



The Cowper-Coles Aircraft Company factory, presumably that on Hanworth Road, Sunbury.



DURING A RECORDING, made some years ago by the Sunbury & Shepperton Local History Society of the reminiscences of Bob Posthumus, a former Sunbury resident, he mentioned that, when first starting work in 1929, he was employed as a junior draughtsman by the Cowper Coles Research Laboratory at Rossall House in Thames Street. Also housed there were a number of other companies, all the brain children of Cowper Coles, who was a prolific inventor. The names of the companies show his versatility; Home Recorders Ltd, Electrolytic Deposition Company, Sherardising Company, Boracic Glass Ltd, One Way Glass Ltd, Precision Metals and Recovery, Spray Sherardising, Lattice Glass and many others. However, what interested us in the transcript of the interview with Mr. Posthumus, was the following paragraph:

He started during the 1914-1918 War, obviously became involved in the war effort and began to build aircraft components. He did have a go at manufacturing some fighter aircraft to his own design. He had a museum, in which were pictures and various components of this particular aircraft. It was a biplane with a completely enclosed fuselage ... it wasn't an open cockpit. It was a beautiful looking little thing, all streamlined ... As far as I can remember the performance, it had a 250hp six cylinder

inline water cooled engine. The prop was rather small and I think the idea was to get a higher pitch, higher speed propeller to keep the guns clear without synchronizing mechanism. It had a claimed maximum speed of 180mph and, as far as I can understand, only two were made. I saw the bits and pieces in the museum. Whether they ever flew or did any combat work or not, I don't know.

Matters could not be allowed to rest there and so we determined to find out what we could about Cowper Coles and his aircraft.

Sherard Osborn Cowper Coles was born in Ventnor, Isle of Wight, in 1867, the son of a celebrated father, Captain Cowper Phipps Coles R.N. Captain Coles was responsible for the introduction of the revolving gun turret on British naval warships. The principle was known to the Greeks, so it was not really an invention of his, but he can be credited with its modern application. Its first practical application was when one was fitted to a small gunboat called the *Lady Nancy* in 1855. It successfully bombarded Russian coastal batteries in the Crimea with a 32 pounder gun. Later, a 68 pounder was substituted, but the Crimean War came to an end before the trials were completed. Coles continued to urge the general adoption of the gun turret, enlisting the aid of the national