pierpoint Street, Worcester, dealing with the sale and valuation of commercial properties.

There is also a lettings department, which has proved highly successful. Four decades in business have made his name one of the most familiar across a

wide area. It was ever likely to be thus. Because even as a young pupil at Winterfold House, Chaddesley Corbett, Andrew Grant had this urge to buy and sell.

"In school holidays, three of us used to go to the furniture sales at Kidderminster Cattle Market," he recalled. "They used to call us 'the Syndicate' and I remember the auctioneer warning people, 'You can't bid against the Syndicate!'"

"However, we set ourselves a ceiling of five shillings per lot, so I don't expect the

serious buyers were too worried.

"I can't remember what we did with all the stuff we bought. Sold it to friends, I suppose. Or more likely gave it away to relatives."

He was back in the cattle market after leaving school and being articled to Arthur G Griffiths and Sons. Only this time it was at Worcester and he had to book in the cattle and sheep, ear-tag calves and slap lot numbers on the rumps of lively heifers.

Watching the youngster clamber from pen to pen

provided instant entertainment for the gathering of farmers.

"The first lot I was trusted to sell was some mistletoe," said Andrew. "It was bought by some nuns from Stanbrook Abbey at Callow End."

The religious connection was not inappropriate because he is a committed Christian.

A Catholic, he's a former chairman of the governors of St Mary's Convent School, Worcester, and is also deeply involved with St Richard's Hospice, Malvern's Elizabeth **CONTINUED ON PAGE 18**

### Attention to detail is key to his story of success

**FROM PAGE 17** Fitzroy Home for the handicapped and the British Red Cross.

As part of a county committee, he raised £50,000 at an auction on behalf of Worcester Cathedral.

Andrew Grant's first office in Worcester was in Pierpoint Street and fitted out at a total cost of £300.

He bought the desks at auction and the carpets came off an ocean liner.

However, he soon got the chance to move around the corner and "upmarket" to Foregate Street, although his friends could have been forgiven for thinking he'd gone into catering.

The other part of the building was occupied by a Chinese restaurant and, for a while, business was accompanied by the aroma of chop suey and banana fritters.

Now the diners have long gone and Grants have been left with a prime position in Worcester's commercial area.

Ever entrepreneurial in his approach to estate agency, Andrew Grant first came to many people's notice when he brokered the sale of the Spring Grove estate, near Bewdley, to Jimmy Chipperfield and Lord Derby for the setting up of the West Midland Safari Park, one of the first in the country.

"I didn't make a penny out of that, but I got a lot of publicity," he recalled.

It was his introduction to the county's fine country houses and an interest he's fostered ever since for, by and large, properties at the top end of the market are immune to the fluctuations which beset other areas.

It was particularly to promote the country houses that he joined the London office in Mayfair 17 years ago with premises in St James's.

Such a move was typical of a man with an eye for an opening and an approach to business that is both completely professional and caring and confidential at the same time.

"I have a good management team and good managers running offices," he explained. "This is the key to making things successful plus, of course, attention to detail and making staff available at all times. E-mails are OK, but they must not take the place of making personal contact."

When he started, Andrew told a friend: "I want every client to feel I am dealing only with them."

"Forty years on," he said, "I've seen no reason to change that philosophy."



**THE FAMILY BEHIND THE MAN:** Andrew and Beatrice Grant pictured on their wedding day; with the then mayor guests at a function; pictured with his son Frederik.



**CARRYING OUT HIGH SHERIFF DUTIES:** Opening a police station; pictured with other dignitaries outside the Guildhall in Worcester and making an entrance with Michael Brinton, the Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire. Mr Grant was the High Sheriff for Herefordshire and Worcestershire in 2005 and 2006.

# Enjoying family life and public service

As well as being one of the region's most successful businessmen, Andrew Grant is also passionate about his distinguished career in public service to the county and dedicated to his family, as Mike Pryce discovers

**W**HEN Andrew Grant married in a society wedding in London in April 1995, he finally lost the tag of "Worcestershire's most eligible bachelor". His bride, Beatrice Huntington-Whiteley, was a member of one of the county's best-known families, a descendant of Queen Victoria and a great-granddaughter of Stanley Baldwin of Astley, near Stourport, three times British Prime Minister.

The man who quipped about marriage, "When I've had the money, I've never had the time and when I've had the time, I've never had the money", finally found he had both after eyes met across a crowded room in London.

The wedding at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Farm Street, Mayfair, was followed by a reception for 500 guests at the Hyde Park Hotel in Knightsbridge.

The bride decamped from her capital apartment to a Worcestershire manor house and a far different life. She had worked for fashion queen Jean Muir for several years, organising the production and dispatch of her designer outfits and then disappeared with a friend to backpack across south east Asia and India for 18 months.

"If you keep clear of the areas you're likely to get shot, it's OK," she said. She also did voluntary work for a charity providing food for London's homeless and, for seven years, was PA to a member of the House or Lords.

Marriage changed all that and today Andrew and Bea Grant live at Bransford Manor with their sons Frederik, aged 12, and Ludovik, nine.

"I love going to watch Frederik and Ludo play football, rugby or cricket at their school matches," said their father.



**HOME LIFE:** Andrew and Beatrice Grant with their sons Frederik and Ludovik. Mr Grant loves nothing better than to watch his sons play sport and has even set up a cricket pitch at home, where he bowls to them - as he jokingly admits he's too scared to face their bowling.

"A cricket pitch has been set up at home, where I spend my time bowling endlessly - I am too scared to face their bowling!"

As well as being one of Worcestershire's best known business names and a dedicated family man, Mr Grant also has a distinguished career in public service to the county. Among his many appointments, he was High

Sheriff for Herefordshire and Worcestershire in 2005 and 2006, a role that covered everything from greeting royal visitors to the area to meeting inmates at Long Lartin high security prison in the Vale of Evesham.

However, one of the more "unusual" happenings during his time in office has gone largely unreported, until now. "At the end of a High

Sheriff's year in office it is their duty to make an account of the year before guests at the Shire Hall in Worcester," Mr Grant explained.

"At the same time the swearing in of the next High Sheriff takes place. At the end of the ceremony I was given the judge's chamber to change out of my uniform into a suit.

"As I briefly went to the loo in the chamber, the lights

suddenly went out. An usher had looked into the room and seen no one, so he proceeded to lock up the Shire Hall.

"I was imprisoned for some two hours while the Lord Lieutenant of Herefordshire Sir Thomas Dunne and fellow guests were dining happily at home.

"However, I found a public telephone and dialled 999. On the first occasion the person at



the other end of the phone at the police headquarters laughed, saying, 'He says he is locked in the Shire Hall'.

"A subsequent telephone call did produce a better reply, but when the police eventually arrived they found they had to climb over railings which are at least seven feet high.

"A window was found on the ground floor, which would open for about three inches. I

was passed a jemmy to see if I could move the window more, but it was not possible. The policeman then said he would have to break in.

"Sadly, the Under Sheriff arrived. He had access to the Shirehall and was able to release me. In some ways I had hoped that I would have 'broken out' of Shire Hall."

Rather less dramatically, among a host of posts, Mr

Grant is a patron of Worcester's St Richard's Hospice and was formerly a governor for 10 years. He was chairman of the fund-raising committee when the hospice moved to its new site in Wildwood Drive and oversaw the raising of £5.25 million in 18 months.

He is president of Worcester City Conservative Association, a Worcester Ambassador and a



**PUBLIC LIFE:** Mr Grant in his High Sheriff's ceremonial dress, above. Left: Cutting the ribbon to open a new centre for Worcester's Bangladeshi community. Far left: Mr Grant has been a long-time supporter of St Richard's Hospice in Worcester and oversaw the raising of £5.25 million.

Deputy Lieutenant of Worcestershire. He is also a Knight of Malta - travelling with the Order to Lourdes each year accompanying 65 people seeking relief from their illness - and honorary vice-president of the Worcester branch of the British Red Cross.

Mr Grant is also much involved with the Country Landowners and Business

Association and farms 600 acres across three holdings in Worcestershire and Herefordshire. He is a former president and chairman of the CLA Worcestershire branch and a former chairman of the West Midlands regional committee. He is now a member of the national policy committee at the organisation's Belgrave Square headquarters.

### 40 years of making the headlines...





**LOOKING BACK:** Andrew Grant pictured in the Worcester office in 1988 and as an auctioneer during one of the many charity auctions that he has taken part in over the years.

# From cottages to castles, home is where the heart is

Andrew Grant reflects on some of the more memorable sales of his career and shares his thoughts on the future of the housing market

**F**OR many years, Andrew Grant's estate agency business carried the logo "from cottages to castles", although he could also, with complete justification, have included "convents" too.

Because in recent years, one of his most challenging tasks was to find a buyer for the Victorian edifice Stanbrook Abbey at Callow End.

For 170 years, the abbey and its 21 acres of grounds had been home to an order of Benedictine nuns, who in 2006 decided to sell it to move to a new purpose-built monastery in North Yorkshire.

**'Home owning is still a priority for most people. We are, after all, a property owning democracy'**

It originally went on the market at £6 million, but obviously wasn't everyone's cup of tea, because although there was plenty of initial interest and at least one potential buyer, a deal proved difficult to close.

So in 2008, a new marketing campaign was launched at a reduced price and this led to the complex being bought by entrepreneur Mike Clare, who established the UK's biggest bed retailer Dreams, with plans to turn it into a luxury retreat for weddings, parties and private functions.

One of Andrew Grant's memorable sales – albeit with a sting in the tail – was of Broncroft Castle in the Corvedale Valley, north of Ludlow, the home of Topham Brinton, the late chairman of Kidderminster's iconic carpet firm.

In 1998, Mr Grant sold it for about £1.9 million, achieving a Cotswold price in the Welsh



**CHEERS:** Mr Grant has enjoyed much success over the years – but puts it down to his dedicated team of staff who have all worked so hard to make the business flourish.

borderlands. However, 18 months later in a recession, the same property sold for about £850,000.

Today's housing market is urgently in need of a confidence boost, according to Mr Grant.

"There are a certain lack of quality houses on the market for which inquiries are enormous," he said.

"Confidence needs to be brought back in. Banks need to be more sensible and helpful with their lending.

"Never in my 40 years have I seen building societies require 20 per cent or a 25 per cent deposit for the purchase – 10 per cent would be more realistic. Banks are scared of their own shadows.

"Furthermore, banks or building societies have now introduced management fees for a mortgage on say 75 per cent of anything up to £1,000.

"First time buyers are becoming first time renters, which is not good.

"However, in the month of August my offices sold more than 100 houses, which is



**BRANCHING OUT:** Outside the London office in Mayfair.



**GUIDING LIGHT:** Mr Grant pictured outside the Worcester office in 1996 with the late Alan Fortune, who was his mentor.

particularly good for the main holiday month.

"Home owning is still a priority for most people. We are, after all, a property owning democracy. But new housing is at an all-time low and is similar to around 1910. This cannot be good for the housing market or the economy. It does require teamwork to have a

successful firm and I am very grateful to all my staff for what they do and for working so hard to help achieve making a business successful.

"I am very proud of them. Sometimes I do not make this acknowledgement, so here is a public one. Thanks to all who keep my business going."