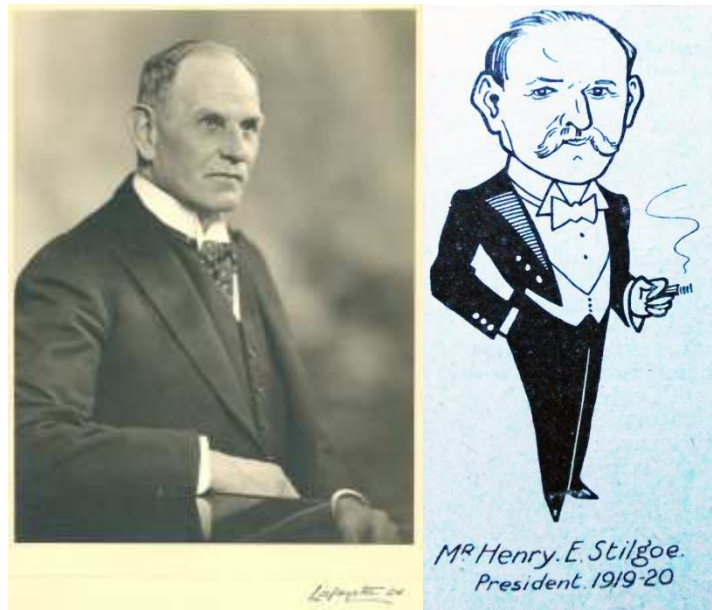


HENRY EDWARD STILGOE, C.B.E., M.I.C.E., (1867 – 1943)



Richard Stilgoe writes:

My Grandfather Henry Edward Stilgoe was born on 4th March 1867 at The Grounds, Adderbury, Oxfordshire, where his father Zachariah Walden Stilgoe farmed. The family has been farming in and around Deddington since the 16th century. His older brother Hugh William inherited the farm, which is now farmed by his grandson, my cousin Robert. Henry and his younger brother Wilfred had to find other professions. Henry became a civil engineer, Wilfred a solicitor.

All three brothers went to school at Christ's College Finchley. Henry arrived there in 1880, and soon won prizes for Holiday Work, Drawing and General Improvement. If ever a life was dedicated to General Improvement, it was his – witness his work for the people of Dover, Birmingham and London.

He trained at Crystal Palace School of Engineering, and after brief stints working in Lewisham, then on the Barking and Pitsea Railway and in Sandgate in Kent, became Borough Engineer for Dover in 1896. In 1906 he moved to a grander job as City Engineer in Birmingham, where he developed the first town planning scheme, and very possibly invented the dual carriageway.

From 1919 to 1933 he was chief engineer of the Metropolitan Water Board, where he revolutionised London's water supply. London's water comes from three main sources –from the River Thames, from wells, and from the River Lea (which is now properly visible as it runs through the Olympic Park). H.E.S built the Queen Mary Reservoir near Heathrow (opened by George V and Queen Mary in 1925), the Grade II listed Kempton fast filter house, and the fine new pumping station at Deptford.



HES, Queen Mary, three dignitaries, King George V.



Kempton Park Primary Filter House

Deptford Pumping Station

Many of his buildings for the pumping and processing of Thames water are still clearly visible by the M3 and the A316. His vision effectively future-proofed London's water supply, and many contemporary reports testify to this. As a result, he was made a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, President of the Institute of Water Engineers, and in 1932 was appointed C.B.E. Not only this, but he was by all accounts loved and respected by all who knew or worked with him. With failing health, he retired from the Metropolitan Water Board in 1933, after a lifetime dedicated to General Improvement.

He died on 12th March 1943, on the day I was due to be born. With an unselfishness most of my family would say was unusual, I waited another fortnight before arriving.

H.E.S had three children – my aunt Vera (who lived in Hempton outside Deddington), my aunt Betty who lived her last years in Deddington itself, and in between them my father John. My father went to Dartmouth and thence into the Royal Navy.



John Henry Tweedie Stilgoe

He was invalided out with TB when he was 26, which must have been a bitter disappointment, and went to work for H.E.S. at the Metropolitan Water Board. Being very bright (he had passed first or second in all his naval engineering exams) he soon became chief engineer to the Mid-Wessex Water board, based in Camberley. We could have stayed there, in a comfortable and predictable place. Then suddenly in 1946 we moved to Liverpool, where he got a job as deputy Water Engineer. Soon he became Chief Engineer, and developed schemes for Liverpool's water supply every bit as innovative as his father's schemes for London.

Now Liverpool for me was a wonderful place to grow up, what with the Beatles and the Liverpool Poets, but why did we leave the cosy south east for this strange land?

In 1898 H.E.S, my grandfather, applied for the job of Liverpool's Water Engineer. He failed to get it. My dad applied for the same job in 1946 and *did* get it. For someone who must have felt under the shadow of his admired and successful father, that small success must have been sweet. I'm sure that's one reason we went to Liverpool, and I'm so grateful that we did. And I am so proud of the father I knew and loved, and the Grandfather I am gradually learning about.

Richard Stilgoe 9th January 2014.