

JEFF ROBERTS

JENNIFER; my name is Jennifer d'Alton, director of the British Balloon Museum and Library. I'm very excited to be interviewing or talking to Jeff Roberts, who is a Director. In fact, he's Vice Chairman of the British Balloon Museum and Library, Jeff, thank you very much for spending time to do this pleasure. Would you like to tell me when you first even thought about ballooning or even saw one?

JEFF: I was basically like a lot of balloonists, I was an airplane spotter, and obviously balloons have registrations on and they're very you know, you can go to an airport and you'll see loads of aircraft, but trying to see a balloon was fairly, fairly rare. I think I probably saw my first balloon at the Biggin Hill Air Fair in the mid 70s.

But in the late 70s, we became aware of like Eastern Region meets that used to be held in the Ipswich area. And I was living in Braintree at the time, and we used to go up to these, these events. And one weekend we went, and there was hardly anybody there. There was normally perhaps a dozen balloons there, and we they said, Oh no, no. Most people have gone up to up to Nottingham, where the British championships are being held. So myself and a friend, we drove up overnight to Nottingham, and it was being held at Clumber Park anyway, but we parked up close to to the site, and one of the first people we met there, because we were blocking the gate, was Ray Bailey.

And here we we all. We were aware. I was aware of Ray because he'd been to eastern region and Chiltern region meets, and he invited us in. I think he probably made us a cup of tea and everything, and he said he'd let us know what was going to happen. So we saw all the balloons driving in, etc. And then afterwards, Ray came out and said all the balloons will be taking off from not from here, but from a different location. And he told us where that was, but basically we just followed all the other retrieve vehicles down there.

Anyway, I was just wandering around on the launch flight taking photos, and this person said to me, what are you doing? So I said, Oh, I'm ever so sorry. I just wanted to take some photos. And they said, Well, can you hold this line for as long as you can. And that was Peter Vale, and he gave me the crown, yeah, yeah. And that was that I was hooked after that. So I think at that meeting there was something like perhaps 40-50, balloons even, because there was the competition ballooning and also Fiesta flying.

So yeah, that was my first taste of ballooning. And then after that, I would go all over the place. So I became a bit of a balloon groupie. If somebody needed crew,

then I would, I'd be available. But I did do quite a lot of crewing for Peter Vale, although he lived in the Midlands. I didn't mind travelling up from Essex, just to get the experience and be involved.

JENNIFER; Did he give you your first flight?

JEFF: He did. I waited for my first flight was in 1981 and that was from Hagley Hall, again in the south Midlands. That was Easter 1981 and I think Peter just said, oh, you know, just been around now it must be his turn to have a flight. So I was absolutely delighted. And found it very strange where you think you're stationary and everybody else is going up and down around you. Anyway, we had nice flights. We had quite a quick landing. I know, we landed in a field full of beans that Peter was worried about. Anyway, we went back to where Peter Vale and his family lived, and he gave me a first flight certificate, etc. Anyway, I then went back to the hotel that I was staying in and proudly showing off my first flight certificate. And it was surprising that a number of other balloons said, Oh, if we'd have known you hadn't flown we would have flown you. But it was, you know, that was my sort of proper introduction to ballooning. And yeah, I was definitely hooked on ballooning after that.

JENNIFER; Did you join the BBAC then?

JEFF: I joined the BBAC, I think sort of probably 1980 something like that. And during that time, I went to other National championships with Peter, and other competitions and meets that he was going to and basically, if I knew they were, if I by then, I think with Aerostat I'd found out where meets were. So I just used to turn up as a bit of a rent-a-crew for anybody needed a hand. I was more than happy to err- to help out.

JENNIFER; Excellent, so, but you didn't have a balloon, or you hadn't thought about having a licence or, well,

JEFF: Not

really I was, I was quite happy just crewing. I ended up doing quite a lot of observing, and that was really good fun. I went to a few, a few events overseas, and that gave me my way of flying. In those days, it was quite, quite common, probably, for an observer to fly, because if you would document the whole flight and work out their approximate score, so if a pilot lost their marker, at least, you were able to witness where it was. So there was sometimes an advantage of taking the

observer. So I got to fly with some, you know, amazing, amazing people in, mainly in Europe and but I wasn't really bothered about flying at all.

JENNIFER; What about observing? I mean, if anybody was to click and listen to you, and they'd say, Well, observing means watching, but in ballooning sense, it's more almost like a judge, but not a judge, isn't it?

JEFF: Yeah, you're kind of, you're a kind of an official.

Funny enough, I've listened to Ali Odell's oral history and Nigel Taskers, and they wrote Nigel in particular, was instrumental in setting up competition ballooning only in the UK, but was then adopted around the world. So you were allocated a pilot to go with, and you would document within reason, everything that happened. So what time they took off, the markers were they in the basket when they took off, etc. And then you would try to score them as best as you can in those days, you know, if there was a scoring team, they would do the scoring, but quite often it would just be a road junction in the middle of nowhere, and you were the one that would make the measurements.

So observers always used to turn up with all sorts of equipment, spray paint, tape measures, yeah, lots of common procedures, drawing stuff. It was a lot of drawing to do of where the markers were, etc, and the way I looked at it, I find it was with a particular pilot. I always wanted that pilot to do well, It probably made it easier, because then I wouldn't have to work out lots of details regarding their scoring, but generally, whoever I was with, I wanted them to do well. And it was a really, really enjoyable time. There was a good bunch of British observers, probably in the 80s, a good band of good band of people that we went to different events too.

JENNIFER; There's a, I think it was when I was talking to Ali. She said, observing now is so totally different. Flying is too,

JEFF: Yeah, no, I think so. In those days it was, you know, the only instruments you would have would be your altimeter and a radio, and that, that was basically it, that people may have had a GPS, but it was- it wasn't a moving map. It just told you the grid references of where you were, and really everything was, again, it was probably still pre mobile phones. So if there was an issue, then it would be back to a telephone number to ring into, yeah. I mean, the whole thing has changed, whether it's for the good or not. I mean, I enjoyed the ballooning that I did in the in the competition in those times, because you were, you definitely felt part of the competition. You were part of the of the flight. Nowadays, it's, you know, the electronically. It's done most of it, most of it's done electronically. All the scoring

can be done by just pushing a button on the laptop and that that will give you your position,

JENNIFER; no maps either. I believe.

JEFF: Yeah, Ordnance Survey maps. Now it's all moving maps on on a laptop.

JENNIFER; Yes, remember sitting drawing my circles around on the Ordnance Survey maps and putting, don't forget to ask about the. And children and little notes that when I went and retrieved I could say the right things to the farmers. Yeah, yeah, but now it's all electronic.

JEFF: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I, I don't fly as pilot anymore, but when I do fly as passenger, almost certainly there's at least an iPad in the basket. And, you know, gone are the days of looking at an Ordnance Survey map, trying to work out exactly where you were, where you were going to next. It's just all on the screen. And it even tells you you know what to expect, the direction you're going to go, and what's coming out.

JENNIFER; So you were you were training, you said, when you became a pilot? So who trained you to be a pilot?

JEFF: Roland Benbrook did most of my training. He was a local pilot. I'd known Roland for quite a long time. He was into competition ballooning. He was a very good navigator. And, yeah, he did a lot of flying with Neil Gabriel and people in the Nottingham area. So yeah, when I had the opportunity to get a balloon, it was natural that Roland would teach me to fly.

JENNIFER; Yeah, so And how long did it take you before you thought? Why? I think I'll go for my license.

JEFF: We bought, we got our balloon in December, 2003 but I throughout my life in ballooning, I've been extremely lucky. There was a guy called David Watkins, who myself and Val used to proof for and he lived in Essex, and we would turn out, you know, whenever he wanted. We used to do shows at the weekends, which were quite common, and we'd always be around. Val used to look after his children. Anyway. He eventually moved up to Northumberland, and he wasn't really flying that often. And he used, when we used to chat, he'd always say, Well, are you going to buy my balloon? And I always said, yeah, one day, David. Anyway, I said to Val, next time David says, Do I want to buy the balloon? I'm going to say yes, and see what he says. Anyway, we came to an arrangement where I bought the trailer, because the trailer was brand new, and whatever was in the trailer we got. So that's

how we ended up with a balloon that was initially sponsored by Pizza Express. It had their logos that were painted, painted onto a camera and concept.

JENNIFER; So meanwhile, you were working in the banking industry, so you were doing a nine to five in London. Yeah, ballooning, yeah.

JEFF: It took me probably the best part of two years to get my licence. I think probably in the days when I had lots of time to go ballooning, I didn't have the money to have a balloon. And then, as you get later in life, you then find that, yes, I've got the resources to probably have a balloon, but I haven't got the time to do it. But so it was, you know, when I was learning, it really was every weekend we would assume that we were going flying, and Val's, one of Val's pet hates was getting up early, going to the launch field and then deciding, OH Actually no, we're not going to fly.

She always found that extremely irritating, but it was the only way to do it. So for sort of a good year or so, when I got my licence, yeah, which was in 2005 we've pretty well given up sort of all socializing. It was just, we're flying. We're flying. We work. Can't agree to do anything, in case it's a flyable weekend, and

JENNIFER; so was Val with you right from the beginning, from Clumber Park.

JEFF: Or I met Val in 1980 a friend of mine had bought a new balloon, and he was looking to fly. And Val was already crewing, crewing for the pilot, David Watkins, who was living in Essex, and David was going to train Tony to fly. I was crewing for Tony. So that's how we met across a muddy field in Essex in in 1980 Wow.

JENNIFER; But it was a bit of a time before your marriage.

JEFF: There wasn't it. It was quite a long time before I wore her down, as it were,

JENNIFER; So glad you did. So you had your your first balloon was, what was it called?

JEFF: It? Sponsored by Pizza Express. Yeah, that was Cameron concept. So that was David's balloon. He had a connection with Pizza Express, and now that's how they ended up having the balloon a couple of one of the directors in particular from Pizza Express love going to Bristol. So that's why they bought the balloon. Prior to that, David just had banners on one of his balloons, but they decided that they would like their own balloon Pizza Express when you landed,

JENNIFER; Did they expect you to get out of the basket and throw pizzas over the burner and give them to the farmer?

JEFF: Or, Yeah, certainly when you're flying over, flying low, people would shout out for garlic bread and different types of pizzas. And again, Pizza Express were very good when, when, when we had the balloon, we had Pizza Express vouchers that we could give to the farmers or to anybody in particular that had helped us. So, yeah, we were lucky. We weren't obliged to do work for Pizza Express, but they were quite happy for us to carry on flying the balloon with their logo on it.

JENNIFER; How long did you have that one before you went on to I haven't,

JEFF: I think we flew Pizza, so I think up until sort of 2017 -2018 it became very porous. And on one particular flight, Dave Such had done the C of A on the balloon, and it passed okay, but I said, today there's something just not right with the balloon. Anyway, we took off, and within about 40 minutes, we'd done all three tanks, and the balloon basically just landed itself. It wasn't going to fly anymore?

JENNIFER; 40 minutes!!

JEFF: yeah, yeah. We just burnt through all the tanks. It was so porous. It just wouldn't stay, wouldn't stay in the air. And I say, the balloon basically just landed itself in the end, you know, there wasn't, there was very little control about the landing, other than, you know, we hit the ground and we definitely weren't going anywhere after that. But I was extremely lucky. By that stage, I had also obtained another balloon from another Essex pilot that myself and Val knew, he'd moved to France and was no longer flying, and we were able to buy a 1979 Thunder, which had very few hours on it. So we were then able to carry on flying that balloon.

The balloon was called Christmas, and Dave Henley, who initially owned it. It was a Christmas present to himself, and that's why it was called Christmas. And we had some really good fun flying that. That was just a 65 so we would only ever fly two up, but we had some really lovely, lovely flights in that balloon. And that balloon is still air worthy, and it did fly a couple of times last year. I yeah, I think I flew in it twice last year. So, yeah, that was nice to for the balloon to fly again. But it's very much a fair weather balloon with its age, at some stage the fabric will give up. It passed grab test again, this loud this year, but with that crinkly fabric, you know, it'll go one day, when we pull it out of the bag, it'll just be a - you know,- you'll hear it rip, unfortunately, but lucky to have this Thunder.

JENNIFER; Did you have you flown your balloons all over Europe? Or are you mainly UK?

JEFF: Based mainly in the UK. The only meet that we really went to overseas as a pilot was to Metz or as or as the British call it Metz Chambley, and we had some fantastic times. That's where I did a lot of my training, with Roland. I know training isn't, in theory, permitted at Metz, but I did a lot of training there, and that's where I knew then I could definitely fly the balloon. And when we took Christmas out to out to Mets, it was just really lovely to be able to fly. We'd just fly two up, three tanks, and it was that particular week, whichever year it was, it was one where there's very little wind, and you could just be picky about where you wanted to land. So we just carry on flying till the right cut field came along. You know, we didn't want six inches of stubble. We wanted an inch of stubble. You were lucky enough to be able to do that. So lovely. Yeah, that was very lucky,

JENNIFER; yes. So now you've been, you've had balloons and been flying since 81 but both you and Val have got big families. Have you flown? Parents, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren?

JEFF: Yeah, I think, I think my dad I flew, and I my mum's definitely had tethered flights. My dad was actually lucky enough to get a flight in a hot air airship in Chateau d'Oex when we used to, used to go there. Most of my family weren't that enamoured with ballooning. They couldn't really see the point. My brother couldn't see the point of taking off and not really knowing where you were going.

But they used to come along to events and stuff like that. My dad definitely did quite a few retrieves for me when I was training. My dad liked the challenge of the retrieve. Say, in those days, you know, you had to, you followed the balloon as best as you can on the Ordnance Survey map, there wasn't GPS to or WhatsApp to, you know, send your position over. So most of the family was involved. Our granddaughter, Marni, she's flown in a balloon with Val. She flew with Roland one evening. So, yeah, they've always been interested in what we've been what we've been doing,

JENNIFER; but they haven't actually decided they're going to do it themselves yet.

JEFF: No, no, I don't think so they've definitely, there was no one that really thought, yeah, yeah, I wouldn't mind giving this, giving this a go.

JENNIFER; So when did you, did you give Val her first flight? Or did Roland?

JEFF: No Val would have got her first flight from David Watkins. She'd been crewing for David for quite a while, excuse me. And in those days, sort of the late 70s, early 80s, it was quite normal that we would go to a village show or something at the

weekend. So there always be one on, and Val went along. And every time they went, the weather wasn't right and nothing happened. And yeah, Val was sort of saying, Oh, it must be me. Anyway. It turned out one evening, there was a particular possibility to fly and David was flying a friend of his, and he said to Val, can you just jump in the basket with me? I just want to test a few things. So Val was quite happy to jump in the balloon. And then she sort of said, well, I guess I better get out now. And David said, Well, I wouldn't, because we're about 30 foot off the ground, and that's her first flight. She didn't realize that that she'd flown. So yeah, Val said, some quite amazing flights with David Watkins and also with Tony Simmons, they had quite an adventurous landing in the Lake District many moons ago.

JENNIFER; So have you she's had amazing flights. What's the most amazing flight you've had?

JEFF: Yeah, that's very difficult. I mean, I have flown the channel with Keith's Storey, that was really good. I had an amazing flight over London again in the early 80s, where we took off from Wormwood Scrubs, and we basically took off. It was not that light, but the first thing that you could really see, that you recognize, was Buckingham Palace.

We flew over the palace. We flew down the Mall, and then just flew straight along the river. And you could decide whether you wanted to land north of the river or south of the river. So we being from Essex, we landed in Dagenham, and I think we were the first balloon to take off. This was David Watkins and we landed in the same field as the last balloon that took off, and that was Ray Bailey and Alex Jenkinson. So that was an amazing flight.

I've just been lucky. I just had loads and loads of amazing flights. And with, you know, amazing, amazing pilots I've flown with, been lucky enough to fly with Crispin Williams, David Bareford, lots of, lots of pilots. Tom Donnelly, I've been very, very lucky.

JENNIFER; And how about you've had some great flights. You've had some great pilots. What's the worst and most scary flight you've had?

JEFF: That was in Metz it was one of those evenings where the forecast was a bit iffy, but I wanted to fly. And it was one of those flights where I said, Look, we're going to fly. I took a friend of mine that was quite experienced at flying, and I said, what we'll do, we'll take off from the launch site, and we'll land after 10 minutes, the first field that comes along. And of course, you never, you never do that. You

carry on flying. And we noticed that the wind speed was getting quicker and quicker. And I looked at a field, I thought, yeah, there was a grass field with a wire across it. And I said to Graham, said, we'll put it in that grass field.

We'd go over the wire, and then we'll put it in that grass field. But there were very few balloons actually in the grass. They'd all landed in the in the plough, and I really couldn't understand why they'd done that. One particular friend of mine was really, very, very careful. Looked after his balloon really, really well. And the last thing you would have done was to have landed in the plough anyway. I think I was more concentrating on why nobody was nobody had landed on the grass, and they were in the plough anyway. I then hit the deck very hard, and I came out of the basket, and I was dragging along under the basket,

- You are joking!

JEFF; no, but my foot, with my boots on it, got caught between the top of the tank and the top of the basket. Now, how on earth I did it? I have no idea, but I managed to haul myself back into the basket. I think I put a couple of burns in, and then we just hit the landed in the plough, along with everybody else. There is an infamous video of my landing on YouTube, if people look for it, that was very lucky. I was very, very lucky that day, nothing broken, no nothing broken. I think I had a few bruises. The shirt that I was wearing, you know, was, I think it was a blue shirt that was now green from dragging across the grass, but that's probably my worst, my worst landing, and you know, it was my own fault for not concentrating. Instead of thinking about getting my balloon down, I was thinking about all these other balloons that had landed where it didn't make sense, and that was after we'd landed. Shortly afterwards, a huge storm came in a huge thunderstorm, winds of 50-60, mile an hour. So we were on the, you know, just on the edge of that. So we were very lucky that day.

JENNIFER; So you've flown Is there anything that, any place or any competition that you would like to do? Have you got any sort of yearnings to fly somewhere?

JEFF: Yeah, I'd love to go back to Chateaux d'Oex. We used to go there as a family, quite a lot. I was very lucky that my brother in law, his boss, had a flat in Chateaux d'Oex.

JENNIFER; No!

JEFF: yeah, yeah. So we would always book it for the ballooning week. So I would go ballooning and the rest of the family would go off skiing, and that was absolutely

superb. So again, I didn't go with any particular balloon. I just went on to the launch field.

In those days, Cameron's used to take an airship and a couple of balloons. So I ended up crewing for Tom Donnelly and Wyn Morgan with the airship. And I'd love to go back to Chateaux d'Oex again. One of the reasons, though, is obviously they have a museum there about the Breitling flight. So I would like to go there to see their museum. And again, I'd like to go back to Albuquerque. I was lucky. I've been twice, and I do, I did fly on both occasions, not as a pilot, but again, obviously their museum is something that I would like to, like to visit.

Last time we went, was in 2000 and it was just being built, it wasn't open. So Chateaux d'Oex and Albuquerque are definitely on my on my wish list. Still wish list, yeah, yeah.

JENNIFER; Very exciting. Well, who knew? Is what's going to happen this year?

JEFF: Yeah, yeah.if Val wins big on the Premium Bonds. We'll go, I'll go to one of those places quick lottery job. Yeah, yep. So

JENNIFER; how did you get interested in the British Balloon Museum and Library?

JEFF: I was always obviously interested in seeing balloons and stuff. And I think the first inflation day I went to was at the Cardington hangers, and that was just the most amazing day. People still talk about it to this day, and when we arrived, I went with my dad, and when we arrived, Rene Thornton was on the on the door, the gate, and she shamed me into joining the museum. Now I can't remember when that Cardington event was, but it was just fantastic. I was able to tether Peter Vale's balloon, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, that was the first balloon I flew in. And, you know, was able to sort of tether it, get it off the ground, etc. And it was just amazing, just walking around the hanger with all those balloons in there, and then later in the day, when they had their sort of mass inflation, it was that's when I really became interested in the museum. And then I started going to the to the AGMs and the luncheons, etc.

JENNIFER; So for people who have no idea who are listening to this explain Cardington, the hangers and the event.

JEFF: So Cardington is in Bedfordshire, and this is where the large airships, British airships, were built, specifically the R100 and the R 101, so these hangers are absolutely enormous. I'm not 100% sure, but I think the Titanic would actually fit in one of these hangers. They are absolutely huge, and they at the time, it was RAF

Cardington, and these hangers, you can see on the horizon for miles around their amazing structures. And yeah, the museum. I can't remember who it was that organized the meet there, but he managed to get permission for us to have one of the hangers, and it was just full of, full of hot air balloons. Probably, I don't know, 50 or 60, it might have been even more, that were basically able to inflate indoors. It has got a huge connection with, with airships. And sadly, the R 101, on that on its fatal flight. It left Cardington before it's unfortunate crash in in France.

JENNIFER; They also had the barrage balloons. They had a lot of kite balloons there.

JEFF: Yes, they did, and Thunders, in particular, they used to test their balloons in the hangar at Cardington. I'm not so much where the Camerons did, but certainly Thunders were often there with with balloons that they were tests inflating in the hangar.

JENNIFER; It was, there were 93 hot air balloons. That was the record they did.

JEFF: Yeah, yeah. It was. I mean, you there's so many people that where you talk about in the museum inflation day, or could we have it back at Cardington? Oh, yeah. Sadly, now I think the chances of that are very slim. One or if not both of them are film sets. I have been into the hangars a few years ago when I think it was the airship Heritage Trust had their AGM, and I was lucky enough, Anthony Smith managed to get, get everybody, get all of us into the hangars. And it was amazing to see all these sets that were being built. There was a Batman set. There was the Brooklyn Bridge was in there. It was an amazing thing to see. But the hangers are used for filming. Bands use them to practice in and stuff like that. But I think the chances of being anybody really getting access to the hangers now is very remote, plus, there's so much building work on in that area as well, but at least the hangers have been preserved, or I might be in trouble here with Giles because they're. They're sheds, aren't they? They're not hangers.

JENNIFER; Yes, the I think the first time I went there, I went with my mother, and they were building the Goodyear airship. And my mother Anne Lewis-Smith knew everybody who was involved, the Americans, the British. And the other shed was being used by the film industry then, but it was airships, and then we pulled it out into the fresh air. It was amazing. It was the first airship I'd ever touched.

JEFF: Yeah, yeah. So you had, like in those days when there was airship industries in the 80s that were based there building airships, and then, more recently, the company that's got that really big airship I'm just trying to Airlander, yes, well, I

never saw The Airlander, which was a bit disappointing, but hopefully, if you if you believe what you read, there will be lots of them in the air in the future, so we will wait to see.

JENNIFER; Very exciting. It's me, it's lighter than air and it's old fashioned, but it's not, yeah, yeah. It's it's all happening. I think it's very exciting indeed. So you also have this incredible experience and knowledge of Flown Covers Envelopes which have been put in, printed specially, and then flown in a balloon basket and signed by pilots. You have got an amazing collection from all over the world. How many have you got?

JEFF: I hate to think I've got over 30 albums just of British flown mail. Wow. And then I have a chest of drawers that's full of covers from overseas. When I first started collecting, I would just collect any, any flown mail that I could, that I saw, or that I could buy. I a lot of stuff i i bought originally, on on Ebay. I joined eBay in 2000 so then it was quite a small community, and the buyers and sellers all knew each other.

But after a while, I decided that I needed to concentrate on one area. So I decided I would concentrate on covers that were British related. So ideally flown in a British registered balloon, flown by a British pilot, or flown in the UK. In theory, I could have extended that in terms of, say, like Cameron balloons, because they are built in the UK, but they built so many that that wasn't going to be feasible. So ideally, I like covers that have a have a British connection. That's what I'm always, always looking for. And I have a few other sort of topics that I like. So Gordon Bennett covers. I like those. They're very difficult, certainly modern Gordon Bennett covers are quite difficult to get a hold of, and the older ones are quite expensive.

One of my early covers I bought was of an American Stamp called Jupiter that was issued in 1959 and that was one of the first covers I bought. So I buy Jupiter covers when I see them come up. I've got quite a nice collection of those. And the other topic that I really like is that Jan and Nini Boesman, the Dutch gas balloonist from Holland, they flew all over the place, and they did a flight in Iceland, and that was, if you like, the first air mail that was flown in that country. So I was lucky enough to purchase a letter that was sent by Jan to a stamp dealer in America, and he detailed all about the flight that the gas they could get had got next to no lifting power, and only Nini was able to fly, as she was the lightest, so Jan didn't get to fly.

I can't remember what gas they were using, but it was really awful. There was no lift. And so, because I've got this letter that details all the flight, I do like collecting

colours from that that particular flight. And there's with them. There's lots of different variations. They've got a different hand stamp on them. They're signed so. Another signed by Jan and Nini. One mark is just signed by Nini, one by Jan. So there's all these different variations you can have. So yeah, that's one of my tribal respects with the Jupiter covers. Val says, Why have you got three of the same cover? And I say, No, they're different because one is a red cachet, one is a black cachet, and one is a blue cachet. So to me, they're different, but the postmark and the stamp are absolutely the same,

JENNIFER; so the museum must love it that your expertise helps them with their collection.

JEFF: Yes, yeah, the museum has got a very nice collection, and certainly there's some, some covers in the museum's collection that that that I don't have. And I think in some cases it's probably the museum is the only, the only holder of those, those particular covers.

JENNIFER; Wow, Pat Edwards collected covers. He was very helpful.

JEFF: Yes, I bought quite a collection, actually, from Pat. So Mike, Pat was did a lot of crewing for Mike Moore, and Mike Moore did a lot of testing, test flights for Camerons. So when they did those flights, Pat would make sure that there were some covers on board, and I bought quite a number of covers from Pat when he was looking to sort of downsize his collections. I was also lucky that I became friends with Terry Adams, and again, he was a huge collector. In his collection that Tracy Robb has in South Africa it is something else, although I think Terry did sell off a lot of his collection. But again, Terry helped me in terms of getting getting covers, particularly as a set of Irish covers from the Irish one of the Irish balloons. So, yeah, I've been lucky that there's lots of different people that have either helped me along the way or have pointed me in the right direction to expand by my collection.

JENNIFER; And do the Americans have the same lust for first day covers, because obviously, being bigger,

JEFF: They are, yeah, there's a few collectors in the States. One guy who I used to deal with. There's a couple of one guy used to bid against on eBay, and I always lost out to him, and it was a guy, I can't remember his first name, Raya, and we met him in Albuquerque event one one time, and he was saying that, you know, when he was bidding on eBay, he always left it to the last few seconds To put a bid in. So I learned my lesson doing that. So I became on eBay, what's known as a sniper the last last 10 seconds, I will put my my bid in to hopefully get the get that cover. What

was this? I do know a few other collectors, but probably for a normal, what I call day to day cover, there's, there's not that many people are interested. It's the Gordon Bennett covers, world record covers around the world attempts, etc. They're the ones that go for the for the big money.

JENNIFER; Tell me the name of the I missed the Americans name

JEFF: the guy, I only remember his nickname, which was Tennessee Lee, and he was a balloonist. And there was another guy, and his surname was Raya, but I can't remember what his first name was. And okay, we would chat and stuff. And I even spoke to Mark Gary on one occasion, because he was flew with Don a lot and flew a lot of covers. And he pointed out once that I bought something that was made out to be a flown cover, but it hadn't actually been it hadn't been executed properly. The pilot hadn't done what they were meant to do. But I was quite happy just to have the cover, you know, because it related to an early Gordon Bennett race, and I think it had been flown by by Charles Rolls.

JENNIFER; It is amazing. How much stuff, maybe stuff's wrong, yeah, how much one collect.

JEFF; It is, I mean, as well as having you know the flow and cover collection, I've got stickers, badges, or badges, pins, patches, programs from various events. But we we also do have a collection of some very nice items that I bought at Bonham's a number of years ago. We got a Delft plate with a balloon on it from 1784 so we have bought some very nice

JENNIFER; 1784?!!

JEFF: Yeah, yes, yeah. The first balloon that flew in the in the UK is depicted on this Lambeth ware Delft plate. There was a few, quite a number of these plates around, and they were up for auction. There was a phase where Bonhams had quite a number of ballooning auctions, and I was at one of them, I was able to purchase one of these plates. I can't remember if it was from the Lord Kings, Lord Ktings Norton collection. I'm not remember which collection I bought it from.

JENNIFER; Yes, he had some superb stuff. Didn't? Yeah,

JEFF: He did, although one of my Val's least favourite items I bought, I bought a Georgian fish slice with a balloon on it. A balloon's engraved on it, and it says something like the estimate was eight to 1000 pounds. Anyway, during that time, there was a lot of ballooning items, because they've been a couple of balloon only auctions at Bonhams, everything was going for quite expensive prices. Anyway, I

just put in an absentee bid, and then I got this message from Bonhams that I'd won the auction and go and pay for it. So I went up there, and Val was less than impressed, but I liked it very much anyway. A few years later, Bonhams were doing valuations at your home, so we got them to come round to give a valuation, and I think I'd paid 1000 pounds for this fish, fish slice, and Bonhams came round, and they looked at everything, and the Delf plates, etc, they valued them, you know, as what I'd expected. But this fish slice, he said, Well, that's got no value at all. That's 150 - 200 pounds. And he said, Where did you get it from? So I said, Oh, well, I bought it from, from Bonhams, from yourself. So he went, oh, oh. He said, I'll make a phone call. So he rang back to the office, and then he came off the phone and said, Yes, actually, you're right. That is worth what you paid for it. And in my mind it, I'm pretty convinced that the balloon that is engraved on the fish slice is the same balloon design that's on the Charles Green salver that the BBAC, I've never done, never done the research on it. I know who made it. So I need to do some research on my fish slice the Green salver and see whether they whether they are connected.

JENNIFER; When you get your Trailrope, you will find as an illustration of the salver. It's about two and a half inches square, but it's quite clear, which is sent to me by Richard Wiles. So, oh, okay, you'll be able to check, yeah.

JEFF: I did once when the salver was being presented at one of the BBAC AGMs, I was able to get some close up pictures of right? I just have never got round to doing some research on it. So I'd like to go to the silversmiths lodge or college and look through their records to find out who it was made for. Said, If you could ever find out who, who it was made for, then that obviously, will give it a bit more provenance. Yeah, it may just have been a display piece, but it would be nice to know if it was made for anybody in particular

JENNIFER; You've been ballooning and collecting is, have you got anything else you're going to zoom off and do, like take up collecting something else?

JEFF: No, I don't think so. I think I've got more than enough stuff to keep me busy as it is, I'm always looking to add to my collection, and I've been very lucky that people have given me the know that I collect mail and have passed on their collections to me. And recently, I was able to get hold of a set of covers from the gas world balloon championships in Tyndall in South Dakota. I've got a full set of those. So I was very happy to have those because there were two British registered balloons there. Jack Soukup was flying a British registered balloon, and so was Neil Robertson.

So I'm always looking to get different things. And, you know, it's nice every now and again to just find something on eBay that I haven't actually got in my collection, even if it's even nice just to see something that is in my collection, I make a note of that. I think, Oh yes, I must. I must look out for one of those. One day, John Baker has got a cover that I absolutely covet. He's got Yeah, yeah.

JENNIFER; He teases you,

JEFF: yeah. Whenever I look at it or I say to him, you know, like, if I'm let loose in his balloon room that check it, he should check his albums afterwards, because the Busby cover that he's had I would, I would absolutely love to have.

JENNIFER; Oh, bless Well, Jeff, I can't thank you enough for giving me all this time. I thought we'd chat for about 15 minutes, and that was really an hour ago. So thank you so much for giving me so much of your time.

JEFF: I know it's been an absolute pleasure to talk to you and regale some of my stories.