



*Fig. 1 Andrew Wood stands near to the location of Alloa's WWI aircraft factory*

Aircraft enthusiast Andrew Wood stands near to the location of Alloa's First World War Aircraft factory - close to the Forthbank amenity skip well known for its tin can statue - and holds a propeller from a Sopwith Camel which was found in a nearby field.

Andrew, who was born and brought up in Alloa and now lives in Dunfermline, revealed some of the secrets of the factory when he gave a presentation to Clackmannanshire Field Studies Society' on Monday, Nov 14 in Alloa Town Hall.

The twin blade propeller which measures about 8ft 6 inches, was found on Bowhouse Farm in the early 1980s and given by a local farmer to Andrew who always had a fascination with aircraft. It was one of two propellers found at the time; the second was gifted to Alloa Museum. Andrew said: "I was going to clean it up and put it on my living room wall, but my wife said it was not going on the wall. So it has been in my loft ever since."

But there is a mystery surrounding the propeller. Four different types of rotary engines were used throughout the First World War to power the Sopwith Camel. The most popular was the French-produced Le Rhone model. This unit powered a number of military aircraft types and the engines were also produced under license worldwide. But Andrew is convinced that this particular propeller was attached to a Bentley engine, from the company that was later to develop the Bentley luxury cars.



*Fig. 2 The half forgotten Sopwith Camel propeller in Alloa Museum*

"It's a mystery how it got here," said Andrew. His mum who stayed at Park Place, Alloa, worked in the factory but Andrew didn't take much notice at the time. Other relations told of French pilots coming to Alloa to collect the aircraft.

The Alloa plant was operated by the British Caudron Company from 1916 until 1924. But the company didn't make aeroplanes after 1919. It carried on making furniture but went into liquidation in 1924 and a new company started up under the name of the Aeroplane & Furniture Factory. After that the trail grows cold until the two Sopwith propellers came to light in the 1980s

Susan Mills, Clackmannanshire Heritage Officer, said that the wooden propellers which had been presented to the museum were discovered by the late Albert Paige covered in straw in a corner of a barn at Bowhouse Farm c1975. She said: "It is believed that they had never been used. It is known that a substantial amount of parts were left in the factory after it closed. Many were taken and used or stockpiled for fire wood, which is presumably how these found their way into the barn."

The Sopwith Camel was introduced on the [Western Front](#) in 1917. Camel pilots were credited with shooting down 1,294 enemy aircraft, more than any other Allied fighter of the conflict.

The story of the aircraft factory has aroused a great deal of interest with even an enthusiast from Canada becoming involved. If you have any information on the factory please contact Clackmannanshire Field Studies Society (cfssec@gmail.com).



*Fig. 3 A Sopwith Camel stands on the runway ready for take off*