

# Local and Essex History – March 2021

## C.S. WIGGINS

Many of the houses in Benfleet and Thundersley were built by Wiggins and Sons. C.S. Wiggins (known as Stan) was responsible for the development of much of the land along Hart Road and over the years he continued to develop the land in the local area.

Stan was born in 1882. His family lived in Kiln Farm Cottages opposite The Woodman public house. He went to the old Thundersley School until he was twelve and during this time he worked with his father on the farm.

In 1896, when he was thirteen, he became a carpentry and joinery apprentice to Mr L.S. Upson in Hadleigh. He continued to work as a day-worker and sub-contractor' for about ten years. During this time, he set up a carrier business transporting goods by horse and cart, from Rayleigh Station to outlying areas. Jobs in the building trade were erratic so his new venture proved very useful.

From 1880, Stan's parents rented Kiln Farm. It consisted of roughly twelve acres of land west of Rayleigh Road and lay between Hart Road and Common Lane. Stan and his older brother, Joseph, worked at cattle dealing, hay-making and poultry keeping. The combination of this and his other businesses kept Stan busy until 1918. He rose early in the day, often at 5 am. and continued to work throughout the day until late at night.

Stan married his cousin, Lois Anderson, in 1908. Her family had moved from Scotland to Essex where her father acted as bailiff on Potten and Havengore Islands. The Anderson family later moved to Barking for work on the newly opened Becton Gas Works, and they called their home "Havengore".

Stan decided to build their first home near where he was born, in Rayleigh Road. They called it "Braemar" which, although greatly altered, is still standing on the corner of Deerhurst. There was neither gas nor electricity and their water supply was a tap in the kitchen.

The family name of Wiggins is inextricably linked to Thundersley's and Benfleet's rise in the mid to late 20th Century. Many houses, including our own was built by Wiggins and they are a lasting memory of a hard-working local builder.

Source Data: <https://www.hadleighhistory.org.uk>, Wiggins the Builder by Gwyneth Craze.

**PAULINE HARRINGTON**

## **The Benfleet Brick and Tile Works Limited 1895 until 1899**

On the 28th February 1895 an agreement was formed between Alfred Butler, a brick maker and salesman from Victoria Road Romford and Mr Philip Solomon, a merchant. They formed a company known as The Benfleet Brick and Tile Works Limited.

The brick fields were a total of 20 acres comprising of three fields, Channel Field, Grass Marsh and Reves Field. The land was situated on the south side of the London - Tilbury and Southend Railway, close to the creek, which gave direct access to the waterways.

In the contract it showed Alfred Butler senior had one share in the business and he would take the foreman's position, paying 30 shillings a week, paid one week in arrears. His contract was for nineteen months, which could be terminated by a three-month written notice. The Poll Book showed Alfred resided at Lower Brickfield from 1894 until 1898.

Alfred's daughter-in-law Emma Alice Butler also held one share in the business. She was married to Alfred junior. This was a family business and it was supported by venture capital, encouraging people to risk their money in manufacturing businesses.

Alfred senior decided that his son Alfred junior had to prove to himself that he was the right person for the role of manager and was given a twenty two month trial period, (two brick making seasons), to prove himself.

Emma and Alfred gave their fifteen-year-old son Alfred Butler junior the job as clerk of the brick fields. This is shown in the 1881 census.

The company ran into difficulties, (assumed to be financial but not confirmed), and on the 28th November 1898 the Butlers received a letter from the Company Registrations Office at Somerset House asking if they were still trading as the Benfleet Brick and Tile Works Limited? The letter gave the Butler family three months to reply, otherwise the company would be struck off the register and dissolved.

On January 9th 1899 the Butlers were sent another letter and had one month to reply, this letter was returned marked GONE AWAY. On 28th July 1899 a notice was placed in the London Gazette that The Benfleet Brick and Tile Works Limited had been dissolved under clause 7 (4) of the Companies Act of 1880.

Source Data: [www.benfleethistory.org.uk](http://www.benfleethistory.org.uk)

**DENISE PHIPPS**

## INVACAR LTD



Invacar  
Grille Badge

Bert Greeves, a trained engineer, had a cousin, Derry Preston-Cobb, who was handicapped and confined to a wheelchair. Bert had a 'Eureka' moment, while mowing his lawn, realising that attaching a lawnmower engine to his cousin's wheelchair would improve his cousin's mobility, many fold.

The motorised wheelchair proved to be the forerunner of the light blue INVALID CARRIAGES which graced our roads until just into the millennium.

Bert Greeves established the company Invacar Ltd, and won a major contract with the recently formed NHS, to supply three wheeled, motorised, single seated, invalid carriages, from a factory in Church Road Thundersley.

The timing could not have been better for Invacar Ltd. Due to the number of former servicemen disabled during the Second World War there was a pressing need for personal mobility, which the Invacar vehicles were able to meet.

The mobility section of the newly formed NHS owned, supplied & maintained Invacars, for those who were eligible, initially free of charge. Invacars were apparently not seen as vehicles by the NHS, but rather as prosthetics. The NHS considered it was their responsibility to improve mobility for handicapped people and saw an Invacar as a leg replacement.

The actual production started around 1950 and ceased towards the end of the 70's; almost three decades. Five or six manufacturers received contracts from the NHS, initially with a basic specification of what they wanted. Unfortunately, this resulted in differing interpretations by each manufacturer. However, towards the latter 50's the NHS standardised its requirements for all manufacturers. From available data, (although not confirmed), it appears that the final NHS specification was very close to Invacar Ltd's design.

The last variant of the Invacar was actually designed by AC Cars Ltd and was in production between 1971 and 1978. This variant was known as the Thundersley Invacar Model 70 and was the largest of all the variants.



Thundersley Invacar  
Model 70

The earlier Invacar variants used a Villiers 147cc air-cooled motorcycle engine. When this engine became unavailable, in the early 70's, and coinciding with the introduction of the Model 70, more powerful 4 stroke 500 & 600cc engines were introduced.

Theoretically the Model 70 with the 500cc engine was capable of 60mph, while the ones with the larger 600cc engine could have been capable of reaching 82mph.

There appears to be no confirmation that anyone actually reached 82mph in a Model 70. However, there is a record from 1978 of an AA man being called by Police to recover two Invarcars, whose drivers had been pulled over on the M5 motorway. Apparently both Invarcars overtook the Police car at speeds in excess of 70mph. (The record does not state if the Police considered this to be dangerous driving or they were just extremely annoyed at being overtaken by something with only three wheels).

The Model 70 could be adapted to suit the individual needs of the user, as there were 56 control combinations offer. The individual had a choice, among other things, of a steering wheel, motor cycle handle bars or an ingenious joystick which activated the brakes by lowering the stick.

At the time the last NHS Invacar purchase contracts ran out, in 1977, it was estimated that there were still 21,500 Invarcars in use in the UK. From then on, the NHS mobility scheme continued using suitably modified conventional passenger cars, leased to eligible people. This was a major improvement because handicapped people were able to travel with their family members in much safer vehicles.

It was originally intended that the Invacar would be withdrawn from use in 1981, but some people were so happy with their Invarcars that they continued using them. In fact, a decreasing number of Invarcars continued to be used in the UK until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003, when it became illegal to drive an NHS owned Invacar on UK roads.

Due to the increase of vehicles on the UK's roads by 2003 Invacars were considered to be unsafe, being built of flimsy fiberglass, with very little by way of crash protection. Also, by then, the Invacars could not meet new government regulations, which required approval under the Motorcycle Single Vehicle scheme; the brainchild of the European Union.

All, but a small handful, of the remaining Invacars were owned by the NHS and the entire NHS fleet was withdrawn, and together with the supporting spare parts, were crushed. Of those remaining, some are in museums, and the rest are in private ownership. Some of the private owners have managed to obtain a V5 document permitting their ongoing use by registering them as motorised tricycles, rather than motorised invalid carriages.

During the life span of the Invacars, 50 variants were actually manufactured. However, it was the Thundersley Invacar Model 70 that became the most popular of all the Invacars, as it remained in production until the end of the final contract in 1977.

When Bert Greeves had his 'Eureka' moment it is unlikely that he would have realised that his name would be associated with Invacars being in use on UK roads for over 5 decades.

Source Data: [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org), [www.3-wheeler.com](http://www.3-wheeler.com), [www.whichmobilitycar.co.uk](http://www.whichmobilitycar.co.uk), [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), [www.motaclarity.co.uk](http://www.motaclarity.co.uk), [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), [www.petrolblog.com](http://www.petrolblog.com)

**IAN PHIPPS**

## **THE CHANGING FACE OF TARPOTS OVER THE SEVEN DECADES FROM THE 1950's**

The area now occupied by Aldi has been home to many different businesses over the years. In the 1950's the haulage company, Essex Carriers (later Atlas Delivery) had a large and successful business operating there. From the 1980's the site was occupied by a number of DIY stores, firstly, Do It All, followed by Payless and finally Focus.

Focus closed down around 2011. The building sat empty for three or four years and then it was purchased by Aldi, who bulldozed the building and built their current store, which opened in 2015.

Where Tesco Express now stands was a garage and petrol filling station, selling various different brands of fuel over the years.

The building housing Cycle King, with flats above, is on the site where Max Motors once stood. Max Motors used to display their cars on the corner, where Beck Wealth Management now trades from. The Beck Wealth Management offices were previously occupied by the solicitors, Nairnsey, Fisher & Lewis. With the closure of Barclays Bank the solicitors moved over the road into the old bank building.

Between Cycle King and Beck Wealth Management used to be A W Alden, the funeral directors. This building is now occupied by Essex Double Glazing.

It is fascinating to think how many businesses have changed hands since the 1950's.

Source Data: [www.benfleethistory.org.uk](http://www.benfleethistory.org.uk) (Please note this is a direct copy from the Benfleet Community Archive contributed by Kathy Clements)

**MARION COLEMAN**

## **To all our readers and members**

As you will see from the following articles two of our members have chosen to research The Canvey Supply Company Ltd. They have both used very similar sources and their articles are similar. We have chosen to include both articles as they are not identical and so include different information.

We are continually grateful to all the sites we use including Benfleet Community Archive website, [www.benfleethistory.org.uk](http://www.benfleethistory.org.uk), and Canvey Community Archive website, [www.canveyisland.org.uk](http://www.canveyisland.org.uk), and acknowledge the hard work their researchers have put into gathering their research.

**Marion Coleman Chair Benfleet u3a**

## THE CANVEY SUPPLY COMPANY LTD

Canvey Supply is the oldest established Building Supply Company serving the local and surrounding area. It celebrated its centenary in 2019.

Founded by Eugene E. Lawrence in 1919, it coincided with the rise in the development of 'plotland' bungalows, both on the Island and on the mainland. This followed the break-up of the large estates of the landed gentry after the First World War, and the sale of their agricultural land.

It was an encounter with a member from one of the Island's well-known families, the Fielder family, during WW1 that brought Lawrence from his north London home to Canvey. Eugene, who was born in 1894, was a draftsman during the war working for the Ministry of War and designing submarine pens for the Royal Navy at Chatham.

He became firm friends with William Fielder and it proved to be the beginning of a lasting family relationship. Initially Eugene Lawrence was building 'classic' Canvey bungalows with corrugated roofs but it wasn't long before he moved into supplying materials to other builders, including the Fielder family who were developing the area between Long Road and Thorney Bay.

Eugene's wife, Irene, gave birth to John in 1927 and his brother Tom in 1933.

Eugene was given the opportunity to quote for materials to undertake a major road building programme on Canvey in 1928. It involved bringing in ballast, cement, aggregates etc. and he constructed the wharf alongside the current site at the Point and put in a private narrow gauge rail track, known as the Jubilee Track, to move materials. The company owned three Thames Barges at that stage including the 'Kate' and the 'Garland'.



Lawrence senior was still employing his architectural skills and designed the bus garage, now the museum, in Point Road, the Casino on the sea front and, in 1934, new premises for Canvey Supply in the High Street. The new building included the iconic, land mark clock tower that could be seen across the Island and beyond.

In 1940, with the threat of an enemy invasion, the Canvey name on the tower had to be boarded over, as part of the Government's efforts to remove and signs that could be of use to guide invading troops. The tower was eventually removed in 1967.

The family lived in a house on Long Road called Welbeck, a reference to Welbeck Street where there had been a family home in London. The Fielders lived nearby and the families remained close. Later John became one of the trustees of the Fielder estate; there were two trusts, one for employees and a charitable one which donated substantial sums to Southend Hospital and Canvey's War Memorial Hall.

With the advent of the Second World War, the company became involved in making concrete Anderson type shelters and with construction work on army installations at Shoeburyness. John was called up into the army but returned to the business after the war. Younger brother Tom did his national service but he too was straight back to the business afterwards.

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In the wake of the 1953 flood, building material was needed for repairs. Although after that disaster no building society would touch the Island for some years, the Small Dwellings Acquisition legislation enabled people to get council backed mortgages and the business started to prosper again.

In 1975 John and Tom expanded beyond the Island. They saw an advertisement in a newspaper for a site near the Manor Trading Estate and bought that. In 1980, they saw an opportunity to buy an old brewery site on London Road and moved there.

Eugene was an early member of the yacht club which started life in 1936. He bought a vessel from the Royal Navy in the mid-1930s and turned it into a comfortable yacht. He also purchased some land from the waterworks company, selling part of it on to the Club for its use. John and Tom followed in their father's footsteps both owing their own boats.

Canvey Supply is still a family run business today.

Source Data: <https://www.benfleethistory.org.uk/> & <https://www.canveyisland.org/>

**MAVIS REGAN**

## **CANVEY SUPPLY COMPANY LTD**

Canvey Supply Company was founded by Eugene Ernest Lawrence in 1919 and today is still run as a family business.

It was an encounter with a member of one of the Island's well-known families, the Fielder family that brought Eugene from his North London home to Canvey. Eugene, who was born in 1894, was a draftsman during the war working for the Ministry of War designing submarine pens for the Royal Navy at Chatham.

The man sitting next to him was William Fielder, brother of Lt. Col. Horace Fielder. They became firm friends which lasted many decades. Indeed, in the early days, William Fielder was a Company Director of Canvey Supply.

Initially, Eugene was building classic Canvey bungalows of the period with corrugated roofs. It was not long before he started supplying materials to other builders in the area. A significant development for the business came when he was given the opportunity to quote for materials to build a major road building programme on Canvey in 1928. This included lowering the High Street to ground level.

It involved bringing in ballast, cement, aggregates etc., and it was at this stage he constructed a wharf alongside the current site at the Point and put in a narrow-gauge rail track, known as the Jubilee Track, to move materials. The Company owned three Thames Barges and whilst some of the goods could be off loaded by crane, the moving of bulky ballast was done by men with shovels.

Eugene was still using his architectural skills. He designed the bus garage, now the museum, the Casino on the sea front and in 1934 the new premises for Canvey Supply in the High Street. This building included the iconic land mark clock tower that could be seen across the Island and beyond. In 1940 with the threat of enemy invasion, the tower had to be boarded over to prevent invading troops using it as a guide. The tower was eventually removed in 1967.

In 1927 Eugene's wife, Irene, gave birth to John, followed by his brother Tom in 1933. The family moved house regularly. Once a house was habitable, they would move in then move onto the next partially built property in order that the last "home" could be sold to a customer. The family finally gave up their nomadic life style and settled in a mock Tudor house in Long Road.

With the advent of the Second World War, the Company became involved in making concrete Anderson type shelters and with construction work on army installations at Shoeburyness. John was called up into the army and Tom did his national service.

Both brothers returning to the business after the war and national service. They were very hands on, no sitting in the office. There wasn't much business after the war. You could not get anything because of licensing. There were only four permissions a year from the council to build a home. It was very quiet apart from a bit of repair and alterations.

Due to the 1953 flood, building material was needed for repairs. No building Society would grant a mortgage for some years, but the Small Dwellings Acquisition legislation enabled people to get council backed mortgages. Also, the Lord Mayor of London's Relief Fund provided finance to put in cinder roads and Canvey Supply started to prosper again.

In 1975 John and Tom expanded the business and bought a site on the Manor Trading Estate. Then in 1980 they bought the old brewery site on London Road, moved there, and sold the earlier Benfleet site.

It was not work all the time. The family developed a keen interest in yachts. The local yacht club had started life in 1936 and Eugene was an early member. He bought a vessel from the Royal Navy in the mid 1930's and when building work was slack, he would get his carpenters across to the boat to do some work, turning the boat in a comfortable yacht.

He also purchased some land from the waterworks company, selling part of it on to the Club for its use. John and Tom followed in their father's footsteps, both having their own boats.

Eugene remained at the helm of Canvey Supply until 1968 when he was diagnosed with cancer, he died in 1970. John his wife Vera, and Tom were committed to the business and took over in 1968. Sadly, they also have since died and the business is run by Tom's daughters, Sarah and Jane.

At one time the Company employed 100 people, today there are just 50. The current economic climate is difficult but the company has planning permission to build some houses on its founding site.

Source Data: <https://www.canveyisland.org/>

**LEE KING**