

## Peter Cecil Wilson CBE

By the terms of Richard Henry Francis Wharton Wilson's will the Kildwick estate was held in trust for seven years after his death, until Peter Cecil Wilson, who was born in 1913, reached the age of 30. He would be the last of the hereditary lords of the manor of Kildwick.



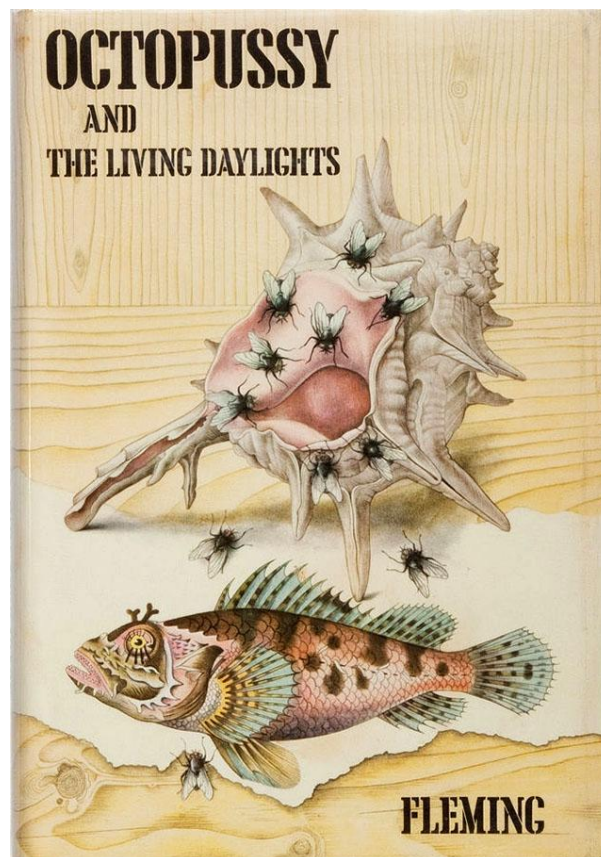
**Peter Cecil Wilson (photographed in 1968)**

Peter Cecil Wilson worked at the auctioneers Sotheby's, rising rapidly from a junior post in 1936 to become a director and partner by the time war broke out.

During the war he worked in postal censorship in Liverpool, Gibraltar, and Bermuda before being transferred to MI6; working in St Albans, Washington and New York. One of Wilson's friends during this period – particularly during his time in Bermuda – was the writer Ian Fleming. Wilson later claimed that he helped the author develop the character James Bond. (Some sources claim that Wilson was actually the model for Bond, but all these seem to reference just a single internet source which fails to give any supporting evidence.)

At the end of the war Wilson turned down an opportunity to remain with MI6 and instead returned to work at Sotheby's, where he became Chairman in 1958.

In 1963 Sotheby's commissioned Ian Fleming to write a short story, called "Property of a Lady", for its in-house journal. In it Bond attends an auction overseen by Peter Cecil Wilson, who plays a small but significant part in the plot. The story later found its way into the collection of stories published as "Octopussy"; but Fleming was so unhappy with the piece that he wrote to Wilson and refused payment for something he considered so lack-lustre.



**The original cover of Octopussy by Ian Fleming – subsequent editions included the short story "Property of a Lady" in which the auctioneer Peter Cecil Wilson appears as a character**

Wilson was awarded the CBE in 1970.

He resigned as Sotheby's chairman in 1980 and retired to the South of France.

His sudden departure coincided with the unmasking of Anthony Blunt as a Russian spy-master and rumours still persist that Wilson himself was connected with the KGB. In fact, it is more likely that his change of address was precipitated by the impending arrival of a tax bill.

Peter Cecil Wilson died in Paris in 1984, aged 71.

But even after his death Peter Wilson has been the subject of controversy. His name still appears in connection with the complex web of events surrounding the discovery and provenance of the Sevso Treasure.



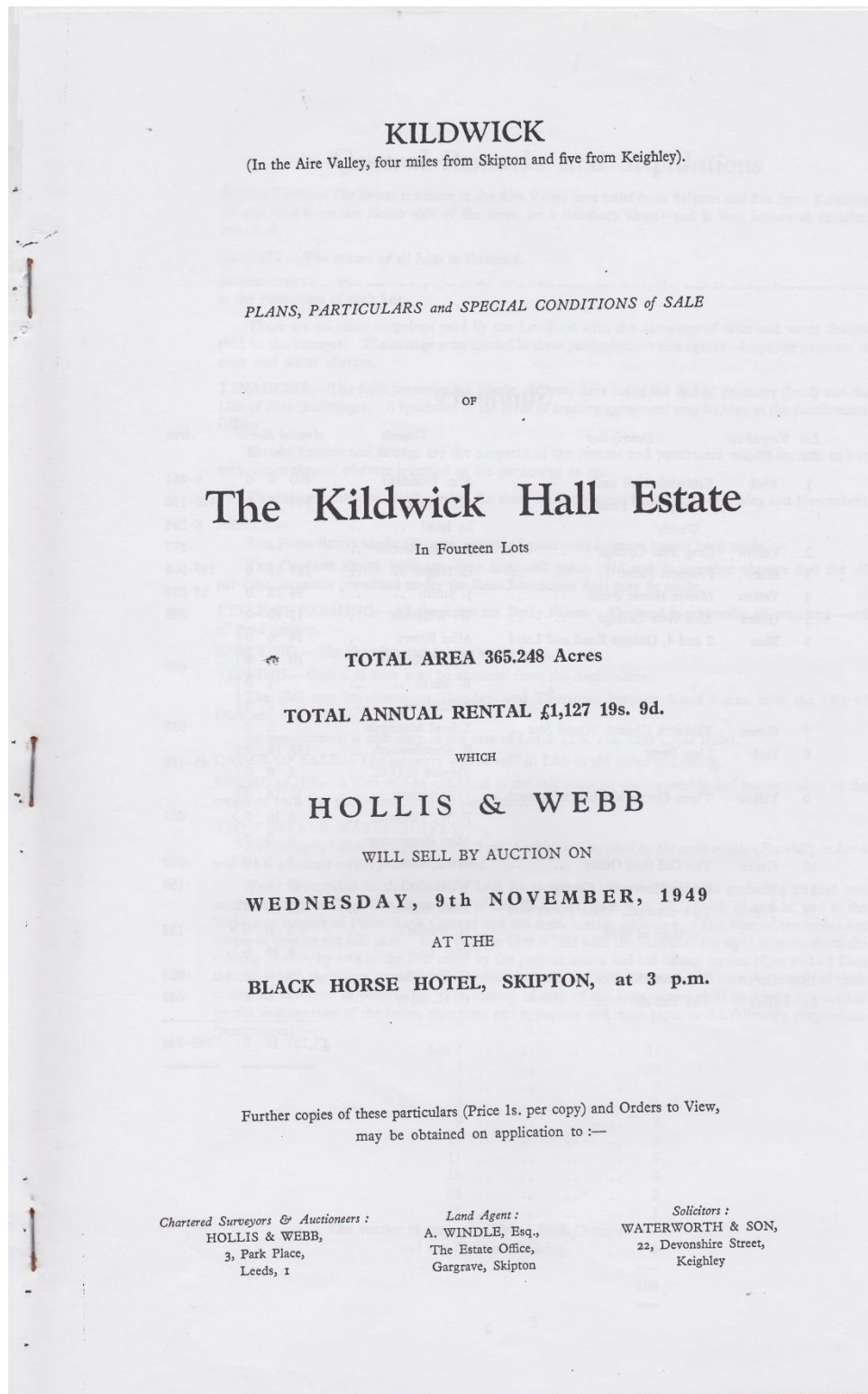
**The Sevso treasure**

The Sevso Treasure consists of 14 pieces of antique silver, probably from the late Roman or early Byzantine Empire. The story of the treasure, insofar as it is known (and it continues to this day), involves allegations of the looting of an unknown archaeological site (probably in Hungary), murder, theft, smuggling, forged export documents, deception, fraud, multiple court cases, and interventions from at least three national governments – a tale worthy of James Bond himself.

In 2014, seven items from the treasure were sold to the Hungarian government, for €15m, by a trust whose members included Wilson's two sons. The remaining seven are thought still to be in the possession of a business associate of Peter Wilson's.

Back to Kildwick to end the story ...

In November 1949 the whole of the Kildwick Estate was put up for auction.



**The Kildwick Estate auction prospectus**

The estate was sold in 14 separate lots and Kildwick Hall entered an uncertain future.

## Sources

[Peter Cecil Wilson – Wikipedia](#)

[Peter Cecil Wilson – translation of the German Wikipedia page](#)

[Peter Cecil Wilson – New York Times obituary](#)

[Auctioneer who lifted art to new heights – Independent](#)

[The Sevso melodrama: who did what and to whom](#) – The Art Newspaper

[Sevso Treasure](#) – Trafficking Culture, researching the global traffic in looted cultural objects

[Hungarian claim on the Sevso Treasure](#) – Trafficking Culture, researching the global traffic in looted cultural objects

[The Mystery of the Roman Treasure \(Time Team Special 34, 2008\)](#)