



WILLIAM 'BILL' KERR

19th November 1924 – 4th January 2024

Bill was born in Bloomfield in the County of Roxburgh, Scotland. He excelled at school and soon became a well-rounded pupil. WW2 started when Bill was 15 and on 27th March 1944, Flight Engineer William Kerr, Service Number 3023108, joined the Royal Air Force.

We can see from his RAF Flying Logbook, that he spent most of his RAF career in Halifax bombers. Although the war had actually concluded by the time Bill finally passed out as a Flight Engineer, he spent nearly 18 months of his RAF service overseas, mainly in and around the Med and Far East. Bill left the RAF on 14th July 1947.

Bill decided that he wanted a career in flying. He knew he could never be a pilot as his eyesight was poor but he knew his engineering skills and flying experience would stand him in good stead for other positions in civil aviation. It wasn't long before he got a job with Bond Air Services/Lancashire Aircraft Corporation, passed his Civil Flight Engineer's exams and medicals and was flying again, only to find himself in January 1949, flying in Handley Page Haltons (Halifax Freighters) supplying goods and freight to Berlin during the Berlin Blockade (June 1948 – May 1949). We can see from his logbooks, that most of the loads his aircraft carried were either Diesel or Kerosene. That contract finished on 14th July 1949. Then began one of the most exciting times of Bill's life – Silver City Airways.

Bill was involved from the start of this enterprise, as flight engineer, aircraft mechanic, clearing the grass runway of snow, plus a host of other jobs to get this enterprise "off the ground".

While all this was going on, Bill still had time to meet and fall in love with Kathleen Joyce Bull; they married in Sellindge Parish Church on 7th June 1952 and set up home in Lympe.

Due to their successful operations, Silver City outgrew the confines of Lympe and in 1954 a new airport was constructed at Lydd, with Bill taking the roll of Operations/General Manager.

By this time the Kerr family had expanded, Iain was born in 1953, Fiona Jane in 1956 and Robert 1959; they moved to New Romney and settled into family life - but Bill's exploits would take him all over Europe, Africa, Middle East and Asia. Be it flying supplies out to 'Red Adair' to fight Oil Well fires, or ferrying supplies to British Forces in Borneo during the Korean War. He spent nights in Bedouin tents whilst building runways in the desert or delivering and changing aircraft engines in some African outpost.

When the days of Silver City came to an end, the British United Airways Group (of which Silver City was a member) offered Bill a job as Engineering Manager at Gatwick Airport, resulting in another family move to Forest Row in East Sussex. More acquisitions followed: BUA was taken over by British Caledonian and in turn BCAL was taken over by British Airways. Bill tells the tale of the 'too many Chiefs' syndrome, saw the writing on the wall and, Bill being Bill, negotiated himself a very rewarding pension package and said goodbye to aviation.

With Kath's passing in 2007, Bill lived independently in Forest Row until he decided that he wanted to live nearer to his daughter, and in 2016 made the decision to sell up and move to Teignmouth. He soon integrated himself into the life of the town and became a well-known resident of Teignmouth, often seen walking with his stick on the Promenade and around the town. Bill was fiercely independent, doing his own shopping and laundry and was the proud owner of an iPad, teaching himself to send emails and search the web at the age of 97.

DE HAVILLAND DOVE UPDATE

Progress on the Dove has been slow, as there was a large number of vital parts missing, and the task of locating replacements was not going to be easy. Here and there small parts were being found, but many of the most visible missing parts were going to be nearly impossible to locate. The Dove we have is a late Dove Mk 8, G-ARHX, which was originally owned by Hill Samuel, and later Hunting Air Surveys. All of the Silver City machines were early Doves, which means a myriad of little differences, but most people would struggle to tell the difference.

A small bit of luck in 2023 came in the form of an auction of an aviation company's assets, and although it attracted a lot of attention and bidders, enough Dove parts were purchased to make a massive leap forward. A better set of propellers, cockpit glazing, elevators with better fabric, a replacement cabin door, and the scoop was a like new horizontal stabiliser, to replace the very badly damaged one. From other sources have been some more seats and, finally, an instrument panel, albeit bare.

Enough is now gathered to move to the next stage of having the aircraft reassembled, but this work is currently on hold, until our new business office is built in Charing. This will include a local transport history archive, something that is long overdue. Some conversations have taken place about the possibility of locating the finished aircraft at a Kent museum, which would allow for much better visibility for the public, but these are at a very early stage. With its 57-foot wingspan, the Dove, although one of the smallest Silver City machines, is still probably too large an exhibit to enjoy local indoor display space at the moment.

A plan for a Kent Transport Museum is not lost though, we have space on the site we own, we just need to move to creating a charitable transport trust in which the process of taking the next steps can start. In the meantime, our online Facebook group, Kent Transportation History, has grown way beyond our expectations to 3,500 members. The posts are incredibly varied, from the smallest memory, to knockout lost photos of old. It is steadily building to be a unique intersectional reference to Kent's very varied transport heritage.

Kent Transportation History:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1756215321182409>

Kent Silver City Dove Project:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1427131174300169>