

THE BAGGESEN NURSERY IN PEMBURY

Written By: Edward James Gilbert-Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada

Date: November 5, 2018

OVERVIEW

The Baggesen nursery was one of two large nurseries in the village of Pembury in the period of 1927 to 1968. The nursery was begun by Niels Immanuel Baggesen (1876-1961) who had been born in Denmark and Began his working career in the horticultural field as a gardener but by 1911 he was working as a nursery manager in Oxfordshire. He had married Sarah Grace Thompson (1876-1951) at Lewisham, Kent and with her had five children before 1911 including a son John Henry Baggesen who was born 1904 in Cardiff, Wales where the family had lived between 1902 and about 1908 before moving to Oxfordshire.

Neils passed away in Pembury in the 4th qtr of 1960. His son John Henry Baggesen had grown up with the same love of plants as his father and joined him in the nursery business in Pembury and when his father retired and later passed away John took over the running of the business.

The nursery that operated appears in directories under various names and suggests from the names that the site of their nursery changed over time. It's a somewhat confusing group of references making tracing the nursery business in the village difficult. From 1927 until about 1934 it was referred to as the "Woodgate Nursery" and as "The Shack, Woodgate Nurseries" but by 1937 directories gave "Baggesen's Nurseries (1936) Ltd, Hastings Road", which listing was still in use up to and including 1950. In 1950 the first appearance of Neil's son John is found given from 1950 to at least 1955 as "Baggesen Jn. H., nurseryman, Highfield Nursery, Hastings Road". Directories of 1961 to 1963 gave "J.H. Baggesen, nurseryman, Stone Court Nurseries, Lower Green". The last listing for Baggesen in Pembury was that of 1968 as "Jn. H. Baggesen, nurseryman, Highfield Nursery, Hastings Road.



In this article I provide information about the Baggesen family with a concentration on the time they were residents of Pembury. Information, maps and photographs are also provided about their nursery (nurseries).

THE BAGGESEN FAMILY

Neils Immanuel Baggesen was born June 5, 1876 in Odense, Denmark, and given as the son of Harald Albrecht Emmanuel Baggesen and Marie Baggesen, nee Clausen. There is no indication that Neils parents moved to England and information about Neils siblings (if any) was not investigated. Harald was a "premier Lieutenant of the 2nd Dragon Regiment.

The 1901 census, taken at 38 High Street in Worthing Sussex gave Neils as born 1876 in Denmark and living as a boarder with the William H. Downer family (a fruit grower) and working for him as a gardener no doubt propagating and planting fruit trees.

In the 4th qtr of 1901 Neils marriage to Sarah Grace Thompson (1876-1951) was registered.

Sarah Grace Thompson was born February 22, 1876 at Catford, Kent and was one of several children born to John Thompson (born 1828 in Derby, Derbyshire) and Sarah Grace Thompson (born 1838 in Topsham, Derbyshire). At the time of the 1891 census Sarah was the youngest of four children living with their parents at 17 Helvetia Street in Lewisham, Kent. Her father was living on own means; her sister Mary (born 1866 Holborn, Lanc) was a dressmaker worker; her brother William (born 1868 Holborn, Lanc) was a butcher worker.

At the time of the 1901 census Sarah was living as the sister in law to Edward Baker (a police constable) and his wife Mary A. Baker and Mr Bakers two children. Also there was Sarah's widowed mother Sarah Grace Thompson, age 64. Mary A. Baker was the married sister of Sarah G. Thompson referred to in the 1891 census above. Sarah at that time had no occupation and was still living with the Baker family up to the time of her marriage to Niels.

The records of the Freemasons listed Niels Immanuel Baggesen as born 1876 with the occupation of florist on the date of his joining the Freemasons on May 14, 1903 in Cardiff, Wales (the Tennant Lodge).

A 1907 directory listing for Neils gave him as a florist at 35 Albany Street in Cardiff. Wales.

Neils and his wife Sarah had five children according to the 1911 census but by 1911 one had not survived. The four surviving children were Harold Immanuel Baggesen born 1902 in Cardiff; John Henry Baggesen born 1904 in Cardiff; Molly Dagmar born 1907 in Cardiff and Thelma Haller Baggesen born February 17, 1910 in Carterton, Oxfordshire and died November 11, 2010 at Seaford, Sussex. More information about these children is given later but shown below is a photo of Thelma's grave.



The 1911 census, taken at Alvescot, Black and Bourton, Oxfordshire gave Neils as a nursery manager worker. With him was his wife Sarah and their children Harold Immanuel, John Henry, Molly Dagmar and Thelma Haller Baggesen, the eldest of which were attending school. The census recorded that the family were living in premises of four rooms; that they had been married 10 years and that of their five children four were still living.

A listing for 1939 taken at Oak Beams on Friday Street in Horsham, Sussex gave Niel I. Baggesen as a consulting horticultural adviser born June 5,1876. With him was his wife Sarah Grace Baggesen (unpaid domestic work) born February 22,1876.

The death of Sarah Grace Baggesen was registered in Tonbridge in 1951. She died in Pembury May 14,1951 and was buried in the Pembury burial ground. A photo of her grave is shown below.



The death of Niels Immanuel Baggesen was registered in Tonbridge in the 4th qtr of 1961 but he passed away in Pembury on December 18,1961. He was buried in the Pembury burial ground.

THE BAGGESEN CHILDREN

As noted from the 1911 census. Neils and his wife Sarah had five children but only four of them were still living at the time of this census. Given below is some brief information about them. Of particular interest are his two sons Harold Immanuel and John Henry Baggesen who worked for at time with their father in the nursery business although John Henry Baggesen was the one who took over his father's business in Pembury.

A directory for 1939 listed Thelma as a hairdresser. With her was her sister Molly, an insurance clerk, and her brother Harold a landscape foreman heavy worker. They were living at that time at "Viborg" in Pembury which according to the order in which the census was taken appears to be near No. 3 High Street.

[1] HAROLD IMMANUEL BAGGESEN..... He was born August 30,1902 in Cardiff. At the time of the 1911 census he was living with his parents and siblings in Oxfordshire and attending school. In 1940 in Pembury he married Elsie Goldsmith(1907-1990) who was born in 1907 and died in Tunbridge Wells in the 4th qtr of 1990. Harold and his wife had a son John Neils Baggesen who's birth was registered in the 1st qtr of 1944. Harold's death was registered in Tonbridge in the 3rd qtr of 1978. He had died on August 27,1978 and was buried at Pembury September 4,1978. Elise Goldsmith was born May 18,1907. Her death was registered in the Tunbridge Wells district in the 4th qtr of 1990.

[2] JOHN HENRY BAGGESEN.....He was born June 17,1904 in Cardiff and at the time of the 1911 census he was living with his parents and siblings in Oxfordshire and attending school. John appears to never been married. His death was registered in Haywards Heath in the 4th qtr of 1985. A passenger list gave John Henry Baggesen born 1904 Cardiff who departed from Liverpool and arrived September 25,1927 at Boston, Mass, USA on board the ship LACONIA. He was given in the passenger list as a resident of Pembury with the occupation of orchid specialist. He was still single at that time. A second passenger list gave John Henry Baggesen born 1903 departing

from Boston Mass. USA on the ship MAGDAPUR of the Brockleband Line and arrived in London April 11,1929. He was given as a merchant of the Hardy Plant Nurseries in Pembury. Probate records gave John Henry Baggesen of 2 Kipling Court Winnals Park Haywards Heath west Sussex when he died October 23,1985 with an estate valued at 190,201 pounds.

[3] MARJORIE MARIE G. BAGGESEN.....She was born in the 1st qtr of 1906 in Cardiff but died in the 4th qtr of 1908. She was buried November 5,1908 while living on Whitechurch Road, Llanduff,Wales.

[4] MOLLY DAGMAR BAGGESEN.....She was born December 24,1906 in Cardiff and was living with her parents and siblings in Oxfordshire at the time of the 1911 census. She died February 28,2005 at Haywards Heath in a nursing home called 'Oakwood Court'. She never married.

[5] THELMA HALLER BAGGESEN.....She was born February 17,1910 in Carterton, Oxfordshire and died November 11,2010 at Seaford,Sussex. She married Wilfred W. Kenward(1907-1992) at Lewes ,Sussex April 22, 1940 and with him had three daughters born at Chanctonbury between 1941 and 1946. Thelma was buried at Lewes Cemetery, Rotten Row, Lewes, Sussex.

Katherine Franklin of the Department of History, University London Birkbeck College gave the following information about the children. As can be seen the children attended school in Groombridge in the pre WW 1 years which strongly suggests that while the family lived in Groombridge Niels worked at Hollamby's Nursery in Groombridge.

"1913.....Aug, John won 3rd prize (small boys) in races at Groombridge Schools treat"

"1913.....Aug. John & Harold both won progress prizes at Groombridge Scfchool with John winning first prize for collecting Queen Wasps (28) and John won a Scripture Certificate. In infants Milly won a Merit Certificate."

" 1914.....Feb. Molly had several mentions in report of Groombridge School entertainment"

"1914.....July- All three children John Henry, Molly won prizes at school".

"1914...Oct. School wild flower collection competition in which Harold won a 2nd and Molly a 3rd"

"1915...May. Groombridge Scout sports,John (1st) in 100 yards and Harold a 1st in sack race".

"1915....Dec. Harold saved another boy from drowning in the flooded river at Groombridge".

"1916....Nov. Both John and Harold won prizes in the school allotment camp"

" 1916....Dec. Mr Baggesen a member of the Groombridge Welcome Slate Club (32 members away on active service out of 127)"

"1921...July. Molly in school play at High Brooms Girls School"

"1922....Jan. Miss Baggesen appointed Monitress at St Lukes Infant's School"

"1924...Molly passes 60wpm shorthand at the Technical Institute on Monson Road, Tunbridge Wells."



THE BAGGESEN CAREER AND NURSERY

An article in a horticultural publication about apple trees, specifically “Niels Baggesen’s Golden Lonicera” (photo opposite) described this hedging plant as being extraordinary as a beautiful, easy and indestructible plant that now graces gardens and public spaces in its millions and is named after Niels Immanuel Baggesen, because he developed it. In part the author states “ Sometime in the second half of the 19th century a certain Neils Immanuel Bassesen was born. Before the century was out, he made the journey to England where he spent the rest of his life. In the 1890’s he was working at Ladd’s Nursery in Swanley, Kent and, by 1900, was a gardener at Kew. From there he moved to Cardiff where he set up a nursery of his own. He married and had two sons, Harald and John, who finally joined him in his last horticultural business, a nursery called The Shack in Pembury, Kent. The London Gazette of August 6,1926 contains a list of aliens to whom certificates of naturalization have been granted by the Secretary of State and who’s oaths were registered during the month of July 1926 which list includes the name of Niels Immanuel Baggesen; Denmark; Nursery Foreman; The Shack, Pembury, Kent July 26,1926. The Shack closed in 1970. In the 1960’s Baggesen was working with *Lonicera nitida* and developed from a cutting a genetic fluke. The story of this plants development though is tinged with sadness as Baggesen received no recognition during his lifetime. The *Lonicera nitida* ‘Baggesen’s Gold’ only started its well-deserved conquest of the world’s gardens after the nursery in Pembury had closed and was only recognized by the RHS in 1993 with an AGM after his death. During his life he made numerous attempts to gain this coveted award after its introduction around 1967, but was repeatedly rebuffed. Bitterly, he put this down to snobbery. He was an elite plantsman but never a member of the elite. He deserved better and though his horticultural legacy would have been assured even if it rested solely on *Lonicera nitida* ‘Baggesen’s Gold’ AGM, he also introduced (among others) the false cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* ‘Pembury Blue’ (named after Pembury, Kent) that enjoys similar popularity. Nobody can be that lucky. It also gained its AGM in 1993”.



Given below is a timeline of events related to the Neils and his career by Kathryn Franklin, who I gave as a reference earlier.

“1926..July, Mr Baggesen displayed (on-competitive) Japanese shrubs at the Pembury Gardens Show”

“1926...Sept. Niels of the Hardy Plant Nursery, Pembury advertised Peonies, also delphiniums”

“1926...Oct. An advertisement appeared in Pembury Village News 78 for a free catalogue”

“1926...Oct. An advertisement gave “ Desirable building plot for sale-full particulars from H.I. Baggesen, Hardy Plant Nursersies, Pembury”.

“1926...Nov. Niels won 2nd prize in the poultry class at the Pembury Gardeners Autumn Show and also had plants on display”.

"1927 – July NIB won silver medal at T/W Flower Show"

"1928 – NIB of The Nurseries, Pem exhibited at Chelsea (no Medal)"

"1928 – June, Motor bike for sale – Baggesen, The Shack, Pem"

"1928 – Oct, NIB crashed his car (see below)"

"1928 – Nov, Advert for Gardener in Swanley, apply B's Nursery, Pem"

"1929 – June, Messr B's Nursery won silver medal at RHS Halls"

"1929 – July, advert for someone to learn Nursery work"

"1929 – July, Pemb Flower Show (held on High Gee Meadow), Mr B snr had a display fr Japan & Californian Desert "

"1930 – B's Nursery won a silver medal at Chelsea for a group of shrubs "

"1930 – July B's won a silver gilt medal in trade class at T/W Flower Show"

"1932 – Baggesens Nursery adjoins the Woodsgate Guest House, a former 16th century Coach"

"1932 – Aug, Mr B a judge at Goudhurst Show"

"1933 – John B selling a car, c/o The Nursery"

"1933 – Made a non-competitive display at Staplehurst Fete"

"1935 – Advertising Garden Design (Pem 107)"

"1935 – May, Messrs Baggesens Nurseries Ltd donate a tree for Jubilee celebrations in Pembury also one for Castle Lawn, Tonbridge"

"1935 – 4 July won 2nd prize for trade stand at T/W Flower Show "

"1935 – 19 July, Baggesens won 2nd prize for Plants and cut flowers in trade classes at Tonbridge Flower Show"

"1935 – Aug, John Baggesen of Pembury Nurseries gave a lecture to T/W Gardeners Assn"

"1936 – April, meeting of Creditors of Baggesen's Nursery Ltd held (W C Cooksey, Director).Reformed as Baggesens Nurseries (1936) Ltd"

"1938 – Nov, Niels B on Jury for fatal accident at Hildenborough "

"1939 – J Baggesen played Table Tennis for team Woodsgate"

"1939 – July, won a silver medal for ornamental trees at T/W Show"

"1939 – Oct, advertising help with Wartime gardening"

"1940 –March, HB listed as a chief mourner at funeral of Mrs Goldsmith (future wife's mother)"

"1940 – March, gifted shrubs to Recreation Ground"

"1941 – Advertising advice on War Time gardening (Pem 107)"

"1941/42 – Feb/Mar, Adverts for veg seedlings, to be ordered in advance"

"1946/7 –often advertising for staff for Landscape Dept "

"1948 – March, Mrs Baggesen of Ripley, Romford Rd, selling pair of unworn shoes "

"1948 – July, A. F Phillips of Messrs Baggesens Ltd of Pembury, a director of Clarks Florist in Dover. Baggesens had recently acquired control of Clarks."

"1949 – March, first advert for John Heny Baggesen (JNH)"

"1949 –11 Nov, BN(1936)Advertising Garden Design (Pem 107)"

"1949 – 18 Nov, JHB Advertising plants at Highfield Nursery (Pem 62)"

"1949 – 25 Nov, seems to be last advert for BN(1936) "

"1949/52 – John H B advertising hedging plants etc, Highfield Nursery (Pem 62)"

A review of local directories gave the following results:

- 1927.....N.I. Baggesen, nurseryman The Shack and Hayes Wood
- 1931..... Baggesen, The Shack, Woodgate Nurseries
- 1934.....Baggesen, Woodgate Nurseries
- 1937.....Baggesens Nurseries (1936) Ltd, Hastings Road
- 1938.....Baggesens Nurseries (1936) Ltd, nurseryman and seedsman Tel 107
- 1940.....Baggesens Nurseries (1936) Ltd Hastings Road
- 1948.....same as 1940
- 1950.....Baggesens Jn. H. nurseryman, Highfield Nursery, Hastings Road
- 1950.....Baggesens Nursersies (1936) Ltd, Hastings Road
- 1955.....Baggesens Jn. H. nurseryman, Highfield Nursery, Hastings Rd
- 1959.....Jn. H. Baggesen, newsagent High St and nursery Hastings, Road.
- 1961.....J.H. Baggesen, nurseryman, Stone Court Nurseries, Lower Green
- 1963.....same as 1961
- 1968.....Jn. H. Baggesen, nurseryman, Highfield Nursery, Hastings Road.

It is known that a large house on Hastings Road at No. 31 that was called Highfield or Highfield House was demolished in 1995. This residence was located on the north side of Hastings Road west of Belfield Road. In 1899 Highfield was the residence of Robert Mather a justice of the peace. No doubt the home was a large residence located on large landscaped grounds. Baggesen may have borrowed the name for his nursery as he had done for 'Woodgate' and "Stone Court" or the possibility exists that he had leased part of the grounds of Highfield for his nursery. No maps labelling the actual location of his nursery were found. Today there is a home called "Highfield' occupied by Nicky Todd, a photographer at "Highfield House 31 Hastings Road" which house may have been a modern replacement for the old Highfield, constructed on part of the site of the old home after 1995.

The Journal of the Kew Guild of 1958 listed " Baggesen, Neils, 'Viborg, Pembury Tunbridge Wells 1936". The reference to 'Vibortg" was the name of his residence and 1936 referred to the date of incorporation as Baggesen Nurseries (1936) Ltd. The London Gazette of April 4, 1952 gave " Baggesens Nurseries (1936) Ltd...At an extraordinary meeting of the members of this company held at 2-3 Duke Street, St James, London Tuesday March 25, 1952 it was resolved that the company cannot by reason of its liabilities continue in business and that the company would be wound up voluntarily and that Mr. Herbert William Pitt, a chartered accountant of Salisbury, Square House, Salisbury Square be appointed liquidator to wind up the business. A subsequent meeting of creditors of the company was held at 2-3 Duke street and it was resolved the business be wound up. Signed by C.L. Walker, Chairman". It appears from this announcement that the business came to an end under that name and after creditors were paid off any residual funds went to John Henry Baggesen who carried on the business under his own name. The local directories confirm this.

Advertisements for the business in Pembury recorded that they sold trees, shrubs, climbing and hedging plants as well as flowering and evergreen shrubs.

The Journal of the Kew Guild of 1961 gave the following " N.I. Baggesen.....With deep regret we record that Niel Immanuel Baggesen died on December 18,1961 at age 85. Mr. Baggesen was born June 5,1876 at Odense, Denmark. Before entering Kew he worked for 5 years in practical horticulture including eight months at Messrs John Laing and Sons, Catford Nurseries. From there he was at Kew for over 2 years, such a long stay being unusual for a 'foreigner". He left Kew in December 1900. After leaving he opened a nursery in Whitchurch, Glamorgan, Wales with a florists shop in Cardiff. Later he travelled south and founded a nursery in Pembury, Kent. He was a keen plantsman, loving trees, shrubs and other flowering plants. One photograph sent by his daughter Molly shows him standing by a fine camellia in the front of his house. It was taken during 1951, and being in full bloom he was obviously and rightly very proud of it. We extend our sincere sympathies to his daughter and to his son John H. Baggesen, who has a nursery in Pembury and carrying on the name in the nursery world".