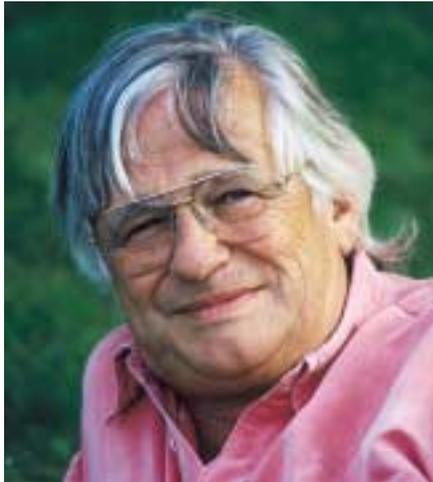


James Gilbert 1935-2006



Author, publisher, aviator and long-time AOPA member James Gilbert died in February at the age of 70.

James built *Pilot* magazine into the pre-eminent general aviation publication of its day before selling it to a publishing group for a price which underlined the extraordinary influence the magazine had over the market. During its glory years *Pilot* reflected James's idiosyncrasy, humour and passion for flying. Always interesting, often surprising, it was a magazine from which the reader – whatever his flying experience – would learn something new.

James was born under the circuit of Croydon Aerodrome and had early memories of watching biplanes from his back garden.

He learned to fly at White Waltham with the Combined Cadet Force, although the RAF declined to take him on as a pilot because of his eyesight. Instead he became a fighter controller, a job at which he became well practised because, he said, his colleagues preferred playing poker.

On his return to civvy street he worked briefly in insurance at Lloyds, got a grounding in publishing with the Oxford University Press and sold advertising. With difficulty because of constant poverty he amassed the 100 flying hours he needed to join the Tiger Club, where he still holds the record for the most hours flown in a club aircraft in a single year. His adventures were legion, and included an incident in Orkney when he ran into a wall, damaging one blade of his Turbulent's propeller. He obtained a saw and trimmed the other blade into a rough semblance of balance then flew back to Redhill, crossing the Cheviots in ground effect.

An accomplished practitioner of aerobatics, he was runner-up in the de Havilland Trophy, the national aerobatics championship, in 1964, and won the Esso Voltige Trophy the same year. Elected by Tiger Club stalwart Lewis Benjamin "the club member most likely to kill himself in the coming year," James said that his natural cowardice saved him from that fate.

James assisted in the production of the 1969 classic film, *Battle of Britain*, and later flew in *Aces High* alongside Neil Williams, as well as making a brief appearance in *The Eagle Has Landed*.

He moved into aviation journalism to supplement his income from advertising and was invited to join the staff of *Flying*

magazine in New York. For six years he prospered at *Flying*, writing with his characteristic authority, clarity and flair, and introducing America to such strange European designers as Stelio Frati. Eventually he was fired – justifiably, he thought. "In truth, I'm virtually unemployable," he said. "Too stropky."

He returned to London to write *The Great Planes*, the first of his four acclaimed aviation books, before taking over *Pilot* magazine in 1972. The book bankrolled a shaky start on the magazine, which lost £15 in James's first year. But in the 28 years of his ownership the magazine rose to become the unchallenged chronicle of general aviation in the UK.

Forthright in his criticism, James endeared himself to his contributors with his unique habit of paying generously and on time.

His experience and his authority, allied with a thirst for knowledge and novelty, made the magazine required reading for a generation of pilots. James was a stickler for accuracy, hated clichés and respected opinions which differed from his own. He was widely read, a *bon viveur* with a love of literature and music, particularly jazz, and was looking forward to a sybaritic retirement on the proceeds of the magazine's sale when he was diagnosed as having cancer, which he fought for two years.

Asked if he had any regrets, he said: "I wish I'd taken more holidays. I gave too much to the magazine. I thought I didn't have enough money, but it turned out I didn't have enough time."

James is survived by his third wife Gena and four children. He is very much missed. – *Pat Malone*

Peter Masefield 1914-2006

The entire aviation world has lost a strong stalwart with the death of Sir Peter Masefield at the age of 91. He was one of those rare people whose interests and activities ranged from the heavy brigade through to the light end of the scale. The Masefield Chipmunk was an upgraded version of the original basic trainer, boasting a tear-drop cockpit canopy with all-round vision, ejector exhausts, a spatted undercarriage, capacity for light luggage in a special compartment built into the wing and an increase in cruising speed of almost 20mph. Peter was a keen air racing pilot. Before this, as the first civil air attaché to the British Embassy in Washington, he flew himself around the United States in his own Proctor.

At the other end, when Chairman of British European Airways (the short-haul predecessor of today's BA) Peter Masefield showed confidence in the British aircraft industry by ordering a fleet of Vickers Viscounts straight from the drawing board. This initiative helped to kick-start the reign of the Viscount as Britain's best post-war success story.

Earlier, during World War 2, as an aviation journalist, he had flown on operational missions on Boeing B-17s of the United States Army Air Force. A later wartime venture was as editor of the *Aeroplane Spotter*, which had official blessing as the medium through which many people learnt the essentials of aircraft recognition, to differentiate between allied and axis machines.

It might be easier to list those aviation bodies in which he was not involved than to tabulate the organisations in which he participated. I always found Peter to be very helpful and supportive of all worthwhile aviation ventures: my first contact was in 1951 when some of us were setting up the Vintage Aeroplane Club as a means of coordinating the needs of owners and pilots of historic aircraft. He was not directly involved, but he sent some supportive messages of encouragement to convince us of the need to get on with it. Later I had contact when he was President of the British Aviation Preservation Council and, most recently, he was the supportive Patron of the General Aviation Awareness Council in which he took considerable interest until his health failed to support his in-built aims and intentions.

Peter Masefield suffered several frustrations during his many endeavours to preserve Britain's leading role in the world's aviation industry. This included managing directorship of Bristol Aircraft from 1956, where delays to service entry of the Britannia turbo prop airliner caused the USA's Boeing 707 to take a lead from which the UK failed to recover. Again, as evidence of his wide-ranging interests, in 1960 Peter became founding managing director and later Chairman of British Executive and General Aviation (Beagle) that set out to produce several light GA aircraft, but this time the Government failed to support 'UK GA Ltd' and, as with the airliners, the nation slipped away from its chance to re-establish a healthy manufacturing industry.

In 1972 Peter Masefield was knighted, as recognition of his very significant contribution to the cause of British aviation. Although some of the projects in which he was involved failed to reach the heights that he had set, I cannot find one in which the fault was his. – *David Ogilvy*

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