

Obituary

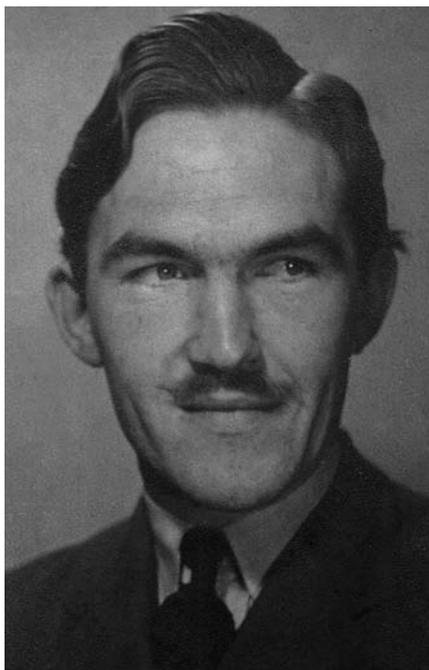
Bill Ison: a man who wanted the best for us

By **David Kynaston**, Chairman of Cambridge Flying Group

Bill Ison, CFI at the Cambridge Flying Group for 55 of its 60 years of existence, passed away peacefully on Wednesday February 9th at 90 years of age. Bill's contribution to the generation and maintenance of the highest standards of both airmanship and instructional methods is well recognised, but what set him apart was the fact that he always delivered to these exacting levels, and therefore was seen as a natural leader. Under his guidance the Cambridge Flying Group became the centre for most students and pilots keen to master the skills required to fly the DH 82A Tiger Moth.

Bill was born in Cambridge and was destined to enter his father's granary and agricultural supplies business but Bill preferred the Royal Air Force. He joined up at the age of 17 and like so many learned his engineering skills at Halton; he remained forever proud of being a 'Trenchard Brat'. However, once he had qualified war was declared and Bill volunteered to become an air gunner. He soon found himself in an Avro Anson flying from Bircham Newton, on the east coast. The young man soon shouldered the awful reality of war when on a morning patrol of four such lame ducks they came under attack, and one of his fellow crew members was killed. That afternoon Bill took tea with his parents just a few miles away at Hunstanton, unable to tell them anything. Bill would later reflect that he and others like him had little control over their destiny, and that skill only served to change the odds a little.

His next posting was to the Middle East and the North African Campaign but he was soon recognised as pilot material and sent to Rhodesia for training. Following qualification he returned to the same theatre of war to fly Blenheims on shipping and ground attack duties. In later life the injury he suffered to his knees, having survived a desert prang, was sometimes to give Bill a rather unusual gait when performing the tortured act of getting into a Tiger front cockpit. Posted back home Bill went on to fly Lancasters from Waterbeach, often against the much-feared V1 and V2 sites. It was almost an act of completion that Bill, with his agricultural supplies background, should end his war as part of Operation Manna, dropping essential food to the starving Dutch population. Bill had survived, but many of his



A Halton apprentice, Bill was sent for pilot training in Rhodesia in 1941

friends had not.

Bill continued with the RAF but in the Reserve, and following the closure of the Reserve he was lobbied by some private owners in the Cambridge area to take the

Bill Ison in his most favourite aircraft, the de Havilland Tiger Moth



position of CFI in a new group they wished to form. Bill, deeply suspicious of all things civilian, reluctantly agreed to give it a go and in 1953 the Cambridge Flying Group was formed. Quickly Bill insisted that *proper* aeroplanes should be used for training and by the mid 50s the Group had purchased two Tigers. The Group survives and flourishes to this day. Bill accumulated over 10,000 hours on Tiger Moths alone, and while he was just as comfortable in a modern aircraft there was no doubt where his real passion lay. He was never starry-eyed about the performance of the aeroplane, well recognising its inherent limitations, but he was confident that this aeroplane had the best characteristics for training and making better pilots. This is what Bill was all about; nobody doubted his obvious flying skill, but what he wanted to do was teach.

Those who knew Bill well, and after working with him for the past 40 plus years I count myself as one, know that he did not suffer fools or have much interest in socialising or personally profiting from his skill. To have Bill Ison in the same aeroplane as yourself was a privilege and to experience the calm, direction and encouragement that went with each instructional sortie has stayed with all those who have been taught by him. In every flight the basic skills were honed and something new was learned. Bill's personal ambition was to make us safe within our own skill level; everyone was an individual with different needs. To gain a PPL with Bill was the start of a lifelong love of flying, but one in which respect for airmanship was paramount. While Bill did not suffer fools, redemption was always at hand as he would spend with us the many hours required to sort out our problems, irrespective of level. Over 200 pilots were trained *ab initio* under his guidance and many more than that converted onto type with him – and all this achieved in an organisation of volunteers.

Bill was honoured to receive AOPA's Lennox Boyd Trophy in 1980, and in 2005 GAPAN awarded him the Pike Trophy for his outstanding contribution to aviation, but I am certain that he would want to be remembered for founding a training organisation in which he demonstrated what could be achieved by a man dedicated to excellence – the Cambridge Flying Group.

He will be greatly missed by all and our sympathy goes to his wife Betty and family. ■