

Aviva Fellowship Croydon – Trip to Brooklands Museum 15th July 2013

On a very hot summer's day, as Members arrived, they were warmly greeted and 'booked-in' by Hilary Kearney at the Gate Lodge. 34 of us then met and mingled at the Sunbeam Café, part of the original Brooklands Clubhouse, near Weybridge in Surrey. After some light refreshments we then gathered upstairs and we had a brief talk from our Organiser Chris House. Chris first welcomed a new member Christine Kelly, and that it was also nice to see Richard & Diana Dines, and Ian & Morven Rae once again. Chris also informed us that amongst us was Alan Chipperfield, now 90 years old, who flew Wellington bombers during WW II. Also present was Bert Firmin, who was an ex Spitfire pilot. Chris then sadly reminded the party that Dickie Dyke's (also an ex WW II RAF man) funeral was taking place at that moment in Wallington, and a short period of contemplation was observed.

Maddie, a Brooklands guide, then gave us a brief introduction to Brooklands history which, from its inception, and sadly 'cheap' (6" thick, instead of the specified 9") concrete track construction, was increasingly heavily funded by Hugh and Ethel Locke King. This eventually led to its opening in June 1907, with a cavalcade of 43 automobiles, a real spectacle for its time! Many World records were subsequently established there over the years on their track; in fact, Malcolm Campbell's 'Bluebird' racing car was built and developed at Brooklands. A small airfield soon followed, together with a 325 ft hill climb with a 1 in 4 gradient, quite a test for acceleration and braking systems in those days and still used today. Unfortunately the track, as part of the aircraft production site attracted severe bombing during WW II and was latterly uneconomic to restore. However, London Weekend Television filmed one of the Hercule Poirot episodes (with David Suchet) at Brooklands, and more recently (September 2009) Top Gear's James May broke the world record for the longest Scalextric track, using the remnants of the Brooklands circuit.

During WW II, Barnes-Wallis (designer of the Wellington bomber, and the famous 'bouncing bomb' of the Dambusters fame) was based at Brooklands, and the aviation hangars contain many examples of his work, including a partly restored Wellington that was recovered from the bottom of Loch Ness in 1985, discovered by an American adventurer looking for Nessie!

After the Introductory Briefing, we were split into two groups with two further expert guides John & David, and proceeded with the tour. Exhibits included a Formula One museum, a bicycle museum (featuring a tandem with a side-car) amongst others. Far too much to see in one day!

After lunch, some of us met in the main hangar to see Alan Chipperfield climb once again into a Wellington cockpit (see pictures in Newsletter). The other half of us were due for our UK first production Concorde Flight Experience. We learnt that the UK Concorde's nose and tail were built at Brooklands with France providing the middle sections and wings. Certainly a 'flight' to remember and somewhat less than the 70's return ticket price tag of \$10,000! Amongst the other static aviation displays was a VC10 airliner, once used by the Sultan of Oman as his personal transport – very opulent indeed!

A brief visit to the large London Bus Museum completed a very interesting day out. It needs another visit to see those areas we didn't have time to see. Thanks go to the Brooklands Guides and our Organisers.