

For the Record...

Did you miss a meeting? Find out how it went.

An unusual side of a well known local family was revealed in John Pulford's talk on **The Locke Kings in Africa.**

The Locke Kings are known in Byfleet as a family of wealthy landowners. They owned much land in Surrey and Sussex, and it has been said that you could walk from Brooklands to Brighton at one time and never leave Locke King land. Sir Hugh and Lady Ethel Locke King are, of course, famous for building Brooklands race track. The family lived for a long time at Brooklands House (now Brooklands College) and yet Brooklands Museum did not contain much in the way of the personal paintings, photographs, correspondence and ornaments that would be associated with such a large house. Where had it all gone?

This question was answered in an unexpected way. To celebrate the 90th anniversary of Brooklands track the Museum wanted to create a special front cover for their *Spirit* magazine. They decided to recreate a photograph of Sir Hugh Locke King, sitting in his car with one of his poodles (breeding poodles was one of his hobbies, and they were all called John). They had the car at the Museum, and the use of 2 Locke King character actors, but had to advertise for a suitable poodle in The Daily Telegraph. Penelope Daley, the great great niece of Ethel Locke King, saw the advert and contacted the Museum for help with a family dilemma.

Penelope needed help. She was the granddaughter of Stewart Gore Browne, a keen racing driver and the son of Ethel's brother, Frank. Frank's family lived at Norfolk Farm Park, in between West Byfleet and Woking, but Stewart became very close to Ethel and spent much time at Brooklands House. In 1911 Stewart went to the Congo while working on the Anglo-Belgian Boundary Committee and he fell in love with the country, and after serving in the First World War, he went back and started to build himself a house at Lake Ishiba Ngandu. The house and estate, Shiwa Ngandu, became his pride and joy, and when Sir Hugh Locke King died in 1926 Stewart asked Ethel to move to Africa with him. She declined, but when she died in 1956, she made Stewart her chief beneficiary. Hence most of the Locke King possessions were moved to Africa and the question of where it had all gone was solved.

However, the African house was now in a bad state of repair. The estate had gradually gone into a decline, and unfortunately Stewart's daughter and her family were murdered there by poachers in 1991. The family were worried about the contents of the house being damaged beyond repair, and so the call came to Brooklands Museum to come and identify and save any Locke King items of interest. John Pulford was chosen and reluctantly set out into the unknown.

The journey was long and hard, with the roads ranging from quite good to almost non existent. The scenery was magnificent, however, and soon he came to the Gore Browne estate, with its brick buildings and large house built in colonial style. Darkness was closing in, so any exploring had to be left until the next day, as the house no longer had any electricity.

After being awoken by drums summoning the estate workers, John set off to explore. He was not disappointed. There were boxes of letters and property deeds, some going back to the 16th century and relating to business in Weybridge. There were portraits on the walls of Ethel Locke King (which turned out to be the partner of one of Sir Hugh in the National Portrait Gallery) and of the King children. He discovered boxes of books from Sir Hugh's father's library at Brooklands House, busts of the Locke Kings and furniture from Brooklands House including a fine long case clock.

All these items were in some danger of damage, as conditions ranged from very humid to very dry. As they went into some of the rooms to explore, bats the size of pigeons flew out, so there was the danger of animal damage as well.

John spent some time retrieving many small items which he took home in his suitcase straight away. Other items that he had selected were packed into crates and arrived at Brooklands Museum some months later. The crates were crammed with letters, deeds, books, paintings and prints, many of which needed conservation work before they could be stored safely or displayed. Some items are on show in the Billiard Room at Brooklands Museum, and all the many documents have now been inventoried, so are now available for research. One of the most exciting items was Stewart's diaries which documented the early days at Brooklands, as he had been an avid racing driver.

On a positive note, John reported that the house, Shiwa Ngandu, was now restored, taking in guests and being put back to how it used to be. The family are keen to maintain links with Brooklands Museum, and you would like to think that Stewart Gore Brown, who is buried next to Lake Ishiba Ngandu, would be happy that his possessions had found a safe home back in Weybridge.

With the long summer evenings now with us, we asked **James Adler** from the **Surrey Wildlife Trust** to speak about our local wildlife. The Trust looks after around 3.5 thousand hectares of Surrey countryside, including Wisley Common, an internationally protected site.

Heathland is now more rare than rain forest and provides a unique habitat which must be highly protected. Due to the land being built on or planted over the last 200 years, heathland has shrunk dramatically, and all that is left could fit onto the Isle of Man.

However, thanks to the Trust's protection, some of the species of plants, animals and insects are starting to return to the heaths. Tiger beetles have been recorded for the first time in 20 years. These are terrifically fast insects—if they were the same size as a cheetah James said it would chase it, catch it and most probably eat it too. All six species of British reptile make their home on the heath. Sand lizards were reintroduced onto Ockham Common 15 years ago and slow worms, common lizards, adders, grass snakes and the rare smooth snake also appear. The heaths provide a home for 3% of the UK population of Wood Larks, and 5% of the population of Nightjars, a nocturnal bird which comes all the way from South Africa to breed here. If you head out onto the common at dusk at the beginning of June you may be rewarded by their strange, churring song or even catch a glimpse of one as it flits by chasing insects. The Dartford Warbler is very sensitive to climate, with numbers dropping perilously low in bad conditions such as a very cold winter, so the heath provides vital areas for them to breed and recover the population. This is also true for the Silver Studded Blue Butterfly, which used to be very common in Surrey, but now has only 14 colonies. It does not fly very far, so if the habitat of one colony is affected, it tends to die out. Maintaining the heathland habitat is vital for this species, and James said that if you go out onto Fairmile Common early in the morning, you may be lucky enough to see about 5,000 of these butterflies on the wing at once, a truly beautiful sight.

One of the main problems for the heath is the invasion of scrub, bracken and grass. Grass takes over large areas, shading the surface of the soil and decreasing the surface temperature, so that insects and reptiles do not like it, and flowers will not grow. They also use up water and dry up the bog areas. In the past people used to be able to make money from these things, so they would get cleared, but those practices died out. Birch has also moved in and killed off a lot of the heather that grows on the heath. So the Trust carries out a lot of clearing to try and restore the conditions that heathland wildlife needs. Trees are cleared and controlled burning of heather is carried out. Bracken is such a huge problem that they have enlisted the help of the army in getting it sprayed with fern specific herbicides. Luckily heathland species tend to be tough, and once a space is cleared, the heather will regrow, due to the fact that its seed can remain dormant in the ground for over 100 years.

The most natural way to clear the ground is through grazing, and in 2007 the Trust obtained 3 Belted Galloway cows—Una, Duncan and Draco. They house the herd in Pond Farm, which was carefully restored for the job, and Manor Farm in Byfleet, which recently came into the Trust's possession, provides grass areas for the cattle through the winter. In 2010 the herd numbered 200 cattle. Each cow has a collar containing a GPS receiver which records where they are. The collar sends a text to Germany, and then an email is sent to the Trust and they can keep track of where the cows are and also how they are using the common. The movement of the cattle churns up the ground creating bare areas which can then be colonized by heathland plants. Previously the only colony of bog hair grass in Surrey could be found on Wisley Common. But after a couple of years of grazing there are now 4 or 5 colonies totalling around 30 plants. The “gifts” the cows leave behind are hugely valuable too. As the cows are given as little medicine as possible, and then usually organic, their cowpats are hugely attractive to beetles that live and feed on them. The beetles lay their eggs in the pats, and the larvae provide tasty snacks for foxes and badgers.

Naturally dealing with the cattle provides its own set of problems to be overcome. They have had to choose a breed without horns to avoid alarming the public, and the cattle have had to be trained to become used to horse riders. The cows have also worked out how to cross the cattle grids in some places! Luckily the snow at the beginning of the year did not bother them. The cattle are built to cope and have more hairs per square inch of skin than other breeds, providing plenty of insulation. But perhaps the most unexpected problem was when someone reported a bald man chasing the cows. Someone was sent to investigate what he was up to, and it turned out that he had heard that if you could get a cow to lick your head, it would make your hair grow back. Sadly the results of his experiment are not known.

We thanked James for an interesting talk that reflected the enthusiasm he felt for his work, and we looked forward to a good summer so we could all explore the Surrey heathland for ourselves.

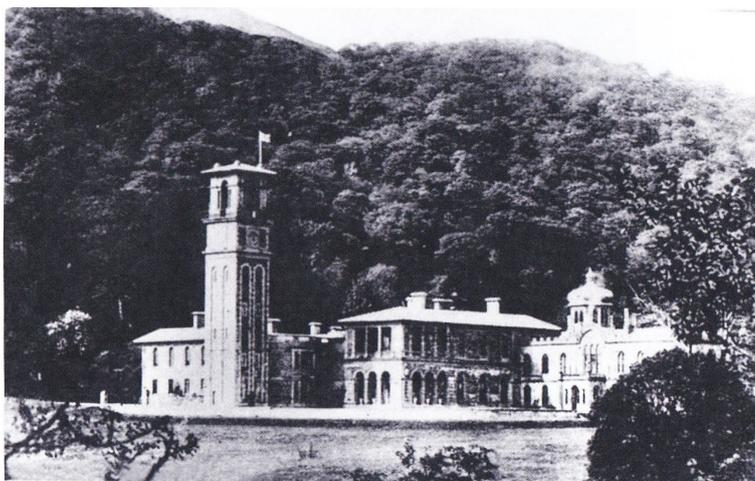
SOCIETY TRIP TO LOSELEY PARK. JULY 22ND 2010—a brief account of our visit will be given at our September talk. Come along and hear all about it.



WELSH CONNECTIONS

In May 2010 I spent a holiday week in Wales, and took the opportunity to visit two places with Byfleet connections.

The first was Hafod. Built in the 18th Century, the mansion at Hafod was in the middle of a large estate. Over the years there were several owners. When one of these, T J Waddington, died in 1938, aged 98, the outlook for the estate was very uncertain. In 1940, W G Tarrant bought the estate. Although he was possessed of ambitions to restore the house and make the estate a flourishing concern, he was short of money and started the process of extensive tree felling, justified by the demands of the war effort. He also made strenuous efforts to interest the Ministry of Supply in Hafod's mining potential, and opened up



Hafod Mansion, near Aberystwyth, Wales

some of the old levels. One substantial landscape feature was created, namely the barrage across the river at Dologau, which supplied hydro-electric power to the house, the estate cottages and buildings. Tarrant was the last person to use the mansion as a permanent home. He died suddenly in 1942, and subsequently Hafod was owned by a succession of timber merchants. The house fell into disrepair and was demolished in the 1950's. The estate features a number of interesting walks.

The nearby church professes to be open at all times to enable visitors to use its computer to locate the various graves. Unfortunately when I visited, it was closed for building work, so I visited the Estate Office. The ranger on duty knew little about Tarrant, although one of his colleagues apparently knew quite a lot – but she was away on holiday! She subsequently made contact with me and has kindly provided me with a copy of Tarrant's obituary published in the local newspaper.

Later the same week, I visited Pendine Sands, the location of many world land speed records. We in Byfleet know of the attempt on this record being made by John Godfrey Parry Thomas, when he was tragically killed there in March 1927, and was subsequently buried in Byfleet churchyard. The car he was driving named 'Babs', was buried in the sands after the accident, but much later was dug up and restored to running order. The specially-created Museum of Speed just above the sands, is a small building commemorating these world record attempts which were attempted by both racing cars and motor bicycles. The centrepiece of the exhibition is 'Babs', but it spends some

months away from there each year, visiting both Beaulieu and Brooklands. At the time of my visit, there was an empty space, as 'Babs' was away at Beaulieu. I found an interesting book on sale, called 'Capt Campbell & Mr Thomas' by Lynn Hughes [published by Golden Grove @ £3.95]. This tells the story of the friendship and racing rivalry between Parry Thomas and Malcolm Campbell

This area of south Wales is well worth a visit, particularly as to get to Pendine Sands, the route goes through Laugharne, the home of Dylan

Thomas, whose house and boathouse are open to the public.



Jim Allen



SOCIETY SNIPPETS

A MEMORIAL TO HOWARD COOK

On June 19th a memorial plaque was unveiled to Howard Cook at Byfleet Village Hall. Mr Cook was a key figure in the village, setting up numerous groups and organisations and serving as Chairman of the Residents' Association for many years. The plaque was sponsored by the Heritage Society, the Byfleet Bowls Club and the Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Residents' Association, and was unveiled by Howard's daughter, the Revd Kathleen Allen. She later sent the following letter of thanks.

"I would like to thank the Byfleet Heritage Society for sponsoring the plaque placed in the Village Hall in memory of my father. He never looked for praise or thanks, but I am sure he would have been pleased with it.

The wording and materials used are in keeping with him and a worthy memorial to a man who gave so much to the three villages for such a large part of his life. I am sure he would also like to express his thanks to everyone who continues to work for the good of the area.

Thank you to all the people who came to the Village Hall for the unveiling. It was lovely to see so many people there, particularly as he left the village over ten years ago. It will be a treasured memory for me, my husband, Richard and my cousin, Norman."



Kathleen Allen unveils a plaque in memory of her father Howard Cook.

RECEIVE YOUR NEWSLETTERS BY EMAIL!

Would you like to cut down on the amount of paper on your desk and also help the Society cut down on postage costs? We are now able to send your newsletter and any other Society letters and notices by email.

Some members have already signed up for this service at the AGM. If you would like to join them please drop an email to Tessa Westlake at tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk and she will add you to the mailing list.

If at any time you decide that you would like to revert to "snail mail", just drop Tessa another email and the switch can easily be made.

So if you would like to join our e-mailing list, drop Tessa a line now. Thank you.

BYFLEET FIRE STATION OPEN DAY

Byfleet Fire Station will be open again for the latest Heritage Open Day weekend. You can see inside our local landmark on **Saturday 11th September between 11am and 4pm.** It is also hoped that the Fire Brigades of Surrey Preservation Trust will also be there, so come along and find out about their wonderful collections.

