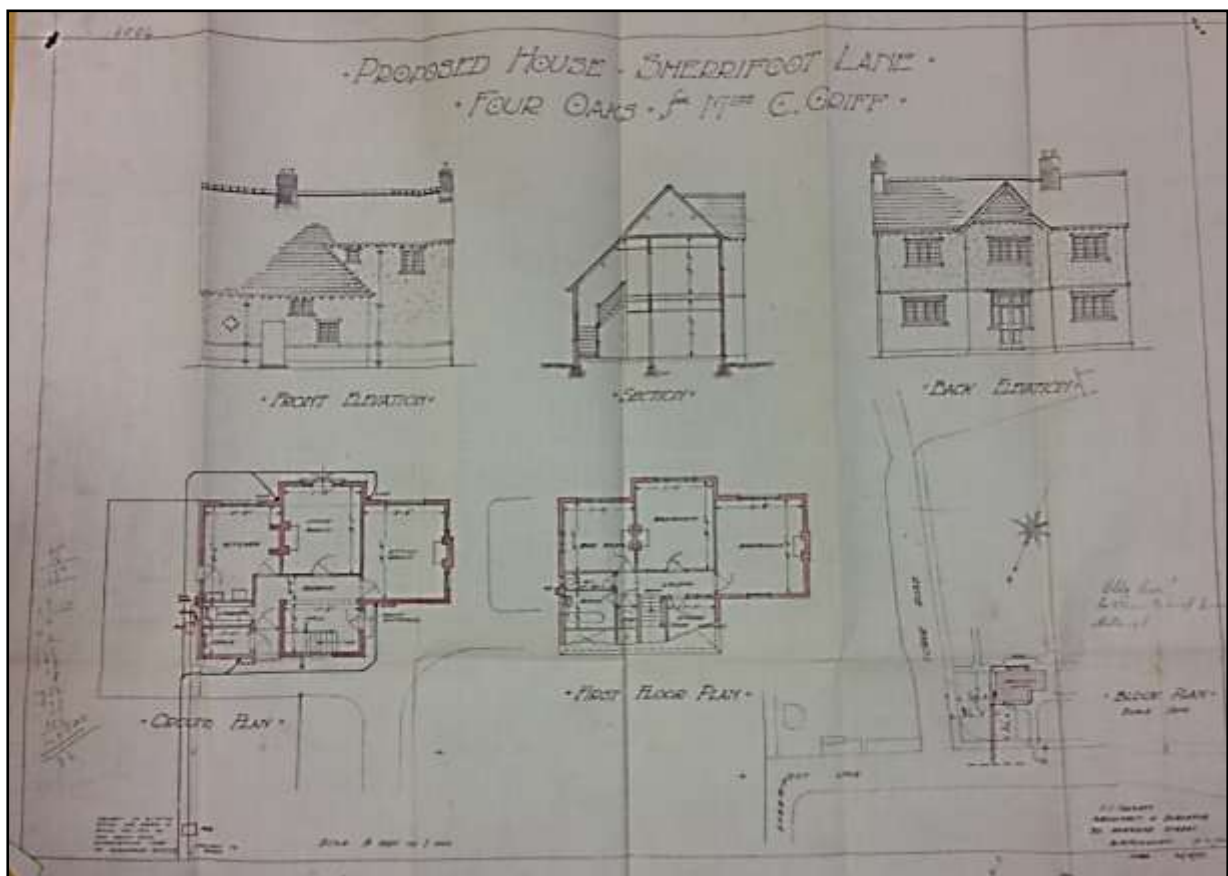


Cleone de Hevenham Benest (aka Miss C Griff) 1880~1963

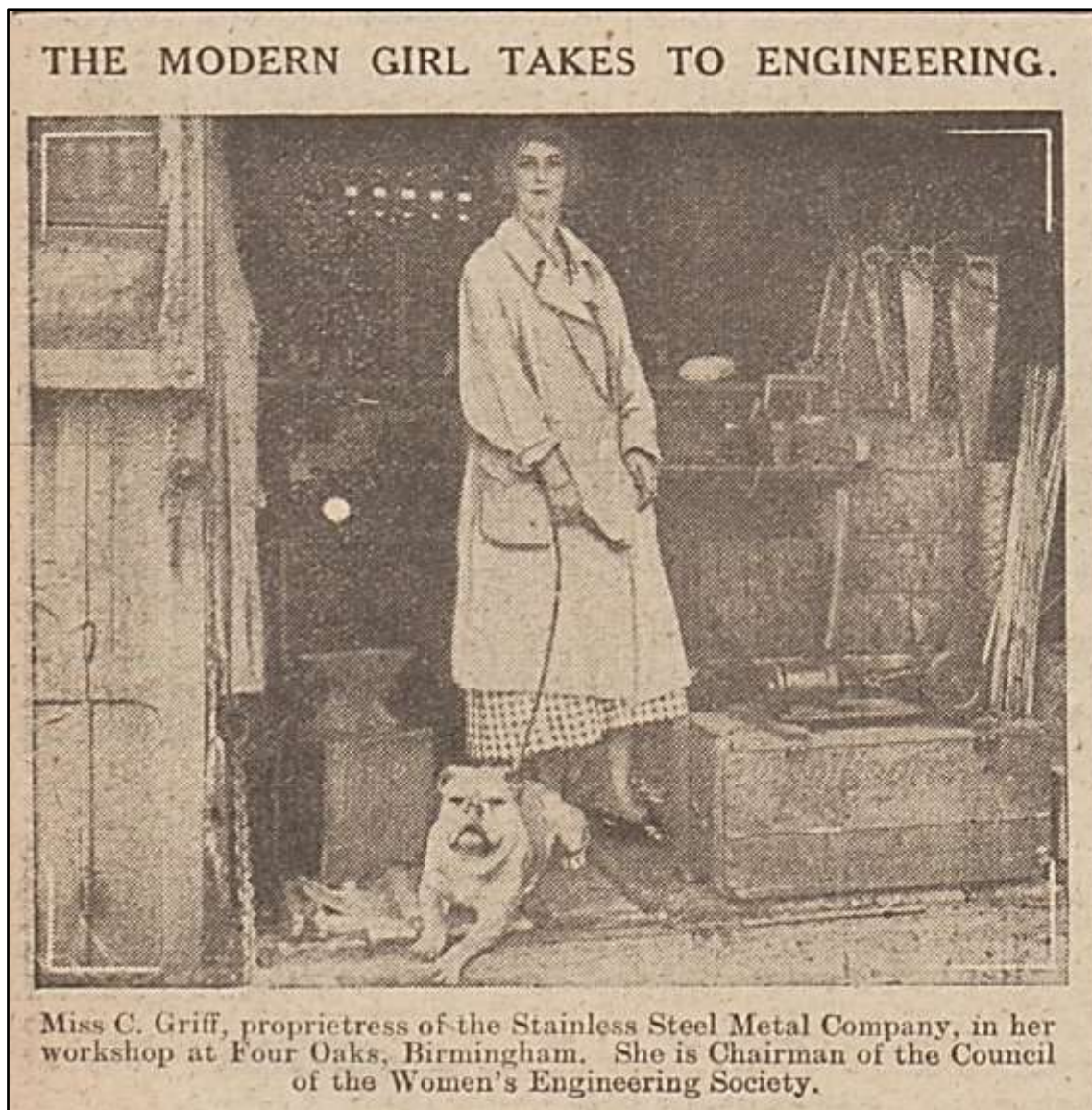
by Janet Jordan

Early in the 1920s, an attractive and talented woman put in an application for planning permission to build a house in Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield which she called *Wildwood* at 26 Sherifoot Lane. In the 2020s, this property has now been replaced by a residential development.¹



Planning Application No. 3004 for *Wildwood*²⁺³

Miss C Griff, as she called herself then, later applied to build a Motor Home and Tool Shed on the site⁴⁺⁵ - not the normal action of most women at that time! But there was something unusual about her. She was a pioneer woman, a remarkable engineer and a metallurgist.



Miss C. Griff standing beside her new shed.⁴⁺⁵
(*Sunday Illustrated*, 15th April 1923, *British Newspaper Archive*)

There is still an unresolved mystery, however, surrounding her name; Cleone de Heveningham Benest, Cleone de Heveningham Griff, Cleone Griff, Miss C. Griff and Miss Clayton Griff, were all pseudonyms which she used for many years.⁶

Her skills were such that she featured in many newspaper articles of the time. One (see next page), taken from *The Vote* newspaper of the 7th December, 1923, welcomed her into the ranks of the Women's Freedom League and detailed her many achievements. The object of that League was to secure for women the Parliamentary vote.

This same newspaper reported that she was the first woman to obtain the R.A.C. mechanical proficiency certificate and that she handled cars of every description. She was also the first woman member of the Institute of Automobile Engineers and Chairman of the Women's Engineering Society.

THE VOTE,
DEC. 7, 1923.
ONE PENNY.

OUR ELECTION CAMPAIGNS.

THE VOTE

THE ORGAN OF THE WOMEN'S FREEDOM LEAGUE.

VOL. XXIV. No. 737.

(Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper and transmissible through the post in the United Kingdom at the newspaper rate of postage, but to Canada and Newfoundland at the Magazine rate.)

FRIDAY, DEC. 7, 1923

OBJECT: To secure for Women the Parliamentary vote as it is or may be granted to men; to use the powers already obtained to elect women in Parliament, and upon other public bodies, for the purpose of establishing equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes, and to promote the social and industrial well-being of the community.

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

WOMEN'S CAREERS.—I. WOMEN ENGINEERS.

WOMEN AT HOME AND ABROAD.

TRAINING FOR WOMEN.

PRISONS AND WOMEN. F. A. U.

WOMEN AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

A BELGIAN SORTING-HOUSE FOR BOYS.

By S. Margery Fry, J.P.

INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS IN THE ORIENT.

BOOK REVIEWS.

WOMEN'S CAREERS.—I. WOMEN ENGINEERS.

Our members will join us in welcoming to our ranks Miss Cleone de H. Griff, A.M.I.A.E., Member of the Iron and Steel Institute, etc., and in congratulating the Birmingham Branch of the Women's Freedom League on securing so valuable a recruit.

Miss Griff is, in every sense of the word, a pioneer woman. Since 1904 an owner driver of an automobile, she was the first woman to obtain the R.A.C. mechanical proficiency certificate, and was one of the first women technical contributors to the motor Press. She has handled cars of every description, from the high-powered racer to the heavy motor lorry, and at all times with marked success. She is not only the first woman member of the Institute of Automobile Engineers, but Chairman of the Women's Engineering Society.

Miss Griff holds certificates from the Board of Education, and from London City and Guilds, and is a member of the Iron and Steel Institute, and of one of the most important scientific societies in the Provinces—the Birmingham Metallurgical Society. She began her engineering career early in life, and has, by sheer pluck and determination, worked her way up to the position she now holds. Her articles in technical papers, and her lectures on technical subjects, are as much appreciated as well known in engineering circles.

In the early days of the war, Miss Griff carried on business in London as a consulting engineer, and on such matters as the installation of pumping and

lighting plants, especially in country houses, as well as on farm machinery, motor ploughs, and tractors, she had no serious rival. Later, during the war, Miss Griff was concerned with aircraft construction, and dealt with such questions as the production and supply of tools and raw materials.



MISS GRIFF.

She is at present the first woman Chairman and Managing Director of the Stainless and Non-corrosive Metals Company, the Board of which is composed solely of women, and has a woman auditor and a woman secretary. Owing to illness, Miss C. M. Davis, who with Miss Griff was joint managing director, has retired, and two other women, the Hon. Gabrielle Borthwick, and Lady Gertrude Crawford, have joined the Board as directors. Miss Borthwick, who is the daughter of a former Lord Borthwick, is the Governing Director of Borthwick Garages, Ltd., whose principal premises are in Brick Street, W. Lady Gertrude Crawford, who is a sister of the Earl of Sefton, is also a director of Borthwick Garages, Ltd. She is the only woman freeman of the Turners' Company.

Amongst the objects of the Company is the employment of women in all stages of the work. As a pioneer and leading woman engineer, Miss Griff is convinced that there is a wide field for women in that profession, and many openings should be available for women, who possess the necessary qualifications, as consulting engineers, laboratory assistants, lecturers, factory and

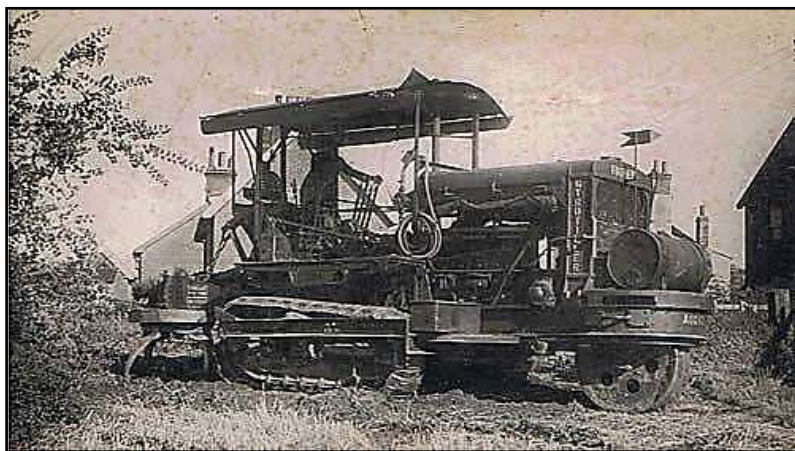
Image by copyright holder unknown. Please contact us via spott@britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk if you wish to share rights to this title.

Extract from 'The Vote' 7th December 1923
(British Newspaper Archive)

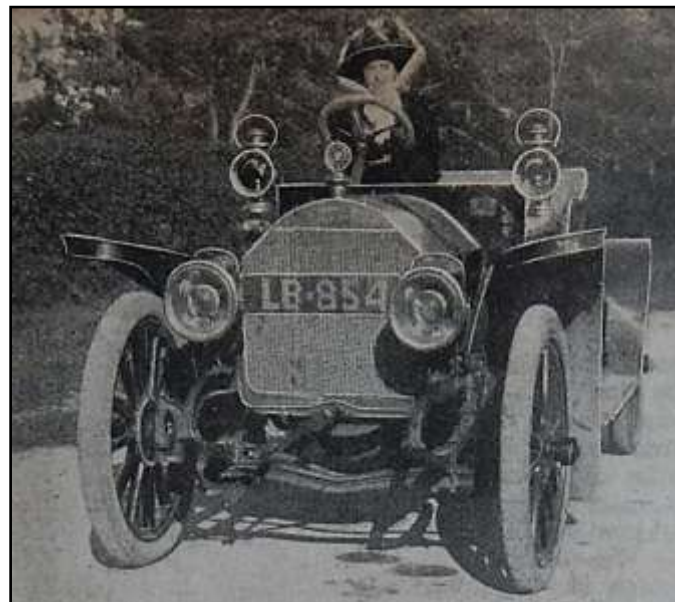
She also held certificates from the Board of Education and the London City and Guilds, and was a member of the Iron and Steel Institute and the Birmingham Metallurgical Society.⁶

Her war work was also mentioned, remarking that she was convinced openings should be available for women who possess the necessary qualifications as consulting engineers, laboratory assistants, lecturers, etc.

Many other newspapers reported on her skills with all things mechanical. This picture shows a gyrotillage, used for ripping up heavily overgrown land. In the 1939 registration for ID cards she described herself as a *Gyrotillage executive*!



A Gyrotillage⁶



Miss Griff in her Fiat⁶



Miss Griff in her Lanchester Tonneau⁶ (possibly outside *Wildwood*, 26 Sherifoot Lane)

During the time she lived in Four Oaks, she had her own company, i.e. *The Stainless and Non-Corrosive Metals Company Limited* of 14 Weaman Street, Birmingham, and the Women's Engineering Society met at her home. She also contributed regular articles to *The Woman Engineer* and gave six broadcast talks in 1926-7 on BBC Radio on various aspects of engineering, aimed at housewives.⁶

In 1928 she moved away to the Isle of Wight, reverting to the name of Miss Cleone de Hevenham Benest.

More information about Miss C Griff can be seen on several other websites, including *The Round-about in Sherifoot Lane* on www.sclhrg.org.uk .

September, 2026

Sources:

1. Sutton Coldfield Electoral Registers, Archives and Collections: Library of Birmingham
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3. Archives and Collections, Library of Birmingham (holder of planning applications)
4. www.sclhrg.org.uk, Index to Building Plans Register, Books 1-27, Planning Application No. 3183
5. Archives and Collections, Library of Birmingham (holder of planning applications)
6. [Miss Benest and Miss Griff – one woman, several names, many talents. Part 2 of a strange tale. – women engineers' history](#)

My thanks go to Nina C. Baker who introduced me to Miss Griff. (see: [Scholar: Nina Baker - Women Also Know History](#)). She is also the author of my source No. 6.