

LOCAL LAND-SPEED RECORD-HOLDING CONNECTIONS

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A month ago I wrote a small piece on Britain's first Motor Grand Prix that took place in 1926 at Brooklands, following Henry Segrave's win in the French Grand Prix the previous year. The 1926 race was won by a Frenchman, with Malcolm Campbell coming second, and Henry Segrave having to retire, but the two Brits were to lock horns on many other occasions, not least for the more prestigious title of being the fastest man on land. They were joined in that pursuit by John Godfrey Parry-Thomas, who lived in a bungalow called 'The Hermitage' in the middle of the race track at Brooklands.

Malcolm Campbell was the first of the three to gain the land-speed title in September 1924 when he drove his Sunbeam across Pendine Sands in South Wales at 146.16mph. The following July he increased the record, becoming the first person to travel at over 150mph, but that record was smashed the following April when Parry Thomas in his car 'Babs' crossed the sands at 170mph!

Parry Thomas didn't have the wealth of Segrave or the prestige of Campbell, and in fact 'Babs' was adapted from a second-hand car that he had bought from the estate of Count Zborowski (of Chitty Bang Bang fame) following his death at the Italian Grand Prix at Monza in 1924.

Sadly Malcolm Campbell in his 'Bluebird' regained the record from Thomas at Pendine in February 1927, but when Thomas tried to get it back the following month he lost control of Babs and was killed as the car rolled and slid upside-down along the beach at over 100mph. The car was buried in the sands (until it was later dug up and restored), but Parry Thomas was brought back to Byfleet and buried in the churchyard, where his memorial can still be seen.

Before the month was out Campbell's land speed record had been broken again, this time on the sands of Daytona Beach in America, where Henry Segrave had taken his 1,000hp

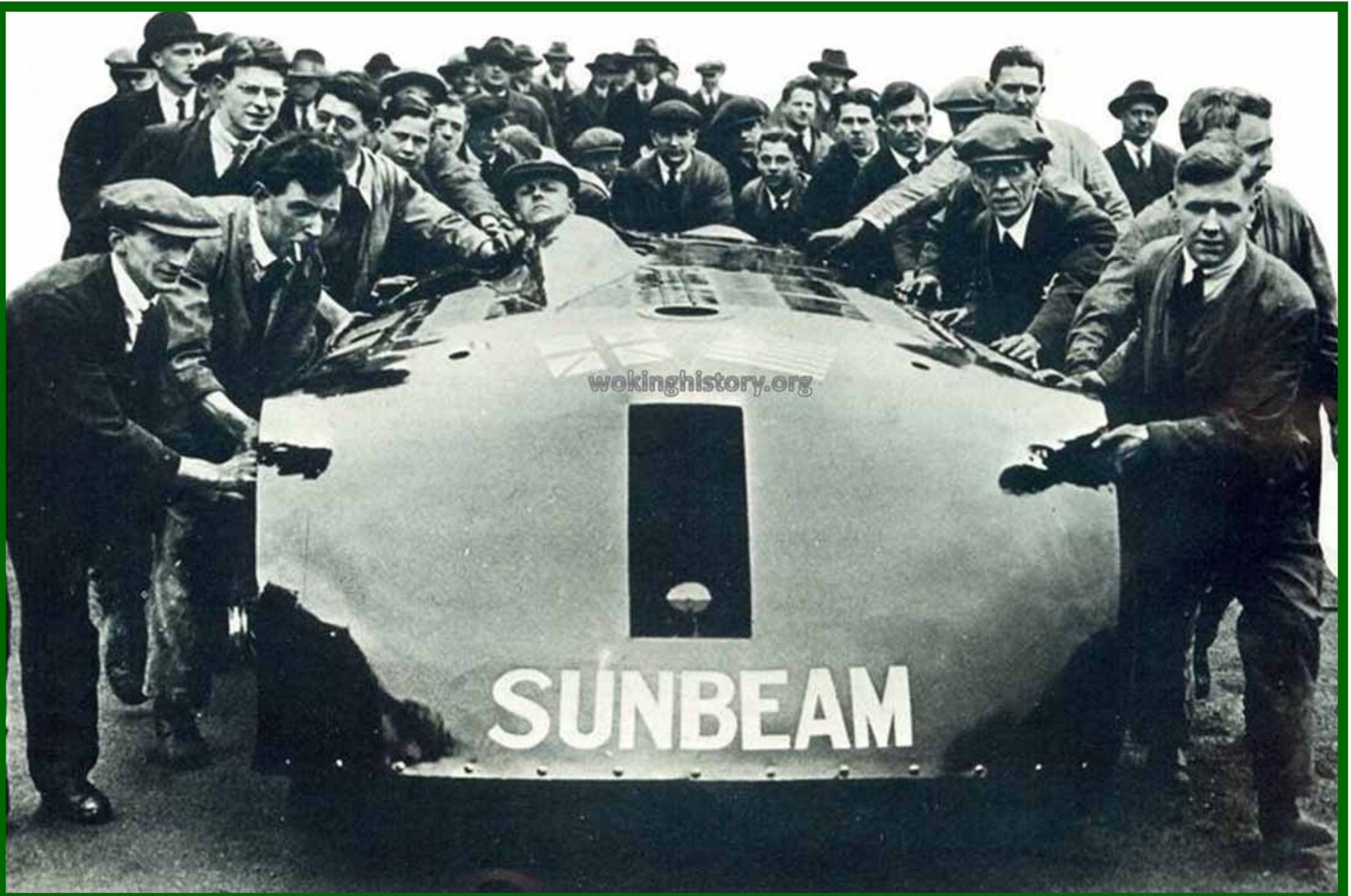


The simple headstone in Byfleet churchyard records John Godfrey Parry Thomas and his land-speed record of 1927.



Sunbeam (nicknamed 'Mystery') to become the first person to drive at over 200mph! Campbell in his Bluebird recovered the record there the following year, with Segrave wrestling the record back again in 1929 (after an American had briefly become the fastest man on earth) – a feat for which Segrave was knighted.

His car on this occasion was called the Golden Arrow and featured a revolutionary toughened-glass windscreen made by a company of which Segrave was a Director – the Acetex Glass Company. They took over the old Sorbo Rubber works in Maybury Road in 1928 after Sorbo had



A Director of the Acetex Glass Company of Woking, Henry Segrave won the land-speed record (and later the water-speed record) before being killed when his boat hit a log on Lake Windermere in 1929.

moved to new premises at the end of Arnold Road.

The Acetex building (originally a laundry before Sorbo took it over), was later used by the Parazone Company, later still becoming a car showroom, before being demolished and the site turned into apartments - the distinctive clock-tower being retained in the new building.

Sadly a few months after receiving his knighthood in 1930 Sir Henry Segrave died whilst capturing the world water speed record in his boat 'Miss England II' on Lake Windermere. On the second run down the lake it is thought the boat hit a log and capsized. Segrave was dragged from the water unconscious, but apparently was briefly revived and told of his new record (the first person to hold both land and water records simultaneously) before dying a few moments later.

World Speed Records were obviously not all that lucky for our two locally-adopted heroes (and ultimately not for the Campbell family either), and eventually Segrave's Acetex company didn't survive either!



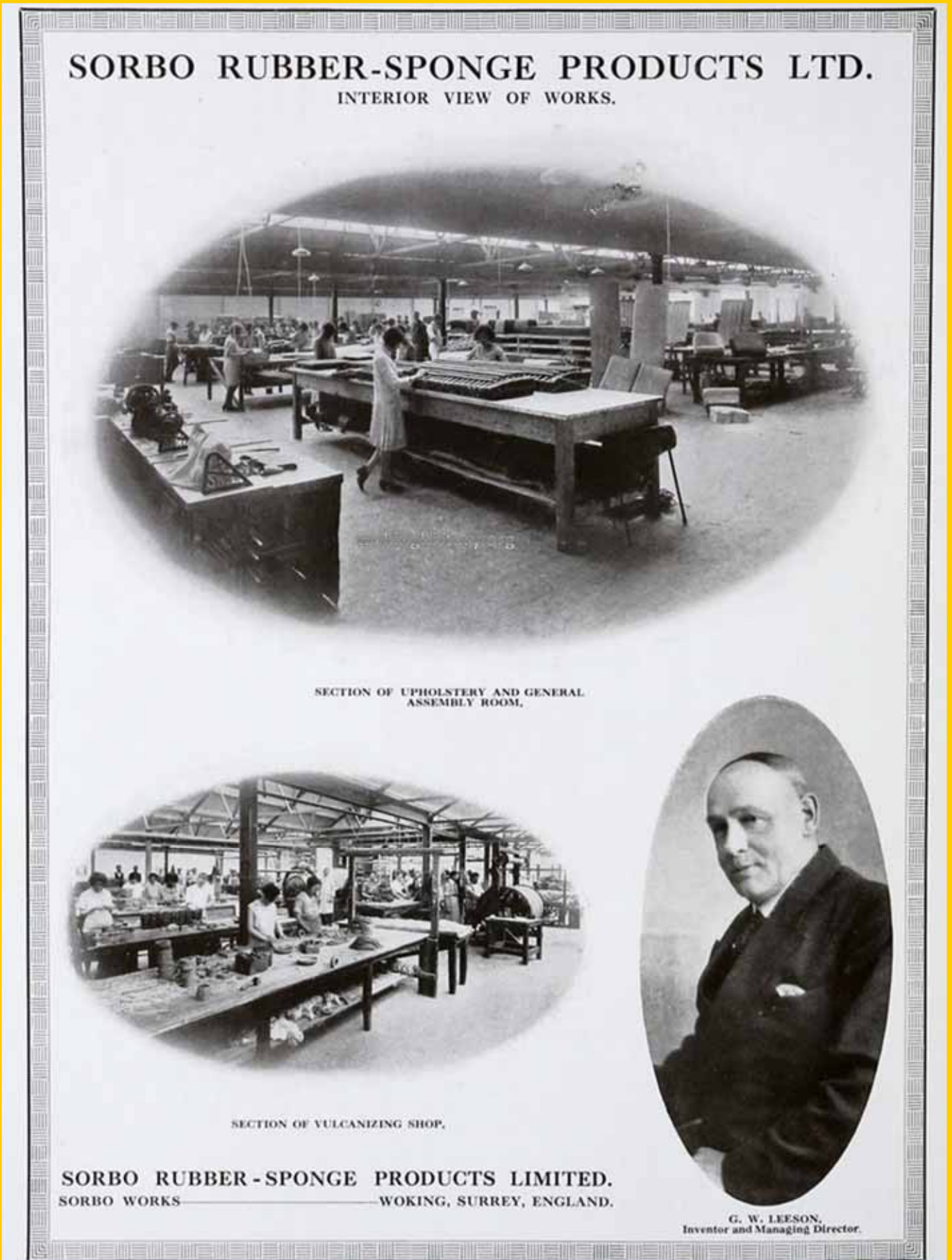
Originally a laundry, then Sorbo Rubber and Acetex Glass in the 1920's, the site was later used by the Parazone Company before becoming a motor showroom (perhaps appropriately given Henry Segrave's connection).

SORBO RUBBER-SPONGE PRODUCTS LTD



In 1916 Mr G W Leeson started a small business in Chiswick producing a new type of rubber he had developed. It was immediately used in products during the Great War such as gas masks and for 'cutting out vibration' in submarine listening apparatus as well as in aerial photography, but the works in Chiswick soon became inadequate and in 1918 the company moved to the old Maybury Steam Laundry in Maybury Road, Woking.

As well as the war items the new 'Sorbo Rubber-Sponge' was used in all sorts of industries including engineering, motoring, railway carriages and aircraft production. It was mainly used in upholstery and flooring where according to one brochure produced by the company 'it is as soft and springy as a deep pile carpet, and acts as a complete vibration damper. It excludes all possibility of exhaust fumes entering a motor vehicle, and insulates from heat of engine whilst most effectively cutting out floor-board tremor and underneath noises, when travelling at high speeds'.



In the late 1920's Sorbo moved their factory to a new site at the end of Arnold Road. It was just beyond the bounds of Woking in what was then part of Pyrford - known as Sheerwater, where the rates were cheaper than Woking. The site is now occupied by the Woking Business Centre off Albert Drive.

I wonder whether Messrs Segrave, Campbell and Thomas had it fitted to their cars?

By the late 1920's Sorbo had again outgrown their premises and moved to a new site at the end of Arnold Road.



WOKING'S NEW FIRE STATION IN 1928



A few weeks ago I wrote about Father Plummer, the Catholic Priest of St Dunstan's Church, who when he came to Woking in 1923 decided he couldn't live in the damp and decaying old presbytery in Church Street and instead bought first a large house in Onslow Crescent and later Lavender Cottage in Heathside Crescent. In order to help pay for his new purchases he had to sell the old unwanted presbytery, which he finally managed to do when Woking Urban District Council decided to build a new fire station for the town, incorporating the old house into the project in order to save money – the final cost

of the scheme coming to £4,900.

The new station (with the old Presbytery on the left) opened on the 21st July 1928, housing the Dennis fire engine bought in September 1919, as well as a second engine purchased in 1925 and the Renault that had been donated by Councillor Illingworth the same year for use as

a 'fast motor tender'.

There the fire brigade stayed happily (even rebuilding on the same site in 1982) until now, when they have had to move to Goldsworth Road to make way for the proposed Victoria Square development.

