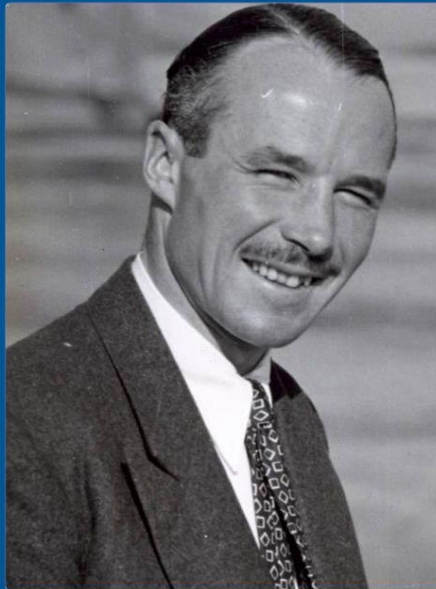


ANDREWS MACLAREN

AS/A2 AQA Design & Technology
Product Design (3-D Design)



Owen Maclaren and the Maclaren Baby Buggy

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**BARBY LOCAL
HISTORY GROUP
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Engineer Owen Finlay **MACLAREN**, was born in Saffron Walden, Essex in 1906. He was educated at Marlborough College and Blair Lodge Academy in Polmont, Falkirk. He went on to study at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he learnt to fly in the Cambridge University Air Squadron, qualifying as a pilot in 1928. He was to make a significant contribution to the UK's efforts in WWII. He worked in aircraft components design, including the anti-drift, retracting, landing gear for the Spitfire in 1937, which greatly improved safety when landing in cross winds. In 1943 he was involved in improving aero-engine cooling radiators which then became more resistant to bullet damage, halving their vulnerability.¹

After the war he worked on anti-skid brakes for the aviation arm of *Dunlop* in Coventry but became frustrated there and, in the early 1960s, he set up a company called *Andrews Maclaren*, with backing from his friend Bill Andrews. Its main products were chrome-plated aircraft parts. The company continued in the business of aircraft components but in 1961 the company released its first consumer product, the *Gadabout*, a scissor-like folding camp-chair constructed of tubular aluminium alloy.

Maclaren's daughter married an employee of the American airline Pan Am, who was posted first to Helsinki and then to Moscow. After her first child was born in 1962, her flights home from Moscow involved struggles with heavy conventional pushchairs. Maclaren resolved to help her, and using his knowledge of lightweight, collapsible structures, he was to inspire a whole new generation of infant transport, influencing the design of future collapsible products. He designed his first folding *Baby Buggy* in 1964, built in the stables of *Arnold House* in Daventry Road, Barby. A UK patent was granted on 18 July 1966 (No 1,154,362) and a US patent in 1968 (No. 3,390,893A).



The business grew rapidly and the *Arnold House* stables were unable to cope. Production was moved to the factory in the centre of the village vacated by *Albico* in 1970, the present site of 6 & 6a *The Green*.

¹ The content of this article is mostly taken from *Wikipedia* and other web articles, supplemented by local knowledge.

Outworkers, many of them living in Barby, were employed to cut out and stitch the fabric required for the buggies' seats.²

Andrews Maclaren became the *Maclaren Company* and again outgrew its premises. The business was moved first to Daventry and then to a much bigger purpose-built factory at *Station Works* in Long Buckby. In 1976 they were reportedly manufacturing 600,000 buggies per year of which 280,000 were being exported. The range of products had also expanded.



Owen Maclaren with, left to right, the *Gadabout* folding chair, the *Major* buggy and the *B01* push chair; and, below, a publicity photograph taken at the Long Buckby factory



² For the perspective of one of these outworkers, see [www.barbylhg.org.uk/Local Topics/Babies and Buggies](http://www.barbylhg.org.uk/Local%20Topics/Babies%20and%20Buggies); for another, see the DVD by Barby Local History Group (BLHG), *Barby: A Village History*

Not without problems, Maclaren was forced to defend its American patents in the US courts and sued a US company called *Cross River* for wilful infringement of their US patent; in 1975 their case was proven.

In January 1978, Queen Elizabeth II awarded Owen Finlay Maclaren an MBE in the New Year's Honours list. Sadly, Owen Maclaren died shortly afterwards on 3 April 1978.

Examples of his classic buggy design are held by museum design galleries in the USA and the UK and, although the original company has changed ownership and production sites many times since those early days, the *Maclaren* brand is still manufactured to this day.³

In a very pleasing link to the past, the current owners of *6 The Green* themselves purchased a *Maclaren Buggy* and here it is pictured proudly carrying their son Gavin during a visit to Wicksteed Park in 1976.



BLHG PD2024/034

³ In 1977 the BBC made a documentary about the company which includes interviews with Owen Maclaren,