

## **Rob Bayly**

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*My name is Jennifer d'Alton, and I'm incredibly honoured to be allowed to talk to Rob Bayly, who is very well known in the ballooning world and with the BBC. But I wondered if I could first ask you, Rob, how did you find your first balloon? Oops!*

### **Rob Bayly**

How did I find it?

How did I get into ballooning? It was a certain young Scotsman called Don Cameron who was responsible for many people, I'm sure it's the same globally.

Don and I have become very good friends, having spent a week in a box together crossing the Atlantic and I owe him a lot. He's a great enthusiast and initiator .

In 1978. Don was attempting to fly the Atlantic and got very close. He landed, as you probably know, 100 miles off the coast of France, becalmed with a leaky balloon, and he was safe and everything, but didn't quite make it to be the first across, and two weeks later, the Americans, Abruzzo and company, became the first balloon to cross the Atlantic.

I watched that when the news covered it and a programme called Nationwide was following him and I was totally fascinated.

I hadn't been into ballooning at all at that point, but that inspired me to get into ballooning. I thought the best way was to meet this man Don Cameron, and I invited him onto a children's science program that I was producing for the BBC.

As I remember, we flew a teddy bear across the studio, Blue Peter style and using a hairdryer as a hot-air source and bin liners I think it was, stuck together with sellotape and Don was just brilliant.

We had great fun and we just got on like a house on fire. Don invited me to Bristol, and I went to one of his symposiums that Camerons organised at the time. I got my first ever flight one weekend over Bristol and never looked back.

Don is a sort of quiet gentleman, a quiet worker. In his mind, I can sort of see the cog wheels working all the time. He's analyzing and thinking, and his engineering skills are second to none and because he comes from an aeronautical background and I think that's why he ended up in Bristol, British Aerospace base. Why was this Scotsman in Bristol, but he's an inspiration and many of us pilots owe that inspiration to Don.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*So how did you go from knowing Don to having a flight?*

### **Rob Bayly**

Well, I went along a weekend quite soon afterwards, and we had a flight over Bristol.

There were some slides he was showing, and I got back to Bristol and I got the Don Cameron Ballooning handbook which is like the Bible for ballooning and on the back cover of it is a picture of a beautifully bulbous colorful Viva balloon.

Gosh, it's just hanging there in space, and I've got to try and work out to get one of these things.

I was newly married to Julia, and Julia had a background in sailing, so she knew a bit more about the weather than I did.

She said yes, let's try this new thing ballooning, we'll try this together. Ladies first. She got her licence in 1986, I got mine in 1987. We also joined the London region. That's where we were living at the time, and as you no doubt know, you can't fly in the middle of a city generally.

I've learned since that you can get some special permissions and I've been honoured to be on most or all of the cross-London flights. Fantastic to see that.

But Julia and I used to get up at five in the morning and drive to places like Newbury or Great Missenden and we would learn to fly with the London balloon region.

Actually, we ended up going with an American team, Jacques Soukup and co. and they were brilliant and they embraced us and got us a lot of training flights and I ended up looking after the kit.

Jacques like to spend some time back in America with Kirk and he let us look after his balloon which was a 77 Viva balloon just like the one, I saw on the back of Dons cover, and Julia and I could learn on that .

We were at the right place at the right time, and we got the use of this balloon to learn to fly on and started flying around areas around London.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*It sounds incredible. The London balloon region is still going strong.*

### **Rob Bayly**

Absolutely. Yeah, the regional system of the BBAC I think is brilliant. It means you can fly with local clubs, and you know, it sounds like an expensive sport ballooning, but it works for everybody, you know, you can go along and be crew. Everybody needs a crew and get a flight now and then and learn the ropes literally.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Yeah, very useful having a good crew. The people and children that you can wake up at five in the morning.*

### **Rob Bayly**

The thing I've loved about the sport is that even the simplest flight or what you would think's going to be the simplest flight gives you a great story, little mini adventure.

I think life these days is a little bit sometimes - a bit too sewn up, a bit predictable and you know exactly what's going on, health and safety etc. and all that ,but on a balloon flight you're at the mercy of the gods, you never know where you're going to land, that's an unusual aspect. And you always have a mini adventure, you hope it's not a disastrous adventure, but you get a little story.

It could just be the farmer that brought you a cup of coffee in the field.

Or one farmer I met who pointed a shotgun at me! There's a story in all of it.

My hardest ever landing was in the Alps, and I was flying down a valley.

I was at a balloon meet and flying down the valley that was funneling, getting narrower and narrower. Anyone who has a basic understanding of the winds will know that if the wind is blowing along a valley that's getting narrower and narrower, the wind speed has to pick up and it whizzes you along.

I wasn't the only one, about 20 of us flying. There were all sorts of other well-known balloonists who all got into trouble. Again, the weather wasn't quite as predicted, and I landed a balloon in snow about 25 miles an hour, quite fast for a balloon 25 knots.

I thought I was landing this balloon on a nice snowy, slow, snowy field, the soft snow turned out to be rock solid ice.

I hit with a massive bang and the balloon - actually the basket - as ever the basket - takes up an amazing amount of the impact. Like these crash zones on cars.

You know that actually - we did not suffer any bruising as passengers. But what did happen is one of the metal fuel fittings snapped and raw propane gas is now squirting all over my legs, so I've got a massive big gas leak!

Due to the great training I'd had from the London region I had turned out my pilot lights before landing as you remember to do it and I don't remember doing it, but it's like clicking a seatbelt when you get in the car it becomes automatic.

But I had turned off my pilot lights.

This massive cloud of propane gas was now enveloping the balloon and me and my four passengers and you know there could have been a massive fire. That really was a near death experience. I got away with it, but I got away with it with cold burns, and I have got on my left leg a sort of a skin graft I had to have from the cold burn I got from that.

But that is that was a near death experience, you know, I have just a big respect for the weather and a great crew and well, we got away with that one.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Flying in Chateau d'Oex there are some interesting valleys around there.*

### **Rob Bayly**

—It is so dramatic the scenery, we can't deny it. You are hanging amongst around amongst the mountains but very different weather in the valleys from what you get above. You have to make a very clear decision; this is the valley I am going to land in and you don't mess around otherwise you get sort of blown up the top of the hill with these local winds. And yes, I love it's one of my favorite things is mountain flying.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

Flying back in the UK. Did you go to the very first Bristol Balloon Fiesta, were you involved with them?

**Rob Bayly**

I have been to many balloon fiestas. Julia and I started crewing for one of the commercial operators Tessa with her 'Flying Pictures'. So that was all the special shapes and things, all the weird balloons.

In fact, Jacques and Kirk, whom we were crewing for, owned a lot of special shapes that he used to fly. Chicky boom, with fruit on the top. Yes, some fantastic shapes.

He had a flying witch on a broomstick and God knows what else. So, we learned the hard way and they are very heavy, those special shape balloons, but you need a big crew to run around. Every orange and apple on that Chicky boom had a little Velcro rip which you had to put in.

So, in the early Bristol Balloon Meets I was crewing with Julia and thoroughly enjoyed it and then in the in the 90s once I got my licence in the late 80s we entered in our own right

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*Did you find flying over Bristol challenging?*

**Rob Bayly**

Flying over Bristol today is very challenging much more so because of the, I mean all the farmers that don't welcome balloons now, you know they're all marked very clearly on our maps, and it doesn't leave that much space left. So, it is quite daunting area to fly. We are always working close to the airport who is very, very friendly.

But you tend to fly over the city got to make sure you got enough speed to clear the city. There is a nice gap between Bristol and Bath and then you got Bath coming up. So it's quite a challenging area. It is just synonymous with the city.

I am wearing a Bristol t shirt now doing an interview. The Bristol balloon, the Bristol Blue balloon flown by Derek Maltby around here is a common sight.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*Did you ever go and see the blue glass being made?*

**Rob Bayly**

Yes I did. I love that blue glass there's a lovely shop, the shop is in one of my favorite places in Bristol is Arnos Vale cemetery.

If you notice it, it is a real Victorian cemetery and opposite that is the Bristol blue glass showroom. And I've given many presents for people. It's a great memory of Bristol. Lovely deep blue glass, so this big, this big blue balloon that Derek flies and I helped him sometimes it's got just got Bristol written in big letters on a bright blue balloon. And we just called it Bristol blue.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*Each time you went to Bristol you met up with Don.*

*When did Alan Noble actually first come up with the Transatlantic Challenge?*

## **Rob Bayly**

Well, Don and Alan had been cooking this one up with Jim Howard as well for many years. It's a difficult one because of how is it paid for?

At one level. Don wants to sell a load of balloons. So let's come up with an event where you had the original idea was 10 identical balloons flying the Atlantic and of course Don would be the best person to make them so it was publicised in the early 90s and 1990-1991.

Entries were looked for and I think that £100,000 pounds was deemed to be the entry fee to include the balloon and that was it.

So along with many other people Julia and I tried to raise money for ourselves. And actually I got half the sponsorship from BBC. Yes, I was lucky I worked on and was a producer on Tomorrow's World. Remember the technical show on BBC?

I had a few good contacts there. I rang the Press Office of British Telecom and they liked the idea because there's lots to do with communications and so-on the balloon, and that'd be a positive association, the technical side of ballooning with telecom but nonetheless we got a long way but didn't not raise 100,000 pounds and no one else did.

But I got a wonderful call from Don one day saying "we want to go ahead with the race. We haven't got 10 entries. We're going to go with a five Balloon Race."

Evert Louwman and the Dutch entry was Chrysler dealer for Holland and he, along with Alan, came up with a financial package that made the race happen.

Chrysler's name is on all the balloons. Don made five identical balloons and I was very, very honoured to be asked to join Don. I think the combination of doing a number of long jumps and there's these daft flights and the Alps.

I mean, it's the great thing about ballooning as you can, you can just have a nice one hour flight, which I also enjoy where you fly your mum and your friends, but you can choose in a controlled way to push your limits and put yourself slightly out of your comfort zone and I have enjoyed those long distance flights for long jumps and these kinds of things.

And I think Don and Alan thought that was appropriate experience for the Atlantic and a few press connections.

I did the filming I mean, I'm quite comfortable working cameras and things Don. I mean, I think it's fair to say Don is fairly shy.

You know, he does interviews of course because it's good for PR, but I was able to take the load off him I got special camera mounts hanging on the balloon and then I recorded it, making sure we got good sound on the technical side. I flew with Don with two hats on.

One sort of trying to get good positive press for the race and repeating stuff back into BBC programmes and so on and recording the whole thing, and then hopefully being an adequate copilot for him

## **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Well, we all followed it like mad over here.*

**Rob Bayly**

I know, an astonishing event and it was down as the first transatlantic Balloon Race but there hasn't been another one as we record this in 2024.

It's just such a difficult thing to organize, such a huge event and I can see it because from the sponsors point of view, it's not like a sort of Formula One race when the cars or the logos are going round in front of you the whole time.

Once these balloons set off, it is quite difficult to even these days to get the pictures back in the middle of the Atlantic.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*When you are doing the preparation for this, with actually breathing at high altitude. Did you have to do a lot of practice. I know you've done Alpine flights but...*

**Rob Bayly**

We did a lot of reading about it and getting the theory and working with Don. But we went down to the RAF in Farnborough and had some special training there in a hyperbaric chamber where they, in a controlled way, can expose you to lack of oxygen and see how susceptible you are to hypoxia, that it's quite an amusing thing to do in some ways because hypoxia is a bit like being drunk you feel lightheaded and silly and seeing Don being silly is quite amusing.

They remove the pressure from these tanks and then the RAF guys ask you questions like you know, what's the name of the queen What day of the week is it? It is things like they worked out?

I don't think Don was a smoker I've never smoked and that helps your lungs and we were both pretty good up to about 16 and 17,000 feet on a very short supply of oxygen.

The general rule now as you probably know, Jenny, is flying to about 10,000 feet before supplementing your oxygen. And certainly, you know we seem to be still able to fly the balloon without oxygen up to maybe 15-16,000 feet but anyway that tested our limits and there was a bit of training.

The other thing I trained in is parachuting. We were going to take full survival suits if we had to ditch in the Atlantic and wearing parachutes, so that was invaluable and I did that training at Weston on the Green.

The BBC actually had a parachute section so I joined the BBC Parachute Club. I've only done a few jumps but if our balloon was on fire, I would have jumped with Don holding hands.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*My -goodness. So you did all the parachute training. When Jim Howard and Alan Noble and who else from Camerons was helping on this?*

**Rob Bayly**

Oh, quite a big team he sent out for the inflation, there was a whole team sent out from England. Julia, the team manager, Jim was our standby pilot and bless him.

He passed away did our Jim Very good friend but he was hoping I would get a cold or something that day before takeoff so he could fly, but no such luck.

No, it was, it was an amazing event and you need huge patience too. We stood by for nearly two months. We took off in September 92 But we'd been there quite a few weeks before.

It's looking for the perfect weather and in the early 90s The weather forecasting was pretty good for the next two days. We knew these flights are going to be maybe five days across the Atlantic. And after a couple of days, it's sort of the fiction really, you got to sort of guess what the isobars are doing and we just made sure we took off in a good slot.

These days you'd have better future weather predicting but yes, we waited till we have suitable weather. And even now there are current attempts to fly the Atlantic with Don and I were the seventh balloon to fly the Atlantic, but individual flights now are finding it quite hard still to get the exact weather slot and balance it between you can't stay there all time.

You have jobs, families, and things so how long would you stand by for? In our case we were very grateful for Chrysler. They paid for the hotel for a couple of months before we finally found a slot we liked.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*They must have been pleased with the whole event, Chrysler.*

### **Rob Bayly**

They got very good press with all sorts of very, very photogenic launches. Each of the five balloons took off to their own national anthem and there are some fantastic pictures of them, standing there ceremonially launching exactly, the Americans saluting as they took off, and it was amazing.

We took off from Bangor Maine, which is just north of Boston, quite close to Boston where there was lots of media that could find us easily. That's why we took off there and not say Newfoundland or somewhere closer to try and balance the safety of the flight. We're getting good publicity.

We flew over land for nearly a day before we finally embarked you know, check all your systems, make sure you're happy, and then at dawn, we said right well, yeah, we'll embark on the Atlantic.

Chrysler got great TV. They were an American company trying to get into Europe, and that's really what we were doing with the balloons, trying to get into Europe.

We made sure that the right pictures were sent. There's a there's a newspaper called The European which had a massive colour picture on the front page, which was worth it and even the BBC you know, they let the word Chrysler be up near Tomorrow's World and even the weather forecasters I had contact with and they were putting up pictures and balloons during their weather forecasts. So I think Chrysler should have been quite happy.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Did you have your own met man for the events like Martin?*

## **Rob Bayly**

We didn't have Martin, we used the main control room in Amsterdam, and we took the Met from there, and it worked. It worked very well.

Don interpreted the weather. We didn't have the same digital technology as we do these days but we had effectively a little fax machine squirting out the weather pictures, little thermal images showing the isobars and the vectors showing the wind speed. And we'd sit down rather than these things out and work out which way we wanted to go.

As Don explained once, it's looking for what he calls zonal flow, which is a sort of nice straight lines because you fly along the isobars

A little funny anecdote, actually, while we were waiting, we were all thinking, how do we fill our time and one thing we did was a bit of speed boating, it was not far from the coast and Don, I think Don and Alan together went halves on a speedboat that they bought and they called it '**Zonal Flow**'.

I'm in my 70s, and it's amazing how you can remember things from 14 years ago but can't remember where you put your car keys, but I remembered that they bought a speedboat Zonal Flow. The containers that had brought the balloons over from Europe to America were empty now, so they were going back empty. So we were invited, to put things in them.

Jochim Mass the American sorry, Ambassador German pilot. He was a motor racing driver and he bought a Harley Davidson motorbike. But he has a few quid and lives in Monaco, so he's got a bit of money, but I bought a phonograph, which is an early Edison, wind up gramophone thing.

And there was all this stuff was put in these containers and things that you could buy them in America better than here, but Zonal Flow was Don and Alan's speedboat and all the secrets coming out here. You're drawing stories I haven't remember since then this is the time.

## **Jennifer d'Alton**

*You are all staying in the same hotel, all the competitors through*

## **Rob Bayly**

it was quite intense. We all meet for breakfast. It'd be a daily weather briefing. And of course apart from the pilots, two pilots in each of the five balloons, their husbands wives, brothers, sisters, my Canadian sister came up, my parents came out at one point but yeah, we all stayed in, might have been a Holiday Inn and it was a nice average hotel.

It wasn't a huge luxury in Bangor. And one clever thing that Alan did was he linked us up with local families.

So we've had a sponsored family if you like, and I stayed in touch with my family. They adopt you as a team and then they arrived "you want to come fishing" or something like this.. It's a lovely way of sort of getting close to the community and you know, keeping yourself alert for while you're waiting.

We did go-kart racing . That park where we took off is called Bass Park and-around the edge of it as a sort of the horse racing track. It was trotting horses so we were doing it in a buggy and, you're going to like this, so we were doing races not just ballooning across the Atlantic we had

horse trotting races as well. All these things to try and keep the spirits up, because it's quite easy to get down. When will we get the weather and so on.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*The family that you kept in touch with? Have they been over to the UK.*

**Rob Bayly**

No, they haven't. He was a dentist gentleman and I've been back since I mean we flew in 92 and before the nineties were out, 95 I think it would have been,

Julia and I went back to visit them and stayed with them and we went around local schools and showed pictures and it was a big event for that community.

We're the biggest things that happened to them internationally so we're very happy to be on the "Tell us Your Story" experiences we had in Bangor.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*I believe that they're all on standby again in Bangor*

**Rob Bayly**

Yeah, really, I know that so they've gone back to Bangor that must have been as a result of the good collaboration. Is Alan involved in the organizing?

**Jennifer d'Alton**

I know about it because of Trailrope. A lot of Americans send me fascinating emails and articles and pictures of paintings they've done. And this was in one from a very good correspondent called Mike Fairbanks who I think is now too old to fly as a pilot, but he still flies and he knows everybody.

And if he doesn't know them now, they will know him tomorrow, he's brilliant.

**Rob Bayly**

Can I add to that?

David, there's another of these people who I mean, from not being a pilot, I think he went and flew over the Andes or something on one of his first flights.

And on the transatlantic Bertrand Piccard, I mean his experience was from fixed wing aircraft, and is he actually even technically a balloon pilot?

He was the co pilot with Wim Verstraeten and on that balloon, Belgian balloon but he went on to the fly around the world didn't he, so you know, you have this inspiration for other pilots, and there's a bit of luck in it. Right Place Right Time.

But that Atlantic race did inspire lots of other flights not like not least, and the design of the balloon in it. That's exactly the design that was gone for, for the round the world attempts.

The Roziere balloon. Designs change all the time. I mean, one thing that was learned very quickly was you don't want to let water get inside your balloon.

If you do hit rain. There's a gas valve at the top of the balloon, it's only about half a metre across. And rain can get into that gas valve. If it gets heavy enough it pushes it down and you end up flying 50 bathtubs of water inside your balloon and that's a disaster.

So that bubble on the top when you when you look at around the world balloon, the Breitling Orbiters, one, two and three. That bubble on the top is a little internal balloon that protects the gas valve from rain going into it.

And that was a direct result of what we learned on the Atlantic flight. The German team Eric Kraft, and Jochim Mass, they had to ditch first when they got hit by rain and just got too heavy. And if they had something to stop the rain going in their gas valve, they might have been able to fly on

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*It says in one of the reports that you overtook the Dutch team somehow a bit like F1 to a balloon flying across the Atlantic and overtaking as well!*

### **Rob Bayly**

As you know Jenny, you steer by going to different heights. You can't really steer positively but you find winds of different directions.

The Americans flew significantly higher than everybody else. 20,000 feet class and they curved the right and went down to Africa.

The Dutch team, they were flying a bit lower and slower and they got hooked into a low pressure system and they start to curving back on themselves and heading up to Cornwall and the ended up finding themselves in much faster winds. And so they ditched off Cornwall in a controlled ditching and the Royal Navy came out with this helicopter and rescued them.

They gave a good contribution to the funder as well to thank them but they ended up in in hospital in Cornwall, just checking for hypothermia and so on.

They were fine and both smiling but we overtook them in the sense that they kept themselves up into a low pressure weather system. We sort of, I mean, our flight was lucky again we were the middle of the three balloons that managed to hit dry land eventually, were the odd number balloons one, three and five and number three was me and Don we went right down the middle. We were not too far North and we didn't go down to Africa, we landed, well actually first of all, we landed off the coast of Portugal and but with some skillful flying from Don.

We dragged up onto the beach and sand dunes that place called Figuera da Foz just between Lisbon and Porto.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*So you've done a Transatlantic which is quite incredible. What did your mother think?*

### **Rob Bayly**

Well at the time, it was that funny. There's a really weird moment when the generator failed about, I don't know, two hours before coming to the coast. And it's exactly the time you need really good

communication with whoever really tell you what you're doing. When you need to talk to Air Traffic Control. And we have a transponder sending our position and the generator failed!

I think at height the generator wasn't very happy with the lack of oxygen when we came down from height. I couldn't restart it. So it looked like we disappeared off the screen.

So it was a heart stopping moment for the ground crew and our families they knew we were flying the day before and then all of a sudden this balloon has disappeared. And in fact, we were fine.

Another secret I will let you into, it doesn't matter now because it's a while ago. But Don said we've got to conserve every bit of power we have now for the landing. That's a very sensible answer.

—I'm thinking right but the pilot side of me I agree with Don, we can't waste power.

The TV producer side of me thinks I've got to keep the cameras running and record this. There was a big 12 volt battery on board to power the radio comms and the transponder and so on. And I was using that to power the video cameras as well. I didn't tell Don that the cameras are still running. I mean, from a purely safety point of view. I should have shut them off to save power. But we got great videos because of it with us crashing in the water.

But we went off we went off the radar we disappeared off the screens until eventually we managed to drag up onto the beach in Figuera da Foz I got the generator going on the beach and it's a good combination of skills on aerals.

I mean Don's got a lot of the aviation and aeronautical skills. I was an electrical engineer originally so that was helpful and I managed to rig up the aerial and we got the transmitter going new shortwave radio good old fashioned, like amateur radio operators.

Set up a radio station on the beach in Portugal and said we're safe. We're on dry land. But there was a good two hour three hour period when it looked like we disappeared off the face of the earth.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Oh my goodness. When you actually landed, when you were on dry land or beach, in Portugal, were there hundreds of people tearing out to meet you and say how wonderful, or a man with a bottle of wine or something.*

### **Rob Bayly**

It was actually a long way from any big city, there was one bloke wearing flip flops and shorts and he videoed it, he had a video camera. It was a gentleman on holiday. And I used some of the photos from him.

It's brilliant. He came over bemused as to what this thing was that fell out of the sky and crashed up onto the beach. Gave us hand to pack it away. So no, they weren't 1000s of people.

There was one fellow who was a bit amused. And Don and I, there's a funny thing, when we got out of the capsule, the capsule was all on one side and the tanks were everywhere and our passports are flown out and we're sitting in the sand and it was a bit of a mess that landing with Donald I was not too proud of it but we were safe and dry.

We had to land because the weather was getting much worse and inland was just forests and hills.

But as we staggered out the capsule it's very funny to see two grown men trying to stand up on solid land having been floating in this little box for a week together. Do you remember those David Attenborough films of a baby giraffe just being born and it comes out and then falls over it stands up and it falls over it wobbles that was me and Don.

We had a wobbling disease because we were suffering from lack of sleep, obviously we did sleep on a five day flight took it in turns to sleep but you're just fazed you're exhausted mentally and physically.

We'd also zipped up we had a big issue a few hours before landing where Don thought the balloon was tearing he could hear ripping sounds like a cracking sound that this was this was due to we think it was due to the fabric sticking to itself and we've got frozen in the night and it was unpopping in the midday heat in Portugal but we put on these dry suits and our parachutes and it's sweltering it's midday in Portugal. So it's very hot, and we're putting on these sweaty suits and so we were overheated. Exhausted and but we are telling you Jenni, we stood up and men do give a man a hug and we walked back to the edge of the water, the balloon is flapping about and that Don's instruction he said cut the balloon I got my Swiss army knife and just to stop it you know being blown away by the wind, ripped the gash in the balloon to let the helium escape.

Donald and I walked back down to the water's edge and our feet in the water flopping around in the surf. And a bit of, a well a lot of tears. Actually. It was quite emotional.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*Yes, it must have been incredible.*

**Rob Bayly**

Don's - the overriding line I remember Don said 'I didn't feel like a big boy back then, but this is big boys ballooning'.

That was his phrase. And I was just so grateful we managed it is I look back and think so many things could have gone wrong but it is one we got away with.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*But you don't think about the things that could go wrong.*

**Rob Bayly**

You can't . You've got to do as much preparation as you can and try and imagine what if what will we do?

Then just be really ready to think on your feet because the thing that will go unexpectedly isn't anything you've thought of before and it takes a certain sort of open minded attitude that you can't go and open the book and read the instruction manual. It's never been done before.

And I'm convinced now that the success of some projects and like you can look at people I don't know trying to walk to the South Pole or something like this. The teams that seem to

manage to get away with it and succeed. There's something bonding we is a mutual trust in people. Don and I got on really well.

We never argued in that balloon. I've heard Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones talk about their success around the world flight. You know, they were up there 20 plus days and there was never a cross word. You have a mutual respect.

Same sense of humor that helps you know something's make you laugh, even towards the end. Don's laughing and you know, I said '*right 100 miles to go Don. How do you feel*'. then I've got him on a video saying, Well, I've been here before. I wouldn't count your chickens, you know, but he's smiling, you know?

And in one of the BBC interviews, he's, you know, they asked him, you know, how are you getting on with Rob and he says, 'Well, we haven't got time to argue we're sort of too busy flying' and it was just, you know, I just think they the personalities of the team. And again, quite a lot of luck, Don and I hadn't done much flying together before we've done some hot air flights and you know, training flights and so on, but it's a test of your emotions to be stuck in a little six foot by four foot box with one person. Even your husband your best friend you think blimey, you know, he snores or whatever it is that annoys you. You know, how are you going to manage and you've got to have a way of getting on.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Were you tempted after that flight to do any other record breaking flights or did your career take over?*

### **Rob Bayly**

The career is it difficult?

Balancing your career? With your hobby?

What is practical as the lovely Great British long jump, I still did some of those. And I think what I learned on the Atlantic flight is you know that positive attitude, respect for the weather.

The Long Jumps have got a great rule because yeah, it was take off anytime in October and get the longest flight you can and that meant you could tuck it around your work commitments. And I managed to do a flight as in a different personal way I'm equally proud of I did a solo flight from Norfolk down to right there.

We're down to Cornwall and did you landed on a cliff top in Cornwall by Looe, and it was it was the first ever long jump in a special shape. I've got BBC to lend the Radio One balloon. this was the 'Cool Dude DJ 'balloon he had sort of a baseball cap as clothes . But remember coming in over Plymouth and talking to air traffic control and they are saying, "Oh, you're the one with the big face on".

But that was a long-distance flight. If you choose to fly solo, obviously you could take more fuel instead of copilot so that was quite nice just the personal record it did when the long jump that year. 240 something miles well I-within the British Isles. And I've always enjoyed but in a controlled way and as my ballooning carried on, 35 years of it I think in total ,I slowly eased off from the edgier stuff and you know balanced by life more towards fun flying with friends and the great balloon meets we have around the UK.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*And is your son Matt? Is he a pilot?*

**Rob Bayly**

He's not a pilot although he could be he has an absolute instinct. He's had his hand on the burner many times. He flew the channel with Pete Gregory, the late Pete Gregory.

Great friends.

Matt flew a lot of that, you know the hardest thing you know, if you're a trainee pilot, and you're just told to fly straight level. Well, that sounds easy. But actually, the balloon you know, you've got to anticipate balloon and Matt had has that gift. He came on many flights with me. And he blames me for scaring him witless on some of them.

We did the first Queen's cup together. Which is a sort of accumulation of long-distance flights over a weekend. Again, it was quite testing of physical endurance as well. But I won't give the whole story, but I remember landing in mid-day in the UK, which is not ideal, but it made sense for airspace reasons. We were just too close to power lines, I knew that I was going next to them, but as I came down the wind changed, as it often does and was taking me towards these wires.

I remember from my training, you know, you're not going to climb over, you just rip out and I got down with a very hard landing safely in front of these wires. But you know, there's little moments like that you think, blimey, I've got my son on board here.

We were safe. Matt, he'll tell you the more dramatic version of that if you need.

But, you know, again, if it's pushing your own comfort zone. So, I do enjoy the Alpine flying and the long distance.

I mentioned Jim Howard earlier, he got me interested in this meeting. Kirsch Berg in Austria. Yeah. Jim. Jim had meets he organized St. Wolfgang was one of them. I used to do that a lot with family, I had now married Jan and we had Matt.

Matt is the son of myself and Jan and for many years I've been doing the Kirchberg balloon meet in Austria, which is it's quite nice because this is a good example of 70-year-olds flying. You take pictures, it looks very dramatic. You go up and you've got these mountains, but actually it's a really big wide valley. And if you don't want to get over the top, as they call it, you can just have a nice liberal flight with all the drama of the Alpine scenery, but none of the danger.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*So, what balloon have you got now, you must have had a few over the years.*

**Rob Bayly**

Well, I ended up, I flew a couple of Vivas, smaller Viva 77s, and then thanks to Jan, actually at one of the balloon fiestas. She introduced me to a gentleman Darcy, Darcy Cranshaw, who was a pilot and has this company Snow Business, and Snow Business makes snow for feature films. They're in Stroud, just north of Bristol.

He had two balloons, and they were 90s, bigger balloons. So, he could fly some of these guests. And we got to use one of the envelopes and use my own basket and trailer and everything, but Darcy was just so pleased to have his company name flown.

In the last 10 years of my flying, I've been flying Snow Business and starting with the older of his envelopes and then the later one, but fantastic balloons. They're all beautifully designed the dark blue with the snowman on smiling and when you land, particularly with kids, they love it. And just passing that equipment on now to a great younger pilot called Lawrence Wigfield who also knows Darcy and will keep that balloon flying. Lawrence and I, I mean just an example. We've just agreed we're going to; we're going to fly the channel together in it as a copilot thing when the next slot fly the channel comes up.

### **Rob Bayly**

So, they're still active, but I passed the equipment on now and Snow Business was the last balloon I flew. And this is a memory, I don't know if there's this Telly on here. I'll show you a tattoo I've done. Well, my son Matty said you ought to get a little tattoo. He's got a Liver Bird because he's supports Liverpool Football Club, and I've got a little balloon with a snowflake on it on my arm there.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Oh, that's lovely.*

*Over the years you've met hundreds of balloonists and when you popped in the other day, I had a photograph of your trailer and a telephone box.*

### **Rob Bayly**

Right. It's in my garden over there.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Could you just tell me how you managed to find out who was selling it ?*

### **Rob Bayly**

It is sort of a lovely little ballooning story which I wasn't expecting.

I wanted one of these old fashioned telephone kiosks as they're called in my garden. So, I went on eBay and just searched around and this one came up but what was the point of buying one on eBay? If it is in you know Scotland or somewhere at the other end of the country, because I'm living near Bristol.

I found one in Oxfordshire and bid on it and I think it was 550 pounds. A little note came up saying you are the highest bidder. eBay puts you in touch with the seller. And the seller wrote to me and I noticed the seller's email address was something like gas bag, a Gas bag@something.com. Gas bag and that sounds a bit balloon, reply to it and it was none other than the famous Robin Batchelor.

He's a big deal in the British Balloon Museum and Airship club. And, in in the balloon museum. Robin and I, well we've known each other for years, right?

Robin and I met; he was the first pilot I stood in the basket with. He wasn't free flying. But I started working in London for the BBC in the early 1980s, and Robin, well, I saw this balloon tethered in Hyde Park just going up and down was on the ropes. I stopped my little 70cc scooter at the time and I went in and said, "What's this?" He said, "Hop in?" That was my first thing, and I went up and down on a very windy tether in Hyde Park.

So again, I owe Robin a bit of enthusiasm. That was that was at the time I was watching Don Cameron fly the Atlantic before.

When Julia and I got married, Robin drove us away from our wedding in his old vintage car, so it was a Bullnose Morris or something. And he took us from the church in the car, of course, to a launch site where some good friends from London Region Chris Allen, the Max Store had agreed to fly us from our wedding.

So, it all it all links up but going back to the phone box, it was indeed Robin completely out of the blue.

I was buying a phone box, nothing to do with ballooning and found out it was Robin, we went over there. A balloon trailer was the perfect size for the phone box.

Although it took about eight of us to get it in there. Very heavy phone boxes. And I did take the telephone box back in my trailer to get the phone box in its final position in my garden there.

I had a little phone box moving party--Matt was at the local primary school and a lot of big heavyweight dads were standing in the playground once, I went around I said, this Saturday if any of you fancy, and I will buy the beers and any of you fancy coming round-- I need to move this phone box from my trailer to the edge of my garden. "Yeah, we'll do that" One drunken Saturday was spent moving Robin Batchelor's phone box across my garden.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Now he is President. I can't thank you enough for giving me all this time.*

### **Rob Bayly**

It's funny, you actually drawn out quite a few anecdotes didn't know were lodged away in the gray matter. But ballooning is a great you know, initiator of things. You randomly meet people you wouldn't normally meet; you've landed in their backyard and then you make a new friend. Or you know somebody wants to help to crew for you They invited to do something.

It's become a fantastic travel opportunity, particularly in the in the 80s you know, the countries that didn't have balloons like Thailand and so on Malaysia they will send invites out to Europe and to America. You know, anyone wants to bring their balloons. So, again, we were able to fly.

The balloon was usually paid for to get out there. You'd have a very economic holiday really, you know, you'd help people out by tethering and like glowing and flying their guests. Again, the sport opened many doors, and I got some fantastic memories from the ballooning career.

### **Jennifer d'Alton**

*Have you written a book about this?*

**Rob Bayly**

No, I haven't written the book.

I've ended up on cruise ships. Doing talks. And that's quite a sort of a you know, a way of getting out your system and enthusing others in passing on the stories. I have now retired from BBC, and I got a phone call out of the blue saying would I be interested in talking not just about ballooning, but the BBC, you know how we make the antiques roadshow and it was the last program I produced.

And so, I put together a number of talks with lots of video clips, and so on. So it's probably instead of writing a book, but I'm not sure anyone want to buy a book.

**Jennifer d'Alton**

*Well, maybe this transcript will help, I'll put in a few commas and send it to you.*

*Lovely, thank you so much, Rob, for spending all this time with me.*

**Rob Bayly**

Thank you, Jenny.