

GIVING KIRKBY A BAD NAME...

WHAT WENT WHERE

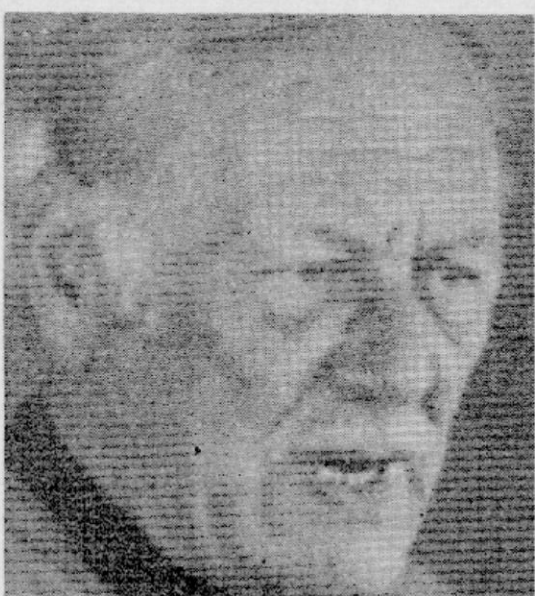


● **GEORGE LEATHERBARROW** (Builder)
Council contracts worth £10 million



● **ERIC SPENCER STEVENSON**
(Council architect)
A £2,000 Alfa Romeo car
Bricks, building blocks, stone,
timber, sand and cement.
A set of kitchen units.
A tree.
A trip to Switzerland.
A trip to London.
A trip to Bordeaux.

● **DAVE TEMPEST, OBE.**
(Former Council Leader)
Work on his house.
Bricks, timber, flagstones,
cement.
A trip to London.

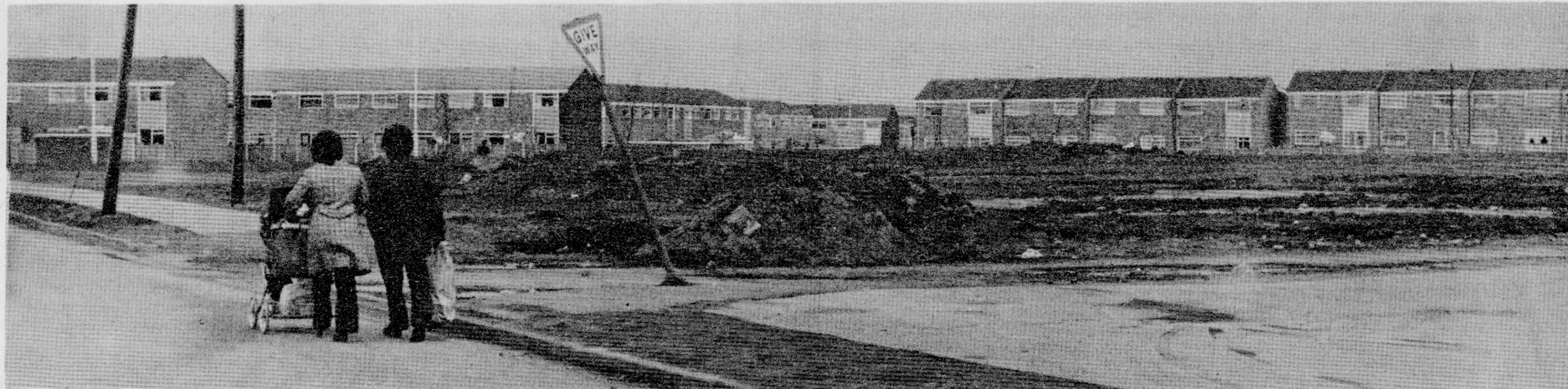


● **ALAN WRIGHT**
(Assistant council architect)
Mixed concrete, timber, soil.
A trip to Switzerland.

● **E.H.WILLIAMS LTD.** (Landscape gardeners)
Numerous council contracts
A pile of soil dirt-cheap.



Tempest's house. His son called our photographer a "horrible little pleb".



Where the earth was... near the Farmers Arms at Tower Hill.

The great earth robbery

PRESENTING: "The Great Earth Robbery". A moving epic. Directed by Eric Spencer Stevenson. Produced by Alan Wright.

And featuring the astonishing Peter Jennings (by kind permission of E.H.Williams Ltd).

This is the story of the men who moved a mountain — and cost Kirkby thousands. But first, the background...

E.H.WILLIAMS are landscape gardeners based at Gateacre. They did a lot of work for Kirkby Council.

Wherever George Leatherbarrow went E.H.Williams were sure to follow. Tower Hill, Kirkby Park, the ski slope... E.H. Williams saw them all.

On Tower Hill E.H.Williams were nominated sub-contractors to Leatherbarrow. They were nominated by the council. Or more precisely, by the council's architect, Eric Spencer Stevenson.

Their job was landscaping. Kirkby Council had a Parks Department perfectly capable of doing the work themselves. But the contract went to E.H.Williams.

There was plenty of scope for landscaping on Tower Hill. The topsoil there was so deep it was a "damn nuisance" to the builders. During building, a mountain of topsoil was heaped up behind the Farmers Arms pub in the middle of the estate.

It's not there now. Unknown to councillors, thousands of tons of this valuable stuff did a disappearing act last summer. E.H.Williams Ltd were the stars of the show.

They carted about 30,000 tons of topsoil to Crosby seafront where they had a £97,000 landscaping contract with Crosby Council. Under the contract, Williams were to supply the topsoil.

This little performance, worth around £20,000 to E.H.Williams Ltd, is not recorded in Kirkby Council minutes. Nor is it in any of Architect Stevenson's many reports to committees.

And yet it was Stevenson, assisted by Alan Wright, who "authorised" the deal at a meeting with Peter Jennings of E.H.Williams.

Curiously, written authority was not given until almost a year later — after the Free Press had started poking about in Kirkby. It was contained in a letter to the council's consultant surveyors, Tweed, Atkinson, Lewis and Partners.

The letter was dated March 4, 1975. And it was

signed by Alan Wright.

We asked Stevenson why he had not mentioned any of this to councillors. Wouldn't they be interested? "I don't think so," he said.

Asked about payment for the topsoil both Stevenson and Jennings at first told the same story. The cost was set against E.H.Williams' bill for work on Tower Hill.

But Jennings later changed his script. The price of the topsoil was deducted — not from the Tower Hill bill — but from his firm's bill for work on the ski slope and at the sports stadium.

Whenever it was paid, Stevenson was clear about the amount. "If topsoil was taken off it was paid for at the going rate," he told us.

Not true. E.H.Williams did not pay £20,000 or anything like it. According to Jennings, they paid £4,500.

And the Crosby Herald of November 1, 1974, reported that Crosby Council got the soil at "an extremely favourable price". How about a knock-off price?

Mr Stevenson may find councillors are interested in his little deal after all. Especially since there does not appear to be enough topsoil left on Tower Hill to form the football pitches planned for the estate.

Knowsley Council might well have to bring soil back onto the site... and pay for it at the correct market price.

There are other things about E.H.Williams Ltd which Eric Spencer Stevenson should explain. Like why, when the contract for Kirkby's all-weather sports pitches was due to go out to tender, he called an official into his office and told him E.H.Williams Ltd were to get the contract.

In Stevenson's office at the time was Mr Peter Jennings, Contracts Director for E.H.Williams.

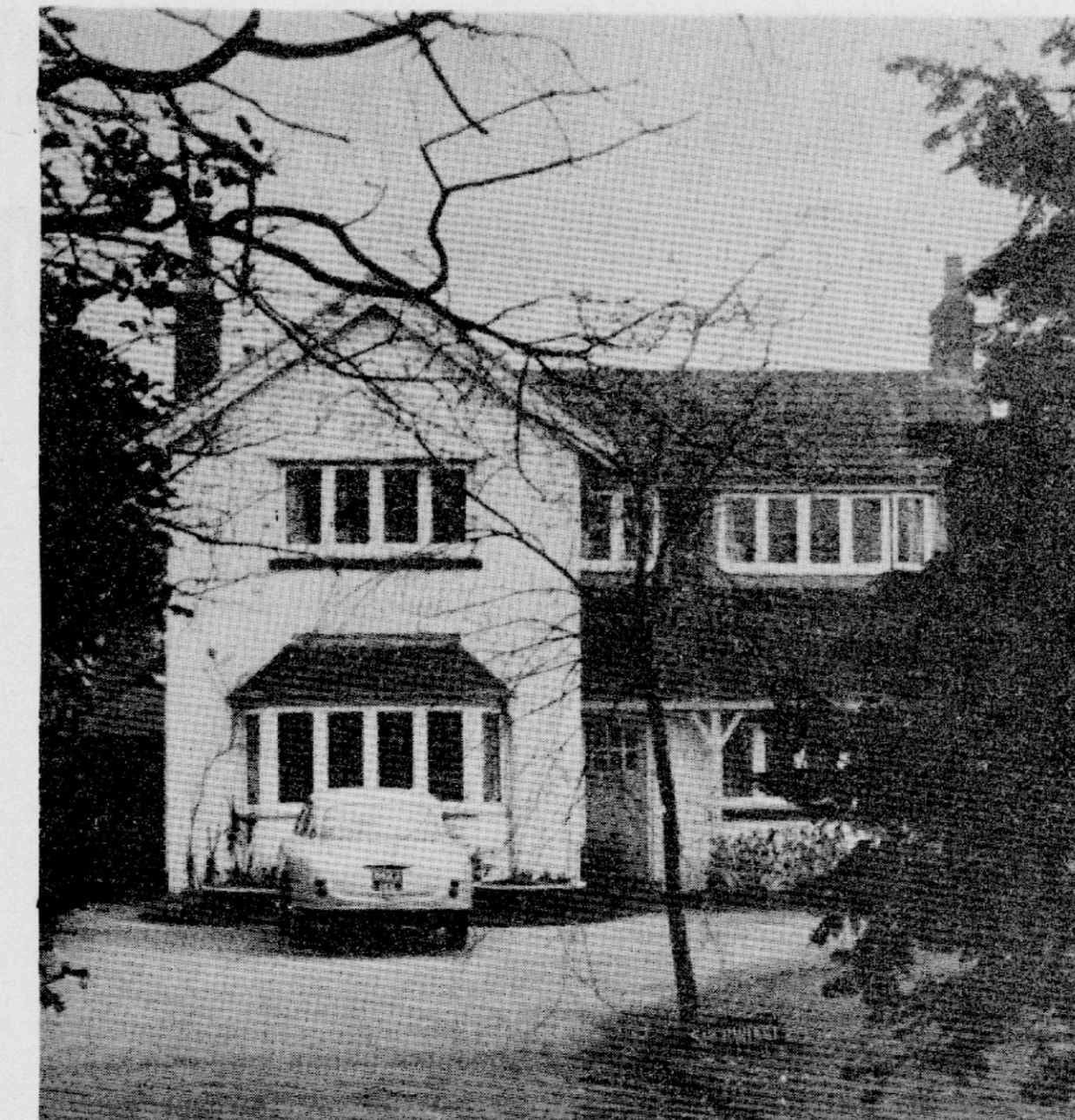
The official was Richard Lane, sports stadium manager, who made recommendations on sports contracts. This £9,300 contract was highly specialised and other firms were better suited to carry it out.

But E.H. Williams Ltd got it. Or why, on a council trip to see sports facilities in Birmingham, Mr Peter Jennings was introduced as an engineer from Kirkby Council.

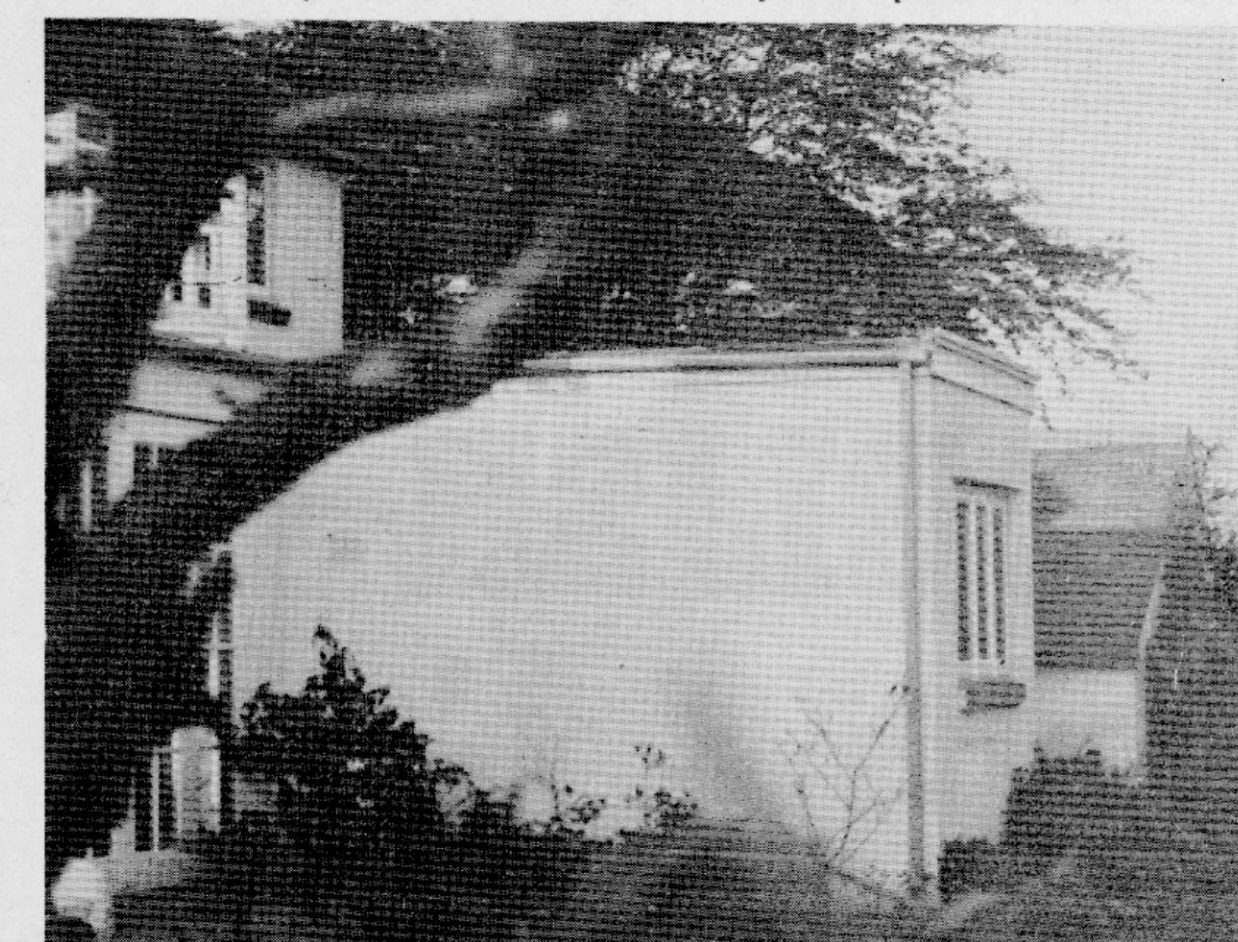
Stevenson did not, in fact, go to Birmingham. But councillor John King, who did, recalls the incident.

Or why E.H.Williams Ltd shared the costs of the two-day trip to London's Crystal Palace with builder George Leatherbarrow.

Both Peter Jennings and Eric Spencer Stevenson were on that one.



'Sherwood', Gayton Lane, Heswall, home of Eric Spender Stevenson.



The extension at the back of Stevenson's house.

GEORGE, ERIC & CO

(Continued from previous page)

these materials was later charged in connection with other materials stolen from Leatherbarrow.

The driver remembered those unusual deliveries he'd made. The times there were no delivery notes. And the times he was slipped a couple of quid.

The driver threatened to cough the lot. Leatherbarrows told him to keep his mouth shut and they'd look after him. So he did.

He appeared in court, was found guilty, fined £200... and then given his job back.

But there's something else. Just who

did those building materials on Tower Hill belong to?

On delivery to the site Leatherbarrows would receive an invoice from the manufacturers. On the strength of this Kirkby Council would pay 80% of the price — so Leatherbarrows always had council money to buy more materials as work progressed.

This means that the council had invested in the materials from the moment they appeared on the site. In other words George Leatherbarrow had no business selling them off.

A Leatherbarrow worker we spoke to about this was later called into the office at work and told: "Don't worry, they're just bluffing you. We've got it all covered with bills."

That sounds like a good idea.

FREE TRIP TO LONDON

NO DOUBT Leatherbarrows also have a good cover story for a little two-day trip to the Crystal Palace sports stadium in London. At the time they were interested in the council's grandiose plans for sports facilities.

Kirkby councillor Dave Tempest, who awarded many of the sports contracts personally, has his own cover story.

"I made arrangements myself to go to Crystal Palace and I paid my own expenses. What George Leatherbarrow did, I don't know."

The Free Press does know. On July 17, 1972, he booked seven Pullman tickets through M.D. Travel, in Moorfields, Liverpool. The bill was sent to him marked "Personal". And it was for £114.90.

Pullman tickets have names on them. The names were:

- Mr George Leatherbarrow.
- Mr Eric Spencer Stevenson, council architect.
- Mr David Tempest, councillor.

- Mr Peter Roberts, architectural assistant.
- Mr Peter Jennings, of E.H. Williams Ltd (see above).
- Mr Peter Hobbs, a quarry merchant.
- Mr Richard Lane, manager of Kirkby stadium.

Strange, Tempest didn't know about that. Stevenson didn't either. So they probably didn't know it was E.H.Williams Ltd who paid their hotel bill. Or that E.H.Williams Ltd shared the night-clubbing expenses with Leatherbarrow.

And it can't be that Tempest has forgotten. "No-one has ever paid any expenses for me on any trips," he told us.

George Leatherbarrow was certainly generous. (Generous enough, for instance, to sell a company car to a policeman... and lend him the money to pay for it. Inspector Harold Hayhurst must have been very grateful).

DIRT IN HIGH PLACES

PEOPLE may get the idea there was dirt in high places. There was. It was all over Tower Hill and it had to be shifted.

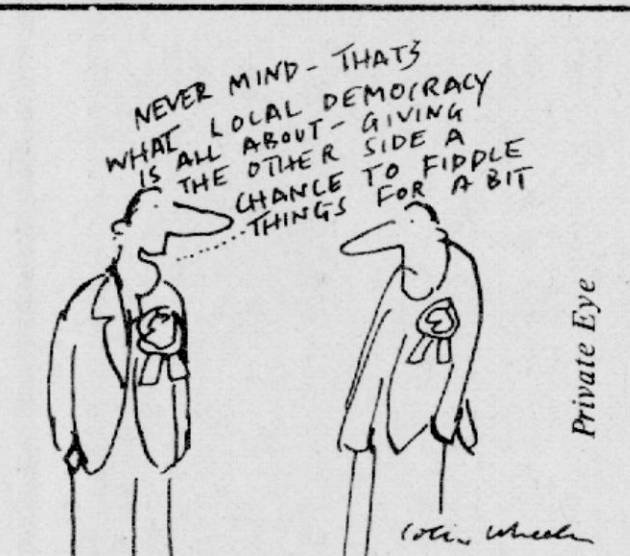
Building sites have to be cleared. And Leatherbarrows got paid for clearing Tower Hill. Paid very well indeed for some of it.

The real expense in moving earth is loading the lorries, not actually carrying it. The handling costs for moving earth 50 yards or 150 yards are very much the same.

So why, on Phase 2C, Leatherbarrow should have been paid according to the distance they moved it (e.g. £1 for 50 yards, £3 for 150 yards) is a mystery.

It was worth thousands. "In my opinion it should never have happened," said a man qualified to pass an opinion and in a position to know.

But it did happen. And the man who



authorised payment to Leatherbarrows was Mr Eric Spencer Stevenson.

REMOVALS BY TRACTOR

LEATHERBARROWS also made a lot of money moving furniture.

Furniture moved out of tenants' houses on the Kirkby Park estate where Leatherbarrows were carrying out improvements.

Tenders were invited for this job. Leatherbarrow's was the most expensive. So of course they got the contract.

The explanation was — a mistake. Leatherbarrow's tender figure of £40 a removal turned out to be £40 each way: total £80.

So we asked Architect Stevenson, who dealt with the tender, how it happened. No, the mistake was not his, he said, rather a "misunderstanding of the committee."

That's another "mistake". Leatherbarrow's tender didn't go before the housing committee. It was accepted, personally, by housing chairman Frank Lawler.

One last thing. Leatherbarrows are not a removals firm. Tenants were furious about removals on an open lorry and in a box-car pulled by an unlicensed tractor.

SKI SLOPE DISASTER

THEN THERE WAS the ridiculous, and extremely expensive, Kirkby ski slope.

The more you look at it the more it

looks like the only people who will get anything out of it are the builders.

The contract to supply and mound the earth went to George Leatherbarrow. There were no tenders. Councillor Dave Tempest, first Pharaoh of Kirkby, accepted "the lowest of four quotations".

That meant £25,000 for the local lad One way George "earned" his money was by placing an advert in the Liverpool Echo for a free tip in Kirkby.

Strange, with money-saving ideas like that, that the £90,000 project is currently overspent by about £30,000.

Few people want to be associated with the ski slope. Eric Spencer Stevenson "doesn't really know" who dreamt it up. But he does remember doing the rough drawings for it.

Assistant Architect Alan Wright said he was definitely not involved. The unfortunate truth is that Wright was in charge of the project.

One of his jobs was to check in all those lorries answering Leatherbarrow's tipping advertisement.

SECRET CODE

SO GEORGE Leatherbarrow did all right out of Kirkby. And he's still doing all right, because what's good for Kirkby Council is good for the new Knowsley Council.

Leader of the new council, until May 1 was Dave Tempest. And the council's Architect is still Mr Eric Spencer Stevenson.

Last December, Architect Stevenson presented a report on overspending of council contracts to the housing committee. It was highly damaging to George Leatherbarrow (Builders) Ltd.

The firm stood out as the overspenders over all others. They compared badly with Holland, Hannen and Cubitts Ltd, who had carried out council contracts worth £3½ millions in Huyton (now joined with Kirkby under Knowsley Council). Total overspending on these...

NIL.

At the same meeting the committee

to award two new housing contracts. There were a number of tenders for each.

Mr Eric Spender Stevenson introduced a novel way of presenting these tenders to the committee. Instead of naming each firm, they were identified only as "Firm A", "Firm B" etc.

Stevenson told the Free Press an unidentified group of councillors had persuaded him to do this. "I don't like that way of doing it," he said.

Presumably it was not the same group of unidentified councillors who quickly told him to discontinue the practice.

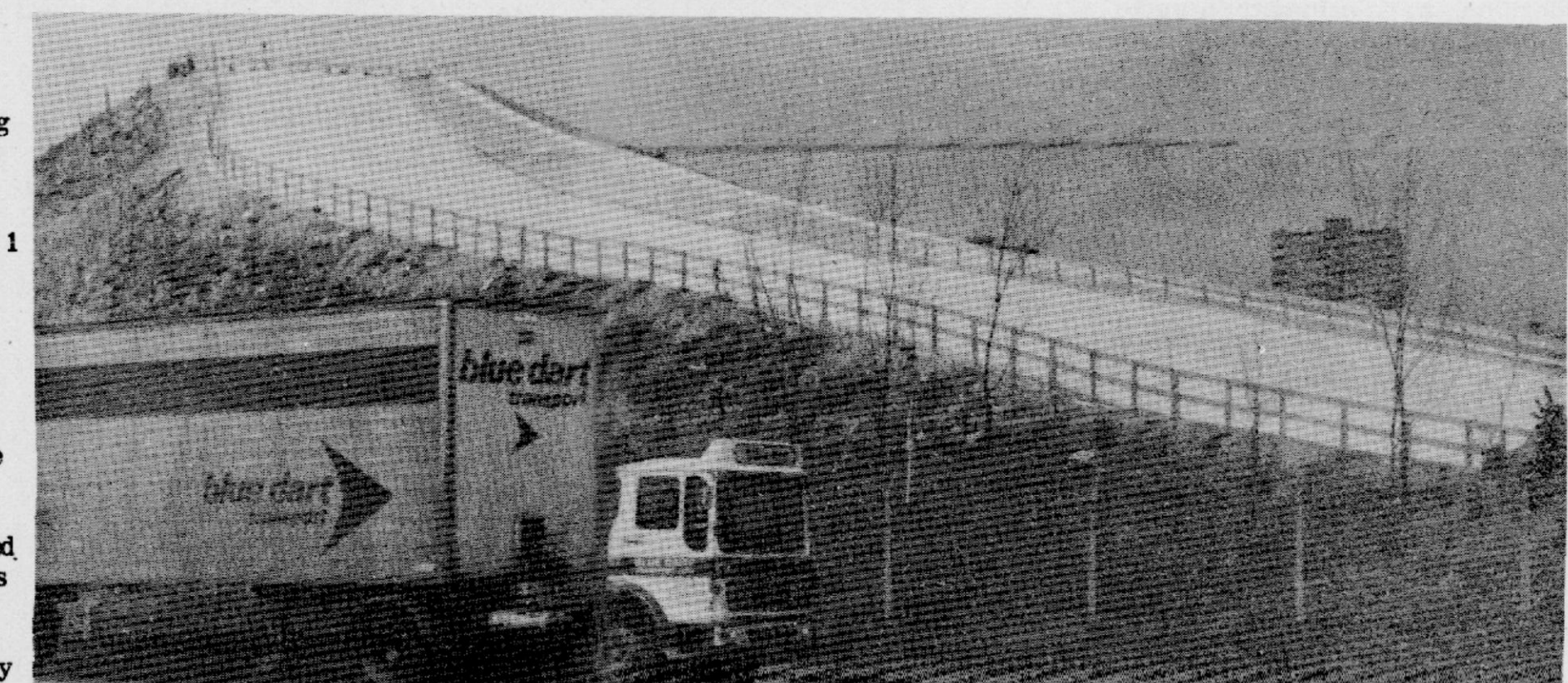
Anyway, at the December housing committee, Stevenson recommended acceptance of the lowest tender in each case from "Firm A". The committee followed his advice.

You guessed it. "Firm A" turned out to be the one that delivered all that stuff to Stevenson's house, that paid for his trip to London. The firm run by the man who bought the Alfa car, Stevenson's old mate, George Leatherbarrow.

Registration District		VITAL		County of Chester	
Warrington		The Register Office		in the	
Name and surname	Age	Condition	Rank or profession	Residence at the time of marriage	Date of 5th Party Cou
George LEATHERBARROW	52 years	Previous marriage dissolved	Builder and Civil Engineer	5, Baby Co	1951
Noreen LEATHERBARROW (Name changed by Deed Poll)	31 years	Previous marriage dissolved		6, Baby Co	1951
Register Office					
G. Leatherbarrow	in the presence of us,		E.S. Stevenson		
M. Leatherbarrow			Elizabeth N. Stevenson		

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

Part of Leatherbarrow's marriage certificate. The witnesses were Eric and Elizabeth Stevenson.



Kirkby ski slope. It was built without planning permission, over a water main, on land the council didn't own... and was advertised as a free tip by the builder.