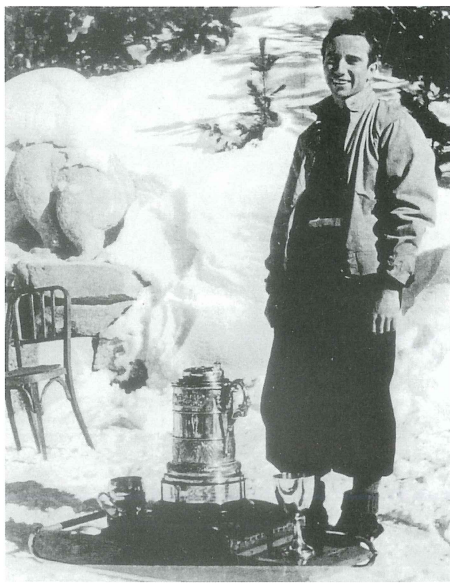


Billy Fiske (1928), youngest male Winter Olympic gold medal winner, and first American airman to be killed in World War II



*The incomparable Billy Fiske
In the late-30s, his Cresta Run skills became legendary, breaking all records and earning Billy the reputation as "the supreme artist of the Run."*

Billy Fiske was born on 4 July 1911 in Brooklyn, New York, the son of a wealthy banking family whose ancestors had moved to America from Suffolk in the 17th century. Before coming up to Trinity Hall in 1928 to read Economics and History, Billy had already set a number of

unbroken records on the Cresta Run. He had also taken part in the 1928 Olympic Games in St Moritz, assigned to the USA II bobsleigh team, where despite atrocious conditions, Billy Fiske managed to steer his novice team to victory beating the USA I team to the Gold Medal. Not only was Billy especially courageous – at that time bobsleighs were completely exposed – but at the age of 16 he became the youngest male Winter Olympic Champion, a record he was to hold until February 1992.

While at Trinity Hall, Billy demonstrated his love of high speeds by driving his 4.5 litre open Bentley (in British Racing Green, of course) to the golf club. He could reputedly cover the 24 miles to Mildenhall in 17 minutes, reaching speeds of 110 mph!

After leaving Cambridge, Billy worked in New York, but his heart remained on the ski-slopes. In 1932, he was chosen to carry the US flag at the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, and once again, Billy drove his bobsleigh to victory winning his second gold medal.

Aspen Ski-Resort owes its beginnings to Billy Fiske, who together with Ted Ryan and T J Flynn formed the Highland Bavarian Corporation. Their first lodge opened on 26 December 1936 but their ambitious plans for the resort were thwarted by the onset of war.

In 1938, Billy married Rose Bingham, recently divorced from the Earl of Warwick. When war broke out, Billy became the first American to join the RAF (601 Squadron at Tangmere) and proved to be a natural pilot. However, on 16 August 1940 during the Battle of Britain, his plane was hit in a dog-fight with Stuka dive-bombers. He managed to crash land, but suffering from burns and shock, he died later in hospital aged 29. Billy Fiske is buried at Boxgrove in West Sussex. On 4 July 1941, a plaque was unveiled in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral, dedicated to Billy Fiske. It reads "An American citizen who died that England might live."

We are most grateful to John Charter (1951) for introducing us to Billy Fiske and his connection to Trinity Hall. For those interested, there is some wonderful coverage to be found on the web. Visit www.olympic.org/uk/games/index_uk.asp for a link to the 1932 Olympics, with video clips of the opening ceremony and the actual bobsleigh race (see "Highlights"); or www.aspenhistory.org/recre2 for the full story of the establishment of the Aspen Ski-Resort. The Tangmere Aviation Museum Trust has recently refurbished the Memorial Stone dedicated to Billy Fiske in the churchyard of St Mary & Blaise in Boxgrove.