

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

Iain Wakeford 2016



On Wednesday 26th May 1926 an event took place in the grounds Pyrford Court, the home the Viscount and Viscountess Elevelen (Rupert and Gwendolene Guinness). It was held in aid of funds for the St George's Home for Officers' Children at Old Woking and was appropriately known as 'The Pageant of St George'. It appears to have been a sort of early 20th century 'Community Play' with 'six little plays, four of which marked great stages in the making of England'.

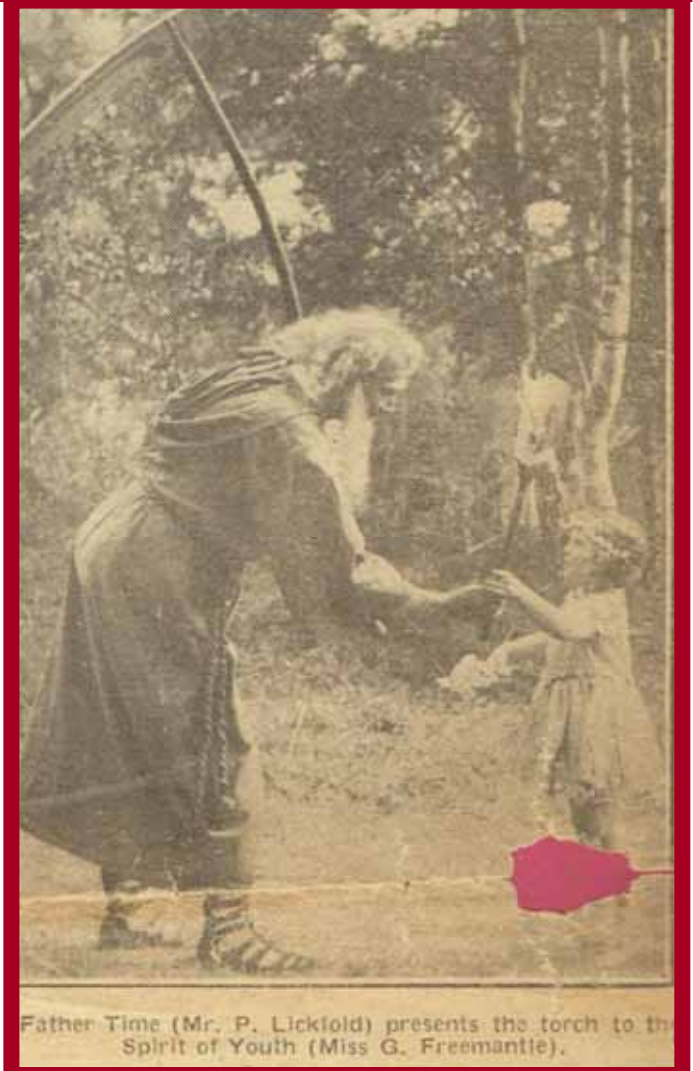
Judging by photographs published in the national press (the Daily Mirror and Daily Sketch both reported it) it appears to have been very well attended, with numerous local people playing parts such as 'Mr P Lickfold' as 'Father Time' who presented the torch of life to the 'Spirit of Youth' played by an angelic looking 'Miss G Freemantle'. St George was played by Captain Pidsley with the dragon incorporating the acting skills of Mr F Shaw and G G Hunt, all of whom performed the pageant to an audience at Henley Park at Pirbright the following Saturday.

Above - The cast of the Pageant of St George, probably in the grounds of Pyrford Court.

Right - Father Time (Peter Lickfold) from the Daily Sketch report of the pageant.

According to an article in the St John's Parish Magazine, 'during the progress of the Historical Pageant and Modern Fair, on both occasions, the Band of the 2nd Batt. The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment will play' and 'there will be stalls for baskets, children's toys, tobacco, lemonade, milk, and cake, etc.' with 'tea in the enclosure' at 1s6d and 1d an item on the refreshment stall.

I do not know who directed the play, but the chairman of the committee, and a great benefactor to the home at Poundfield House (formerly the home of Edward Ryde), was Lady Elizabeth Balfour (of Fishers Hill at Hook Heath), with the Countess of Onslow opening the play at Pyrford and the High Sheriff of Surrey opening the performance at Henley Park. 'Father Time' was probably Percy Lickfold, a stalwart of the newly formed Woking Amateur



Father Time (Mr. P. Lickfold) presents the torch to the Spirit of Youth (Miss G. Freemantle).



The Cast of Woking Operatic Society's 'Merrie England'

Operatic Society, who had played 'Big Ben' in their first performance (Merrie England) in January 1925 and the 'Inquisitor' in The

Gondoliers, performed the following January – both at the newly refurbished Palace Theatre in Duke Street. By the time of their third show, in

December 1926, he was the lead performer in The Mikado at the Grand Theatre in Commercial Road.

The Cast of Woking Operatic Society's 'Mikado'





Mrs Euneta Hutchinson Driver as the Carnival Queen outside the Boys Grammar School.

Another prominent member of the Operatic Society was Euneta Hutchinson Driver (nee Truscott), a well known West End opera- singer, pianist and actress, who played the role of Bessie Throckmorton in the Woking performance of Merrie England. She had married James Hutchinson Driver (whom we looked at a couple of months ago in connection with the recruitment of horses for the First World War) on his 61st birthday in 1918, she being twenty years his junior!

Along with her husband (who was President of the Operatic Society), she had also been a member of the Woking Musical Society and a

founder of the Woking Music Club in 1923. She was also heavily involved in the Hospital Carnivals, apparently playing the role of Carnival Queen in 1923.


Woking at this time appears to have had a wealth of local musical talent with groups such as the Epworth Choir and a choral society in Horsell also regularly performing, as well as an orchestra being recorded in Knaphill.

The St John's Parish Magazine of January 1926 noted 'a section of the Knaphill Orchestra' played at the Parochial Tea on December 30th at the Highclere Hall, where songs were also

sung by several parishioners and Mr W Ruglys gave a violin solo.

The people of Woking clearly knew how to entertain themselves, and to a certain extent still do, although none of the venues mentioned above have survived.

Woking from the Air in 1926, with the Woking Public Hall in the bottom left hand corner, next to the offices of the Woking Water Company. To the right were the council offices, the Constitutional Club and the Trinity Methodist Church. This is where the new 'Victoria Square' development is due to take place.



The Woking Amateur Operatic Society
presents
GILBERT & SULLIVAN'S
Famous Opera
THE MIKADO
or The Town of Titipu
(by kind permission of R. d'Oyly Carte, Esq.)
**THE GRAND THEATRE,
WOKING**

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday & Saturday,
15th, 16th, 17th & 18th DECEMBER, 1926
Commences 7.40 p.m. Concludes 10.45 p.m.

Prices of Admission (which include Entertainment Tax):
**STALLS 7/6. PIT-STALLS 5/9. PIT & BALCONY 3/6.
UNRESERVED SEATS 2/4.**



WOKING'S CINEMAS



The Central Halls Cinema was rebuilt as the Plaza

It is not known for certain where Woking's first 'moving pictures' were shown, although the Woking Public Hall in Commercial Road was probably the most likely venue, with the 'Argus Bioscope Company' advertising for three nights and one matinee only, 'a high-class and up-to-date animated picture entertainment' in March 1909 (priced from 6d to 1/6d.).

In January 1910 the 'Woking Electric Empire' in Commercial Road advertised 'the very last word in animated pictures' every night, Sundays included, with continuous performances from 6pm to 11pm (children 2d, adult 3d), but it appears that the first purpose built cinema in the town was the Central Halls Cinema in Chertsey Road, built in 1912 by local entrepreneur (and councillor) Henry Quartermaine. He was also responsible for opening Woking's first motor garage in Chobham Road. The following year the Palace Theatre opened in Duke Street, where not just plays and operas were staged, but also films regularly shown as well.

In March 1925 both the Woking Palace Theatre

and the Central Halls Cinema were taken over by Messrs Cohen & Freedman of Apollo Cinemas, giving them a virtual monopoly of moving picture entertainment in the town. That could have been challenged if Mr Kinns of the Elite Cinema in Kingston had got his way, as in February 1926 he exhibited plans for a new 'Orient Cinema' on the corner of Guildford Road

and Station Approach (the site later occupied by Conway West Motors).

In the meantime the Central Hall Cinema had closed for rebuilding and on the 7th February 1927 opened as the 'latest word in cinema – The Plaza' (which later became the Gaumont – more commonly known amongst locals as 'the flea pit')!



Henry Quartermaine on the campaign trail - often credited with opening the first purpose-built cinema in Woking - the Central Halls Cinema - later rebuilt in 1927 as the Plaza Cinema.

THE BRITISH GRAND-PRIX AT BROOKLANDS

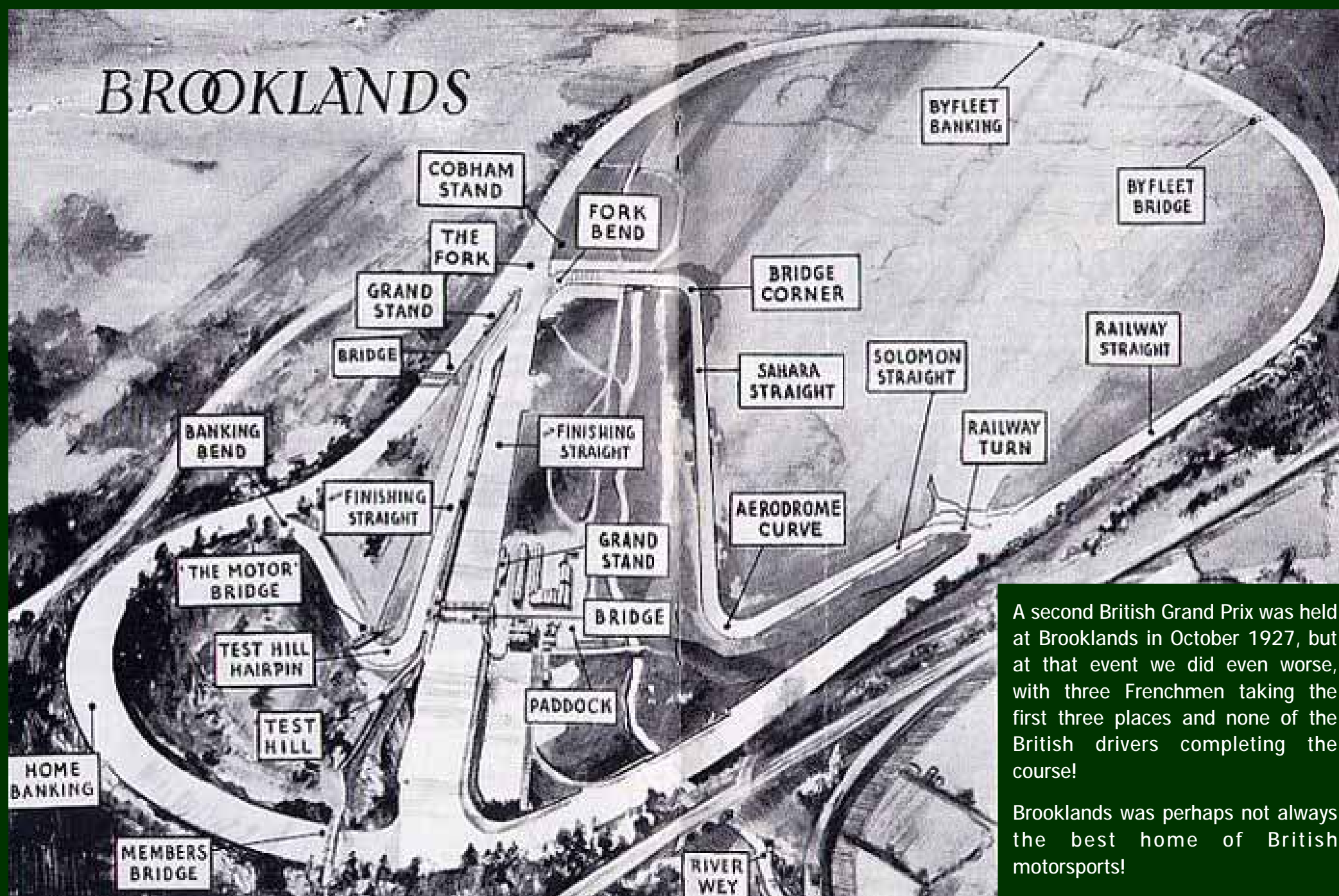


In those days the drivers had to race to their cars before the motor racing could begin

In 1923 Henry Segrave won the French Grand Prix (and the San Sebastian Grand Prix the following year), which led to the staging of the first British Grand Prix race at Brooklands on the 7th August 1926.

Seven Frenchmen and four British drivers competed in nine cars (a pair of the French cars being driven by a team of two men), but sadly Henry Segrave, driving his Talbot 700, had to retire on the sixtieth lap.

Indeed only three cars survived the full course, of which the sole British representative was the Bugatti of Malcolm Campbell, which came in second.



A second British Grand Prix was held at Brooklands in October 1927, but at that event we did even worse, with three Frenchmen taking the first three places and none of the British drivers completing the course!

Brooklands was perhaps not always the best home of British motorsports!