

**A QUEST FOR SPEED.  
NOEL BADDOW POPE, 1909-1971.  
SURBITON'S FORGOTTEN RECORD BREAKER.**

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**12 October 2018**

**ABSTRACT**

Noel Baddow Pope was born in Toxteth, a sub-district of Liverpool, on Christmas Eve, 1909. His second forename was the stage name of his father, who was a ventriloquist. Noel's father died in 1911. Sometime thereafter, Noel and his mother lived in Blackheath, London. They moved to Surbiton before 1926 and, in 1971, Noel died there. As a schoolboy, Noel saw Lawrence of Arabia riding by on his Brough Superior motorcycle. Thus was born, in Noel's own words, *the germ of a lifetime's devotion to the risks and thrills of motorcycling and racing*. As a spectator at the famous Brooklands racing track, near Weybridge, he was inspired by the great motorcycle racers of the time. After acquiring an electrical engineering diploma, between 1933-1939, Noel's professional motorcycle racing career developed as he participated in meetings at Brooklands, the Isle of Man, elsewhere in the British Isles, and on the Continent. In 1938-1939 he gained many motorcycle speed records at Brooklands, including the fastest lap for solo machines at 124.51 mph on a supercharged Brough Superior: a record that stood for all time. This was an outstanding feat of engineering, persistence, riding skill and, above all, great courage. He was an officer in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1939-1945, was evacuated from Dunkirk, served in North Africa, took part in D-Day and finished his war in Berlin very soon after the German surrender.

In September 1949, on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, supported in part by Comerfords, the motorcycle dealers of Thames Ditton, he made an unsuccessful attempt on the world land speed record on a streamlined version of essentially the same Brough Superior that he had used for the Brooklands record, ten years earlier. He crashed at about 150 mph and the attempt had to be abandoned. Thereafter, he wrote his autobiography, *Full Chat*, and engaged in many other pursuits. He was an active member of Kingston Sub-Aqua Club, was a writer of science fiction, he started a local newspaper, was

the vice-president of an *avante-garde* art group and was president of the Kingston and District Motor Cycle Club.

## **INTRODUCTION**

On 4 July 1939, on a solo supercharged Brough Superior motorcycle, Noel Baddow Pope broke the official lap record at the Brooklands' motor racing track, near Weybridge, at an official average speed of 124.51 mph. This record stood for all time because the track never reopened after the end of WW2. In 1949, after distinguished military service, on the Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah, in the USA, he made an unsuccessful attempt on the world motorcycle speed record on a streamlined version of essentially the same Brough Superior machine. Noel lived in Surbiton from around 1926 until 1971.

When I first met Noel in the early 1960s he was the President of the Kingston and District Motorcycle Club [K&DMCC], of which I am still a member.<sup>1</sup> His autobiography, *Full Chat*, published in 1952, was a source of much information for this paper. Written for those in the know, it was mainly about his career as a professional motorcycle racer and speed record breaker in the period 1933-1949 and, in places, it was obvious that he expected his readers to know what exactly he was talking about. Accordingly, this paper may be of particular interest to an older generation of people with affection for vintage and classic motorcycles and who once participated in motorcycle sporting events. Taken in context, words and phrases in italic script are taken directly from Full Chat.

Another source of information was the collection of Noel's scrap books, containing newspaper cuttings and photographs, held in the Library of the Brooklands Museum.<sup>2</sup> It seemed likely that he referred to these when writing Full Chat. To facilitate understanding, **Appendix 1** details the various chapter headings of Full Chat and outlines the contents of each. **Appendices 2 and 3** provide respectively sources of information on some of the motorcycles, riders and other persons mentioned in the autobiography. Roger Bird's books, *The Birth of Brooklands*, *A Glimpse of the Vintage Years of Motorcycling at Brooklands* and *Brooklands Grand Prix. The Initial Years*, published in 2012, 2008 and 2017 respectively, also provided background information.<sup>3</sup>

In Full Chat, Noel mentioned family connections in Boston, Lincolnshire and his [un-named] boarding school where Lawrence of Arabia rode by on a

Brough Superior motorcycle. However, his book did not expand on these and other points relevant to his early history. Neither did it mention how he acquired the unusual forename *Baddow*, nor his marriage, about which I had heard about earlier from a K&DMCC member.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it was necessary to carry out some research.

## **ANTECEDENTS**

Noel Pope's father was Robert Field Percy Pope and his mother was Edith Pope, née Delamore.<sup>5</sup> Various entries in *The Stage* newspaper showed that Robert Pope was a talented and popular ventriloquist, whose professional name was *Baddow*.<sup>6</sup> Two entries in the Music Hall and Theatre Review of 1907, reported that his *assistant*, otherwise called his *dummy*, was called *Tim*.<sup>7</sup> Previously a bank clerk living in St. Marylebone, according to the 1901 Census, Baddow appeared at various music halls around the British Isles between 1905 and early 1911. Noel Pope's second forename, Baddow, was his ventriloquist-father's stage name.

Kelly's 1909 Directory for Lincolnshire showed that Edith Delamore was a costumier at 7 Pump Square, Boston, Lincolnshire. *The Stage* of 19 November 1908 gave this as Baddow's address for the coming week. Robert and Edith were married in the Register Office at Boston on 25 March 1909 and 7 Pump Square was given as both their addresses at the time. Probably, they met when he was appearing at a music hall in Boston or nearby.

Noel's birth certificate showed that he was born on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1909 at 1 Wordsworth Street, in the Sub-district of Toxteth Park East in Liverpool. His first forename, *Noel*, reflected his birth on Christmas Eve. The Stage of 3 February 1910 showed that Baddow was appearing at the Lyric Theatre, Liverpool. Probably, he was billed to appear at this theatre, or another one in Liverpool, and took lodgings there to accommodate the birth of his son. On 27 March 1910, Noel Baddow Pope was baptised in the Parish of Spilsby, seventeen miles north-east of Boston and thirteen miles north-west of Skegness. The baptismal record stated the abode of the Popes as *Boston*. Probably, they were staying in Spilsby, while Baddow was appearing at a nearby music hall.

The Stage gave Baddow's address from 9 March 1911 until 9 November 1911 as The Grand Theatre, Johannesburg, South Africa. Clearly, Baddow

was appearing at this establishment, or was touring in South Africa, for the duration. It was not established whether his wife and son were with him in South Africa. Baddow returned to Boston sometime after 9 November 1911 and, according to his death certificate, died of pulmonary tuberculosis on 17 December 1911, aged 27, at 46 Argyll Street. His brother in law, George Delamore, was present at the death. Noel Baddow Pope would have been aged about two at the time and his mother was widowed, aged about 30.

### **THE GREAT AWAKENING<sup>8</sup>**

The first chapter of Full Chat began, *An inky-faced schoolboy persistently missing prayers to peer through the school railings and watch Lawrence of Arabia riding by on his Brough [i.e., Brough Superior motorcycle]....* In Noel Pope's own words, thus was born in him *the germ of a lifetime's devotion to the risks and thrills of motorcycling and racing.* Noel's first experience of motorcycle riding was an illicit tour of the quadrangle of his school in a Triumph sidecar outfit owned by one of the masters. But, what was the name of the school and where was it?

Initially, it seemed likely that the school was in Dorset because T. E. Lawrence, when he joined the Royal Tank Regiment in 1922, the first year that he owned a Brough Superior, was posted to Bovington Camp, between Dorchester and Wareham, and rented a house called *Clouds Hill* nearby. Lawrence used this house as a base until 1935, the year that he died as a result of an accident on a Brough Superior. Between 1922-1928, Noel Pope would have been aged 13-18 and possibly a pupil at a public school in striking range of Bovington.<sup>9</sup> Candidate schools in the area were Canford and Sherborne. However, their records showed that he was never a pupil.<sup>10</sup> No more research was undertaken to identify the school.

While the incident just outlined ended in a crash and retribution, it did not deter Noel from seeking more adventures on wheels. The next one involved a soap box cart with Noel and one of his cousins travelling very fast and out of control down a steep hill in Blackheath, where his family lived at the time. The journey ended when the cart ploughed through a hedge, through shrubs and over flower beds before coming to rest on a lawn.

Later, Noel and his mother moved to Surbiton. Kelly's Directory showed that Mrs. Edith Pope lived at 32 Maple Road in 1926. Electoral Rolls showed

them both living at 32 Maple Road from 1932-1934 and at 64 Portsmouth Road from 1934-1940. Surbiton was about 10 miles from the famous Brooklands race track.<sup>11</sup>

At Brooklands, lacking the price of admission, Noel and other boys, with the acquiescence of competitors, climbed the railway fence and made their way through the undergrowth to the paddock. There, they were inspired by the great motorcycle racers of the time, including Barry Baragwaneth, Bill Lacey, Joe Wright, Chris Staniland and Pat Driscoll.<sup>12</sup>

At last, Noel was able to leave school and persuaded his mother to buy him his first motorcycle, an old side-valve Matchless. This he rode, in the late 1920s, to stay with relations at Boston. Here, he met Austin Munks, later to be a famous motorcycle racer, and Sam Coupland, later to become famous as Munks' mechanic.<sup>13</sup> Noel witnessed various wild races in the countryside around Boston. Eventually, he was able to buy an ancient Douglas motorcycle at Boston market for 10 shillings. This, he stripped down for practice on the shores of the Wash and gained experience in sliding around markers in the sand. The machine never broke down and finally, worn out, it was abandoned to the sea.

In the first chapter of *Full Chat*, Noel talked about *fellow engineering students* with whom he was involved in impromptu grass track races and hill climbs. However, he did not say where he studied engineering. Records of University College London [UCL] showed that in the academic year 1928-29 Noel Baddow Pope entered the Faculty of Engineering but did not complete his course.<sup>14</sup> The Daily Herald of 7 November 1930 reported that Noel Pope was fined £3 for obstructing a police constable during a Guy Fawkes Day rag involving University of London students and perhaps voluntarily he left UCL shortly afterwards, or was sent down following the rag incident.

However, in October 1949, an American magazine, *The Motorcyclist*, reported an interview with Noel Pope in which it was stated that he was a trained electrical engineer who earned his degree at Faraday College in England. In fact, Faraday House Electrical Engineering College, in Southampton Row, not far from University College London, and now closed, awarded electrical engineering diplomas that were highly regarded in their

time.<sup>15</sup> It was concluded that Noel took an electrical engineering diploma at Faraday House after he left UCL.

## **RACING & SPEED RECORDS, PRE-WW2**

Noel's development as a professional motorcycle racer and speed record breaker, from 1933-1939, was chronicled in great detail in Full Chat [see **Appendix 1**]. In this paper only a few selected extracts could be included. These were chosen to paint overall, in Noel's own words, a *picture of excitement, risk, good fellowship, triumphs and the gradual accumulation of wisdom and practical knowledge which those years of hard racing represent.*<sup>16</sup>

On his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, in 1930, Noel was able to acquire, by part exchanging his old Matchless, a 350 c.c. Zenith racing machine. The deal was struck with Comerfords of Thames Ditton and it started a long association with the company which was to sponsor him for nearly every Isle of Man Tourist Trophy event [TT] and with the backing of Teddy Comerford and Bob Winter, two of the directors. Around this time, Noel obtained, for £5, a 350 c.c. Velocette capable of nearly 100 mph.<sup>17</sup>

### **First season:1933<sup>18</sup>**

Noel's first race, on the Zenith, and without success, was at the British Motor Cycle Racing Club's [BMCRC] Clubmans' Day, on 25 March 1933, at Brooklands. He entered as a member of The Dittons Motor Club.<sup>19</sup> Afterwards, at Comerfords, he part-exchanged the Zenith for a British Anzani racer which he likened to a camel. Recounting his first event on the bumpy Brooklands track on this machine, at a BMCRC meeting, Noel talked of it *rearing and plunging, sometimes doing a lock-to-lock with the handlebars, shuddering, straightening-up and shooting forward again.* His erratic riding nearly led to him being blackballed from the Club. He was allowed to ride again provided that he allowed Baragwaneth to keep an eye on him. To enable the Anzani to be entered for a 50-mile race, it was fitted with a seven-gallon fuel tank. With hindsight, Noel realised that petrol swilling about very high above the centre of gravity would have made the motorcycle even more difficult to ride, especially on the banking. Fortunately, vibration soon made galvanised metal flake off the inside of the tank. This blocked the carburettor

jets, stopped the engine and forced him to retire from the race, thus preventing a more serious, perhaps fatal, outcome.

Later in 1933 an accident that damaged his wrist did not prevent Noel from travelling to the Isle of Man to race his Velocette in the Manx Grand Prix. In an exploratory run, he skidded on a pile of cow dung and slid along the road on his back, while watching his machine bounding along the wall alongside the road. During an official practice session he scraped and bounced off the wall of Quarter Bridge, escaping with nothing worse than a bent mudguard and temporary panic before he set off again. Other riders were not so lucky and Noel recounted how one parted company with his machine which, because there was no fence along the road to stop it, disappeared down the mountain side. A heavyweight rider on a Scott machine jumped high from the summit of a bridge and both of his wheels collapsed when he landed. Eventually, Noel had to retire from his race when the exhaust valve of his Velocette broke up and was expelled from the exhaust pipe into some assembled spectators. In Full Chat, Noel devoted a whole chapter to his reflections and recollections of racing on the Isle of Man and only a few specific events could be mentioned in the paper.<sup>20</sup>

In the last race organised by the BMCRC in 1933, at Brooklands, Noel managed to take second place on the Anzani and to achieve a Gold Star award for a lap of 105.29 mph, before the engine completely disintegrated.<sup>21</sup> He was so far ahead at the time that he was able to coast to the finishing line.

Before the end of 1933, Noel obtained a financial windfall which enabled him to buy a brand-new racing 350 cc Velocette and to purchase from Baragwaneth his supercharged 1000 cc V-twin JAP-engined Brough Superior fitted with a sidecar, upon his retirement from competitive motor cycling.<sup>22</sup>

### **1934 season<sup>23</sup>**

Noel's season opened at meeting at Gatwick Racecourse in March. This venue was used by the Sunbeam Club for sprinting events. The course was a quarter-mile strip of private road leading to the grandstand on the horse racing course, now swallowed up by the Gatwick Airport site, near Horley, Surrey.<sup>24</sup> With the sidecar removed, Noel entered the Brough in the standing start event. Contrary to the advice given him by Baragwaneth, at the start he let the engine revolutions [revs] build up to the point that the engine was wrecked.

The new Velocette was given its first airing at Donnington. When breaking at a hairpin bend, the engine sprocket became disengaged and locked the primary and rear chains of the machine. It came to an abrupt halt and as a consequence, Noel was thrown over the handlebars onto the track.

Thereafter, on the Velocette, Noel rode in the Essolube Trophy 50-mile race at Brooklands on 12 May achieving his first big win at an average speed of 90.72 mph. The Velocette was entered for the Junior TT. On his fifth lap, Noel was distracted by some friends at the side of the track and was too late to stop his handlebars from clipping the roadside fence causing him to crash. While the machine was damaged, Noel suffered only bumps and bruises. Racing at Brooklands on the Velocette, he suffered repeated engine failures due to over-heated exhaust valves and once when the tread came off the rear tyre, it hit his backside where it overhung the saddle.

Noel fared better in the Brighton Speed Trials sprint event, achieving first places on the supercharged Brough Superior. In the Hutchinson 100 race in August, despite sparking plug trouble and pulling un-necessarily into the pits because of misinterpreted signals from his pit attendant, Noel achieved sixth place.

### **1935 season<sup>25</sup>**

Noel spent the winter of 1934-35 rebuilding the Brough and Velocette. He also rebuilt the British Anzani with a 750 cc engine intending to seek a Gold Star for this class before selling it. His first race was at the Skerries Circuit outside Dublin. This ended for him when he slid on the loose surface of an S-bend and injured his right wrist on a granite wall. On 26 May, he entered the Brough in the Prestwick and Staniland Cup Races. In the first of these handicapped events, he was placed second and achieved the fastest lap. In the second race, despite gear-selection problems, he came in second. In the Junior TT, his Velocette caught fire twice because of a leaking petrol tank and he had to withdraw from the race. At Brooklands, on the Brough, Noel gained a Double Gold Star for a record lap of 120.59 mph. A slightly edited version of his vivid recollection follows.

*You can remember it afterwards! Every thought and impression of that first record-breaking effort remains in my memory even now. I can still take you with me, as it were, and re-ride it in imagination.*



*At the end of the rolling lap, you open up and the acceleration startles you as the Brough leaps suddenly from 90 to 100 mph and you find it doing its level best to leave you behind. But you hang on grimly and use all your weight to bend it round the Fork.*

*On the Members' Banking you roar and now the momentum seeks to swing you upwards and up again...over the top. That makes you shift your weight urgently to the other side to keep down. Again and again the footrests scrape – and all the time the back wheel is prodding out.*

*Then on you go again, along the banking to the Members' Bridge, and under it. Here the wind comes up from the Finishing Straight with terrific force, as it often does even on ordinary days. It brings again the threat of a forced flight over the top and you fight the wind to win your way down a foot or two.*

*Next the famous Bump looms up, growing swiftly; and as you hurtle towards it, you pull the Brough straight. It must face head-on dead in line for the Railway Straight or you will land the wrong way round after the leap. So you poise yourself on the footrests and make sure that you have an even pull on each handlebar. The Brough is still heeled over and you have a tendency to continue lugging harder on one side. But you must have that straight wheel for landing.*

*The greater your speed, the higher the Bump seems to stand up before you, and the swifter it grows. You take the leap. You live through a breathless split-second in mid-air, wondering if you will land square; then thrill with relief and delight as you feel the wheels touch and take ground faultlessly. That's over, at least!*

*But now you press on again for the Railway Straight, which for real exhilaration, is the high spot of the dice. Here, with the Brough running upwards of 160 mph at the end, the scenery seems to leap up at you. It no longer waits passively while you approach it.*

*As the Brough is now on a straight line, and no wrestling match is demanded from you, this part can be really enjoyed, but all soon it is over and another struggle begins. On the Byfleet Banking, speed has to be briskly reduced, for the Brough again wants to disappear over the top. All the way round it is hard work holding it down. If you relax for a split-second, the Brough sweeps dangerously near the edge. The time you will lose over the Fork and that lost on the Members' Banking has been made up in the dash down the Railway Straight, and now a speed of well over 120 mph must be maintained round the Byfleet Banking to keep up the average.*

*Even at this speed, and although concentrating to keep on the track, the brain still takes in an amazing amount of detail. White faces peering over the fence by the aerodrome, people standing on the Byfleet Bridge - which almost makes you duck your head – an aeroplane just landing, a photographer stationed on the top of the track, and all the time, like a wall of death, the track unwinding before you.*

*Diving off the banking, then straightening up for the Fork, steering hard over to get what now appears an acute right-hand bend, trying to take the chosen path that misses all the pot holes at the Fork, going over to the inside of the track, and shutting off at the same time – this patch really is all-in-wrestling, and it is with a breath of relief that one feels the machine slow up on the hill. You relax now. You run into the paddock. Stiffly, you dismount.*

*You have only done three miles, but you are quite out of breath and as hot as the back tyre – which is too hot to touch! The Brough, smelling and making noises like a fried fish shop, retires behind a haze of smoke. That's how it was. The Brough had done it for me. The record had been taken. An ambition was fulfilled.*

Noel's victory was short-lived. Soon afterwards, Eric Fernihough, also on a Brough, lapped Brooklands at 123.58 mph.<sup>26</sup>

In the August meeting at Gatwick, on a re-surfaced course that generated showers of pebbles, the friendly rivalry between Noel and Eric Fernihough was exemplified. Fernihough on his un-supercharged Brough got the fastest time of the day, with Pope, on his supercharged Brough, in second place. The Ulster Grand Prix followed and Noel witnessed the rider ahead of him going straight on at a bend and through a hedge. At Southport in late September, rain and the tide had left about two inches of water on the seaside track and the visibility was poor. Nevertheless, Noel obtained the fastest time of the day but later had completely to strip down the Brough because it was totally caked with sand.

The last meeting of the year was at Brooklands. On the Anzani he obtained a second place but failed to achieve a Gold Star lap. On his Velocette, Noel won a third place and, in the last race of the day, a first place.

### **1936 season<sup>27</sup>**

In the winter of 1935-36, Noel fitted specially-designed cams to the engine of the Brough in an attempt to address overheating problems. During a test run at Brooklands early in 1936, he narrowly missed a group of men who were sweeping the track because he was unable to slow down by disengaging the clutch, thereby to disconnect the engine. This happened after the clutch cable jammed because he had forgotten to oil it. At the first meeting of the season at the Gatwick track, the fastest time of the day was made by Eric Fernihough. Noel managed only second place because the engine of his supercharged Brough still was not running reliably. Later, at Brooklands, on a newly-acquired 500 cc Norton running on dope, he achieved a first place, a second place, a second place and a Gold Star for a lap of 105.07 mph.<sup>28</sup>

At the Easter meeting at Donnington, Noel achieved a fifth place on his Velocette but only a seventh place on his Norton. This was because the petrol filler cap mounting had cracked away and *Plasticine* was used to

reduce leakage. In the race, his goggles were spattered with a mixture of escaping petrol and *Plasticine*. When he wiped them, the smearing and visibility worsened. In the subsequent N.W. 200 event Noel did well, achieving a second place in the open handicap race on his *Velocette*. In the Senior TT race, Noel achieved a fifth place on his *Norton*. He had to take the jumps with great care as the handlebars were not *feeling quite firm* in his hands and *occasionally doing lock to lock wobbles*. The cause was a broken fork spring. The two broken ends had stuck into each other. This forced the petrol and oil tanks out of their mountings and broke the handlebars in the middle. Fortunately, the broken handlebar parts were still loosely anchored to the machine.

Noel was still keen to obtain a Gold Star in the 750 cc class, so he bored out a Norton cylinder barrel to obtain 515 cc in order to qualify. He entered handicapped races at Brooklands on 24 June. In one race, the engine stopped because the sparking plug cap came off, touched his leg and gave him a big electric shock every time that the magneto fired. Nevertheless, he was able to pull in the clutch and coast to the finishing line to achieve a second place. In his second race, Noel won a first place and obtained the Gold Star that he was seeking.

At the Saltburn meeting on 29 June, on the Brough, Noel achieved the fastest time of the day at 117.7 mph despite one cylinder being put out of action by a broken valve spring. A broken valve spring on the *Velocette* put him out of the Dutch Grand Prix after he had narrowly-missed Stanley Woods who had skidded on the wet track and crashed into some straw bales.

At the Brooklands Grand Prix on 20 July, in the Junior Race, Noel on the *Velocette*, after being in the lead, was overtaken by an AJS rider. He reacted to this by pushing his engine harder, thereby to wreck it. In the Senior Race, the engine of Noel's Norton seized up as he was approaching a bend for which no escape route was provided. Despite the use of the clutch, he was still going too fast for the bend and the quick thinking of a bystander, who lifted the marking rope to enable him to escape, saved a disaster.

All of Noel's machines now were out of commission and he had entered for a number of forthcoming events. He decided to give priority to the refurbishment of the 500 cc Norton for dope events. On his machine, in the

Gatwick sprint meeting he achieved a first place and, in another run, a second place. At the Brooklands Mountain Championship Meeting, on 15 August, he won a first place after being well ahead of the others despite *Go Slow* flag signals from the pits to tell him that there was no need to put his engine at risk.

Noel had no success in the Ulster Grand Prix, but at meetings at Brooklands he achieved a second place on 14 September and a third place on 24 September. The Hutchinson 100 meeting was the last in the season and, although he had doubts whether it would go the distance, he entered the 490 cc Norton converted to run on petrol. In the final race, a much-publicised event took place. As a consequence of going too fast, Noel was forced to leave the track at the hairpin bend. He turned around very quickly, straightened up, pointed the machine in the right direction and set off as fast as he could. Unfortunately he hit some sand heaps, put there to mop up oil spills. This resulted in a *king of all lock-to-lock wobbles, with the back wheel nearly in front*. This led him to *abandon ship – for the railway sleepers were becoming much too close*. All this took place under a battery of news cameras. Later, Ixion of the Motor Cycle, probably with tongue in cheek, asked whether Noel had decided to throw his machine away, but he assured everyone that it was a *power slide*. At the time, readers would have understood this to mean a deliberate cornering technique as used by speedway riders. Quick-thinking Noel would have used it to change course to avoid the railway sleepers looming up in front of him.<sup>29</sup>

### **1937 season<sup>30</sup>**

In the Chapter *The Writing on the Wall – 1937*, Noel reviewed his career so far. First, he had been rushing all over Europe for the Grand Prix Races then returning to Brooklands for races and speed record attempts. He had misgivings about this. In his own words, *Many times I had made a vow to leave Brooklands for ever, now the prize money and bonuses were so low, but the course had an amazing fascination for me and I suppose that I was a complete addict of the place*. While Noel intended to continue along the same lines as before, if anything on an intensified scale, the signs were that he had concerns about the impossibility of the task – would he be overwhelmed by the great effort that was required? Second, Noel thought that the writing was on the wall for riders of British machines with the advent of German and

Italian supercharged machines, which were very fast and, when made reliable, would win all the races.<sup>31</sup>

In the winter of 1936-37 Noel designed and built a machine for use on the Brooklands track. This was fitted with a 500 cc JAP engine and named the *Pope Jap*. This, at the start of the 1937 season, brought his stable up to four machines; the others being the supercharged Brough, a 350 cc Norton and a 500 cc Norton. Keeping all these machines running was more than Noel himself to cope with and he engaged an assistant, Frank Baker, to help him. Photographs in Noel Pope's scrapbook for 1937 showed that he was very much part of the Brooklands establishment. He had his own shed there and kept a van, which was lettered, *Noel B. Pope, Brooklands Track, England*.

At Brooklands, on the 500 Norton, he gained a second place, and on the Pope Jap, after achieving a third place, despite hitting the machine in front of him, he won another third place. At the April meeting at Gatwick, he obtained fastest time of the day on the Pope Jap and on the Brough. Additionally, he was top in the six fastest riders event. At Crystal Palace, after seeing other riders come off, Noel slid on an oil spill and managed to roll to the side of the track out of the way of following riders. Thereafter, he saw his machine turn a somersault off the bank before it landed on top of him. He escaped with a damaged knee. Noel described Crystal Palace as, *of all the diabolical circuits ever dreamed of, this was the worst...a pocket handkerchief TT course*,

In the 1937 Senior TT practice, Noel had to withdraw when the connecting rod of his engine punched a hole through the crankcase and in the Junior race his engine seized up. At the Grand Prix of Europe at Berne, at the start, Noel's machine hit an official at the start and he was obliged to retire from the race, later to be exonerated in the subsequent enquiry. At the Swedish Grand Prix, the last event of the season, he found that he had broken the frame of his Norton and had to braze a large piece of metal across the break without stripping the machine. In the following race, in which German BMWs achieved first and second places, and an Italian Gilera achieved third place, Noel had to retire because his engine overheated. The heat from the oil tank went through his boot leaving a burn nearly six inches long on his leg. On the way home, the back axle of his transport car began first to whine and then

to make a clonking noise. Repeatedly he had to top up the axle with oil and, by the time that he got home, the differential was completely worn out.

### ***Continental capers***<sup>32</sup>

In this chapter NBP described problems with transport vehicles of different kinds. Eric Fernihough used a shooting brake which was close to the ideal solution. Others used big American cars *off the scrap heap*. In order to make a trip to race on the Continent it was essential to have a partner and at least three motorcycles in order to collect as much starting money as possible. Two machines could be carried on the running boards on either side of a big car, or even put inside if all non-essential seats were removed. Noel had a large platform built in place of the boot of a Chrysler car costing £5. Towing a trailer was too slow. Noel tried an old Chevrolet van but found it to be too slow and too hot, especially in Southern Europe. Going over the Alps was quite an ordeal and careful planning was necessary. The British riders travelled in convoy, the vehicle with good brakes went first, with the best runner as far as the engine was concerned taking up the rear. Thus a lame duck could be bumped over the top, where, once over, the brakes of the first vehicle were able to prevent the rear vehicle taking off downhill.

### **1938-9 season**<sup>33</sup>

At the Gatwick sprint event in March 1938, on the Brough, Noel achieved the fastest time of the day. In the August event at the same venue and on the same machine, he was the fastest rider.

Noel then rode for Francis Beart on his 500 cc Norton in the Senior Road Championship on the Campbell Circuit at Brooklands achieving a second place. In July 1938, in the Swiss Grand Prix, at Geneva, he was unplaced. The Hutchinson 100 was held in 1938 at Brooklands, in appalling weather conditions with visibility which dropped to 50 yards, Noel was forced to retire from the race.

Much of the early part of 1939 was taken up with preparation of the Brough for record attempts [below]. However, in April of that year he entered the Clubman's Day event on the Brough with the sole idea of beating the track record. The track was wet in places and he found himself nearly out of control on a 115 mph lap. He was content to achieve a third place. His last race in June 1939 was at the TT. In the Senior race, as a private entrant, he rode a

Norton and, according to the Birmingham Gazette of 17 June 1939, by a feat of skilful riding, just missed a wall. Lieutenant Georg Meier of the Wehrmacht, on a BMW, won this race. Meier was pictured giving a Nazi salute thereafter.<sup>34</sup> According to the Manchester Daily Mail of 17 June 1939, the German machines were of a new design and behind them was an organisation that amazed TT circles by its completeness. Meier became the first continental rider on a foreign machine to win a Senior TT. Noel's prophesy, of the eventual success of foreign machines, made in 1937 [above] came to pass.

### **Record breaking at Brooklands, 1938-1939<sup>35</sup>**

Noel wrote that for him *the only joy was going flat out – flat as a pancake, all the time*. Indeed, at the front of his book, he indicated that *full chat* was a synonym for *full bore* [meaning maximum throttle opening] or *flat out*. This ambition was realised for him in the pursuit of speed records rather than road racing. A record *was the ultimate joy*, whether it was a local one, or a world record. And, while there was *utter despair* after an attempt failed, it produced in him a *grim determination* eventually to succeed.

In Full Chat Noel recalled his vivid memories of this first record-breaking success at Brooklands in 1935 [above]. He emphasised the need to slow down at the top of the banking, for, as he put it, *if you relax for a split-second, the machine sweeps dangerously near the edge*. Elsewhere, he recorded that Ben Bickell, in a record attempt on a supercharged Ariel 500, as dusk was falling, went over the top of the track, nearly flat out. Fortunately, he escaped with only an injured wrist.

The world's two-hour speed record stood at an average speed of 105 mph. In March 1938, the team of Noel Pope, Dennis Minnett and Jock Forbes attempted to beat this record on a 500 cc Norton prepared by Francis Beart. After a session in which Minnett covered 108 miles at an average speed of 110.68, Noel Pope took over. After a few laps, the petrol tank became loose, rose up and hit him under the chin, taking out a front tooth. Additionally, a front fork spring was lost and the attempt was called off to prevent a disaster.

Noel entered the Brough, fitted with a ballasted sidecar, for the first outer-circuit race of the year. While he easily won the race at an average lap speed of 99.21 mph, when the sidecar outfit became airborne on The Bump, the

handlebars nearly flew out of his hands and he had only just enough time to point the front wheel in the right direction again before landing. Realising that he had achieved unofficially the world's 10 kilometre and 10 miles speed records, he made another attempt the following week with an official timekeeper present. On his second lap he achieved a record speed of 106.6 mph. Well into the third lap, in his words, he found the outfit *rather jellified in his hands* because it was attached only by the front fixing, the rear fixing having broken. After this mishap, he resolved to try again. Next week, after the rear sidecar fixing was replaced, he made another record attempt with the outfit. This time, the clutch failed, the engine revs increased dramatically and *after a lot of valves and pistons became rather mixed up* the engine gave up the ghost.

The next record broken by Noel was on Francis Beart's 500 Norton fitted with a light ballasted sidecar. He kept the outfit well down on the banking to obtain the shortest route and achieved 96.33 mph. Noel was involved in many attempts to secure the 500 cc solo machine lap record on Beart's Norton [Figure 1]. He kept the machine laid over on the very edge of the banking making every effort to clip off a split second. Eventually, the inside foot rest broke off, letting his foot down heavily on the concrete at 120 mph. Fortunately, he managed to recover from his potentially devastating situation but he was thoroughly shaken and the attempt was abandoned. This failure made him realise that if a streamlined cowl had been fitted to the machine and he had worn a streamlined helmet, there would have been a better chance of beating the record. Clearly, Noel understood the benefits of streamlining for racing motorcycles; in fact, this was proposed in *The Motor Cycle* on 18 January 1912 under the heading *Streamline Bodies for Motor Cycles. Why Not?*

Beart prepared a 350 cc Norton for attempts on the world's three hour record, which stood at 92.88 mph. Noel and a young man named *Earle* were his riders. This proved to be a tedious and back-breaking affair. Eventually, the record was taken at 93.30 mph.

Noel prepared his Brough for an attempt on the Brooklands lap speed record for solo motorcycles. The engine was rebuilt with both exhaust pipes facing forward and with a new induction system. New front forks with a



streamlined cowl were fitted and everything was tucked in as far as possible to reduce wind resistance. The foot rests were raised and shortened to reduce the chance of them touching the surface of the track when the machine was cranked over. The effects of modifications were tested by riding the machine as fast as possible at flying kilometre test runs. On one test lap, the return springs of the carburettor broke when he was flat out. The engine did not slow down when the throttle was closed and Noel found himself heading for the barriers at the paddock entrance at high speed. To stop the engine, he was able to remove the sparking plug leads, but had to endure the effects of cracks of lightening from the magneto. Then, fortunately he was just able to find a gap in the fence, which enabled him to escape. On another test run, when flat out, he nearly collided with a swan that had just taken off from a lake on the site. Noel was very satisfied with the flat-out test run over the Railway Straight. The Brough achieved an average speed of 145 mph over the kilometre, which meant that it was touching a top speed of 160 mph, as he had entered the start at only 115 mph.

While Noel felt that he had overcome all the troubles encountered during the years that he had owned the Brough, the weather took a hand against him. Every time he planned for a record attempt, it rained. On one occasion, at lap speeds of 115 mph, he had to give up because on the wet track there was no tyre adhesion at all. On another occasion, it was so cold that the induction pipe to the rear cylinder froze causing a partial seizure of the piston. Finally, on 4 July 1939, a day with gusty winds and wet patches all over the track, *throwing caution to the winds*, he broke the Brooklands' official lap record for all time at a speed of 124.51 mph.

Plate 7 in Full Chat showed that steamlining was fitted over the front forks and rear wheel of the Brough during the successful record attempt [Figure 2]. However, Plate 13 in Full Chat [Figure 3] showed that no steamlining was fitted for at least one of the record attempts [Figure 3]. This suggested that Noel experimented with different configurations during the many attempts that he made to gain the record.

*Talmage*, writing in *The Motor Cycle* on 26 October 1939, argued that the lap speed achieved by Noel Pope could have been as high as 127 mph if the banking of the Brooklands track was taken into account. It appeared that he

lapped the track in 80 seconds and the official lap distance, based on a line 50 feet from the edge of the track, that was used to calculate the lap speed, was 2.767 miles. This yielded an average lap speed of 124.51 mph. *Talmage* pointed out that Noel Pope kept as close to the outer edge of the track as possible on the banked sections and possibly he traversed 2.828 miles in 80 seconds. Thus, in the opinion of *Talmage* the record lap could have been 127 mph.<sup>36</sup> Whether the Brooklands lap speed actually was 124.51 or 127 mph, without doubt, it was an outstanding feat of engineering, persistence, riding skill and, above all, great courage.

### **Sources of income and publicity**

As an example of the economics of Continental racing, Noel gave a detailed account of the costs of a round trip, for two riders, for the Dutch and Swiss races. These amounted to £28 15s 4d. On the other hand the starting money for the two riders was £52; an overall profit, which could be increased if there was prize money. Starting money varied, the French, Belgian and German races paid only £5-8, while a Dutch race paid £11 and a Swiss race paid £15.<sup>37</sup>

As stated previously, Noel received prize money and bonuses for races at Brooklands and was sponsored by Comerfords for some TT races. Examination of the catalogue of *The Noel Pope Collection* of letters held by the National Motor Museum showed that, between 1935 and 1938, he had financial support arrangements with George Brough [Brough Superior motorcycles], Lodge Plugs Ltd. [sparking plugs], Amal Ltd. [carburettors], Ferodo Ltd [brake and clutch linings], Veloce Ltd. [Velocette motorcycles], British Thompson-Houston Ltd. [magnetos], Dunlop Rubber Co. Ltd. [tyres and inner tubes] and Norton Motors Ltd. [Norton motorcycles]. In addition, he received letters congratulating him on racing successes from Eric Fernihough and Barry Baragwanath, both high-profile individuals, was in correspondence with *The Motor Cycle* magazine and received letters from seven fans, including one in Australia. The *Nottingham Evening Post*, of 4 August 1949, indicated that Noel then was on the payroll of Comerfords as its works manager.

## **WW2 & MARRIAGE, 1939-1945**

An announcement about the Supplementary Reserve of Officers in the London Gazette of 22 November 1938 revealed that Noel Baddow Pope lately was an Officer Cadet in the University of London Contingent of the Officers' Training Corps. This status probably originated when he was a student at UCL [above]. In Full Chat, Noel Pope mentioned that in April 1939 he was a reserve Tank Corps officer and that in June 1939, when at the TT, he received his call-up by telegram from the War Office. Moreover, he reported that in July 1939 he was on Salisbury Plain as a regular army officer. In fact, the London Gazette of 7 July 1939 showed that he had been granted a temporary commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Army Service Corps [RASC] having been transferred from the Supplementary Reserve of Officers of the Royal Tank Regiment.<sup>38</sup>

The UK declared war against Germany on 3 September 1939 and before long Noel Pope was in France. As officer in charge of motorcycle training, he managed to organise a few motorcycle trials during the winter of 1939-1940.<sup>39</sup> Later, on the run-up to the Dunkirk evacuation, Noel's dispatch rider, who had been in the saddle day for days and nights, fell asleep while riding, first colliding with a barbed wire fence before ending up in a ditch. On the beaches, Noel witnessed an impromptu race between a Bren gun carrier, a motorcycle and a lorry.

Back in the UK, he was assigned to a staff post which he did not like. However, he was able to organise, in the Tunbridge Wells area, a motorcycle trial for the whole Corps. Later, promoted to Captain, he was posted as RASC Officer to an armoured brigade, which he described as *the dream of all captain's jobs in the Army*. Soon, he became Officer in Charge of Motorcycle Training before being posted to start up a Motorcycle Instructors' School. Noel described this as one of the most pleasant times of his Army life which involved motorcycling all day long through the lanes and hills of Surrey in the Autumn of 1941.

Then, came another spell of overseas service for Noel and his men. This time it was in North Africa. From *somewhere south of Gibraltar* in convoy they crossed the Atlas Mountains, at times in freezing conditions. When the warm weather came, it brought with it dust, clouds and storms. The company was

at times spread over a hundred miles and the despatch riders were the only means of communication. When off the beaten track, landmines were one of the risks that they faced. However, because of their low weight and speed, sometimes motorcycles went over a mine safely, while heavier and slower four-wheeled vehicles that followed them triggered an explosion. Noel's unit transported an infantry battalion through Tunis and then up Cap Bon. They encountered prisoners driving their own vehicles and captured motorcycles joined the unit's stable. When the campaign was over, boredom was relieved by organising hill climbs on captured BMW sidecar outfits and Captain Pope had his own motorcycle built from Italian army parts. Returning from Tunis late one evening, he received an order to report to Algiers by the quickest possible route. Noel and his driver took turns at the wheel and they reached their destination, 500 miles away, in one day, over a route that *in some parts would not have disgraced a trial*.

Back in England, Noel started training for D-Day at Crystal Palace. In the evenings, he rode one of his new company's motorcycles around the road racing course. Later in Normandy, Noel, now a Major, and his Staff Sergeant enjoyed themselves by racing a battered, captured Zündapp sidecar outfit round and round a field. One of Major Pope's tasks was, as fast as possible, to transport General Koenig, the Free French Resistance leader, and his staff, from Le Mans to Paris where Koenig became Governor-General after the city was liberated.

Somewhere in recently-liberated Belgium, Noel was able to ride a 1935 350 cc AJS racing motorcycle which, like other motor vehicles, had been hidden from the occupying power. From Ghent, he started on his company's last convoy to Berlin. This time, instead of being in the front of the convoy, the dispatch riders had to ride behind vehicles fitted with upright angle-iron *anti-neck cutters* to safeguard the drivers from wires that the enemy had stretched across the roads between the trees. In war-devastated Berlin, Noel chose for his company's workshops the building that had housed the automobile show, which he had visited in 1937.

### **Marriage, children and Surbiton**

A marriage certificate and birth certificates provided details of Noel's army rank and address in Surbiton between 1940 and 1943. On 4 September 1940,

Captain Noel Baddow Pope, of the RASC, aged 30, of 64 Portsmouth Road, married, at St. Matthew's Church in Surbiton, Daphne Jeanne Dupont, aged 22, of Old Pines, Southborough Road, Surbiton. On 1 August 1941, Daphne Pope of 64 Portsmouth Road, gave birth to a son, Lawrence Robert Pope, whose father was Captain Noel Baddow Pope of the RASC. On 13 April 1943, Daphne Pope of 64 Portsmouth Road, gave birth to Timothy Baddow Pope, whose father was Major Noel Baddow Pope, of the RASC, who, according to the certificate was a *racing motorist* in civilian life, of 64 Portsmouth Road.

Lawrence Robert Pope attributed his first forename to his father's respect for Lawrence of Arabia.<sup>40</sup> His own second forename possibly reflected Baddow's off-stage name, Robert Percy Field Pope. The forenames of his brother, Timothy Baddow Pope, possibly reflected his ventriloquist-grandfather's stage name and Tim the name of his dummy.

The Kingston upon Thames Electoral Registers provided Noel's addresses in Surbiton at various other times. In 1946, he lived at 64 Portsmouth Road. His mother, Edith, also lived there and it was assumed that it was also the address of his wife Daphne and his two sons. Between 1947-1952, Noel and Daphne Pope lived at 16 Bond Road. In 1954, Noel lived at 11 Oakhill Road, a house that appeared to be divided into flats. In 1956, Noel and Edith Pope lived at this address. In 1960, Noel Pope was living at 11 Oakhill Road and in 1965 he was living in Flat 3 in this property, along with his son Lawrence Pope, while his mother lived in Flat 5. Edith Pope, died in 1970 and in this year Noel and Lawrence Pope were living in Flat 8C, The Crescent. In 1971, the year that he died, Noel Pope was living on his own in Flat 8C, The Crescent. This evidence suggested that Noel and Daphne Pope separated sometime between 1952 and 1954.

### **RACING AND RECORD ATTEMPT, 1945-1949<sup>41</sup>**

When in Berlin, Major Pope visited the Avus motor racing track which was undamaged and, theoretically, still usable. However, back in England, he soon found out that the Brooklands track was a *complete write-off* because it had been used during the war for, among other things, aircraft production by the Vickers Company.

Immediate post-war motorcycle racing was mainly confined to ex-RAF airfields and other military sites. Noel took part in meetings at Dunholme in

Lincolnshire, in 1947, Haddenham in Buckinghamshire and, in 1948, Blandford in Dorset. He rode a Velocette in the Junior TT in 1948,

He also entered the rebuilt Brough in a sand race at Redcar, in Yorkshire, to make an attempt at the flying kilometre record. As he approached the end of his first run, he was dismayed to find that in a matter of 100-200 yards from the finish there was a crowd of people picnicking on the sands. Fortunately, they scattered as he approached and made avoiding action a little easier. The situation ruled out a second run. Nevertheless, he made the fastest time of the day at 118.99 mph. On 1 April 1950, Noel took part in some road races at Blandford Camp that were organised by the Blackmore Vale Motor Cycle Club.<sup>42</sup>

### **The world motorcycle speed record attempt<sup>43</sup>**

By 1947, Noel had set his sights on the world motorcycle speed record of 173 mph, which had been established, in 1937, on a straight length of the A3 Autobahn between Frankfurt and Munich, by Ernst Henne, of Germany, on a fully streamlined BMW.<sup>44</sup> However, an editorial in *Motor Cycling* of 17 April 1947 cited a letter from Noel which indicated that so far he had received no official government support for the project. Undaunted, in consultation with Bob Winter and Teddy Comerford, he decided, in February 1949, to press on with the challenge. It was believed that Henne's machine produced 78 brake horse power [BHP]. Noel knew that the engine of his Brough was capable of 120 BHP and calculated that if his machine was enclosed in a streamlined shell, maximally to reduce wind-resistance, the record would be in his grasp. The Bonneville Salt Flats, in Utah, USA, offered the best venue for the attempt. At an altitude of 2,000 ft. above sea level, this was a shallow lake in winter. It dried out in the summer, leaving a 100 mile long, hard, flat surface which usually was smooth.

In March 1949, work started to enable a team of Noel Pope, Teddy Comerford and George Brough, the sponsors of the project, to set sail for the USA in early August. On 4 August 1949, George Brough stated *everything that has gone into the making of this machine is entirely British and if we succeed it will be another feather in the cap of British workmanship, design and courage...we hope once more to wrest the world speed record from the Germans...* No doubt alluding to post-war shortages of metals, he added that

while no government funds were provided, they had been extremely helpful in granting permission for the use of special materials for the building of the machine.<sup>45</sup> While in the USA, the British team had the use of an Austin car at no expense. It was difficult to escape the conclusion that this enterprise was a matter of post-war national pride, at least for Noel and his supporters. And, as to the total costs, *The Sphere* newspaper of 20 August 1949 reported that they were £5,000.

Then, numerous setbacks arose and, had trans-Atlantic bookings not been so difficult to secure at the time, the trip would have been postponed. The first bombshell was to find a crack in the crankcase of the engine. The J. A. Prestwich factory in Walthamstow had been engaged in production for the war effort. No spares were available and production of the type of engine required had not started. However, JAP promised a suitable engine in the shortest possible time. Then, the American Motor Cycle Association informed the team that they were not very interested in the project and, as their timekeepers were not recognised by the Fédération Internationale de Motorcyclisme, the run could be accepted as a world record. This problem later was solved by George Eyston who arranged for officially-recognised timekeepers from the American Automobile Association to be in place.

Blackburn and General Aircraft Ltd, of Brough in Yorkshire, designed and tested the model of the streamlined shell. With great efficiency, preliminary drawings and notes were available in May. Results from wind tunnel tests enabled Noel to estimate that a speed of 208 mph was achievable at the Bonneville site.

It proved impossible to measure the maximum BHP because the bench test rig repeatedly was wrecked by the back-fire of the engine when it tried to start. At last, in July, it was possible to test the engine, fitted to the Brough, without steamlining. This was done surreptitiously in the evenings on the runway of an aerodrome. At the first attempt, the supercharger blew up. When the spare went the same way, a replacement was provided and fitted by Wade Engineering of Gatwick. The shell structure eventually was fitted by Tidy of Wimbledon. A three-speed gearbox was fitted for the record attempt.

The delays prevented the Brough from being sent ahead of the team by cargo boat as had been planned originally. Instead, frantic arrangements

were made to have the machine assembly and spares, in eight separate crates, to be sent from the Portsmouth Road to Southampton so that it could join Noel Pope, Teddy Comerford and George Brough on the Queen Elizabeth.

They arrived in New York and went on, by train and car, to Wendover, Utah, by the salt flats. When they arrived, they discovered that the crates were still in New York, having been delayed by the US Customs. Moreover, they found that because of the action of wind, the salt had dried out to produce ripples, four inches high, on the surface. It was therefore necessary to cut out a runway for the record attempt, from which it was advisable not to deviate.

After a wait of ten days, it was possible to test the Brough, without the shell. A speed in excess of 150 mph was obtained, which Noel estimated would enable him to touch the 200 mph mark when the shell was fitted.

Then disaster struck. When the crate containing the three sections of the once-beautiful polished shell was opened, they were found in a battered state on top of one another. Panel beating equipment was procured in an endeavour to restore the original shapes of the sections. However, when Noel Pope tried to attach them to the Brough, he found that instead of fitting neatly together like the lid of a tin, gaps, inches wide, resulted. Eventually, after a great deal of pushing at either end, the gaps were closed. With hindsight, Noel realised that it was extremely stupid to attempt a run with the machine, but they had travelled thousands of miles, time and money were running low and the timekeepers were standing by.

The runway on the salt was smoothed and cleared. A black line was laid down the side for him to follow to the end, which was eight miles away. The timekeepers' equipment and control tower were situated half way down the runway. Noel was ready to go and a slightly edited version of his recollection follows.<sup>46</sup>

*The noise and smell inside were incredible as I streaked away in bottom gear with the engine revs near the maximum in an amazingly short time. I changed into second gear and again the speed and revs mounted almost too quickly, as I was not giving the engine full throttle. A quick glance at the rev counter showed that I was in the 150 mph region. As I was preparing to*



*engage top gear, I noticed that I was drifting a little away from the black line on my right hand side.*

*I immediately put my weight over, as is the normal practice to counteract the drift. I might as well have leant against a brick wall, for although in the end I was completely off one footrest with my whole body leaning on one side of the shell, I was not making the slightest impression on the direction of the drift, which was becoming alarmingly near the edge of the runway.*

*In desperation to keep off the four-inch ripples at the edge of the runway, I pulled on the handlebars, knowing full well that it was a chance in a thousand of getting away with it at that speed. The chance did not come off, and everything started to happen at once, a lock-to-lock wobble with the machine now at right angles to the runway careering like a camel over the ripples. I knew it was only time before I hit the deck, so with a final burst of speed to try to straighten up, I shut off and prepared to bail out.*

*The machine came to earth as I was fumbling with the safety catch, bursting the hood open to spin me on the salt, as I kicked myself clear. My jacket was torn upwards and my trousers downward to leave a square foot or two of tender skin to try to wear away the salt surface and fail miserably in the attempt. I was too thankful to be out in the fresh air to worry then about the skin on my back. But the usual, of course, had to happen as a grand finale. At first, I had been beating the bike, which now only proceeded to catch me up, but passed me as well by the simple process of rolling on top of me, making my ribs feel as though it was a steamroller. I sat in the middle of this vast expanse of salt and thought how utterly stupid it was to have come all this way just to fall off.*

In Noel's own words, *the next day my morale was crawling as I practically did the same down the main street of Wendover.*" And, accompanied by Bill Dell of Dunlop, he retired to a small, quiet bar for a drink and a rest. Here, he fell into conversation with a veteran of the Berlin Airlift who, like him was suffering the effects of an accident. This encounter made Noel Pope feel much better and, after the shell was removed from the Brough, he resolved to make another attempt on the record.

He just managed to climb onto the machine unaided and after two or three attempts over the timing strip, in which he achieved 140-150 mph, a decision

was made to abandon the project. The engine had *lost its sparkle*, the vibration was terrifying and the machine kept dropping out of top gear. Later, it was discovered that the frame was broken and the gearbox was damaged.

The passenger list of the Queen Mary, which arrived in Southampton on 4 October 1949, recorded that among the first class passengers was Noel B. Pope, aged 39, an engineer of Bond Road, Surbiton, Surrey.<sup>47</sup>

### **DISCUSSION ON SPEED RECORD ATTEMPTS**

Arguably, even if Noel had broken the motorcycle world land speed record on the Bonneville Salt Flats in 1949, taken overall, his Brooklands lap record of 1939 would have been a greater personal achievement which surpassed Ernst Henne's record of 1937. Henne's record was on a linear track that was a relatively new autobahn, which must have been commandeered by the Nazi government of the time. Thus maximum support by a totalitarian state was implied. On the face of it, with due respect to Ernst Henne, who was a distinguished all-round professional motorcyclist, a government supported speed attempt in a straight line on a well-maintained flat surface could be reduced to the rider just aiming a motorcycle at full throttle at the finishing line. However, this may be a simplistic view in the absence of information on other factors including the weather on the day.

There was no evidence that Noel's record had state support and certainly was achieved on a banked circuit, with potholes in places. He had to negotiate a big bump which made him leave the ground and to fight centrifugal forces on the banking to avoid going over the edge. Furthermore, on the day that the record was taken Noel had to contend with gusty winds and wet patches on the track.

It was concluded that Noel Pope's 1939 Brooklands lap record was a greater personal achievement than Ernst Henne's 1937 world land speed record. It was recognised that another person might disagree with the foregoing analysis and a different conclusion could emerge. However, it is absolutely certain that Noel's Brooklands record cannot be reproduced or bettered because the track as it existed in 1939 is no more.

### **FINAL YEARS, 1949-1971**

Minimal research was carried out on Noel Pope's activities during 1949-1971. Full Chat, published in 1952, contained advertisements, aimed at

motorcyclists, for the Esso Petroleum Company, Ferodo Ltd [brake linings], United Lubricants Ltd. [*Carburol*], The upper cylinder lubricant and fuel economiser], K.L.G sparking plugs and Comerfords Ltd., The Motorcycle Specialists, of Oxford House, Portsmouth Road, Thames Ditton. Comerfords advertised *Tuning for speed under the supervision of N.B. Pope, holder of Brooklands lap record, 124.5 mph*. This indicated that, at the time, Noel remained in contact with the motorcycle industry, especially with Comerfords, where he specialised in preparing motorcycles for racing.

The Daily Herald of 13 July 1959 reported that Noel was leading a group of divers from the Kingston Sub-Aqua Club to look for a lost city under the Adriatic Sea where sharks presented a risk. In 1961, Noel B. Pope's story *The Thin Red Line* was published in a magazine called *Science Fiction Adventures*. It concerned an imaginary planet that was invaded by aliens who were unable to see anything coloured red. The defenders sprayed red themselves and their weapons. Thus they were rendered invisible to the invaders and so were able to defeat them.<sup>48</sup>

In 1961-62, Noel was a vice-chairman of an *avante-garde* art organisation called *The Free Painters & Sculptors*. When I visited him at his flat in The Crescent, Surbiton, shortly before he died, he had been working on a wooden sculpture using rotary burrs that he would have used in the tuning of motorcycle engines. Sadly, Noel Baddow Pope, aged 62, of 8c The Crescent, Surbiton, died in Surbiton Hospital on 23 March 1971. His death certificate gave carcinomatosis as the cause of death. It stated his occupation as *electronic engineer*.<sup>49</sup> This suggested that, in his later years, building on his pre-WW2 electrical engineering qualification [above], Noel had taken up what was then a relatively new field of engineering.

In an obituary, his son Lawrence recalled that in his younger days Noel played for Esher Rugby Club, was a member of the Institute of Contemporary Arts and that, after he retired from motorcycle racing, Noel took up painting, with which he had experimented during the War. Moreover, in 1962 Noel took up parachute jumping, and spent enjoyable times searching the Mediterranean seabed for wrecks and sunken treasure. Additionally, according to Lawrence Pope, Noel was involved in local journalism, having started the *Surbiton News*, later to become the *Borough News*.<sup>50</sup>

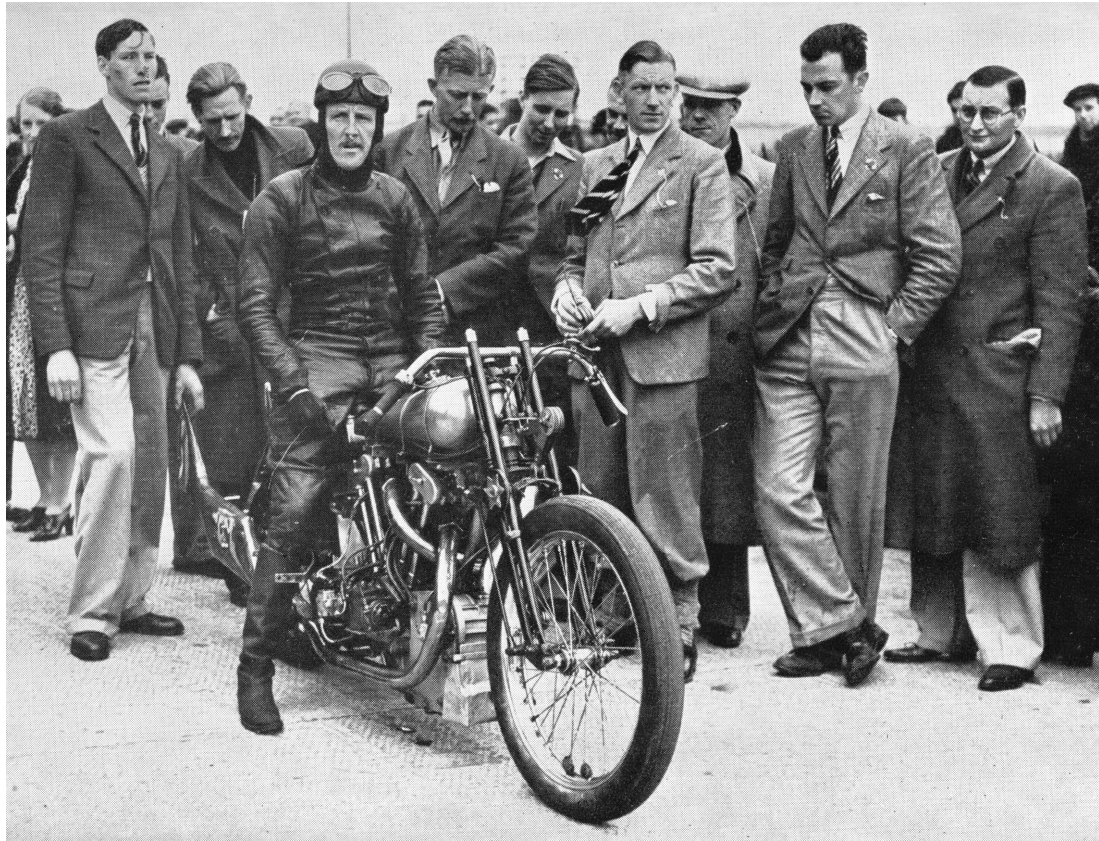
After his funeral, a party was held in the saloon bar of The Plough pub in Ewell Road, Surbiton, which had recently been Noel's local watering hole. Lawrence explained that this was the way his father would have wanted it, with friends gathered round enjoying a drink and a laugh in his memory.<sup>51</sup> Noel Baddow Pope largely has been forgotten in Surbiton. I hope that this paper will serve as a memorial to him.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

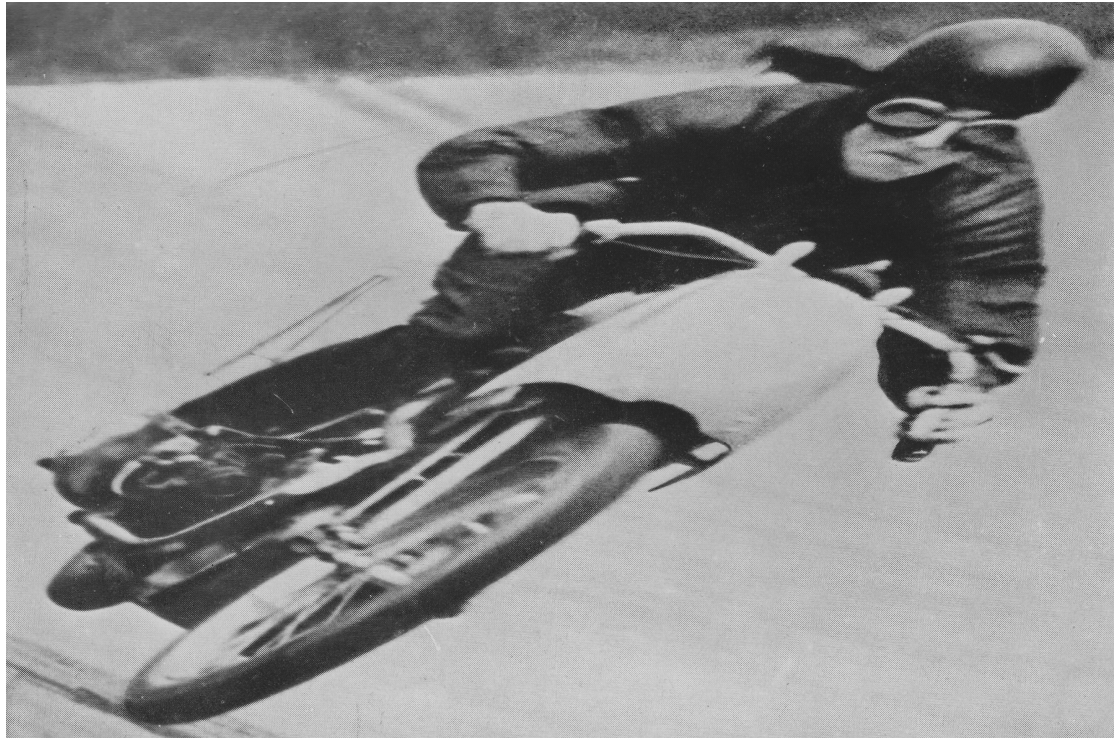
In addition to those cited in the endnotes, I am grateful to staff of Kingston History Centre for help in finding references and to Simon Kennedy for computer-enhanced scans.



**Figure 1. Noel Pope riding a Norton in a 500 cc record attempt, Brooklands, 1939. Note that the elevated front wheel does not have a front brake or front mudguard. Computer-enhanced scan from Full Chat, Plate 5 by Simon Kennedy.**



**Figure 2. Noel Pope astride the supercharged Brough Superior waiting to start the record lap attempt, Brooklands, 1939. Note the huge “Brooklands Can” silencer [the other cannot be seen], the absence of a front brake and of any streamlining. Computer-enhanced scan from Full Chat, Plate 13 by Simon Kennedy.**



**Figure 3. Noel Pope on the supercharged Brough Superior travelling at very high speed during the 1939 lap record attempt. Note the streamlining on the front forks and over the rear wheel. Note also that the rear wheel is elevated and that the machine is close to the edge of the banking. Computer-enhanced scan from Full Chat, Plate 7 by Simon Kennedy.**



**Figure 4. Noel Pope and family with the streamlined Brough Superior before the record attempt in September 1949, possibly taken in a workshop at Comerfords of Thames Ditton. Note the side fins that were intended to stabilize the machine at high speed. Computer-enhanced image of a photograph taken in the Brooklands Museum Library by David A. Kennedy.**

## APPENDIX 1, CHAPTERS IN *FULL CHAT*

**One**, pp. 1-3, *The Great Awakening*, the birth of a lifetime's devotion to the risks and thrills of motorcycling and racing.

**Two**, pp. 3-6, *The Start*, early days of motorcycle racing, 1933.

**Three**, pp. 6-10, *Seeking the lights*, career development, 1934.

**Four**, pp. 10-18, *All lit up*, career development, 1935.

**Five**, pp. 18-27, *The chequered flag*, career development, 1936.

**Six**, pp. 28-35, *The writing on the wall*, 1937.

**Seven**, pp. 36-43, *Continental capers*, racing on the Continent at different times.

**Eight**, pp. 43-48, *Record breaking*, 1938-1939.

**Nine**, pp. 48-54, *The Island, some reflections and recollections*, the Tourist Trophy and other races on the Isle of Man.

**Ten**, *Behind the pits*, 54-56, the need for correct assembly of parts, getting the fuel mixture right for the particular circuit and the need to pay great attention to detail when preparing for a race, in the light of past failures.

**Eleven**, pp. 56-60, *The final fling*, racing in 1939, before the start of WW2.

**Twelve**, pp. 61-67, *The bog wheel*, [according to NPB, *bog wheel* was the army slang term for a motorcycle] army service, 1939-1945.

**Thirteen**, pp. 67-69, *Fresh fields*, racing after WW2.

**Fourteen**, pp. 69-76, *The record attempt*, the world motorcycle speed record attempt, 1949.

**Fifteen**, *The inward eye*, 76-80, reflections on a motorcycling career.



**APPENDIX 2**  
**SOME OF THE MOTORCYCLES MENTIONED IN *FULL CHAT***

**AJS**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AJS>

**Ariel**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariel\\_Motorcycles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariel_Motorcycles)

<http://www.arielownersmcc.co.uk/history.html>

**BMW**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMW\\_Motorrad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMW_Motorrad)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMW\\_R75](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMW_R75)

**British Anzani**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anzani>

**Brough**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brough\\_Superior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brough_Superior)

<https://www.broughsuperiorclub.com>

**Douglas**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas\\_\(motorcycles\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_(motorcycles))

<http://www.douglasmcc.co.uk/douglas-motorcycles-1907-1957/models>

**Gilera**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilera>

**J.A.P. engines**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JA\\_Prestwich\\_Industries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JA_Prestwich_Industries)

W. C. Haycraft, 2016, The book of the J.A.P. engine, 1927-1952, Veloce Press, San Antonio, Texas.

**Matchless**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matchless>

**Norton**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norton\\_Motorcycle\\_Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norton_Motorcycle_Company)

<https://www.nortonownersclub.org/history>

**Scott**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Scott\\_Motorcycle\\_Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Scott_Motorcycle_Company)

**Triumph**

<http://www.ianchadwick.com/motorcycles/triumph/time02.html>

**Velocette**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velocette>

[http://www.velocetteowners.com/history/history\\_timeline.html](http://www.velocetteowners.com/history/history_timeline.html)

**Zenith**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zenith\\_Motorcycles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zenith_Motorcycles)

**Zündapp**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zündapp>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zündapp\\_KS\\_750](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zündapp_KS_750)

**ALL WEBSITE REFERENCES DOWNLOADED ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2018**

**APPENDIX 3**  
**SOME OF THE PEOPLE NAMED IN *FULL CHAT***

**Ted Mellor**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted\\_Mellors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Mellors)

**Les Archer**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les\\_Archer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Archer)

**“Barry” Baragwaneth**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brough\\_Superior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brough_Superior)

<http://www.ttwebsite.com/forums/showthread.php?tid=3691&pid=38090>

**Austin Monks**

<https://www.lincolnshirelife.co.uk/posts/view/motorcycling-heroes>

**Eric Furnihough**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric\\_Furnihough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Furnihough)

**Stanley Woods**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley\\_Woods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Woods)

**Francis Beart**

<https://www.500race.org/web/Men/Beart.htm>

**Dennis Minnett**

<http://www.voc.uk.com/net/docs/18/18-390-21.pdf>

**Jock Forbes**

<https://www.racingvincent.co.uk/01%20Web%20Frames/WD-pvn04a.html>

**Crasher White**

<https://www.imuseum.im/search/collections/people/mnh-agent-1277790.html>

**Harold Daniell**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold\\_Daniell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Daniell)

**Jock West**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jock\\_West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jock_West)

**Walter Rusk**

<https://wwiini.org/person/walter-frederick-rusk/>

**Ginger Wood**

<https://www.motorsportmagazine.com/archive/article/july-1937/10/tt-motor-cycle-races>

**Ben Bickell**

<https://www.imuseum.im/search/collections/people/mnh-agent-1275720.html>

<http://keesknegt.doodlekit.com/home/ben-bickell>

**Jimmy Guthrie**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie\\_Guthrie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie_Guthrie)

**Bert Le Vack**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bert\\_le\\_Vack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bert_le_Vack)

**George Brough**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Brough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Brough)

<https://www.broughsuperiorclub.com/index.php/history/history-of-george-brough>

**Ernst Henne**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst\\_Jakob\\_Henne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Jakob_Henne)

**George Eyston**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Eyston](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Eyston)

**ALL WEBSITE REFERENCES DOWNLOADED ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2018**

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- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.kdmcc.com> Downloaded, 1 September 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Andrew Lewis of Brooklands Museum for providing access to these.
- <sup>3</sup> Roger Bird, 2008, A glimpse of the vintage years of motorcycling at Brooklands, Woking, published by Roger Bird. Roger Bird, 2017, Brooklands Grand Prix. The initial years, Woking, published by Roger Bird.
- <sup>4</sup> Noel Baddow Pope [cited as NBP hereafter], 1952, Full Chat, London, Motor Racing Publications Ltd, pp. 1-3. His obituary in the Surrey Comet, 31 March 1971, p. 6, confirms the origins of the forename *Baddow*.
- <sup>5</sup> Certified Copy Of An Entry Of Marriage, Robert Pope and Edith Delamore, Boston, 25 March 1909.
- <sup>6</sup> British Newspaper Archive. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>
- <sup>7</sup> Music Hall & Stage Review, 6 September 1907 & 6 December 1907. The word *assistant* was understood to mean a ventriloquist's doll, otherwise called *dummy*.
- <sup>8</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 1-3.
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.telsociety.org.uk/places-to-visit/dorset/>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brough\\_Superior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brough_Superior) Downloaded, 1 September 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> I am grateful to Richard Knott, Archivist, Canford School, for his help.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.brooklandsmuseum.com/explore/our-history/motor-racing> Downloaded, 1 September 2018. See also, Roger Bird, 2012, The birth of Brooklands, Woking, published by Roger Bird, Roundhill, Woking GU22 8JB
- <sup>12</sup> NBP, 1952, p.2. See also, Roger Bird, 2010 & Roger Bird, 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> The Mercury and Guardian, 19 September 1936.
- <sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Richard Temple, Archivist, University of London, Senate House and Robert Winkworth, University College London, Records Department, for this information.
- <sup>15</sup> I was told this by a work colleague who was a Chartered Electrical Engineer, some years ago.
- <sup>16</sup> NBP, 1952, Foreword. In the Chapter, "Behind the pits", NBP emphasises the importance of paying great attention to detail when preparing a machine for a competition – NBP, 1952, pp. 54-56.
- <sup>17</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>18</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 3-6.
- <sup>19</sup> Programme held in Brooklands Museum Library. Motor Cycling, 30 1937, indicated that NBP then was a member of Dittons Motor Club.
- <sup>20</sup> NBP, 1952, pp.48-54.
- <sup>21</sup> A Gold Star was awarded at Brooklands for a lap of 100 mph. A Double Gold Star was awarded for a lap exceeding 120 mph.
- <sup>22</sup> On 3 May 1933, NBP's mother, Edith Pope, was left a portion of a legacy, totalling about £31,266, in the will of Laura Evelyn Pope [National Probate Calendar, 1933, via Ancestry]. It is likely that some of this was given to NBP. For sources of information on engines made by the J. A. Prestwich [JAP] company, see Appendix 2.
- <sup>23</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 6-10.
- <sup>24</sup> See Motor Cycling, 10 August 1938.
- <sup>25</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 10-18.
- <sup>26</sup> Fernihough was killed in a speed record attempt in Hungary on 23 April, 1938. Terry Wright, 2018, Eric's last ride, The Vintage & Classic Motorcycle, Issue 689, July 2018, pp. 20-21.
- <sup>27</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 18-27.
- <sup>28</sup> *Dope* was a fuel that was mainly composed of methanol. Such fuels are discussed by Roger Bird, 2008.
- <sup>29</sup> See NBP's letter in the Motor Cycle, 24 December 1936. Clearly, learning to slide around markers on the sand of the Wash on his old Douglas paid off at this time.
- <sup>30</sup> NBP, 1952, 28-35.
- <sup>31</sup> See also the chapter, *Continental Capers*.

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- <sup>32</sup> NBP, 1952, 36-43.
- <sup>33</sup> NBP, 1952, pp.43-48.
- <sup>34</sup> Manchester Daily Mail, 17 June 1939.
- <sup>35</sup> NBP, 1952, pp.43-48.
- <sup>36</sup> "Talmage", 1939, Brooklands lapped at 127 mph, The Motor Cycle, 26 October 1939, pp. 486-487. I am grateful to Roz. Williamson of the Vintage Motor Cycle Library Team for drawing this reference to my attention.
- <sup>37</sup> NBP, 1952, pp.36-43.
- <sup>38</sup> NBP, 1952, pp.60-61.
- <sup>39</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 61-67. An army motorcycle trial was a cross-country test of riding skill designed to further the training of motorcycle riders.
- <sup>40</sup> Surrey Comet, 31 March 1971, p. 6.
- <sup>41</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 67-76.
- <sup>42</sup> Western Gazette, 31 March 1950.
- <sup>43</sup> NBP, 1952, pp. 69-76.
- <sup>44</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst\\_Jakob\\_Henne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Jakob_Henne)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motorcycle\\_land-speed\\_record](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motorcycle_land-speed_record) Downloaded, 1 September 2018.
- <sup>45</sup> Nottingham Evening Post, 4 August 1949. An assumption was made that the special materials referred to included the aluminum used for the shell.
- <sup>46</sup> NBP, 1952, p. 74.
- <sup>47</sup> Queen Mary passengers list, arrivals in Southampton on 4 October 1939 from New York.
- <sup>48</sup> Noel Baddow Pope, 1961, The thin red line, Science Fiction Adventures, No. 23, Vol. 4, pp. 91-99.
- <sup>49</sup> Certified Copy of an Entry of Death, Surbiton Hospital, Surbiton, Noel Baddow Pope, 23 March 1971.
- <sup>50</sup> Surrey Comet, 31 March 1971, p.6. Lawrence Pope probably referred to The Kingston Borough News, founded on 6 September 1968 or the Kingston and Malden Borough News, founded on 19 April 1963. See British Library Board, 1996, Report on the Newsplan project in the London and South Eastern Library Region [LASER], January 1992-December 1995, British Library, London.
- <sup>51</sup> Surrey Comet, 31 March 1971, p.6