

# MARTINSYDES

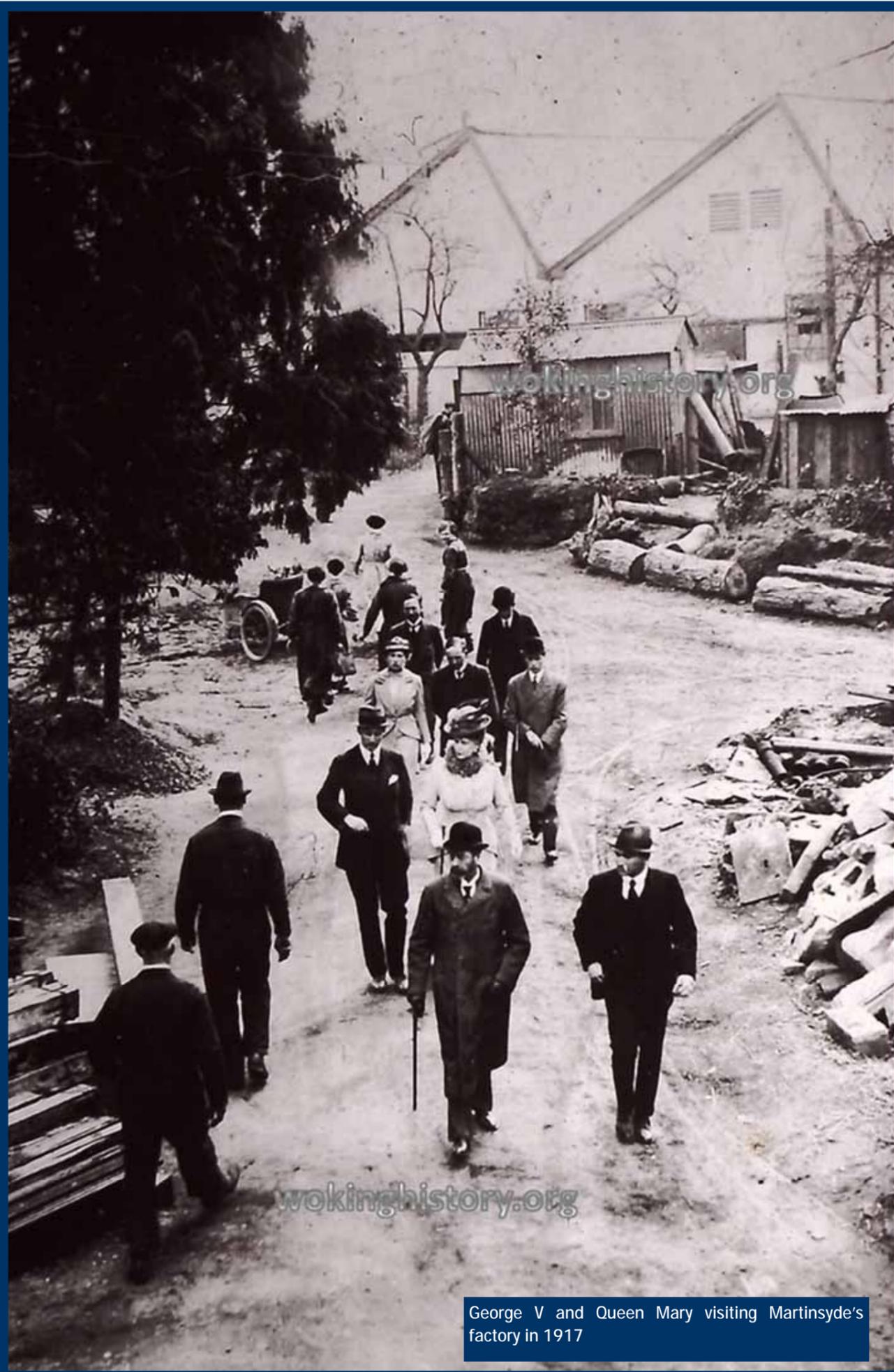
Iain Wakeford 2016

On the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1917 their Royal Highnesses King George V and Queen Mary, accompanied by the Princess Royal and Prince Albert 'motored to Woking from Windsor' to visit the works of Messrs Martinsyde's aircraft factory at Maybury.

Many years later a Mrs Millard, who worked for Martinsydes at the time, recalled the Royal visit. 'While Queen Mary was being shown around the Department where I worked, the King was shown the Dope Shop. I had a conversation with the Queen and found her most understanding and pleasant, asking me about my work and so on. Then our pilot, Captain Raynham, gave a display of loop the loop over the factory. We were all given an hour or so off to have a cup of tea and the Royal Family had tea in our canteen'.

The men in the Dope Shop worked a 'break system' so that after a week in the room they were moved on to another part of the works for several weeks before returning again. According to Mrs Millard they were also required to drink several pints of milk each day. Whether His Royal Highness had a glass following his visit to the room is not recorded, but in 1935 a local newspaper looking back at the visit noted that he was 'particularly interested in the oldest employee there, a Mr T Baker aged 70, who had been a member of the crew of the yacht "Osborne" when she made a cruise up the Baltic with the late King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra in 1864'.

Martinsydes was set up by two pioneer aviators, H P Martin and G H Handasyde, whom as early as 1908 had had built a monoplane in the ballroom of the Old Welsh Harp public house in Hendon before becoming tenants at Brooklands



George V and Queen Mary visiting Martinsyde's factory in 1917



and then taking over part of the former Oriental Institute buildings in Oriental Road.

Previous articles have concentrated on the history of the Oriental Road site from when the buildings were first constructed in the 1860's as the Royal Dramatic College, through to Dr Leitner's Oriental Institute and University (and the building of the Mosque in 1889). After his death in 1899 the Institute (and indeed the Mosque) closed and Leitner's son, Henry, used part of the old central hall for one of his company's – the Woking Accumulator Supply Company.

So ended the institutional history of the site and began a long period of industrial use. It was the British Government who apparently help pay for the expansion of the Oriental Road site with the building of vast workshops on what had once been the gardens of the old Institute buildings.

Sadly, after the war, the government cancelled their contract for aircraft and Martinsydes struggled to remain in business. They attempted to win the race to be the first to cross the Atlantic, but narrowly missed out to Alcock & Brown in their Vickers Vimy, and eventually aircraft manufacture ceased.



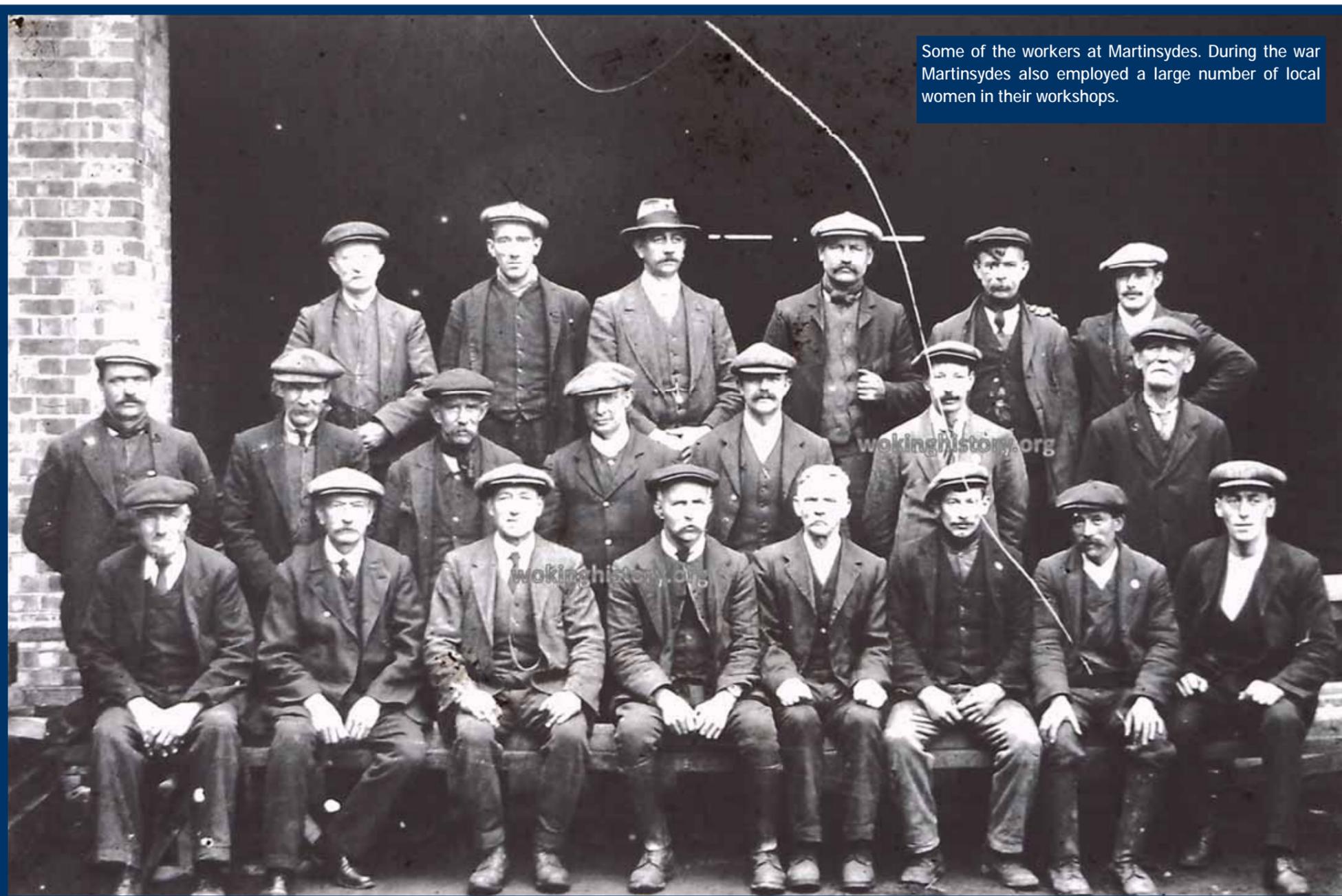
Inside one of the workshops.

They switched to making motorcycles (many of which still survive), but the company couldn't survive and a disastrous fire in the early 1920's probably didn't help much either. Apparently many people, having seen the flames billowing from the factory, ran to help recover as many

motorbikes as they could, riding them up the road never to be seen again!

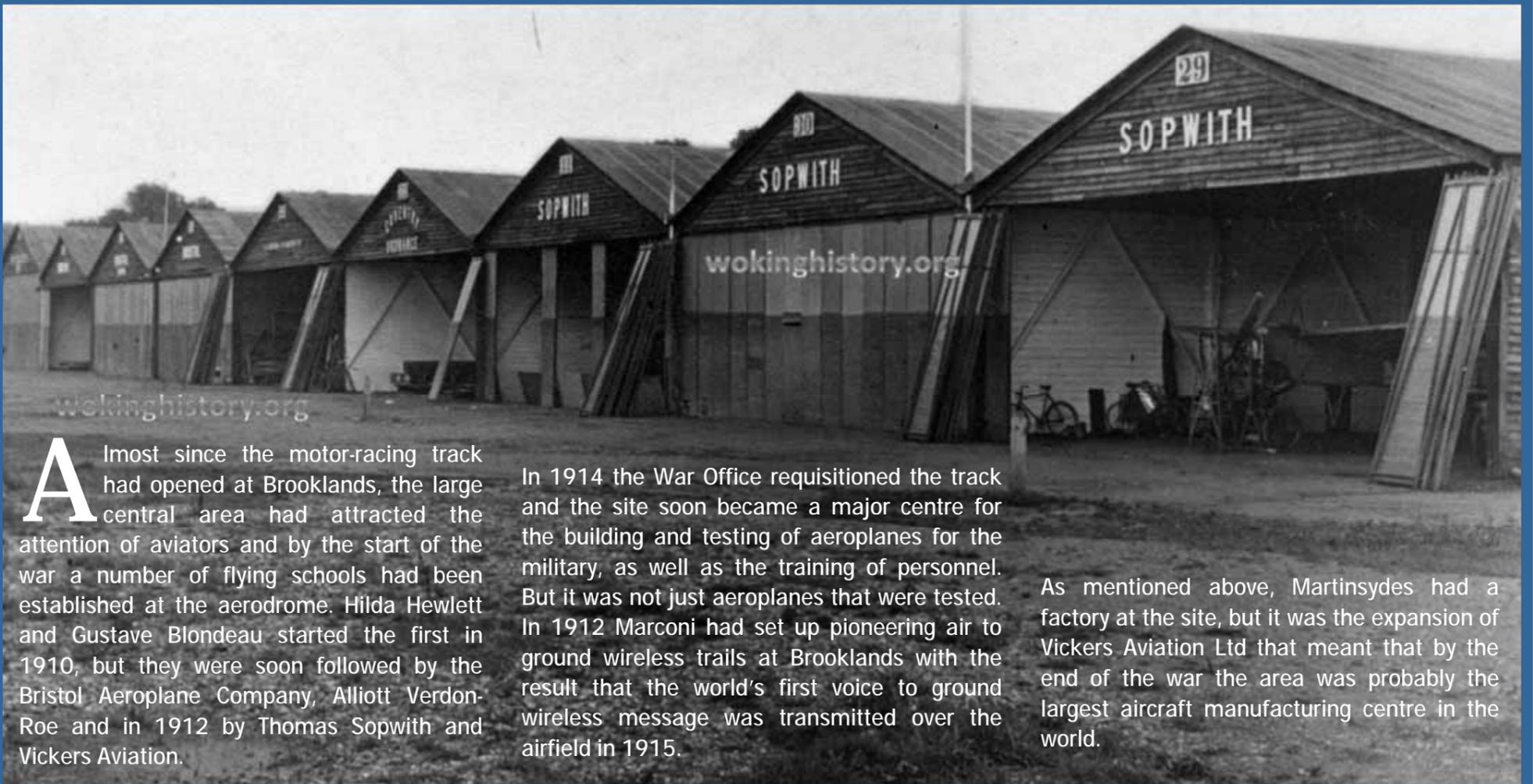
Only one Martinsyde aircraft is known to have survived – a 'F4 Buzzard' that was bought by the Aircraft Disposal Company in 1921. They

subsequently sold it to the Finnish Air Force in 1927 who used it in operations until 1934. It finally ended up in the Air Museum of Central Finland, although whether it is still there, I am afraid I do not know.



Some of the workers at Martinsydes. During the war Martinsydes also employed a large number of local women in their workshops.

# THE PIONEERS OF BROOKLANDS



Almost since the motor-racing track had opened at Brooklands, the large central area had attracted the attention of aviators and by the start of the war a number of flying schools had been established at the aerodrome. Hilda Hewlett and Gustave Blondeau started the first in 1910, but they were soon followed by the Bristol Aeroplane Company, Alliot Verdon-Roe and in 1912 by Thomas Sopwith and Vickers Aviation.

In 1914 the War Office requisitioned the track and the site soon became a major centre for the building and testing of aeroplanes for the military, as well as the training of personnel. But it was not just aeroplanes that were tested. In 1912 Marconi had set up pioneering air to ground wireless trails at Brooklands with the result that the world's first voice to ground wireless message was transmitted over the airfield in 1915.

As mentioned above, Martinsydes had a factory at the site, but it was the expansion of Vickers Aviation Ltd that meant that by the end of the war the area was probably the largest aircraft manufacturing centre in the world.

## MYSTERY PLANE ON THE BROADMEADS AT OLD WOKING

This photograph of a biplane on the Broadmead in Old Woking is dated 4<sup>th</sup> June 1915. According to the Send & Ripley History Society Newsletter Sep/Oct 2004, the picture is of a plane that lost its way on a flight from Brooklands to Paris (possibly

in a race), although I suspect that it was more likely a 'crash landing', possibly by one of those undergoing training from Brooklands.

It was not the only plane to land on the Broadmeads (Alan Cobham's Air Circus famously using the meadows during the

1920's and 30's), with the aviator Claude Graham White also crashing his bi-plane near to Unwin Brother's printing works in 1910 when he had been summoned to court in Woking for speeding (at over 20mph) in his car in Woking.



In 2004 the Send & Ripley History Society published the memories of a gentleman from Old Woking called Henry Cooper. He recalled playing cowboys and Indians on the Broadmeads one day when a small monoplane flew overhead. He pointed his toy

pistol at the plane and said 'bang', just at the engine cut out. He was scared that he had caused the crash, but the pilot simply got out, made some adjustments to the engine, and then flew off again. He also recalled an

emergency landing by Edward, Prince of Wales. He stated that the plan was 'towed to the garage in Old Woking to be repaired and taken by road to Brooklands', although whether the History Society was ever able to confirm that story I do not know.