



The history of the Flavel family in manufacturing can be traced back over three hundred years. Subsequently the firm was steered by members of that family in Leamington for nigh on 140 years. It is a long and quite complicated story involving this family of men with strong personalities. Reports differ on a number of facts and we have relied on contemporary sources when readily accessible.

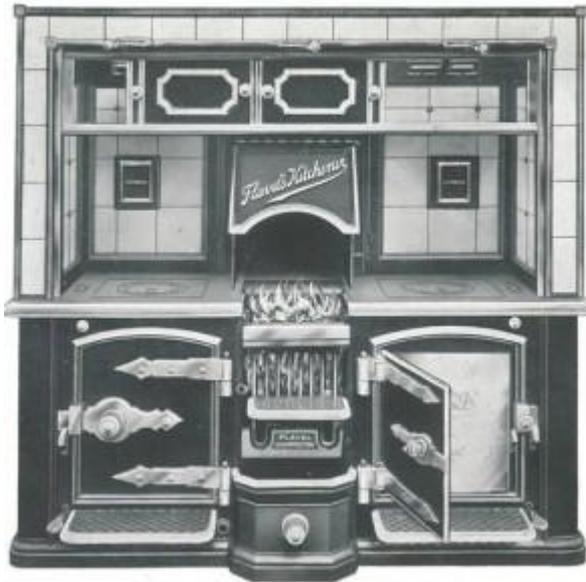
The earliest confirmed report about the family is that **William Flavel** ran a business in the middle of the seventeenth century in Bilston in the Black Country, a couple of miles east of the centre of Wolverhampton. He made armouries, including gunpowder, which was a profitable industry in that time of frequent warfare.

A descendant, **John Flavel** (1754 to 1834), was recorded running a metal-working business in Bilton near Rugby and he was also an armourer as well as a smith. It was said by the company that this business began in 1777 (see logo above).

A son of John, another **William Flavel** (1779 to 1844), was trained in metal working by an uncle in Coventry. It appears that he was ambitious to take advantage of the early growth of Leamington and moved to a house and workshop at Gloucester House in Church Street (on the corner of Gloucester Street) in the town in 1803. It is said that his unique idea was to make Russian vapour baths to complement the mineral water baths in the town. Sadly, that idea did not flourish despite the approval of a Russian visitor, Major General Sabloukoff, although William did advertise a vapour bath at Hygeia House in Bath Street in 1832.

In 1828 William attempted to heat the Episcopal Chapel (Christchurch) with coke with little success. Sadly, there was a flirtation with bankruptcy in that year. However, William persevered with the business. Despite the setbacks he patented a new design of fire-grate in 1829. He established a showroom opposite the Old Well in Bath Street at this time; this was later listed as 47 Bath Street; it was probably later called Hygeia House. It is likely that the Bilton premises closed when father John died in 1834.

The big breakthrough for the firm came when William designed and constructed "The Leamington Kitchener" range around 1830. Primitive cooking ranges existed from the eighteenth century and around 1800 Count von Rumford (born Benjamin Thompson in USA) proposed the "range" to reduce the waste of fuel and to prevent chefs being burned when using open hearths. His design was a brick range enclosing fires with openings for placing pots. Each of the individual fires



An early Flavel Kitchener

could be controlled separately and each of the openings could be closed. The next development was to replace the brick parts with cast iron panels to suit the range to a domestic situation. The Kitchener was such a range made from cast iron and which consumed solid fuel. It is uncertain whether Flavel ever formally patented this design. It is likely that components were made at various foundries including Bilton, Emscote and even Mansfield. The largest unit was said to replace five fires and two cookers.

because by this time his wife, his sons John (age 19) and William (age 24) had all died.

Unfortunately William had an emotional time leading up to the year 1832

It is often reported that William moved to Eagle Foundry in Ranelagh Street in 1833. In fact this foundry was occupied by Smith, Taylor and Co, iron founders at this time and later by Radclyffe and Co for many more years. Flavel did not move to Eagle Foundry until 1856 when Sidney senior advertised the move. From 1833 until 1856 Flavel's occupied premises in Augusta Place at the rear of the Tennis Court (now the Real Tennis Court).

The Kitchener was something of a sensation and William soon took to placing advertisements warning the public about copies of his design. Radclyffe's however also advertised a Kitchener. William later opened a showroom at the corner of Dormer Place at 35 Lower Union Parade in 1839 and the firm later vacated the Bath Street premises in 1847.



Grave of William Flavel, photo Alan Griffin



Sidney Flavel senior

William attended Mill Street chapel which was on the site of what is now Urquhart Hall and he was buried in the churchyard at the rear in 1844. The ornate white gravestone is still present.

Sidney Flavel senior (1819 to 1892) ran the firm from 1844, when he was 25, on the death of his father William. The business was known as Sidney Flavel and Co from 1844 and it was incorporated in 1917. Sadly Sidney too struggled in his early years

and he faced difficulties in paying debts in 1847.

He continued to produce The Kitchener and was rewarded with one of only 19 trophies at the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851. Queen Victoria herself had a Kitchener installed at Kensington Palace.

Sidney also established a London showroom around this time.

Sidney senior moved the business to the existing Eagle foundry in 1856 and an advertisement states that they left Augusta Place and Emscote foundry at this date. The Eagle Foundry was immediately to the east of Ranelagh Gardens and was accessible from Clarence Street and the Warwick and Napton Canal. The drawing dated 1867 corresponds well with a map of around 1890.



Eagle Foundry 1867

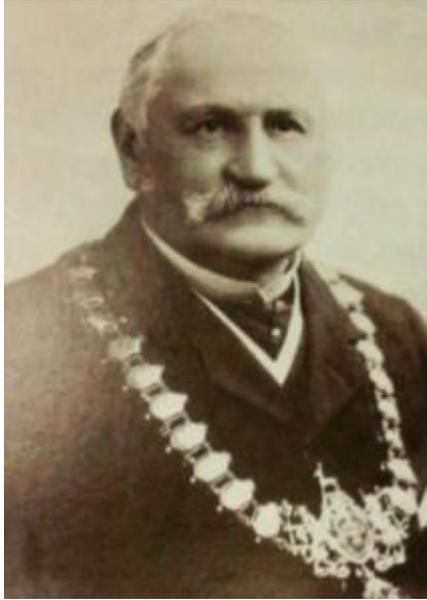
Flavel was producing around 30 Kitcheners each week in 1859 and the firm employed about 100 workers. Incidentally, a Kitchener remains in situ at the Lord Leycester Hospital in Warwick. Sidney bought out his partners around 1867 and his son, who we will name Sidney junior, became the only other partner at the age of about 20. Sidney senior was in poor health for many years so Sidney junior ran the firm long before his father's death.

Sidney senior moved to Edgeville at Nos 24 and 25 Newbold Terrace in 1870. There is now a Blue Plaque in his memory on this house. The property at the rear is still named Edgeville Cottage.



Edgeville





Sidney Flavel junior (1847 to 1931) was educated at Warwick School and was later a governor of the school and president of the Old Warwickian Association for many years. He started with the firm in the retail premises at Lower Parade. The business continued successfully during his long stewardship. The firm had concentrated on solid fuel appliances but made their first gas cooker in the 1880s.

There was a dispute around 1902 when Sidney accused the firm of Radclyffe and Co at the Imperial Foundry of copying products and the outcome was that Flavel's took them over. Flavel's then used the Imperial Foundry until it was sold on to Ford's in 1940. Flavel's produced bomb cases in the Great War.

Sidney junior is perhaps best remembered for his public-spirited works. He was

elected to the new borough council in 1875 and was mayor on six occasions; he was a vicar's warden and bestowed several gifts on the parish church and he was also a justice of the peace. It is said that he influenced the post office to add the suffix Spa to the name of the town.



Bushberry Lodge

He lived at Bushbury Lodge in Willes Road, on a corner of St Mary's Road; it has been renamed as Bushberry Lodge. Bushbury is a place near where the family lived in the eighteenth century.

Percival Flavel (1889 to 1939), a son of Sidney junior, took a major role in the business from 1904 after the death of his brother and became managing director in 1916. He established a training school for iron-founders at 14 Parade in 1924 and was a pioneer of modern apprenticeships. It became a difficult period for the company as it wished to expand on a site bordered on two sides by housing, the canal to the north and to the east by a recreation ground. There were complaints from neighbours about noise at night and fumes at all times. Despite this the firm publicly criticised the council in 1935 for restricting the growth of the site after a serious fire. In the event the council released some land and Eagle works were largely rebuilt in the 1930s. By 1935 the company employed 1,000 people. Sadly, Percival committed suicide by gas inhalation at the London office in 1939.



Factory 2015

Isobel Flavel, Percival's wife, took a leading role in the business after his death and was chairman of the board from 1939 to 1944. During the Second World War the company made munitions and was noted for making ammunition boxes for several years afterwards.

From 1944 the chairman and many of the directors were not connected to the family although two or three of the family did take on managerial roles. The company struggled after the war. Sales were reduced and materials were scarce and expensive. So much so that no dividend was paid in 1960/1. However the firm saw fit to buy out several smaller companies in this period.



An Early Debonair 1963

Fortunes turned in a positive direction when the company launched the Debonair gas room heater in 1961. This was the first one with a wooden surround and it chimed well with current fashion. Sales were phenomenal and 1963 was the best year ever.

Footnotes.

- A partnership of Harrison, Radclyffe and Blunt vacated the Eagle foundry in 1856. Radclyffe's initially moved to the Old Town Foundry in Clemens Street (the car park of the Co-op is now on the site). Around 1884 they went on to establish the Old Town foundry off Old Warwick Road in "the lane leading to the sewage works" that was later to become the Imperial Foundry.
- There is a brass plaque inside St Mark's parish church at Bilton which remembers many family members.
- The Flavel brand name was sold off after 2001. Flavel fires are now made by BFM Europe in Stoke on Trent
- Smaller Flavel cookers are now made by Beko which is the UK name of the Turkish company Arcelik.
- AGA is a name derived from the Svenska "Akktiebolaget Gas Accumulator" which was invented in Sweden and was first imported into the UK in 1929.

Further images appear at the end of this Paper.

Mick Jeffs, March 2015

Further references:-

“Rangemaster” by Jean Field, Brewin Books, 2006

Leamington Courier archive

Websites including Rangemaster, Beko, BFM, Flavels Fires and The History Channel



Evolution of Trade Marks and Logos



Family Plaque in Bilton Church



*Flavel Family Graves,
Leamington Cemetery*