

Cancer patient Bill's legacy takes flight

For Roy Parkinson and his father-in-law Bill Ellwood, their painstaking work to complete a scale model of a Tiger Moth biplane took on extra significance. When 'The Goose' finally took to the air at BAE Systems' Model Aircraft Club, it was an emotional climax to a project which, it is hoped, will inspire the next generation of engineers and modellers



The Goose – a 1/6 scale model of a De Havilland DH-82A Tiger Moth biplane – was a labour of love for one man and his son-in-law. Although it took more than 13 years to complete, it strengthened the bond between Williamson Ellwood, known as Bill, and his son-in-law Roy Parkinson after Bill was diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer.

The plane, with a wingspan of 5ft, became a focal point for the inseparable pair when retired pattern maker Bill, 84, was given just months to live after hearing the cancer had spread to his bones.

Roy, who works in Structural Health Monitoring at Samlesbury, and Bill spent weeks reading books, scouring the internet and visiting model shops to try to finish the model. He explained: "The skeleton of the plane had been propped up in a spare room for 13 years gathering dust. I'd asked Bill if he'd mind me tinkering with it. I took it upon myself to get the balsa and plywood plane ready for its first flight. We were great friends – I used to call him Billy



Bill Ellwood watching the first flight

Buzzard and he used to call me Spruce Goose so we called the plane 'The Goose'.

"The first day I brought it into work, I broke the tail. I was going backwards before I went forwards. But, once I got my teeth into it, it became a bit of an obsession."

The novice model maker spent around four months working on the plane during breaks and after his shift. He had managed to put in all the moving parts, but when it came to the skinning, he admits he didn't have a clue.

He called in the help of Colin Waite, an Airworthiness Group Leader from Warton, who helped to skin and balance the plane.

By Christmas the finished plane – skinned and painted in Royal Air Corp yellow with RAF decals – was presented to Bill.

Roy said: "It was a great surprise for him to see it finished. The whole project has just been for him, to take the focus away from the cancer."

The Goose made its maiden voyage on 7 March, flown by pilot Glen Britnell with assistance from Max Kirk who carried out the checks at Huntley's Farm Store in Samlesbury – the home of BAE Systems' Model Aircraft Club.

Roy said: "There were about 30 people who came to see The Goose fly. Bill was very ill but he watched from the car and smiled and cheered as it soared into the sky.

"I asked the club to help because the last thing I wanted to do after all that work was fly it into a tree. The pilot did warn me that it could end up as a bag of bits. He was concerned that it didn't have much power but within 15 yards it was in the air. It did a few circles and then landed safely."

Bill died just days after seeing The Goose take flight. Some of Bill's ashes will be put into a compartment below the pilot so he is always with the aircraft.

Roy is now learning to fly with the model aircraft club, and hopes to pilot The Goose himself one day. It is hoped that The Goose can be used as an educational tool to teach children about flight and the construction of aircraft.

He said: "If everything goes to plan, what a legacy Bill will have given to the next generation of engineers and modellers."

BAE Systems has hosted a similar scheme at Brough, inviting students from schools across the Humber region to use their creativity and innovation to imagine cockpit instruments for the aviation company's first 1916 Blackburn Seaplane. Last year, engineers from the site built a 1/3 scale model based on that aircraft, using archived material, which is used for demonstrations.

The sky's the limit for Jacob

Despite moving 240 miles away from his home in Suffolk, Jacob Cleverley felt at home when he joined BAE Systems.

The aircraft enthusiast accepted a five-year engineering apprenticeship scheme with the company in Preston – and one of the reasons for his decision was the existence of a thriving model aircraft club.

Jacob, 20, has always had a fascination with planes. Photos of his childhood show him regularly playing with toy planes, and as he grew he learnt to build and fly radio-controlled aircraft with his dad. He also built models with his dad and granddad.

Jacob, who is on placement in flight test, said: "You have to consider everything that could potentially go wrong. It's the same considerations you have when building a model aircraft. Before every flight, they undergo a full inspection – which is also the same for models."

"I have built four major projects including a couple of bi-planes and a Spitfire, and I'm currently working on my own design. The models are extremely manoeuvrable and very light – the average aircraft with a wing span of 1.5m weighs just 5lb.

"By building models you get a good understanding of aerodynamics – and I have found that my hobby has helped me a lot already during my placement."

"When I first moved to Preston from Suffolk I was just renting a room, so I had model planes tucked behind the TV, behind the bed and wings perched on the shelving. I have now moved into a house and have a garage I can store my planes in."

Jacob, who is the youngest member of the BAE Systems Model Aircraft Club, said it has been a great way of meeting people with similar interests and is a great way to relax.

"I was accepted by BAE Systems and I was pleased to take the placement. The model club is one of the reasons I chose this company, and another is the products they make. The Typhoon inspired me because of its high performance. The company is steeped in history with planes like the Spitfire."

"I would like a career in a field like flight test – if the opportunity arises. I love looking at the structure, the aerodynamics, and how they work. It gets my inquisitive nature going. I have been interested in planes as long as I can remember."

"The club is really enjoyable and the members are very helpful. I'd recommend joining a club or taking up a hobby if you move to a new area as a way of meeting people with similar interests. Now I've done it once, I feel comfortable moving again if that's where my career takes me."

