

Glimpses of the Past

by George Toms

No. 13 A Remarkable Brush Veteran

To have been born during the reign of Queen Victoria, before the end of the last century, worked at Brush in two world wars and tell the tale with a twinkle in her eye is truly remarkable. More remarkable is that this lady may be the oldest surviving former Brush employee, and at nearly 95 years of age her memory is as sharp as ever.

Originally from the Isle of Sheppey, Mrs Sargent first came to Loughborough in 1916 as Miss Ellingworth and to most people who knew her during her later times at Brush she is better remembered as Mrs Bowles.

She was sent to Loughborough by her parents to her aunt's, to avoid the Zeppelin raids in her home area. She liked it so much that she stayed. Indeed, it was whilst in the town that she spotted advertisements with vacancies for people to work at Brush. At this time many men were in the armed forces, so women were being encouraged to enter industry. Brush at this time was under Ministry of Munitions control and engaged on important war work. She was set on, and employed in the Aviation Department, her job being in the Dope Shed. Here she was involved in trimming the fabric which was used for covering the aircraft and treating it with dope to seal the surface. At this time the foreman was Mr Dewick and his assistant was Mr Lee. An influenza epidemic broke out and most people were affected greatly, fatally in a lot of cases. All the Dewick family were ill and of course the father was not at work. Miss Ellingworth and her cousin Edith Clarke were sent to the family to nurse them out of the crisis and enable Mr Dewick to return to work.

At this time Brush was engaged in building Avro 504C aircraft, Short 184 and Short 827 seaplanes. Aircraft must have made an impression upon her, because during her time at Brush she volunteered to join the Women's Royal Air Force, but because of her involvement on important war work she was not allowed to leave the Brush company. Her youth did not belie her determination, because as soon as the war was finished and the regulations could not hold her, she left to join the RAF. Her stay in the forces lasted until the disbandment of the women's section.

Away from the Brush and aircraft, she became Mrs Bowles and was raising a family, but it was another world war that brought her back again. During the early part of World War II she was back in her home territory, at Sittingbourne, in Kent, where she witnessed the return of troops from Dunkirk on the trains that passed nearby on the Dover to London main line. She also saw the Battle of Britain struggles over her local skies. In 1940 she came up to Loughborough for a fortnight's holiday and whilst here it came to her attention that Brush wanted trimmers and dopers for the aircraft activities. An interview soon had Brush welcoming her back, her experience was vital, and of course no training was needed. She had a problem inasmuch that her family was still in the south east and she had no accommodation in Loughborough. Mr A. P. Good's wife had a housekeeper with spare accommodation, a cottage in Russell Street, so it was arranged that Mrs Bowles and her family could stay there for the duration. Mr Bowles, a pottery painter, was duly summoned northwards. The furniture problem was sorted out by Brush. It was arranged that a Brush lorry due to return to Loughborough empty would call by and pick up the furniture, and so the job was done. Mr Bowles also came to Brush, starting as a progress chaser.



Ethel Sargent at her present Loughborough home.



Ethel's son Fred, who was the bugler on HMS Ajax during its action against the Graf Spee in the famous Battle of the River Plate in South America.

One of their sons was serving in the Royal Navy on HMS Ajax. Fred was a bugler on this ship and saw active service when it was involved with the chase and destruction of the battleship Graf Spee off the South American coast. It was he who called everyone to action stations. After the war he was on HMS Vanguard which was bound for South Africa on a Royal Tour. On his arrival at Cape Town he was met by the former Brush Coachworks manager Mr Danny Houston who was by this time living there. Since those days the family has lost touch with Mr Houston, but would like to know what happened to him. Fred, now 72, still lives in Loughborough, next door to his mother and keeps an eye on her, although the reverse could be true!

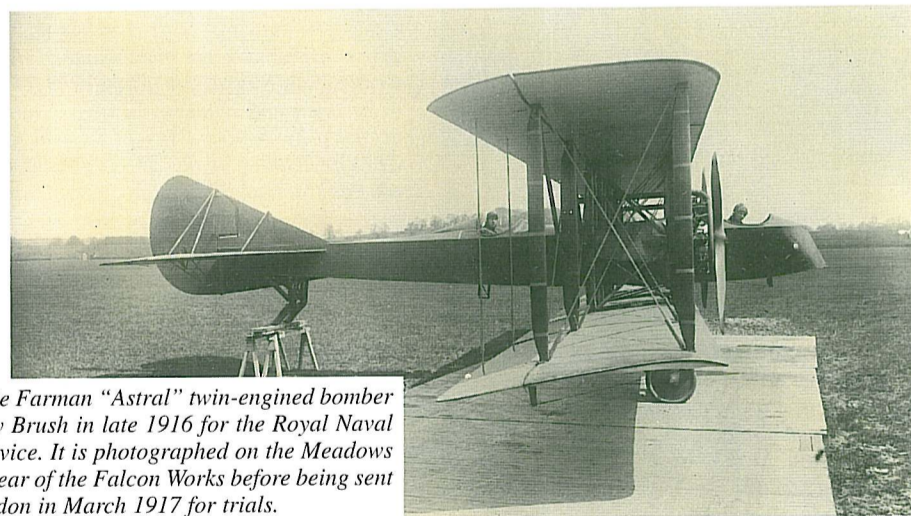
Meanwhile, back at Brush in 1942, the job of Welfare Officer became vacant and Mrs Bowles was volunteered for it. Somewhat apprehensively she accepted and settled into it admirably during those difficult times. Her duties were varied of course, and among them were the various committees upon which she sat. Decisions of all sorts were made, both inside and out of the works, and from one meeting there stemmed the Brush "Holidays at Home" event, mentioned in a previous "Glimpses of the Past". From the early part of the war travel was very difficult and of course most seaside resorts had



The Brush "Holidays at Home" Committee in 1942 with Ethel Bowles (known as "Aunt Ethel" to the children, centre). "Uncle Arthur" (2nd left), a visiting entertainer (name not known), was being presented with a tankard on behalf of the Committee by one of the children whose games he organised. Her name was not known either, but the other Committee members are (left to right) Mr Norrish, Mr Cape, Mr T. Fielding, Mr Hill (Mayor) and Mr Perkins.

beaches laced with barbed wire if they were in a danger zone.

She recalled how some of the events were arranged. J. B. Priestley brought in some national singing celebrities. There was Heddle Nash, tenor; Peter Dawson, baritone; and Margaret Eves, soprano. It was decided that there should be an official "Voice of Brush" to make announcements for the various events and auditions were held, with the prospective candidates making recitations behind screens. No doubt most of the voices of Brush at that time were the wrong sort, but one girl, Miss Rita Brooks, was chosen. At the Town Hall Ballroom, J. B. Priestley opened the first Brush Holidays at Home Ball, escorted Miss Brooks during the opening speeches and made the official announcement of her as the Voice of Brush to all present. The works photographer had an unfortunate mishap over his photographs. They were lost in a studio fire, so events



The sole Farman "Astral" twin-engine bomber built by Brush in late 1916 for the Royal Naval Air Service. It is photographed on the Meadows to the rear of the Falcon Works before being sent to Hendon in March 1917 for trials.

The Good Old Days

Apart from the great deal of interest generated by George Toms' regular "Glimpses", there is always a fascination in the personal memories of Brush and its people. As this seems to have increased recently, it may be a good subject for a regular 'nostalgia' spot in the 'News'. This photograph was loaned to us recently by Margery Purday, who was the Brush Receptionist for many years, and shows the Brush lawns and flower gardens before the Transformer Offices were built. Many older and retired employees will recognise the spot it was taken from, and the date is fairly well tied-down by the immaculate Morris Oxford Saloon and what looks like an M.G. Roadster? on the right. Margery is standing

were not so well recorded as had been hoped. After a hectic fortnight of events an exhausted Mrs Bowles had one of her days off to recuperate. Upon her return she discovered that her pay was reduced accordingly – it was duly rearranged to a satisfactory conclusion!

Among Mrs Bowles' duties was organising the canteen trolley service around the Falcon Works and prior to the first Christmas after the war ended in 1945 she extended her skills in holding a party for employees' children in the canteen. It was a daunting task, bearing in mind that rationing had been the order for some years. How would they feed all those mouths with even the most basic of foods? She suggested that an appeal for "goodies" such as sugar, nubs of butter, eggs, jelly and so forth should be made over the works Tannoy system. This was done and the response was very impressive, with all sorts of things coming in. On the day of the Victory Party the canteen staff worked wonders and Father Christmas made his entry on a specially decorated battery electric vehicle; there was a little toy for every child present.

Mrs Bowles' next departure was abrupt. She wished time off to meet Fred when his ship, HMS Vanguard, returned to Britain following the Royal tour of South Africa. Unfortunately it was not granted, so she tendered her resignation, and travelled south to Portsmouth.

Later she had various jobs, but returned to Brush in the early 1950s, working this time in the Winding Shop under Harry Brailsford, then foreman. Her stay lasted several years until lean times and redundancy arrived. She volunteered to take the place of a single girl whose job was threatened and left for the last time about 1956.

When I visited Mrs Sargent I expected to meet an elderly lady and was surprised to see an active-minded lady, looking not a day over 65. My thanks go to her for a lively afternoon recalling her past at the Falcon Works.

If you have any information relating to this or any other period of Brush history, please contact George Toms, preferably by internal mail, c/o Main or Mining Test.



at the right end of the back row. From other sources, we understand that up to around this time, the Brush site had several trees and garden areas – enough to justify a full-time gardener.