A photograph of David Ogilvy, an older man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a light blue shirt and a dark tie. He is sitting at a desk in an office, looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a window with a view of buildings and a small statue on a shelf.

David Ogilvy in his office at AOPA headquarters in Victoria, London

Ogilvy relinquishes the stick

AOPA's David Ogilvy talks of his life and times to **Pat Malone**

David Ogilvy, AOPA's longest-serving officer, has decided to step back from his involvement with the Association after 45 years and is passing on much of his workload on aerodrome protection.

A co-founder of AOPA UK in 1967, David has done almost every job in the Association down the years – he is a former Executive Chairman and President, as well as having edited this magazine. An RAF Mosquito and Meteor pilot, he is the author of 14 books on aviation and has been involved in fighting general aviation's cause at 30 public inquiries. Once General Manager of the Shuttleworth Collection, David has 6,500 hours on some 80 different aircraft types, many of them rare and exotic, and he was awarded the OBE in 1994 for services to aviation. Among the many highlights of his career was flying the Mosquito in scores of air displays, and for the film '633 Squadron'.

Unfortunately, the legacy of an accident thirty years ago is coming back to haunt him, and he no longer runs the hundred yards as fast as he once did. For this and other reasons he is reducing a workload which in recent years has seen him handle 752 operational or planning issues relating to small GA aerodromes in the UK.

David has had a fascinating career. The son of a music teacher, he played trumpet and trombone, to the occasional consternation of his neighbours, and music led to his first aviation-related job – being the only boy at Aldenham School who was

able both to recognise aircraft and play the bugle, he was stationed in a chair in the middle of the playing field to give warning of the approach of Doodlebugs in wartime. His interest in flying dates from the day the school was beaten up by a Hawker Hart; he immediately began planning to convert the school grounds into an aerodrome, laying out runways and support facilities in his mind. During the war he lived on his bicycle, haunting the perimeter fences of nearby aerodromes or the Hawker factory at Langley, where they turned out 12 Hurricanes a day. White Waltham was the headquarters of the Air Transport Auxiliary and every conceivable type of aircraft passed through. At Woodley, Miles were making trainers, RAF Winkfield was an Elementary Flying Training School with Tiger Moths, and in the middle of Windsor Great Park there was a secret aerodrome attached to a Vickers shadow factory with most of its buildings underground, and occasionally a sharp-eyed cyclist might see a Wellington flying in.

Having joined the ATC at 15 David got his first flight in a Dakota, and it was a major disappointment. "Sitting in the back did nothing for me," he says. "I thought, if this is flying, I'm not as keen as I thought I was. Later I was given a flight in a Tiger Moth from Panshanger and allowed to handle the controls, and I was hopelessly lost to a determination to join the RAF as a pilot from that moment."

Unfortunately for David, if not for the world, the war ended just as he came of

age to join up. With thousands of aircrew being kicked out, there were very few going in. To this day David is bewildered as to how he succeeded where so many failed. "At aircrew selection they made it quite clear they didn't need anybody and the process was fairly intense," David says. "For the medical you had to stand on one leg with your eyes shut, and I've never been able to do that. The medical officer said I should fail, but I pleaded with him so he hauled in the senior medical officer, and of course I couldn't do it for him, either. But he agreed to let me through because I'd come out very fit on every other count. Heaven only knows how I got away with it."

David went to a grading school at Shellingford in Berkshire to do 12 hours on Tiger Moths. "You had four assessments in 12 hours and you could be chopped at any stage," he says. "I didn't go solo in those 12 hours but some did, and I was very jealous of them. But to a man, those who went solo were failed and those who didn't went through. I found out later they had a policy of giving those who were to be chopped one solo flight, so they could say they'd done it."

After ground school at RAF Wittering David was passed around several bases as a non-flying supernumerary. Bursting to fly, he presented himself at Denham Aero Club and showed the CFI his log book. "He gave me two circuits and sent me off, so my first solo was in a civilian Piper Cub."

Training began in earnest on Tiger Moths at No 3 Flying Training School at Feltwell in Norfolk. "The scrub rate was fantastic,"

David says. "Every Monday someone wasn't there; they'd been sacked over the weekend. But I seemed to have an unusual attitude. I said to my instructor, 'you know, I really do enjoy this flying, it's marvellous', and he was quite taken aback – no pupil had ever said that to him before."

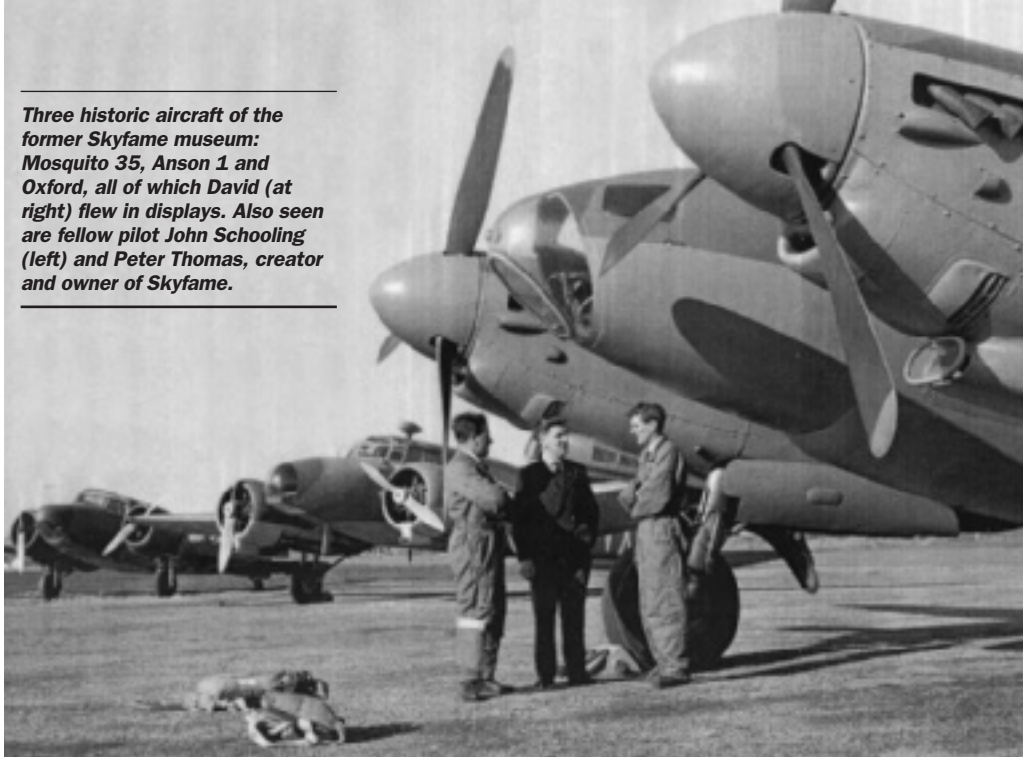
Mosquito

David went on to the Harvard, which was a great leap forward from the Tiger Moth. "I think the sequence of Tiger Moth and Harvard was the best training sequence anyone could invent," he says. "The Tiger gave you a sense of the weather and the wind, and you grew up in the Harvard, which taught you not to fool about." With some 200 hours he went on to 204 Advanced Flying School, where despite his expressed preference for Spitfires he was sent to Brize Norton and introduced to the Mosquito. "I was a little disappointed but I soon discovered the Mosquito was every bit as good to fly. My instructor sold me on it – at a great height he feathered a fan and did a barrel roll. 'Anything a Spitfire can do, this can do better,' he said. The trainer, the T3, was very manoeuvrable, much better than later marks which were much heavier and nothing like as nice."

It was also a handful. David witnessed three fatal accidents where Mosquitos on one engine rolled over and smashed into the ground on short finals – one a real engine failure, two in training. "More Mosquitos were lost in handling accidents during the war than to enemy action," he says. "They'd swing on take-off, they'd swing on landing, and asymmetric flying was very tricky. I saw three of my colleagues being killed, including my own CO, and it happened very quickly. With the high mark Merlins, if at approach speed of about 130 kt you kept the speed up you were okay, but if you had to add a bit of throttle on the good engine it could yaw and roll, and the elapsed time between touching the throttle and hitting the ground inverted would be about three seconds."

After Brize it was on to 237 Operational Conversion Unit at Leuchars, a small photo reconnaissance unit with two Spitfires, three Mosquitos and a Harvard. The Cold War was kicking off and the Mosquito 34 PR, the longest-range aircraft in the RAF inventory – able to make flights of 3,500 miles – was often sent east to photograph things that even now David doesn't talk about. "They had seven fuel tanks, which made fuel management interesting," he says. "We flew with 100-gallon drop tanks which apparently warped the wings; they had to be filled within an hour of departure, and if you were delayed they had to be drained. The 34 was supposed to be pressurised but it leaked like a sieve. Operational height was 37,000 feet and up there you had the sky to yourself – the PR Spitfire XIX could get above us, but the

Three historic aircraft of the former Skyfame museum: Mosquito 35, Anson 1 and Oxford, all of which David (at right) flew in displays. Also seen are fellow pilot John Schooling (left) and Peter Thomas, creator and owner of Skyfame.



new jets couldn't get anywhere near us."

David was often detached to Gibraltar, Libya and exotic RAF Benson, which was convenient because he had developed an outside interest. "I'd always had an interest in historic light aircraft and had flown one or two, so it was useful to be in the London area, where most of them were based," he says. "I was joint creator with Ron Gillman of the Vintage Aeroplane Club, where membership was restricted to owners of suitable historic aircraft. One of the keenest VAC members was Neville Duke, Hawkers' chief test pilot; they had a Hurricane, Hart and Tomtit at Langley. I used to ring him up and say, 'I've got a little show at White Waltham, can you come over?' 'What would you like?' he'd ask. And I'd reply, 'The lot, please.' The Tomtit is now at the Shuttleworth, the Hart's in the RAF Museum and the Hurricane is with the BMBF. We kept the VAC going for six years, but Ron and I both got too busy and had to let it go. Later the Vintage Aircraft Club was formed and does a marvellous job."

While in the RAF David also instructed at West London Aero Club at White Waltham, and with Wycombe Flying Club, then based at a 'wholly inadequate' small field alongside the River Thames at Bourne End. He also instructed on Piper Cubs at a far better aerodrome with two grass runways called Gatwick.

At Benson David converted onto the Meteor, which like the Mosquito had tricky asymmetric handling. "You were also constantly worried about fuel. On the downwind, if you hadn't got 40 gallons each side you had to land – you couldn't go round, that was the rule. On take-off and landing the Meteor was a piece of cake compared to the Mosquito, but one vice killed a lot of people on approach. If you failed to pull the airbrakes in before you lowered the wheels it would go into a

roll and you couldn't stop it. People were killed frequently in those times – the whole attitude to accidents was different. It was a hangover from the war. You got the job done, whatever the cost."

Elstree

After six years in the RAF David was offered a civilian job at Elstree Aerodrome. "I'd started air racing and met Ron Paine, who raced the only remaining Miles Hawk Speed Six. He was Technical Director of Derby Aviation, which operated Elstree Flying School. I took over at Elstree the age of 23 and turned it into London School of Flying, and we expanded into three schools, Elstree, Denham and Derby. At Elstree we had an Air Training Corps contract, and one of my first pupils was AOPA Chairman George Done.

"We developed the professional training

Elstree, early 50s – David Ogilvy, and on the wing, his pupil George Done, now AOPA Chairman



side of the business and I was put on the Board – my actual title was Chief Instructor for Air Schools – and I was charging £3 an hour for the Auster or Miles Magister, and £5 an hour for twin conversion on the Miles Gemini. I was destined to put in 14 enjoyable years at this very successful enterprise.

“I kept flying Mosquitos because Derby Aviation acquired from the RAF a number of Mosquitos on behalf of Spartan Air Services in Canada for survey work. I was asked to fetch ten from Silloth and deliver them to Derby, test fly them after conversion and ferry them to Prestwick, and I used to desert my Elstree post regularly to do this.

“I also flew for the Skyfame museum at Staverton, whose owner Peter Thomas had a Mosquito which I flew in displays. This was the aircraft I flew for the film *633 Squadron* in 1963. Main filming had finished before they realised they hadn't got noises for the soundtrack. They needed the squeal of the tyres on landing, and I flew several circuits and had to land right beside the recording equipment. So my contribution can be heard, but not seen.”

Shuttleworth

In 1966 David was invited to become General Manager of the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden, a three-days-a-week job which left him time to work on behalf of the British Light Aviation Centre, which the following year was invited by AOPA US to become AOPA UK. His association with AOPA remains unbroken from that date. He was also destined to put in 14 years at the head of the Shuttleworth, where the opportunity arose to fly the rarest aeroplanes in the world.

“These were in many cases the world's only surviving specimens of historic aeroplanes, and they were a huge responsibility,” David says. “They are never to be flown unnecessarily, but they have to be flown. You were allowed one familiarisation flight if you were going to fly in a display, which might then last ten minutes. I have a total of 6,500 hours, which is nothing in the airline world, but a lot of it was in very small parcels on very interesting aeroplanes.

“The aircraft that made the greatest impression on me was the Gloster Gladiator. As with other Shuttleworth aeroplanes, the sense of responsibility for the world's only flying specimen ensured that you didn't enjoy the flight until you



Above: the staff of the London School of Flying at Elstree in the 1950s, with David Ogilvy front and centre

were getting out. The Gladiator was prone to carb icing, and on a warm summer afternoon the engine stopped dead on me. I was at around 4,000 feet on an air test, and the thing that went through my mind was that if I didn't get it right, not only would I be drummed out of the Brownies, I'd have to leave the country, so great would be the opprobrium. I'd lost about 2,000 feet before my juggling of throttle and carb heat brought the engine back to life, but it was a memorable experience.”

David fared worse with the de Havilland DH53, which bent him badly. The DH53 was built for the Lympne air trials in 1923 and was later fitted with a 35 hp ABC Scorpion engine. On August 31st 1980 David was asked to air test the DH53 following a rebuild. “The engine was known to be temperamental so I made four full-power taxi runs,” he says. “It was working well so I decided to take off, but at 40 feet the engine stopped. I turned quite sharply to avoid a field in which stubble was being burned and discovered that the aircraft suffered very badly from aileron snatch. Several days later I woke up in Bedford Hospital with seven broken bones, to be told I'd never fly again. After nine months of rehabilitation I managed to get my licence back, but I was left with a limp and a permanently misshapen left foot.”

The DH53 was rebuilt but made another



Gladiator – impressive

forced landing after engine failure nine years later, and for a long time it was restricted to taxiing only. The engine has since been overhauled and it is once again occasionally flown.

From 1980 to the mid-1990s David ran the flying displays for the Shuttleworth, and continued doing the commentary for some years after that, while working as an aviation consultant and expert witness in accident inquiries. He has participated in 30 public inquiries on aerodrome matters, and took over as Executive Chairman of AOPA when Ron Campbell died in 1996. In recent years he has been the Association's aerodromes man, and at time of writing has been involved in 752 issues relating to aerodromes. “Apart from the accounts, I've done every job at AOPA,” he says. “The constant struggle has been to keep GA aerodromes open and healthy in the face of all the pressures upon them, from property developers, complainants, economic factors...”

“General aviation has gone through a revolution in my time, and my generation probably had the best of it. When I began flying there was one small piece of controlled airspace in Britain, around London airport. Many more people flew solely for fun, and there was a great number of aircraft that were engaging and challenging to fly. Regulation was far more reasonable, and training was of a much higher quality – more a matter of imparting piloting skills than making sure documents were in order.

“Attitudes were different. If you met someone else in the sky, you'd give him a wave, not file an airprox. On a summer's Sunday afternoon every aircraft would be up, and the airspace was far more crowded. Aerodromes were busy in those days. The idea that today's skies are impossibly crowded is misplaced. We thought nothing of having 20 aircraft in the circuit, and not a radio between them. There really aren't any busy aerodromes left.”

AOPA's Chairman George Done says: “When I took over from David as Chairman of AOPA in 2000 he was already deeply engaged in the vital work of aerodromes support, having finally given up his active and hugely varied flying life. David's dedication to the task was, and continues to be, unsurpassed and it is going to be a challenge to ensure that the need for support is safely and securely covered following his retirement from the scene.” ■



An air test on the unpredictable DH53 left David with seven broken bones