
Biography of KEN McDONOUGH

Circa 1920 to January 16, 2002

Transcribed & Edited by SS (7/03)

Career:

- Produced box art for many early Airfix kits
 - His aviation paintings are on display in aviation museums
 - Wrote and illustrated the book Atlantic Wings
 - Wrote many articles, including cover paintings, construction plans, details sketches and building instructions, of Free Flight scale models for Aeromodeller magazine
 - Made many vintage aircraft, including pioneer airliners
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The following information on Ken McDonough comes from a book called International Model Builders and Their Models compiled by Bill Hannan and published in 2002. A copy of the book is available in the Lee Renaud Memorial Library, part of the National Model Aviation Museum. For more information on Bill Hannan, see his biography in the AMA History Program as well as his file in the National Model Aviation Museum Archives. Contact the AMA librarian for assistance.

Aviation artist, aeromodeler and author Ken McDonough, of England, passed away on January 16, 2002, at age 81. Ken produced box art for many early Airfix kits, and his paintings are exhibited in aviation museums. He authored and illustrated the monumental book Atlantic Wings, and his Aeromodeller magazine Free Flight scale model articles included cover paintings, construction plans and detail sketches as well as building and flying instructions.

An extremely modest gentleman, Ken thoroughly enjoyed aviation history and had a special fondness for vintage aircraft. Among Ken's favorite models were pioneer airliners, and his remarkable collection of them included one Avro, one Bristol, three Breguets, four Farmans and five Latécoères! According to longtime friend David Deadman, who inherited Ken's models, they were rather simplified by today's standards, with most details and markings painted on, but exquisitely capturing the atmosphere of the Golden Age period.

Ken's model construction drawings were made on ordinary kitchen-cupboard lining-paper with a blue Biro pen. They were drawn with fine assurance, without need for corrections and with only the lightest of pencil guidelines. (For examples, see Runway's Stick and Tissue, volume three and Peanuts and Pistachios, volume six.)

Regrettably a stroke put Ken out of action, and, although he partially recovered, he was unable to continue his creative pursuits. He did manage to keep up with the always cheerful letters to his network of like minded correspondents.

Appropriately, David Deadman plans a display of Ken's models at Impington Village College, the scene of tribute to the late Ray Malmström. Our grateful thanks to David Deadman, Ron Moulton and Cedric dela Nougerede for their contributions to this tribute.

The following article about Ken McDonough the British Flying Scale Models magazine after Ken's death. It was written and submitted to the AMA History Program by Ron Moulton, former editor of Aeromodeller magazine.

Ken McDonough, G.Av.A +

Those who treasure their 40-year-old copies of Aero Modeller and have a particular affection for the specially painted covers of that period will be saddened at the news that Ken McDonough died peacefully on January 16 [2002]. He was 81. Over the past seven years he had been a resident in the Royal Star and Garter Home, following a collapse that had regrettably terminated his activity as a talented artist and scale modeler of international renown.

Ken had the gift of extending his artistic skills into aeromodeling and, in choosing his subjects, revealed a love for the pioneer airliners, the romance of early endeavors in flight, the balloons, the classics of World War I and the long distance record breakers of the 1920s. For each of these, he would delve into religious research, seeking every small detail that he could paint or model, often combining those interests into package deals that became milestones in flying scale model history.

His first in a series of cover paintings, model design and scale plane features on a single subject was that for the B.E.2e in Aero Modeller for February 1959. A similar package appeared a year later on the Sopwith Pup to be followed by striking cover paintings of Hurricane scrambling over Kent, the PZL, PIIc, de Havilland 4s, the Hannover CLIII, Spitfire IX, the Albatros DII and, the last, a cover plus model plan and typically helpful sketch page on the Sopwith Tabloid, which appeared in December 1961.

Each was a classic contribution and drew attention from other directions. Ken was commissioned by Airfix to produce paintings for their kit boxes that absorbed much of his time, but he sustained his connection with Aero Modeller through the series on "Squadron Markings" by producing illustrations for Leslie Rogers' researches on RFC units. The 21-part feature ran from 1961 through to 1964.

Ken's ambition to write a book on the Conquest of the North Atlantic from 1919 to 1939 with scale drawings in color and charcoal sketches of details was realized in 1966 with publication of Atlantic Wings. It was a mammoth effort, in part a personal aim to recognize the failures and to establish a true record of airship crossings in a way where no other author had succeeded. In every aspect that book was a perfect reference work, solid with data yet visually attractive because of Ken's artwork.

As an active model flyer, he made his models to a consistent 1/12-inch scale, of which the Douglas 0-38 became popular with other flyers after publication in August 1971. A large bi-plane at 40-inches in wingspan, the Douglas is extremely slow and majestic in flight on its rubber power and it never failed to impress on outings to meetings at Old Warden. Model size and accumulation of squadrons of both rubber and small engined models led to Ken's switch to 1/18th scale and entirely new techniques.

Using thin sheet balsa, sanded even thinner (possibly under the influence of his great pal Bob Copland) and yet still colored correctly using his artistic skills, Ken began to produce indoor or calm weather flyers that weighed less than a ½-ounce. Airliners, pioneers or fighters, they were all perfect, Siskin, Bristol Scout, Pup, Blackburn Dart or Short 166 were his first of many. Thankfully, a large collection of survivors is now in the safe keeping of long friend and fellow scale modeler, David Deadman to be seen again on special occasions.

As an early member of the Kronfeld Society Art Group, and a founder member of the Guild of Aviation Artists, Ken's prolific output has been widely recognized and can be seen in many collections. The Royal Air Force Museum at Hendon has some of his larger works. The Croydon Airport Society has some of his larger works. The Croydon Airport Society has postcard reproductions of two excellent examples, the AW Argosy or the Vimy Commercial on that famous apron. Ken combined his interests in having six of his "Pioneers of Flight" paintings produced by Royle Publications as large gift cards with a paper model supplement that could be assembled into a three dimension replica. Now a prized collector item, those Modelcards ought, by all that is right, be on sale at every air museum, but sadly they seem to have gone out of production.

A memorial service on January 29 attended by friends and family paid tribute to the life of this so modest man, whose skills were respected in many fields of aviation. Our sympathies go to his sister, Barbara, and brother, Ray, and their families on their loss. Ken was one of a kind with more friends than he ever knew, but he will be missed, especially by those whose recollections of sharing treasured aeronautical moments with him and who are now saddened at his passing.

The following article about Ken McDonough ran in the April 2002 issue of Great Britain's Aeromodeller magazine. It was submitted to the AMA History Program by Ron Moulton, former editor of Aeromodeller.

Ken McDonough G.Av.A+

Artist and expert scale modeler Ken McDonough died peacefully on January 16 [2002], aged 81. A veteran of the 8 Army who served throughout the North African and Italian campaigns, Ken had trained at the Regent Street Polytechnic as a commercial artist on release from the Army and after studies revived earlier interests in models and aeroplanes. He was soon to combine the lot by contributing a model design, scale drawing and cover painting for his B.E.2e model to Aero Modeller. It was the beginning of a flourishing relationship. Through the 1960s, Ken provided the now well known covers for his own designs, the Sopwith Pup and Tabloid, plus sketch pages of scale detail and other covers of Hurricanes, the PZL, P-1L D.H.4s, Hannover CL m, Albatros DII and Spitfire IX. They set a standard and drew attention to his skills which resulted in commissions for Airfix Kit box art and other paintings.

He was a founder member of the Guild of Aviation Artists, achieved personal ambition in producing the best ever record of attempts and successful pioneering flights across the North Atlantic in Atlantic Wings and was widely recognized as an authority on early French aircraft.

While the majority of his self-designed scale models were 1/12th scale, both rubber and diesel powered, culminating in the bi-plane Douglas 0-38, which appeared in August 1971 Aero Modeller, his creation of 1/18th all-sheet models in the same year set the pattern for his remaining years. Ken's regular drinking companion, Bob Copland, probably influenced the technique of using 1/32 balsa and sanding it much thinner where possible to build a fully decorated mini-airliner of the 1930s for under a 1/z ounce. Fortunately, a substantial part of Ken's lightweight fleet is now in the safe keeping of his friend David Deadman.

Ken's main legacy remains scattered throughout the art world. Visitors to the Royal Air Force Museum can see his larger works or, on much smaller scale, can obtain the Croydon Airport Society postcards. Collectors are always seeking the greeting cards he produced for Royle, with a cut-out card model attached to one of six "Pioneers of Flight" that he painted. His field of subjects was broad, but he hated bombers and refused a very famous author's invitation to paint a dusk jacket on that subject. Yet, as all contacts would agree, Ken was the most modest self-disciplined and independent individual, generous to a fault and meticulous in all that he did. One of a kind, Ken belonged to a fast disappearing age of creative hand skills but his trademarks remain in print and paint.

We are sure that all who had the pleasure of meeting Ken, or who have enjoyed his works will join us in extending sympathies to his sister Barbara and brother Ray and their families in their loss.

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