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# THE ESSEX RICH LIST

**FOR YEARS IT SEEMED** that the richest people in the county were continually adding to their wealth, but with the arrival of the pandemic in early 2020, there has been a levelling of the playing field. Some have thrived, while others have felt the effects of lockdowns and restrictions. Essex, as well as the rest of the country, is going through a period of seismic change. The wealthiest among us are either reaping the rewards or hustling to stay on top. We share an insight into the top five richest people in the county, what they're worth and how they made their fortune. We also look at a further 15 of the richest people in Essex, who are all vying for their place in the top five. Next year, it could be a completely different story... The Essex Life Rich List is based on estimates of wealth of people who were born, have lived in or have strong links to the county

WORDS: Lily Floyd



# THE TOP 5

THE RICH LIST

## JON HUNT

2021: **£1.345BN**

**I**t seems the founder of the estate agency Foxtons is still at the top when it comes to being the richest person in Essex. Despite his significant success in the past year, he fell from #111 to #126 place in *The Sunday Times Rich List 2021*.

According to the paper, the property tycoon has increased his mammoth fortune by £45 million to £1.345 billion during the pandemic. This is impressive considering how many businesses have crashed and burned, but he still felt the pinch in the previous year when Covid-19 took £100m off the Colchester entrepreneur's wealth. Leaving school at 16 to follow his father's footsteps into the army, Jon has demonstrated you can achieve your dreams without a degree.

After he quit the military, he spent some time travelling, and on his return, he found work as an estate agent, before co-founding Foxtons in 1981 at the age of 28. You could say perfect timing because in 2007 the 67-year-old sold Foxtons for £375m to a private equity firm BC Partners. Now, his portfolio boasts an abundance of significant assets, including the Pavilion, the business members chain in SW London, and Heveningham Hall in Suffolk.

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## MARK DIXON

2021: £1.437BN

**M**oving on up on *The Sunday Times Rich List 2021* from position #183 to #116 is Danbury-born Mark Dixon. One of the billionaires who thrived during the pandemic increased his fortune by £667m. The 61-year-old spends most of his time living in Monaco, a far cry from his school days at Rainsford Comprehensive High School selling peat from a wheelbarrow.

After leaving school at 16, he founded Dial-a-Snack in 1976, a sandwich-making business that sold packed lunches to Chelmsford offices. After this failed, he travelled the world, doing various jobs, then returned to his Essex roots to attempt his entrepreneurial skills once again. This time, he invested in a £600 burger van on London's North Circular Road.

Moving forward to 2021, he is now the owner of one of the world's largest office companies, Regus, which was renamed in 2016, International Workplace Group (IWG Place). The son of a Ford car mechanic, Mark has many other assets to be proud of, including the Château de Berne vineyard in Provence.

## LORD ALAN SUGAR

2021: £1.2BN

**R**anked at #138 on *The Sunday Times Rich List 2021*, self-made billionaire Lord Alan Sugar is perhaps one of the UK's most celebrated businessmen. Straight shooting as they come, we have seen him on *The Apprentice*, the award-winning Bafta BBC reality series, which will be returning to our screens in early 2022. The show turned the British magnet into a household name and he has certainly come a long way since leaving school in Hackney aged 16.

It all began for the former chairman of Tottenham Hotspur FC by selling car aerials and electric goods out of his van he bought for around £50. Aged 21, he founded Amstrad, a British electronics company and in 2007 he sold his remaining Amstrad empire in a deal to BSkyB (Sky) for £125m.

Recently, in the *60 Minutes* Australia TV show, he was asked when his entrepreneurial streak kicked in. He said: 'Around 11 to 12 years old.'

In 2000, he was knighted for his services to business and holds two honorary Doctorates of Science degrees. Lord Sugar lives with his wife, Ann Simons, in Chigwell and has two sons and one daughter. He is a philanthropist for a number of charities, including Great Ormond Street Hospital and Jewish Care.



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## DAVID & JACK SULLIVAN & FAMILY

2021: £1.04BN

**T**he Cardiff-born entrepreneur David and his family's significant wealth is from property, football and media. Even though their fortune may have taken a hit over the last year with a £60m loss, they are still part of the billionaires' club.

According to *The Sunday Times Rich List 2021*, it has identified a record-breaking 171 UK billionaires – 24 more than in 2020 with The Sullivans being part of that list at #162, a drop from their position last year at 135.

Building his fortune from pornography, sex shops and erotic films, David has invested in other ventures, including various properties and becoming a 51 per cent shareholder of West Ham FC. Keen to start his son, Jack, off young, he made him the director of West Ham United Women from 2017-21, the youngest executive in English football history. David also owns a 14-bedroom lavish mansion in Theydon Bois, which features two swimming pools and a bowling alley.

## SIR CHARLES DUNSTONE

2021: £775M

**S**till ranking the same spot at #209 in *The Sunday Times Rich List 2021*, Sir Charles Dunstone has definitely had a year to celebrate. Someone who has largely benefited from the pandemic with a rise of £94m, equating his fortune to £775m.

The Saffron Walden-born entrepreneur's main fortune comes from technology. It all began for the chairman of TalkTalk Telecom and former chairman of electronics retailer Dixons Carphone when he started working as a sales executive at NEC when he dropped out of university. It was during that time he recognised the potential of cell phones and mobile communication. Driven to this realisation, at 25 years old Charles invested his £6,000 savings and began selling mobile phones from his flat at Marylebone Road. According to Sky News, Sir Charles 'sold the last of his stake in Britain's biggest electrical goods and mobile phone retailer, severing a 32-year tie with the business that turned him into one of Britain's most successful entrepreneurs.'

He was made a Knight Bachelor in the 2012 Queen's Birthday Honours List and recognised 'for his services to the telecoms industry and charity work'.

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## Sir Jack Petchy

2020:  
£493M

**R**efusing to retire, there is still no slowing down the 96-year-old army veteran, Sir Jack Petchy. But where did it all start for the man who has made the majority of his millions in property? Born in Plaistow, East London, he left school at 13 years old and served in the navy in the Second World War. After leaving the navy he began working as a clerk for a solicitor's firm. Here, he applied for management training but was informed he would never make it as a businessman.

But this didn't stop Petchy. Instead of giving up, he used the £39 he was given from the navy to buy a second-hand car and founded a taxi business. From here was where he built a multi-million-pound empire and today Petchy Holdings manages a large commercial portfolio.

In 1999, Sir Jack Petchy set up the Jack Petchy Foundation to inspire young people across London and Essex to work hard and reach their full potential. In 2016, Sir Jack received his knighthood in recognition of his many years of charitable work.

## Mark Burnett & Roma Downey

2020:  
£404M

**R**enowned as the king of American reality TV, Mark Burnett has certainly come a long way from his Dagenham roots. The 61-year-old was the only child of both Ford Motors factory workers and was educated at the Warren School in Romford.

He later went on to serve as a section commander in the parachute regiment in the British Army. Mark emigrated to the US when he was 22 and now he is the president of MGM Television and Digital Group, who has produced award-winning film and TV programmes, including *The Apprentice*, *Survivor*, *Shark Tank* and *The Voice*.

It seemed Mark had always been destined for America. In an interview with *Esquire* magazine, he says: 'I watched American TV shows. And for many summers growing up, I worked on my aunt and uncle's farm in East Anglia. Down the street was an American cemetery for the Second World War, and every Memorial Day an American bomber would fly over that cemetery and drop rose petals.'

However, his success wouldn't be anywhere without his Derry-born wife, Roma Downey, actress, and the chief content officer at MGM for its faith and family division. She has been the driving force behind *The Bible* and other faith-based programmes.

## Bhiku & Vijay Patel

2020:  
£800M

**I**t comes as no surprise that they are wealthy figures in the pharmaceuticals industry, a roaring trade that has massively benefitted from Covid-19. According to the *Independent Pharmacist* (August 2020), Robert Watts, compiler of *The Sunday Times Rich List* says: 'Pharmaceutical and biotech entrepreneurs will spot the opportunities.' He adds: 'Bhiku and Vijay Patel, whose company Atnahs Pharma takes over and markets existing medicines, have attracted controversy for the prices they charge the NHS. Some players in this world will argue that higher prices are justifiable or even necessary.'

Bhiku and Vijay Patel have come a long way since arriving in the UK during the 1960s. Born into poverty in Kenya, they both arrived in the UK to earn degrees with just £5 in their pockets. In 1975, Vijay was able to buy his first pharmacy in Leigh-on-Sea and Bhiku trained as an architect but later joined his brother in business in 1984. A few years later, Vijay has established Basildon-based Waymade to distribute and market pharmaceutical products and prescription medicines. Vijay received an OBE in the 2019 New Year's Honours for services to business and philanthropy. ▶

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# Ray O'Rourke & family

2020:  
£380M

**T**he construction sector seems to be booming since the pandemic, the biggest rise in six years, and Dartford-based multinational construction company Laing O'Rourke seems to be staying afloat.

The civil engineering and construction giant was founded by Irishman and Essex resident Ray O'Rourke in 1977 and is perhaps best known for building the stadium for London's 2021 Olympics. According to its website, it says: 'He founded R O'Rourke & Son as a concrete subcontractor but broke through into the main contracting market in 2001 when it caused shockwaves in the industry by snapping up Laing Construction from John Laing for £1, later changing the name to Laing O'Rourke.'

It has since grown to become the UK's biggest private contractor, but like many businesses, the lockdown has made an impact on its income. 'Laing O'Rourke's profit increased in its last financial year, despite bringing forward a hit from the COVID-19 pandemic,' says *Construction News*. In recent news, the firm is planning a stock exchange listing by 2024, bringing to an end more than 40 years of family control.

# The Ives family

2020:  
£400M

**T**he Ives Family is another thriving construction business. Former heavyweight boxer, the late Bill Ives, founded Essex-based Rainham Steel in 1973 after turning his back on a successful boxing career, winning the ABA heavyweight title in 1966, 1967 and 1968. Also, in his youth Ives worked as a bouncer at Esmeralda's Barn, a London nightclub owned by the Kray twins.

Over the decades, Rainham Steel has become one of the country's leading suppliers of steel products to builders and builders' merchants. According to its website, 'during the last 10 years, Rainham Steel has also expanded its operations into property investments. Two dedicated property companies have been established, which own collectively an extensive portfolio of industrial and commercial investments.'

After Bill died in 2017, the business remains in the family's hands.

# Stephen Conway

2020:  
£230M

**A**true Eastender, Stephen Conway left school at 16 and worked in a bank and ran a market stall at weekends. From here he began his career in industrial finance, before being headhunted to run a small property lending bank until 1974.

The banker-turned-builder moved his focus to property in the 1980s. Running a successful company, Stephen co-founded the Loughton-based firm, Galliard Homes, London's largest private home developer.

On Galliard Homes website, Stephen says: 'In the early 1990s, the London property market was finding its feet again and I was looking for my next challenge. I joined forces with the late John Black to see if we could take advantage of the emerging opportunities. Our first project was the development of 110 apartments in Enfield. The nearest main road was Galliard Road and so Galliard Homes was born.'

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## Alfie Best

2020:  
£341M

It isn't breaking news that the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic propelled the rise in staycations, making caravan holidays very popular. Whilst many businesses took a huge hit, Alfie Best, one of the owners of Wyldecrest Park, a residential mobile home park brand and motor home rental company Vaaroom is part of the booming industry right now.

The proud Romany gypsy has made his money from building up a collection of 75 mobile home parks under the Wyldecrest Parks brand and Wyldecrest Holiday Park is a sub-brand that focuses on holiday parks including a golf course.

Alfie has a real love for Essex. In 2001, aged 30, he bought his first mobile home park in Romford, Lakeview Residential Park, and his main company, Best Holdings, is based in Rainham. In July 2020 he became the sole owner of non-league East Thurrock United Football Club and its ground.

## Gordon Sanders & family

2020:  
£254M

Successful property developer Gordon Sanders had a dream, according to his company's website: 'That dream was to provide the best possible care for the older people in the community in which he lived.'

In 1988, Gordon brought the Essex-based care home business Runwood Homes Senior Living. Since then, he has expanded the Hadleigh-based group, which now provides nursing and residential care in 74 homes across Essex, The Midlands and Northern Ireland.

With 35 years of experience as a developer, this has helped put Gordon at the forefront of the care home construction industry in England. The website states: 'Runwood Homes was formed and 25 years later that dream is a reality. As the dream unfolded, Gordon Sanders, whilst remaining chief executive officer of the care homes group, has surrounded himself with the most qualified and dedicated team of care home professionals available.'

## Andy Hill & family

2020:  
£290M

As we know the construction industry is booming, but it seems so is the homebuilding industry. Andy Hill, founder and chief executive of Waltham Abbey-based Hill Group, is one of the UK's largest private housebuilders.

In 2019, to celebrate Hill Group's 20th anniversary, the privately owned housebuilder wanted to give something back by building 200 homes for the homeless. According to *Housing Today*, Andy says: 'We consulted with members of the family and our directors, and we decided to set up the Hill Group Foundation 2000. We will build 200 modular homes for homeless people over the next five years to give them a chance in life.'

Andy mentions he had been made redundant more than two decades ago and it had proved to be a life-changing event. He says: 'But at least I wasn't homeless. I can't imagine what that must be like. So, I've pledged to give something back.'

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## Sir Rod Stewart

2021:  
£215M

Of course, British rock and pop singer Sir Rod Stewart CBE had to be on the list. With a new album out this month, *The Tears of Hercules*, and a tour across the globe next year, there is no stopping the 76-year-old.

Known for his distinctive raspy voice, he is one of the best-selling music artists of all time and has sold more than 250 million records worldwide. Perhaps that is why he is ranked #12 on *The Sunday Times Music Millionaires* list.

The father of eight currently lives with his wife, Penny Lancaster, and their sons, Alastair and Aiden, in the couple's £4.65 million Grade II listed Durrington House, near Harlow. With 46 acres of pastures and ancient woodland, Stewart indulges his inner child with a vast model railway layout. According to *The Sunday Times Rich List*: 'It is 1,500 sq ft. Seven shipping containers were required to transport the display from the Beverly Hills estate he has owned for 39 years to Essex earlier this year.'

## Vipul, Shamil & Kavi Thakrar & family

2020:  
£215M

Let's throw the catering industry into the mix of the richest in the county. I think a lot of us readers have experienced Dishroom. If not, you may have heard of the upmarket Indian restaurant chain that serves unforgettable mouth-watering dishes to satisfy all curry fans? Founded by cousins Shamil and Kavi Thakrar, Dishroom boast eight outlets, with sites including Covent Garden, Birmingham, Kings Cross and Edinburgh.

What is the Essex connection? The Thakrar family's wealth stems from Rainham-based Tilda Rice, one of the UK's leading suppliers of basmati rice. The state-of-the-art rice mill and packing hall remains the home of Tilda Ltd, from where it supplies its wide range of delicious rice and grains.

## Gary Widdowson

2020:  
£225M

At #510 on *The Sunday Times Rich List 2020*, Gary Widdowson saw an increase of £10m resulting in a £251m fortune. Specialising in scrap metal and property, this is where the former international showjumper has made his money, by selling his family's scrap metal business in 2006 for £120m.

However, Gary kept hold of Total Waste Management, one of the leading metal and waste recycling companies in the UK, a smaller operation with sites in Basildon and Epping.

Celebrating 50 years of zero waste to landfill, a positive impact on climate change, it states: 'Total Waste Management specialises in ferrous metals. 11 million tonnes of scrapped metal is recycled in the UK every year, out of this total amount 92 per cent of it is ferrous metals.'

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## Sir Jonathan Ive

2020:  
£220M

Chingford-born designer Sir Jonathan Ive's fortune comes from computers. According to *The Sunday Times Rich List 2020*. 'Sir Jonathan, who created a succession of coveted devices including the iMac, iPhone and iPad, established himself as the leading industrial designer of the tech era.' But after 27 years, Ive left Apple and is focussing on 'his new California-based venture. LoveFrom will focus on wearable technology and healthcare products for Apple and other clients.'

The Essex designer, otherwise known as 'Jony', attended the Chingford Foundation School and later moved to Stafford where he studied sculpture and chemistry. He boasts a variety of accolades, including being knighted in 2012 and is the chancellor of the Royal College of Art. A long way from Essex, he currently owns a £10m home in San Francisco.

## Victor Chandler

2020:  
£230M

Essex-born Victor Chandler is perhaps one of the most legendary bookmakers of all time. He was the son of Victor Chandler Sr, the grandson of William Chandler, who founded the family's bookmaking business and owned Walthamstow Stadium. According to the *Racing Post*, his dad tried to put him off: 'He revealed that his empire began with an insolvent business and words of advice from his father not to follow him into the game.' But after his father died in 1974, he returned to take over the family's bookmaking business.

Victor is the former chairman of the company BetVictor, which he sold to businessman and racehorse owner Michael Tabor. He is recognised for his belief in the importance of online gambling and being the first to move his gaming business offshore, including building a new gambling empire in Africa.

## David & Victoria Beckham

2020:  
£370M

Both born and bred in Essex, David and Victoria Beckham have built an impressive empire together and it seems they are still raking it in for 2021. With the majority of their fortune coming from football and fashion, *The Sunday Times Rich List 2020* says: 'Since David quit football as a player in 2013, he and Victoria, the former Spice Girl, have put together a portfolio of commercial interests.' It seems Victoria's luxury designer brand is not the only fashion income for the Beckham family. It adds: 'The former England captain has tie-ups with Adidas, the watch brand Tudor, the life insurer AIA and the drinks giant Diageo's Haig Club whisky.'

Married for 22 years, the power couple supports each other in everything they do. They have four children together and they reside between their various homes across the world, including their £31 million home in Holland Park, West London, a £19 million penthouse in Miami and a barn conversion in the Cotswolds.