

THE BUILDING OF BROOKLANDS - 1906-7

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Weybridge Motor Track. "The Hennibique Bridge."



We have seen in previous articles how Hugh Fortesque Locke-King had supported local sports with the building of the New Zealand Golf Course in 1895, and the donation of land in Byfleet for a recreation ground (and village hall) in 1898 – but it was his love of motor-racing that most people remember him for, and the construction in 1906-7 of the world-famous Brooklands Motor Racing Circuit.

Locke-King had seen on the continent how motorsports had taken off, with races allowed on the streets of many countries but not Britain (where since 1903 the maximum speed limit was just 20mph). This country, he noted, had been at the forefront of the development of most sports, but we were lagging behind in this new one, so he set about creating a private course (where speed-limits did not apply) that would be the envy of the world.

Late in 1906 work commenced on his 330 acres estate at Brooklands and Wintersells Farms (then mainly in the parish of Byfleet) with his friend Colonel H C L Holden (of the Royal Artillery) in charge of the plans. It was Holden's idea to build the 2¾ mile circuit with huge banked sections (nearly 30ft high), and a 100ft wide concrete track, so that cars could travel as fast as then possible.

Construction of the course, which also included a half-mile long finishing straight, apparently took only nine months to complete (at a cost of about £150,000), with the opening ceremony taking place on the 17th June 1907. Mr & Mrs Lock-King led a procession of forty-three cars after a special luncheon attended by most of Britain's pioneer motor manufacturers and racing drivers.

Even before the official opening the site was used by Selwyn Francis Edge to establish a new world record, covering 1,581 miles over twenty-four hours at an average speed of almost 66 miles per hour. Lanterns were apparently used to light the inner edge of the track at night so

that he could see where he was going, with bright flares illuminating the rim of the banking!

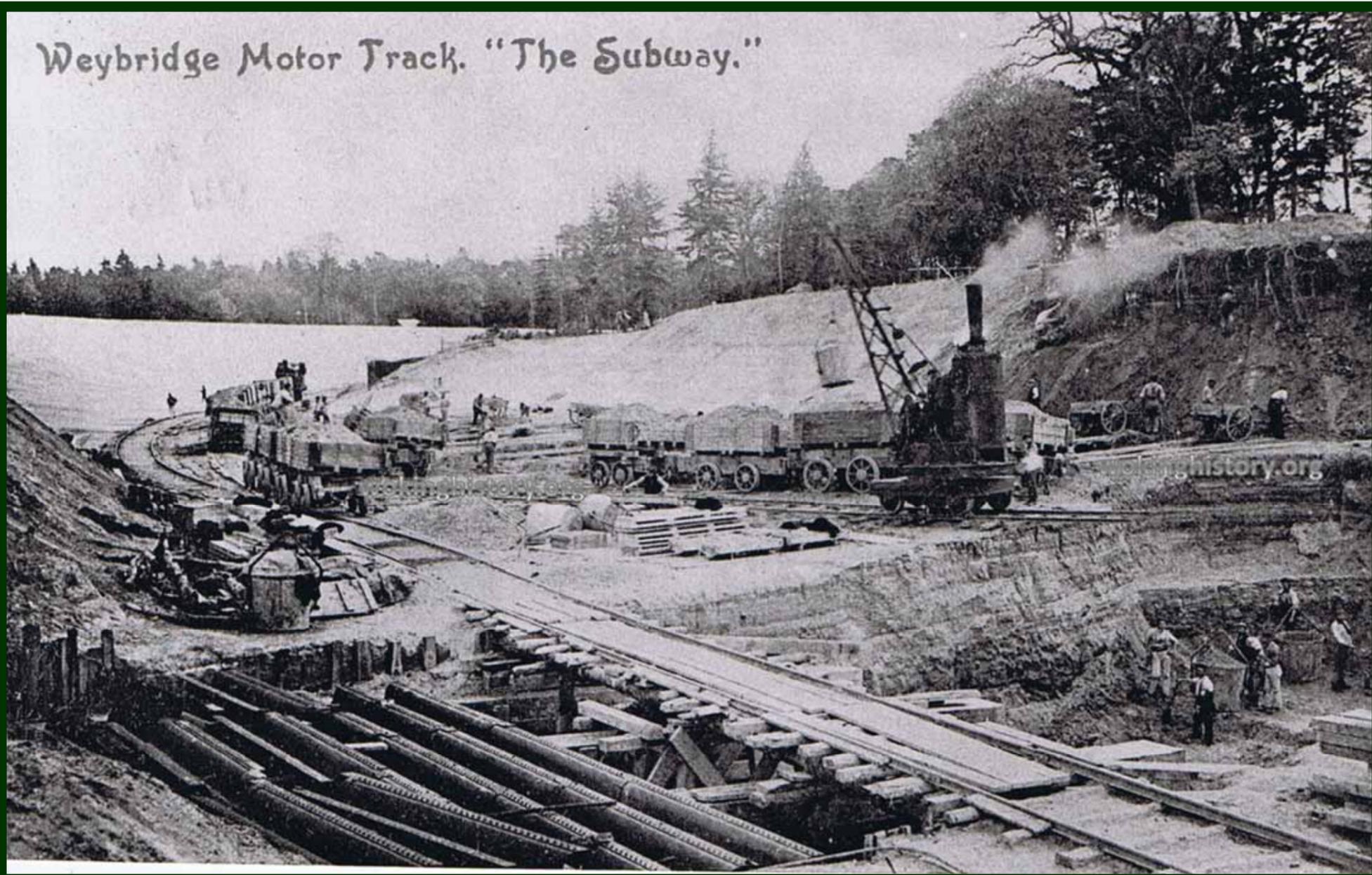
The first official race, attended by over 10,000 spectators, took place on the 6th July, with each driver wearing the 'colours' of their team, just as jockeys did at horse races. Indeed the press often referred to Brooklands as the 'Motoring Ascot' which no doubt helped to make the new sport more accepted by the audiences and establishment. The horse racing influence continued in the 'paddock' where the cars were 'shod' with tyres and the Clerk of the Scales weighed the machines for handicapping purposes.

The bridge over the River Wey was made of reinforced concrete, at that time a relatively new idea pioneered in France by Francois Hennibique.

Construction of the concrete track only took nine months to complete, thanks to the latest technology and machines.



Weybridge Motor Track. "The Subway."

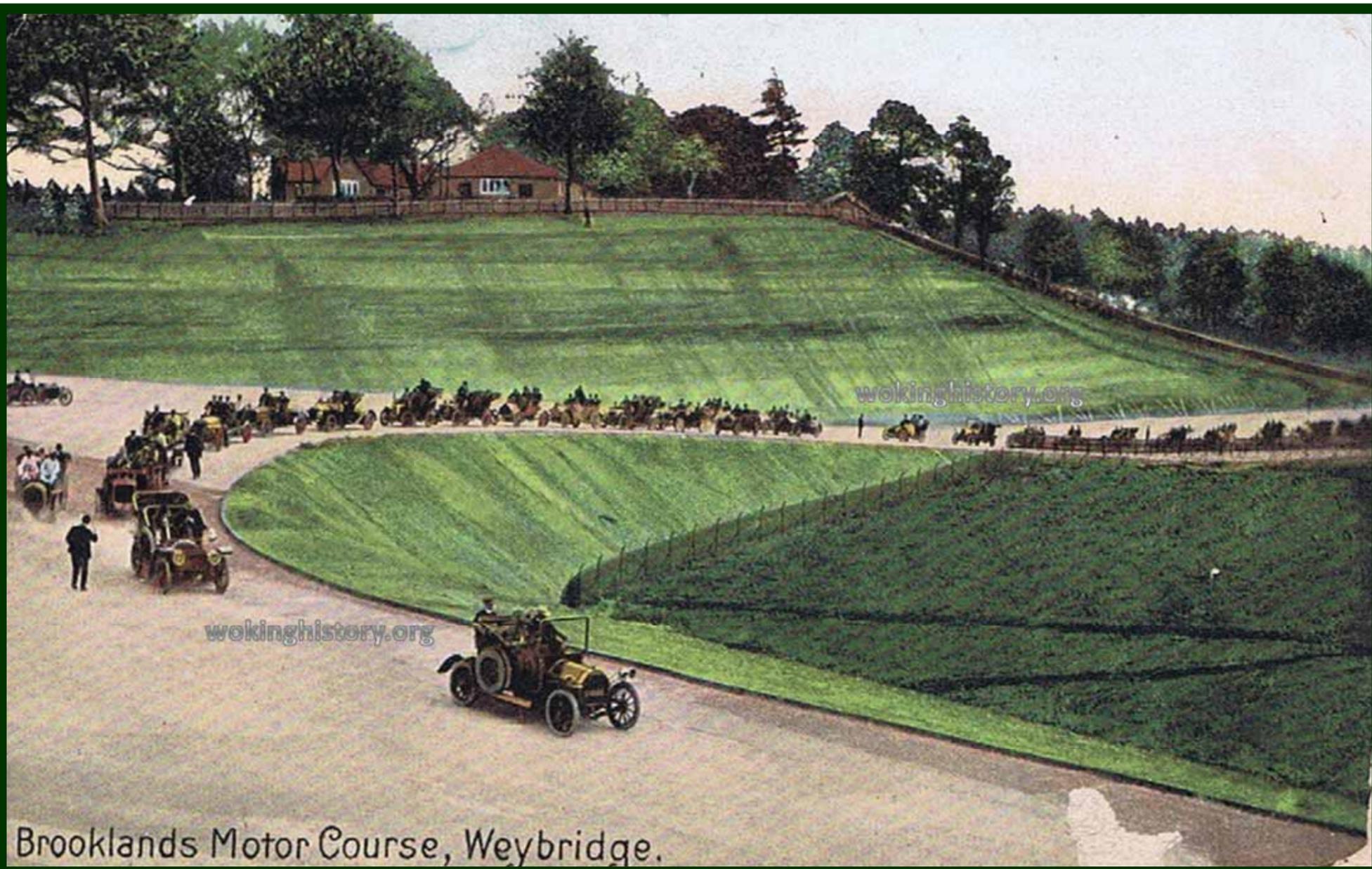


Even cycle racing was not approved of in those days (although many 'unofficial' races probably took place on the Portsmouth Road to Ripley) so that before long the track was also being used for those events – a 100 mile massed cycle race being held in September 1907 (followed in 1908 by motorcycles).

By then the track had started to be used by some of the pioneers of flight in this country, with A V Roe carrying out towed flight trials at Brooklands in June 1908 before the large central grassed area was cleared in 1909 to create one of the country's first aerodromes. Here in October that year Louis Paulman would

give the first public flying demonstration and in 1911 the world's first ticket office for flights was built.

Brooklands really was the 'cradle of motorsports' and one of the pioneering places for flight in this country.



Brooklands Motor Course, Weybridge.

ROSEMOUNT PARADE, WEST BYFLEET - BEGUN IN 1907



The shops of Rosemount Parade in West Byfleet were begun in 1907 when the house called Rosemount (that once stood on the site) was apparently demolished. We know that originally Rosemount was the home of John Leyland who established the Industrial School in Pyrford Road in 1870. He

also ran the Essential Oil Distillery (further down near Sun Cottages) – with 'Rose' mount probably being where the raw materials for his rose-water were grown.

By this time the area of Byfleet Corner (as West Byfleet was then known) was growing rapidly

with shops already built on the corner of Pyrford Road and Parvis Road, and others built about this time in Station Approach. All are now 'Conservation Areas' (designated in April 1992). It is thought that those in Station Approach (and the eastern part of Rosemount Parade) may have been built by W G Tarrant of Byfleet.



A BUILDING BOOM IN WOKING IN 1907



There appears to have been something of a building boom in Woking in 1907, if the dates on buildings in the area are anything to go by.

On Maybury Hill (above) the houses on the right as you are heading from the Maybury Inn towards St Columbus House have the date 1907 in the stonework, whilst on Wych Hill the shop on the corner with Cedar Path, called Aberdeen House, has the year painted on the wall. The place was at one time a butcher's shop so I wonder whether the name refers to the beef that was sold there (it is not the only butcher's shop to display that name).

Just around the corner in Triggs Lane is an even more remarkable date-stone on Tilehurst Cottages. Here a more precise date of 'June 1907' can be seen. I wonder whether having ordered the stone to be cut in advance, the builder did actually build the houses in that month, or whether it was a case of wishful thinking on the part of his clients?

