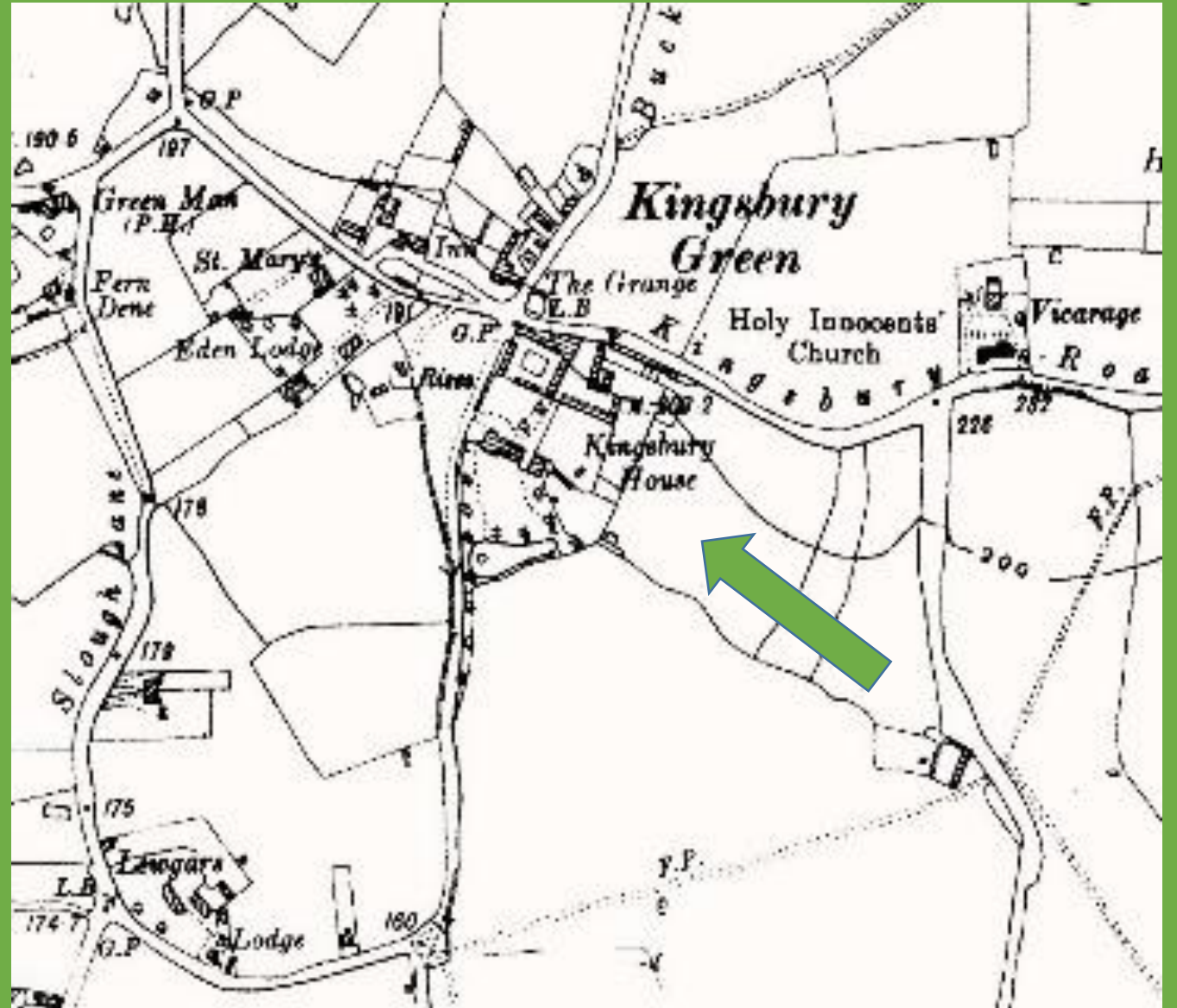


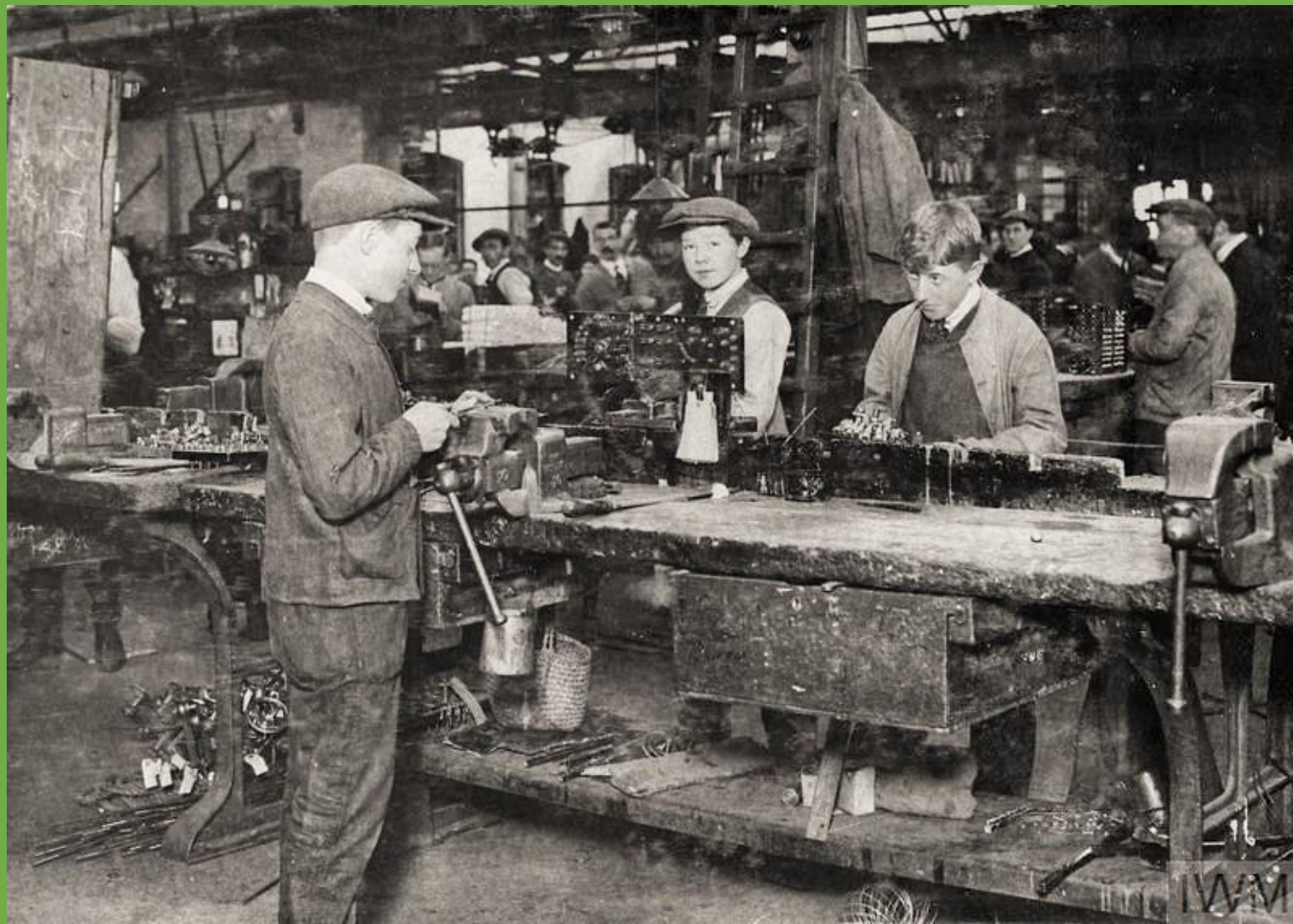
Kingsbury Works, 1915-1980

a local history picture show by
Philip Grant
of Wembley History Society

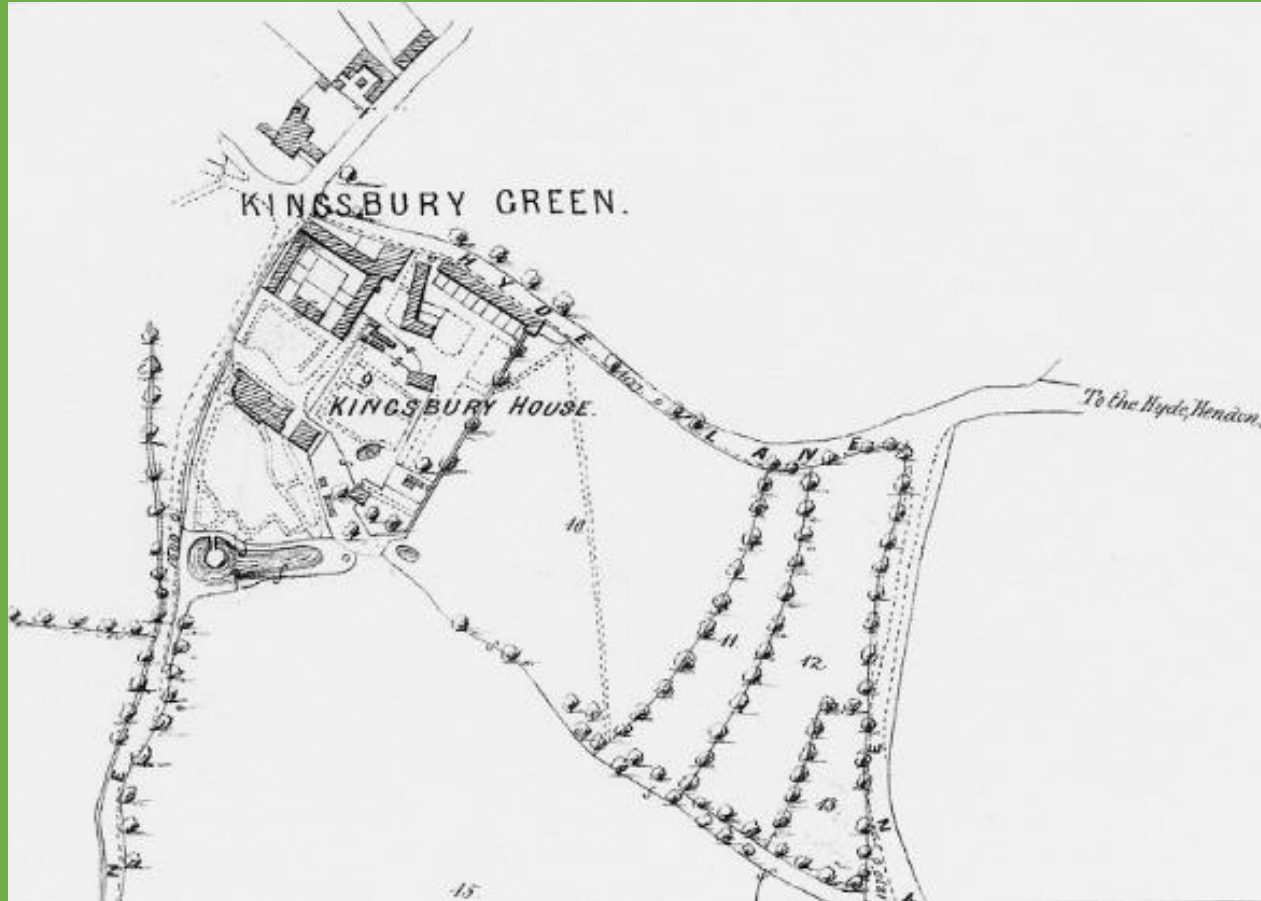


Before WW1, the Kingsbury House estate had been a stud farm.





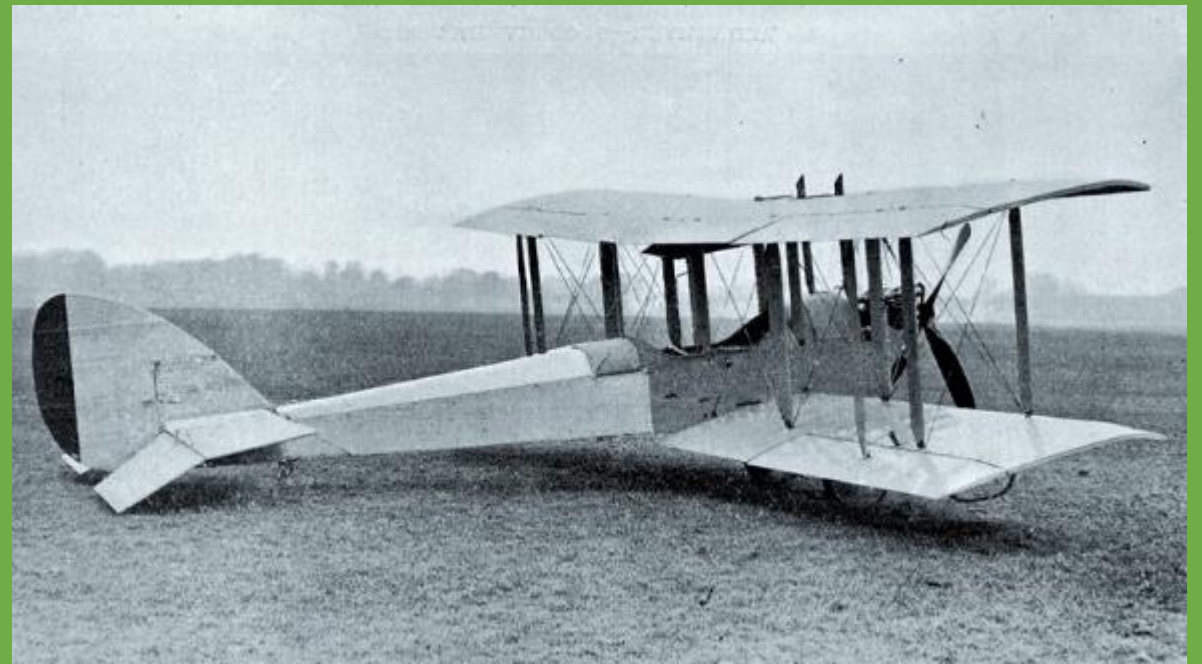
In 1915, Barningham Ltd began manufacturing parts for the war effort in some of the stable buildings.



In 1916, the company bought the estate.

As Kingsbury Aviation Co Ltd, it built two hangars and created Kingsbury Aerodrome.

By the end of the war in 1918, it employed 800 people, and had built 150 D.H.6 trainer, and 30 Sopwith Snipe fighter, aircraft.



In 1919, the Government cancelled the company's aircraft contracts, so it made a different product – the Kingsbury scooter!



KINGSBURY 2½ h.p. 1919 British Exhibit KK.1

At the conclusion of the first World War many concerns engaged on aircraft work during hostilities sought in scooter production a means of maintaining full employment in their factories. The potential demand among demobilized transport-hungry men from the Services was tremendous, but too many designs were rushed on to the market too quickly to survive the test of day-in, day-out work on the rough roads of the period, and none survived to become commercially successful. Better conceived and constructed than some of its competitors, the Kingsbury enjoyed a considerable degree of popularity at the time of its introduction.

Engine: 2/str: 1-cyl. with detachable head; crankcase and cylinder one-piece casting
Bore and Stroke: 58 x 50 mm.
Capacity: 132 c.c.
Lubrication: Petrol

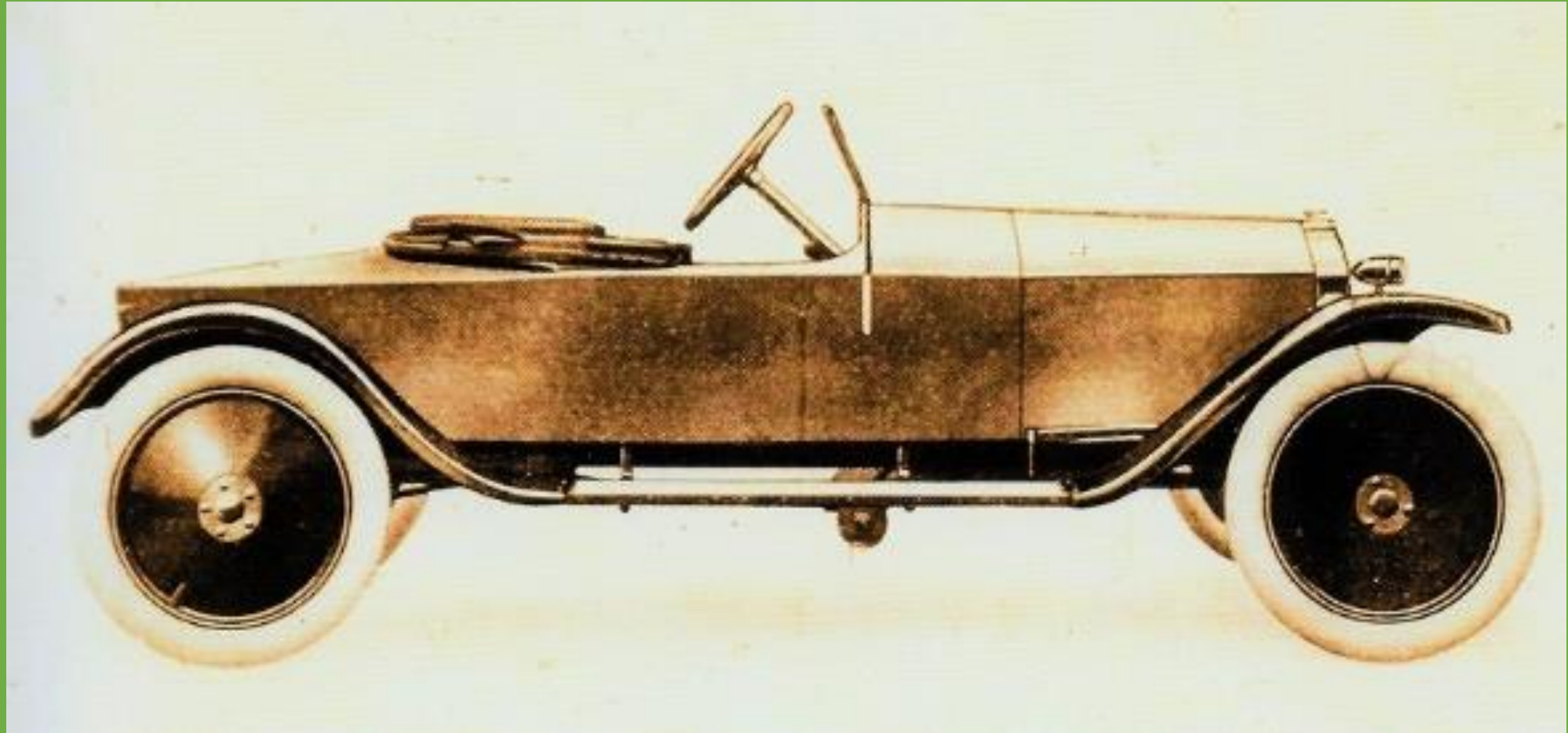
Ignition: Magneto
Gears: Single-speed
Drive: All-chain

Frame, etc.: Steel plate with tubular cross members; sprung front wheel
Brakes: Front, none
Rear, hand- and foot-operated contracting bands

Price: £39

Manufacturers: The Kingsbury Aviation Co.
London

Loaned by Mr. H. Bignell

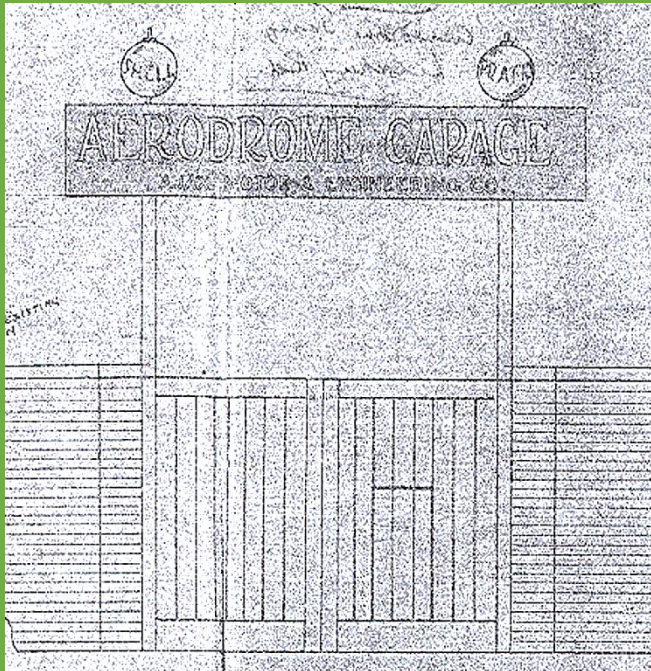


**By 1920, as the Kingsbury Engineering Co Ltd,
it was also making a two-seater car.
The Kingsbury "Junior" cost £295, and was not a success.**



The company was wound-up in May 1921.

Its former drawing office was used by the Zodiac Film Co. to make silent movies until 1923.



Part of its premises on Kingsbury Road became the Aerodrome Garage.

The widening of Kingsbury Road by 1923 attracted the Fox brothers of Edgware to the site.



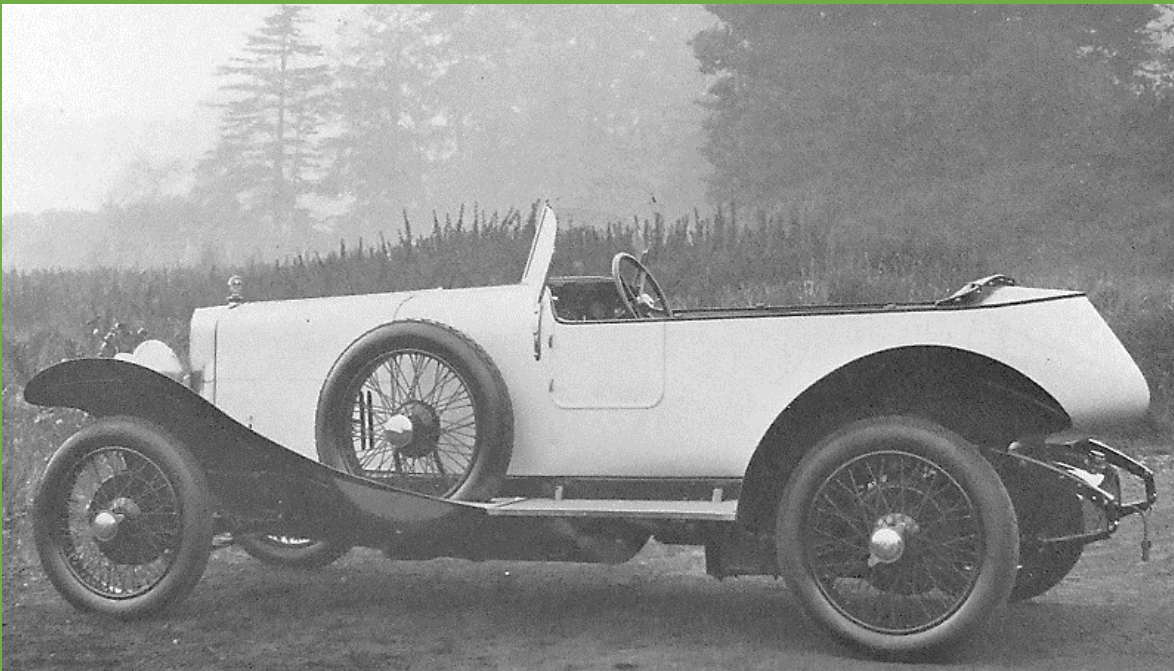
Their company, Vanden Plas (England) 1923 Ltd, had acquired a coach-building business, and rented the vacant hangars for £750 a year.

Vanden Plas took on local skilled workers from the wartime aircraft industry, and soon had 100 employees.

They built car bodies, usually of metal panels on a wooden framework, for individual clients, on the chassis from a variety of makes.

[These photos are from 1924.]





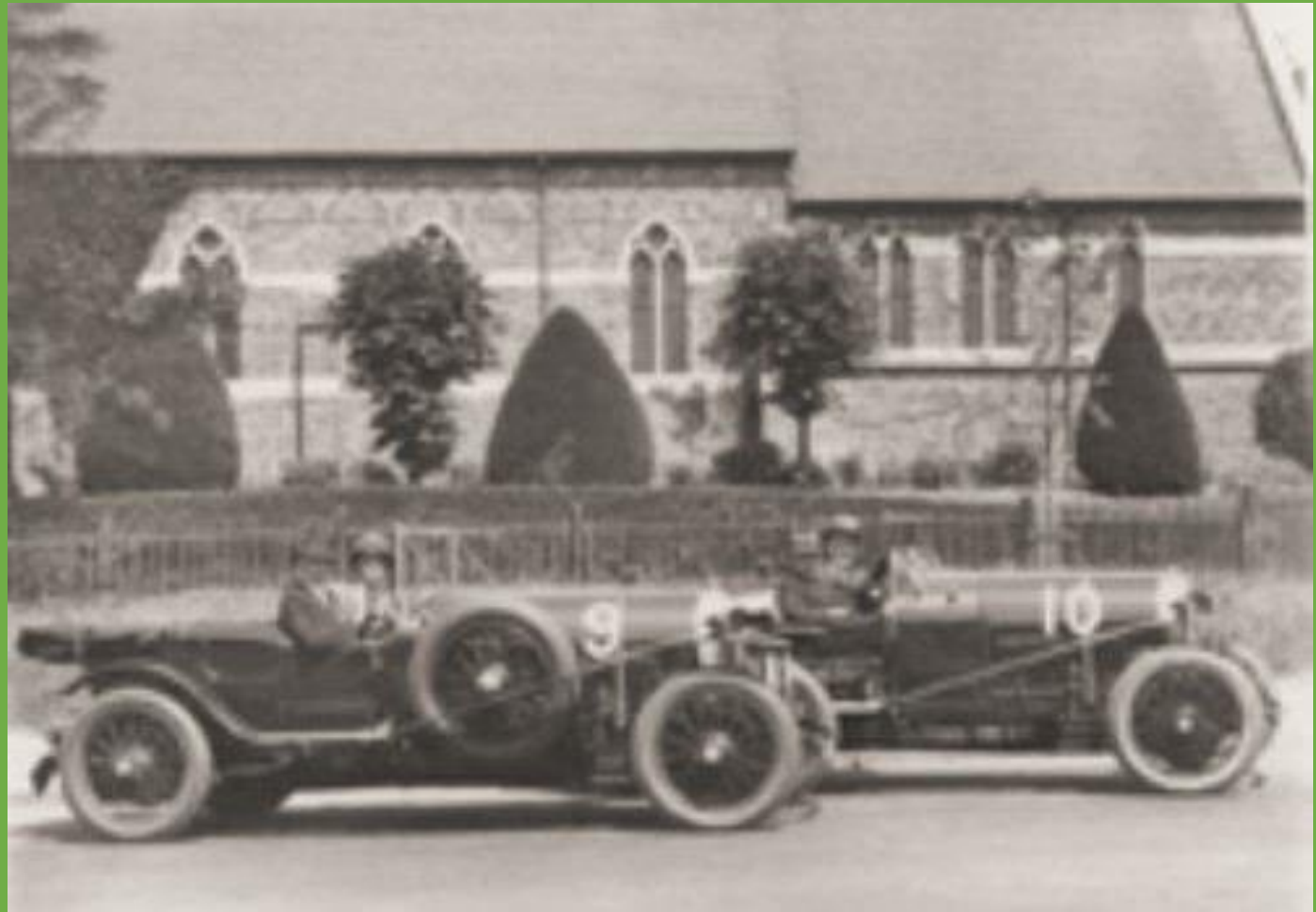
This Alfa Romeo sports car from 1925, and Bentley three-quarter coupé from 1926, are just two examples of their early work.

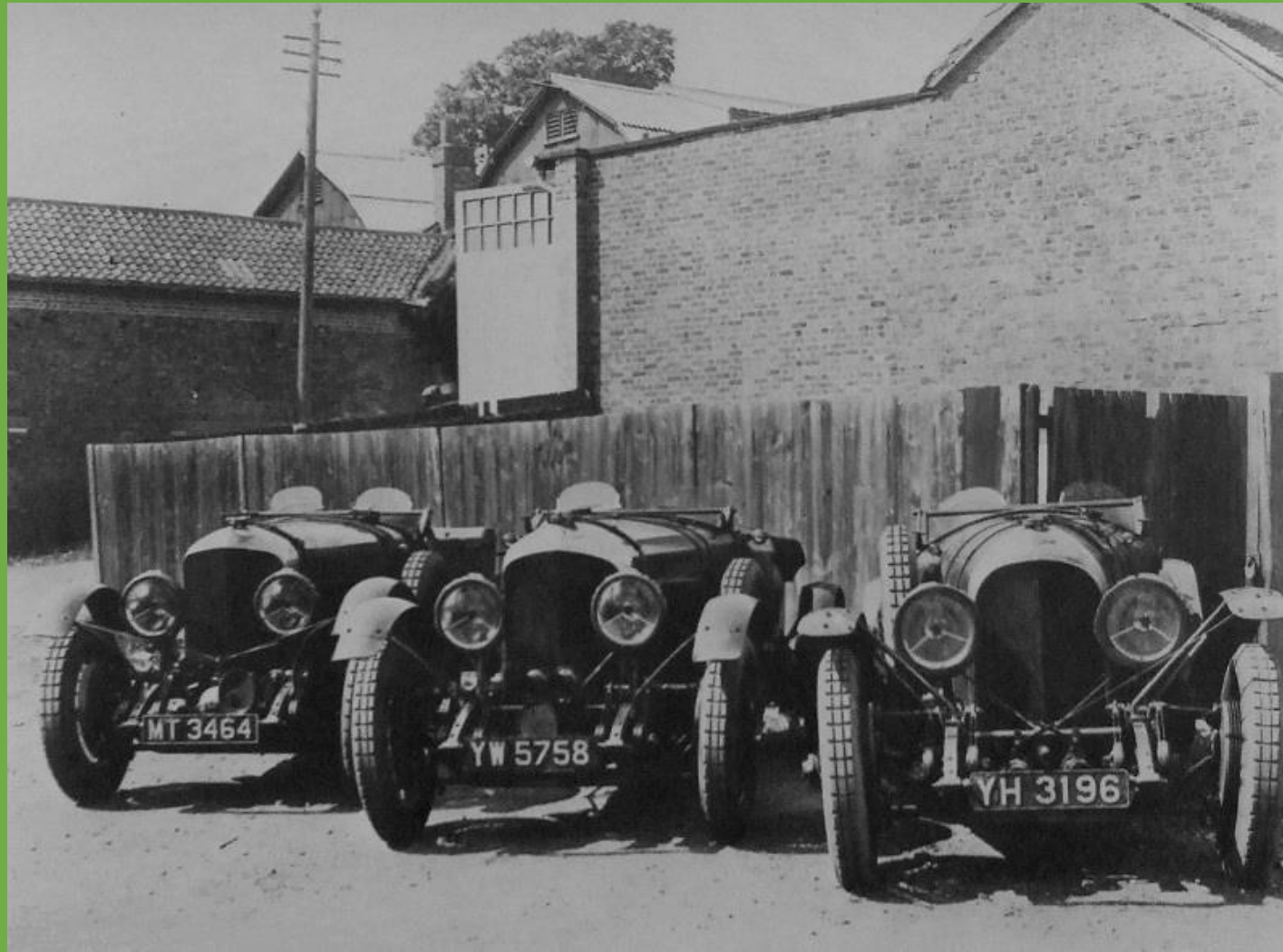


[The lower photo was taken outside Holy Innocents' Church, with the field where Oliver Goldsmith School would be built in the background.]

Bentley were one of their main customers, and the Cricklewood carmaker used parts of Kingsbury Works as a service depot, and a special workshop for their racing cars.

[This photo shows two Bentleys about to set off for Le Mans, in June 1925.]





**The cars which won the Le Mans 24 hour race from 1927 to 1930 were prepared at Kingsbury Works.
[These are the 1929 Le Mans winning Bentleys.]**

This painting shows
the 1930 Bentleys,
painted British
Racing Green,
in action
at Le Mans.





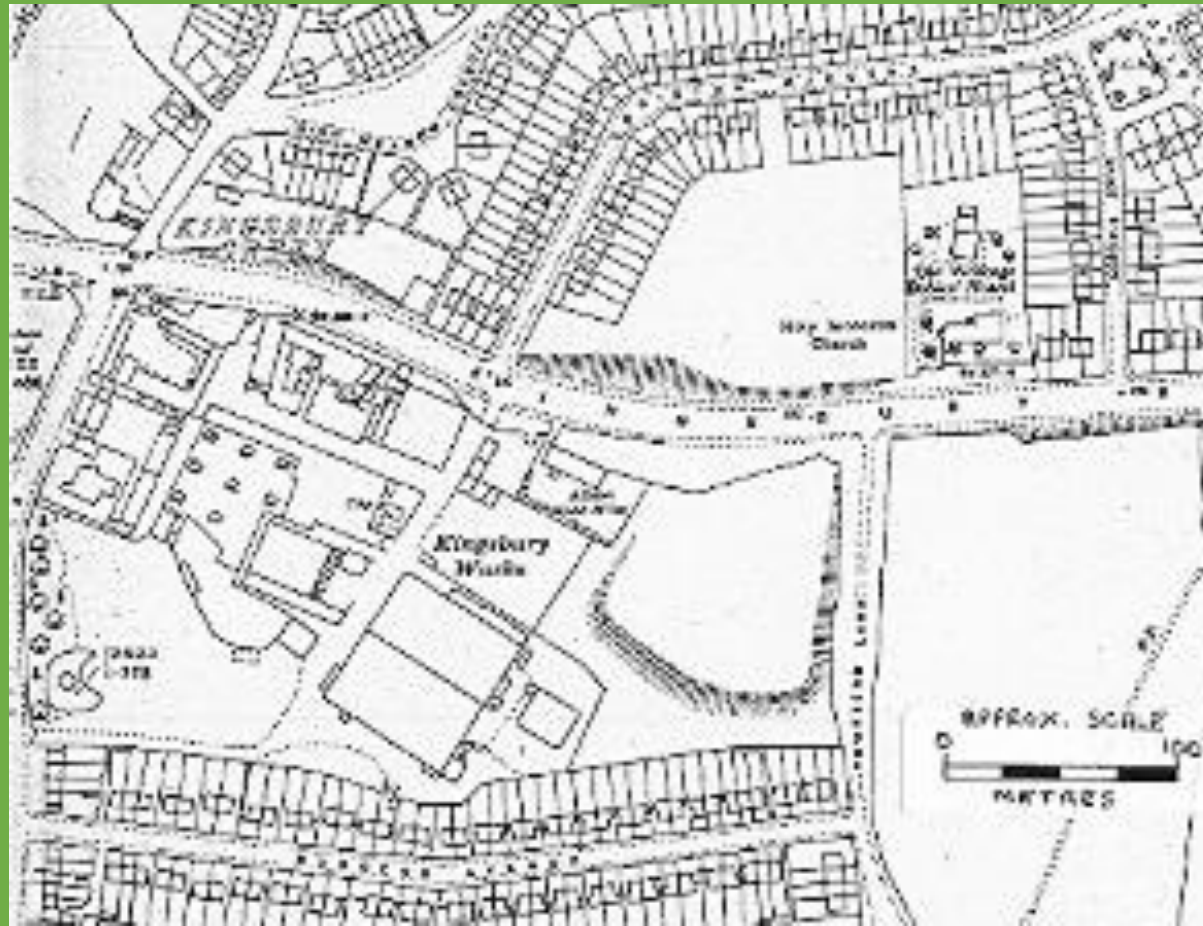
**A photo from
around 1930, showing
the various craftsmen
involved in building
car bodies at
Vanden Plas's
Kingsbury Works,
each with their own
work bench.**

**This Lagonda 4.5 litre sports tourer was built at Kingsbury for the Indian cricketer Duleep [Kumar Shri Duleepsinhji], who like his more famous uncle, Ranji, played for Cambridge University*, Sussex and England.
[* The car's bodywork was painted light blue!]**



Vanden Plas also made the bodywork for this Bentley 3.5 litre model, which drove around India on a sales tour in 1935, gaining orders from at least two Maharajahs!





**Kingsbury Works on the 1935 Ordnance Survey map.
New housing had been built nearby, but with a space left for
a Middlesex County Council primary school, which opened
as Oliver Goldsmith School in September 1937.**

By 1938 another war was looming. Because of Vanden Plas's woodworking skills, de Havilland asked it to make parts for some of its Tiger Moth training aircraft.





From 1940 the hangars at Kingsbury also made the wings for 2,000 of the new DH98 Mosquito aircraft. Nicknamed “the wooden wonder”, the Mosquito was the world’s fastest combat plane from 1941 to 1944.



In 1946 the company become a subsidiary of Austin, who wanted to use its expertise to produce a luxury model for their range.

This was the Austin Princess, a stately and comfortable limousine, sold as the Vanden Plas Princess from 1958.

**The Austin / Vanden Plas
Princess was the model used
as the official car of at least
two real Princesses!**

**Here is Princess Margaret,
visiting Kingsbury Maternity
Hospital in 1953.**



**This is the “Princess”
that Princess Anne
was travelling in,
when a gunman tried
to kidnap her on
The Mall in 1974!**

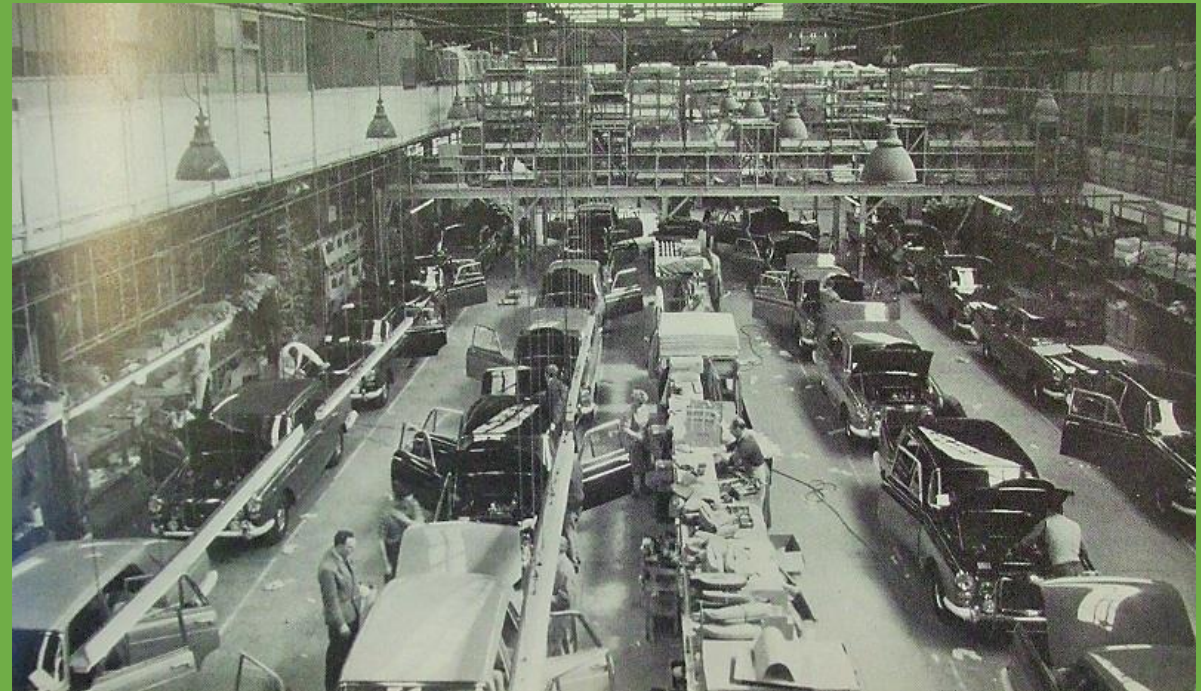
**It is in the Royal
vehicles collection
at Sandringham.**





The 1961 Motor Show at Earl's Court saw the launch of a new, squarer, Princess Mk II saloon car.

**The Vanden Plas Princess
Mk II, 3 litre saloon,
production line at
Kingsbury in 1961.**



After 1968, the Daimler DS420 model was also built at Kingsbury, using pressed steel body panels brought down from Coventry.

This 1970 Daimler Vanden Plas DS420 was owned by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.





Vanden Plas had become part of the British Motor Corporation in 1952, and its brand name was used on a number of the Group's other "top of the range" models.



All of the British car industry's mergers, and its part nationalisation as British Leyland Ltd in 1975, couldn't save the Kingsbury Works from closure in 1979.





The two hangars (put up as “temporary buildings” during the First World War) were demolished after more than sixty years of making aeroplanes and cars, and the Kingsbury Trading Estate was built on the site in 1980.

The road was called Barningham Way, after the company which began the Kingsbury Works.

The former offices and showroom of the Vanden Plas Princess business, at the Church Lane entrance to the Kingsbury Works site, are now serviced offices.

By a twist of history, the building is called Kingsbury House!



THE END

Many of the photographs are from Brian Smith's 1979 book:
"Vanden Plas – Coachbuilders"
by courtesy of its publishers, Dalton Watson limited –
www.daltonwatson.com

A copy of this book is available for reference in the
Search Room at Brent Archives.