



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of MARTIN NEWELL



Written by JS (10/2014); Added to HP files by JS (01/2015)

---

*The following was published in the October 2015 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the “I Am the AMA” column, by Jay Smith.*

---

## **I Am the AMA Martin Newell, Micro-scale model designer**

**Jay Smith:** *How did you get involved with model aviation?*

**Martin Newell:** I have two answers because I got involved twice. When I was a kid in the United Kingdom, my older brother built a stick-and-tissue plane and I copied him. Although he moved on, my interest in model planes grew to include CL, FF, and RC.

I couldn't afford to buy RC equipment, so I built my own. I wouldn't have learned nearly as much if I had been able to just buy the equipment. That's one reason I like building all my own equipment today.

I took a break from aeromodeling for 44 years, but always intended to get back to it. My second answer is that 11 years ago I saw a notice for an indoor flying meeting at a local gym. Intrigued, I went along and was hooked.

**JS:** *How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?*

**MN:** Having discovered through aeromodeling that I enjoyed building things, I chose a major in college that involved making things: mechanical engineering. Then I discovered computer programming, which enabled me to build structures on the computer that were far more complex than any physical thing I could build.

Starting up a carefully written program has the same thrill as the maiden flight of a carefully built model plane. Like a new plane, it would often crash – we even use the same word. My whole career was in software engineering, ending as a Fellow of Adobe Systems.

**JS:** *What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?*

**MN:** Almost exclusively electric RC, especially the small stuff. I enjoy pushing the limits. First, it was to build the lightest radio-controlled plane. At ½ grams for a two-channel plane, I stopped.

Then I started pushing on functional complexity in scale planes. First was a six-channel 1:48-scale B25. Next was a four-channel 1:100-scale Spitfire, and most recently a 4.6-inch, 1:96-scale

P-51 with eight channels, including flaps, retracts, and cannons. Each of these planes took roughly a year.

I also got into flying 3-D, just to see if this old dog could learn new tricks. I can now fly respectable 3-D aerobatics - although not up to the standards of today's 14-year-olds.

*JS: What are your other hobbies?*

**MN:** I focus on one hobby at a time. I think you have to be somewhat obsessive to get good at something, and I can't be obsessive about two things at once. My previous obsession was fly-fishing, which I still enjoy. My other "hobby" is taking care of my [now] 5-year-old granddaughter, Julia, most weekdays, and what a *privilege* that is.

*JS: Who (or what) has influenced you the most?*

**MN:** As a kid, my family encouraged me to pursue whatever I was interested in. Many people in the computer industry have influenced my career, notably Ivan Sutherland, who persuaded me in 1972 to move from the United Kingdom to the University of Utah to work on computer graphics, something almost unheard of in those days.

Recently, Robert Guillot, an extraordinary modeler, showed me the way to make really small scale planes, and nagged me into doing it. Aeromodeling suffered a significant loss when he quit the hobby a few years ago.

And, of course, my wife, Sandra, who has allowed and encouraged me to be obsessive about my various pursuits over the years. Keeps me out of trouble – *mostly*.

---

**This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.**

**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr.  
Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

