

CLIVE BAILEY 1/7/24

My name is Jennifer d'Alton. I'm a director of the British balloon Museum and Library, and I'm really pleased this morning to be talking to Clive Bailey. Clive is a Bristolian. I think you can be called, is that right?

Well, I live in Bristol, just outside of Bristol, originally from Surrey, so I wouldn't class myself as a Bristolian,

But you were, your father was Sales Director for Concord, that's right, you got your gliders licence at 18. Whereabouts did you do that ?

Weston Super Mare on the old western airfield, which is now a housing estate. Of course, it is,

What made you take the move after that, you went to deep sea diving, etc.

Balloons. When did you see your first balloon? Because you're quite young. There must have been loads around.

Yeah. So I think I was at one of the first balloon fiestas at Bristol my first when I was I don't know how. I'm too old to remember that exact date.

And then I had real no interest in ballooning. I was very much into aerobatics and gliders. And then one Sunday evening I came back from gliding, I met this chap called Mike McDonald, a Canadian guy who had just bought a balloon, Bristol Software Factory. We got chatting, and I went out and started crewing for him, and it went from there, really,

But you were still, you're a glider pilot. Then at the same time, had you started diving?

Then, yes, no, not commercially. No, that was just before I started commercial diving. Well, I tend, I tell a lie. Yes, I have been diving. I've been diving since I was 17.

You went out to the Middle East?

Yeah, I started off commercially around here, around Bristol, doing civil engineering diving, then went out to the Middle East and then onto the North Sea.

I bet the North Sea was the coldest.

It was, but fun.

So then you went to the motor trade. What does that mean?

Well, when I was diving out in the Middle East, I was three months on and a month off, and on the month off, I used to get bored of tears, so I helped a chap called Richard Thomas to set up a body shop in his garage, and it went from there, really,

How did you so you've get the Ford dealership balloon?

Yeah, that's right. So when I was learning to fly, I went to our then MD, Mike Gifford, Brian brothers, and said, look, it's ridiculous. I'm flying all these other balloons. And he said, you get your licence, and I'll get a balloon. And so I got my licence and he bought an envelope. So what I meant? So it was good.

So who taught you to fly?

Mike McDonald started off my flying career, and then I went with various other people to finally get my general flight test. Phil Dunnington being the one that's done, bless him, has done, did my PPR, and did 98% of my my CPL and PRE checkout.

What about gas ballooning? I believe you got a gas balloon licence too.

That's right. I got into gas ballooning through David Hempleman-Adams who, who's just got back to UK after his attempt across the Atlantic at the weekend. And I looked after David quite a bit. And then he said, Why don't you get your licence and give it a go yourself? So I did.

And you actually flew in the Gordon Bennett,

Yes. A couple of Gordon Bennetts, the America's Challenge as well. America's Cup.

Which do you enjoy most?

I think, I think the hot air ballooning I enjoy most. Gas ballooning. It's great if you're doing a race like the Gordon Bennett or the Americas challenge, if you're not doing that, and I find it quite boring.

It hasn't got the edge. So going back again, you met Jo and you got married. You proposed to her in a balloon 8000 feet.

Yeah, it's quite funny. It was out of the Bath Balloon Fiesta, and we were just above a small bit of cloud, and we just picked up speed to about 20 knots, and went straight up onto Salisbury Plain, the danger area. So luckily, we landed just outside

of the danger area, but it was quite fun, I think. And then I was absolutely crapping myself.

Did you get down on one knee as well?

Yeah, I did.

Well done. Bristol, Balloon Fiesta, tell me more. How'd you get involved with that?

Well, that was through Phil, really. I, I joined as a committee member, joined the Western Region then as a committee member. And Phil said, Look, we need a hand on the Bristol fiesta. And you're the chap. Looks like you going to fill the whole bit we need to. So that was what 20 - 25, years ago, I would imagine.

Are you involved this year?

Yes, I am. Yes, yeah. We've got a terrible year this year, because they've had 'Love Saves The Day' (music festival) at Ashton Court, and it was very, very wet and it absolutely churned the ground up.

So we've got a director's meeting tomorrow to see exactly which way we're going to go with it.

Oh my goodness, just to tell anybody who's listening to this in 100 years time, the date today is the first of July and the Fiesta is how many days time?

Well, it's going to be what? 30? 30 - 40, days time?

Yeah, so not, not much time for grass to grow.

No, definitely not.

Now you and Jo ran Bailey Balloons for a long time. Tell me about ...

Yes, 29 years. Well, we started off Jo, and Jo got voluntary redundancy from the local authorities, and we knew that there was a space within the market to set up a commercial company really looking after corporate side, as opposed to passengers. And so Jo started, then I left, if

Your email says Exclusive, are you working with Andrew.

No, not at all. No, we've got three small balloons, two 105s, and 140 that we still operate.

Ah, so when you first started doing commercial ballooning, were there any other commercial balloon companies in Bristol?

Yeah, we had Bristol balloons and First Flight, oh, and of course, Bernard Pettiford with West Country Balloons

Did you all compete for the same thing? Was it really competitive field?

Then I don't think it was. We didn't go into be competitors with Nigel or Phil Clark or Bernard, because we were running smaller balloons. So it didn't really matter. It then became competitive. And of course, Virgin came along, and it became very competitive then.

You've flown hundreds of people over the years. Have you had any flights which were really like, you wish you'd never done it?

I think everybody flies planes or anything. I've got those flights there. I can't think of any in particular, but I've had quite a few scary flights.

Come on, Clive, give us a scary flight.

I can't think of it. I've had quite a few. I think, I think the worst ones the Gordon Bennett or the America's Cup, when you're taking off in the middle of the night, two of you in a little gas balloon. And I always say every time you take off, why am I doing this? Why am I doing this?

When you flew over, you've flown at Chateau d'Oex? When you flew David Attenborough from Chateau d'Oex? Didn't you?

That's right, we did. He did the opening sequence of Planet Earth Two from 12,500 feet, right over Chateau d'Oex. And that was amazing. I mean, I spent four days with him. What a lovely man, absolutely super, as you would imagine.

So, you're and I know you've been on a lot of television things, but you also think about crazy stunts. You do some wild things, don't you?

I think, I think we did do some wild things. I think as you get older, your risk levels go down. And before, we didn't worry about doing anything, we've done tightrope walks. I've had Ian Ashpole on top of the balloon flying under the suspension bridge, which we didn't actually do, but we had permission to, and all sorts of stuff like that. But now I just think, no, why? Why do that?

What about Jo? Does she do wild things as well?

Yeah, but not in a balloon.

So you've flown all over Europe, and when you're not flying passengers. Are there any countries you prefer to fly in, or any countries you hate flying in?

Two places that will always be very fond of one is Chateau d'Oex, because it's amazing and very challenging to fly in the mountains.

And I think one of the nicest places to fly was Myanmar in Begann. I did eight May seasons out in Myanmar, and that was just stunningly beautiful. Lovely people, amazing flying.

They've stopped doing it now, haven't they?

Well, no, they might pay for one of our pilots. He's just come back. He came back. He went out for six week, Andy Davey, and a few of the other guys are out there over the winter. But it's scaled right back down. I mean, there were 27 balloons, you know, in its heyday, and then obviously the military coup came in, and now, I think now, three or four balloons fly. So it's a terrible shame.

It is isn't it?

Do you've now do you fly other people's balloons like, I know you used to fly EDF Energy and DS packaging, and do you fly other people's balloons just to advertise them?

We've got, we've got Haboo Money a 105. We've got the Royal Crescent balloon for the hotel in Bath, a very beautiful hotel in Bath.

And we've got Savio, an IT company's balloon, so they're all advertising balloons.

And we fly passengers, Exclusive passengers in those as well.

So that's what you are now, Exclusive,

Mainly Exclusive, no, not exclusive balloons, Bailey Exclusive, Bailey Exclusive.

Bailey Exclusive, alright? And and the pilots are,

There's, there's myself and Doug Hoddinott? Ed Chapman, they're the younger lot coming through. They're very good,

The babies, yes, yeah. So have you got anything exciting planned for this Fiesta when the mud dries out?

No, nothing, really. I think, I think it's like all of the fiestas, like all of the air shows, trying to make ends meet financially is very, very difficult, and that's what we're putting all our effort into.

It cost us about £850,000 to put the Fiesta on. And it's a, it's a make or break every year.

Because you don't charge do you?

No, it's free. It's free entry. But we raise the income from car parks and then from traders, food people and that sort of thing. The small sponsors.

I think, the days of great big sponsors, you know, £100,000 pound sponsors, which is what we need, are gone. So we're trying to get more sort of £15 - £20,000 pound sponsors.

Pete Dalby was telling me it was difficult when I talked to him,

yes, yes. He's Yeah, obviously Pete's a fellow director as well. Yeah,

*You two are crazy. Some of the things you two have gotten up to.
So, at the moment, I don't know what the weather's like with you. We couldn't fly up
here at the moment*

We wouldn't be flying here at the moment, no, but drizzle coming in. It's not very nice at all, but it's cool.

So what does what does your mother think of you flying all over the place in laundry baskets made by the blind?

Well, Mum, Mum and Dad both, both passed now, sadly, but when I was diving, they thought I was mad, and then and how we were going to make a business out of flying hot air balloons, we were even worse. 'Even Madder', as they say, but it's all worked out in the end, I think, you know, we've done well out of ballooning, and we've had a great time.

Have you flown your - did you fly your parents?

Yes, yeah, yeah, of course, yeah, yeah. Flew my parents and and my brother, he always says he's never flown with me, but he forgets he has flown with me.

What about your children?

Yes, Rosie's. Rosie's flown and Kyly's flown. Yeah, they're both very keen. Rosie's got her own business now, and no time for anything, but she will learn to fly one day, I'm pretty certain, alright.

And they live close to you.

Yeah, yeah. Rosie lives just down the road, and Kyly's in Bristol, not far at all.

No, not far at all. So is there anything you would like to do now? Have you got any urge to break any records? Or not,

Not on the ballooning side, I've just been looking after David Hempleman -Adams with Kevin Stass and Jonathan Harris over the weekend with his attempt with Burt Padelt to fly the Atlantic. And unfortunately, we have ballast problems and weather problems. So they landed on Sunday morning in New Brunswick.

So no, we're off, I'm off to Germany on Thursday, in a light aircraft with Jo and another friend.

We're going to Leipzig, and then I'm, I'm very keen on sailing, so, so that's my there's all one. I've always been sailing, but I've got a bit more time to do it now.

So what are you sitting in at the moment?

A little, a little tub of a boat I'm just about to do some painting on.

Thank you very much for giving me all this time. Is there anything else? I mean, you've been all over the place. You've flown everybody. Jamie Oliver, Ant and Dec. David Hempleman-Adams will do this again with Bert.

Yeah,

I've got, they've they've got a bit of a reset now the balloon back and there's no damage or anything to the balloon, which is great. They did a very, very difficult landing yesterday they had to come down from 10,000 feet with about 15 miles, maybe even 12 miles, to go before the coast. But they got down and everybody's safe and sound, the balloon is not damaged.

So I think they'll have a reset, and then we'll look again. The trouble is, with it, global warming, whatever, they're very, very few opportunities, weather opportunities to get across the Atlantic, it would appear.

Now last year, we were waiting August, September, but it was just tropical storms coming, one after the other and then Saturday morning, early hours. Saturday morning was the first opportunity this year.

Lindsay Muir wants to fly as well. The Atlantic
Tell her she's mad.

You can tell I'm sure you'll see her before me.

Yeah, it's you guys have done most amazing things.

And what did you do on D Day with your brother's aeroplane or something?

Well, sadly, I lost my brother, Trev, last August 22nd last year, and he was test flying a Spitfire Mark 26 Spitfire, and it looks like he had a heart attack. whilst he was flying it. So he went doing what he loved most,

And he had a 1947 Auster. So a friend of mine bought the Auster. We've spent two months getting it ready for its certificate of airworthiness, we got that. We flew over to Challet in France for the Normandy 80year Normandy Celebrations, which was quite amazing.

It's amazing.

So what's Jo doing now? She's organizing you. Is she?

Yes, we're trying to, trying to. She's coming out. She's absolutely worried sick about flying in this week. We're going out in a little four seated Comanche out to Germany on Thursday. So she's a bit worried about that. It'll be fine. So, I don't know what she's worried about, but sat in the back of that for three hours might not be as comfortable as she thinks

it might be, because she's frightened of football supporters for England. They're all going to be there.

Oh, god yes, yeah, yeah. Well, that was a What a laugh last night.

Well, we won't talk about that. This is, I think you are an amazing man. Clive Bailey, really, really pleased that you've actually given me so much time to speak.

That's an absolute pleasure. I mean, we've known each other for God, I don't know how many years, almost from 30 odd to 35 years.

I would think yes, and we've ballooned in so many countries, and you're always there.

