

John Rose

So my name is Jennifer d'Alton, and I'm a director of the British Balloon Museum and Library, and I'm incredibly lucky to have actually found John Rose, (and we've got zoom to work), and I'm going to ask him all about his ballooning life, which is very varied. So Good morning, John.

John.

Oh, good morning. Yeah.

Jennifer

When did you first see a balloon?

John

I was at my sister's in just south of Bristol. When the Bristol balloon festival was going on, I knew nothing. Had no interest in ballooning whatsoever. And we ran out in the garden, and this balloon came over, and we all followed it, of course. And I thought that's just a fantastic thing to do. And then I just kind of forgot all about it. And yeah, until I met this, this young lady in Bristol who had a balloon, actually had a balloon, and which was, I think it was probably april 1990 something like that, anyway. And she had a balloon, which I didn't, I wasn't aware of.

She asked me if I wanted to, I'm on a balloon flying. I just assumed she'd be getting a voucher from somebody. And she pulled this thing out at the back of her garage with this trailer. And we flew from Thornbury Castle near Bristol, and that was my very first PUT flight, and I was completely hooked.

Jennifer.

And who was the young lady?

John

Oh, Christine Luffenham

Christine, yes, yeah, haven't seen her for years, yeah. I hope she's well, yeah,

Jennifer

I'm sureshe is yes. Can you remember? I mean, it was obviously a hot air balloon,

John

yes, yes, it was a Viva 77 I can't remember the registration, to be honest, but an old Viva. And yeah, we actually did a crossing the estuary, not the first one, but probably about second or third flight, which was amazing. Totally amazing.

And as you know, there's nothing like it, and that was it .

Jennifer

How exciting. So you went home, were you living in Oxfordshire?

John

yes, I was living in Oxfordshire and traveling down to Bristol, and then I eventually joined the hedgehoppers group. I'm not sure we're not probably 91 or something like that, with a great group of people that taught me to fly.

Jennifer

Wow. And who checked you out?

John

Checked out? Wow. I had a really good check out, actually, in Albuquerque. Chris, yes. Chris Kirby in Albuquerque, and that in 92 in Lou Watt's brand new balloon, bless him. And he, I remember I did, I did the flight. And then Lou jumped out, and Chris Kirby jumped out and said, 'off you go on your solo', and I remember the look on on Lou Watt's face as I flew off of his brand new Viva, seventy seven. so I was very lucky to do that. You know,

Jennifer

Where did you land? I mean, landing on your solo flight is often quite dodgy.

John

When I just met it was all desert. It was dead simple. I just had to find a track. So it was, yeah, so then I had to kind of learn to fly after that properly. But, yeah, it's a great place to check out. Yeah, really, really happy memories there.

Jennifer

but you also one of the very first to start commercial ballooning.

John

Yes, I did. I started in. When did I start 98 I think, started my little balloon company, Oxford Balloon company, which I started with a 105, quite a small balloon, and yet continued with that. Several balloons later, they got never flew bigger than a 160 so it was always quite nice.

Jennifer

So did you have home crew, or did you use some of the Hedgehoppers, or what?

John

Oh, some of the Hedgehoppers helped me out early on. Then I had to get to know different crew. Mike Wolf, for instance, was Yeah, and he's been with me, crewing for and flying for years and years, but yes, the Oxford Balloon company was very exciting. I like the flying, but maybe dealing with passengers wasn't so great at times.

Jennifer

Who was the worst? Don't name names? What was the worst passenger you had?

John

Well, the worst passenger had was a group, actually a group of six, unruly children. Well, yes, young adults, which they came from, this, this place for Disrupted Children. They caused havoc when we were when I looked back, it was quite funny, but on the day of course, on the side of the balloon, I had the Oxford balloon.com all across it. And when we were flying over villages looking for somewhere to land, they were swearing and all sorts of things. So it was, I think they were probably the most disruptive lot otherwise varied.

Jennifer

People proposed to each other?

John

I had a few of those, yes, I flew once from the Dog House Hotel, and just after the after the wedding they had, they were celebrating in the Dog house, and I flew the couple from the Dog house. She came out in a wedding dress and Dr Martin boots. It was so fun. But they originally asked me if I could fly them to Heathrow Terminal Two. So they don't want to have anywhere fair enough that wasn't going to happen. So yes, lots of proposals on which are really nice things to do.

Jennifer

It was yes. So you flew hot air from 1990 and then you go, what caught you into gas ballooning.

John

Oh, gas ballooning. Very lucky.

There was a syndicate being started up with Colin Butter. Jonathan Harris, Howard, I think was Mike. I'm not sure if Mike's here. And Chris Wood, of course, Chris. And they asked me to join them, I was really, I was really surprised, actually. So that's what got me in. Was really lucky to be part of that syndicate for many, many years, and mainly flow flew from Gladbach with Willy Eimers, Ben Eimers, who are a fantastic family. Yeah, so, and once you start gas ballooning, it's even worse than hot air, you know, really, it just grabs you.

And just the silence is fantastic. And duration, of course, yeah, blank through the night. And yes, lovely. It's wonderful. The first, first flight I actually had was from Switzerland. That was with Jonathan Harris and Chris Wood, and on a very hot day, and we were flying over this small town, looking for somewhere to land. And I think it was, I don't think I dropped my bag quick enough, and we landed on somebody's driveway short of the field. Was quite which was quite fun in a way, but there was a few words said, but yeah, so yes, great memories there.

Jennifer

So you can fly your hot air and do your gas ballooning. I think you're mainly gas now, aren't you?

John

Yes, yes, yeah.

Jennifer

Have you landed anywhere? Where the landowner, the farmer, the household has been so grateful, has brought you in and given you champagne.

John

Oh, not champagne. No, never had champagne. Well, some of our flying, a gas ballooning flying from Dobby's, we've had some great welcomes of being taken back for afternoon tea. And, yeah, where did I? I flew out of Henley, and we had tea, did a short flight, and we landed in this rather wonderful house and the butler came out with tea and cakes for us. So that's another really, it's very, really nice.

Jennifer

And what was the worst landowner then?

John

Worse, landowner was one of my very first flights. That was with Christine Luffenham, and we flew from the Wye Valley across the estuary. Well, actually, we didn't actually cross the estuary. We had a couple of we had a lady and a child on board, and we had to land just before the estuary at the sunset, and the farmer was so nasty, so nasty. Locked the gates wouldn't let us out and call the police.

We eventually got out around midnight.

Just an awful person. Yeah, there was nothing in the field. It was completely empty field. All the village came and came to see us, and you know, we're all pleased to see us. And then the farmer arrived and went downhill from there. Yeah, not many of those. Thank goodness.

Jennifer

Um, you've flown for years. Did you ever fly your mother or father?

John

No, I didn't, unfortunately, because I didn't start till late and they they were both passed by then. But what about your sister? Oh, yes, managed to fly the sisters, all five. Sisters five, yes, managed to get them all flown, which was really nice.

Jennifer

So have you got lots of nephews and nieces you can use as crew?

John

Not in this country, not in this country, they're in three of them are in America. And so no, not many of those. But my daughter and son come in handy. So that's quite, quite good. Yeah.

Jennifer

Gordon Bennett, how did you get into Gordon Bennett, I think you flew with Anne Rich, didn't you in 2019

John

Yes, I did. Yes. We had a yes. We flew from Montbéliard in France, I believe, yeah, um, but we had real tummy trouble, and we got to know each other really well. It was awful. We mistakenly, just before we took off, had some street food, they were going around with this food and some sausage. We both had a munch on this sausage, and that was the end of that. Really.

Jennifer

No,

John

So yes, I flew then, Ann because she's our world champion, of course, for duration with the ladies?

Jennifer

Yes, she is quite good, isn't she?

John

Yes, very good. 2009 I think, just two records, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jennifer

So have you actually got any records under your belt?

John

Me records, I don't know. I don't think I've got record many records. No, I don't hold any records, not even Beatles.

Jennifer

So you've got, how many Gordon Bennetts have you actually flown in? Seven? Seven? And is Colin butter your sort of manager, so to speak, for all of these.

John

Colin, oh, really, yes, we had a wonderful flight. When we flew from. Where did we fly from? We flew from, flew open. Oh, we Switzerland. That's right, we flew from Switzerland and had a fantastic flight into Poland, to the east of Poland. So great. We had a really good fun flight. Yeah, Colin because we were, you know, Colin's always about if, if he's not flying, he because he flew with Paul Spellward with in Bristol. I actually crewed on her.

So I've done a couple of crewing as well, but my first flight was with Chris Wood, the late Chris Wood, and he drove our syndicate. He was really enthusiastic, and that was from Switzerland again, yeah, oh, yes. And we had this great flight. We were heading towards a Pyrenees, just getting late, and we used a lot of sand we were flying. We were just learning then, really.

So we were flying a bit too low and was very hot, so we used a fair bit of sand when we should have been higher. The way we came down, we landed in this wonderful place, probably about 30 miles south of Toulouse. And I was thinking, Oh, I find a hotel. Be able to get have a shower and have something nice to eat. And we were in the middle of this field, and this couple came up with their children. I said, Is there any hotels? And they said, No, we ended up and Chris loved it, or he wanted to stay overnight by the basket, just sleep out. So that's what we did. And it was, it was really good, really good, fantastic experience.

And that the family came and bought us breakfast in the morning, bless them. So really, that's a lovely experience, waiting up waking up to sunrise beside you.

Jennifer

Do meet some wonderful people when you're flying, yes, sort of the farmers and the landowners. And we were very lucky as well. But with Gordon Bennett, it's, must be even more exciting and it's a proper balloon shape, yes,

John

yes, it's, it's really, yeah, really wonderful. I mean, the last flight I did with, with site with Debbie Scholes from Albany, which was in their balloon. They had their own balloon, lucky enough to have it on the English register as well, which makes it a lot easier to fly with the licensing regulations. And we flew for it was my longest flight, nearly 45 hours, which was, 45 hours, which was, which is really a beautiful flight. It's from Albuquerque that we flew. We landed in Mount Pleasant in Texas.

Jennifer

No, yes, that way. Wow.

John

It was a wonderful flight.

Jennifer

And how many Gordon Bennetts, have you actually flown in now? Seven? You're doing this year?

John

Well, we put an entry in with Anne, but it will. It could be any, any of the Syndicate, so we don't know yet, so we'll know at the end of, end of this month, when somebody has to pay some money up. But we've got an entry in so it could be Colin. We're not sure yet, so we have, we have to have that discussion.

Jennifer

So you've got the balloons entered, but the people who fly it over is up to you guys having a pub meeting somewhere. Yeah, there we go. That's reasonable. And are you involved at all with the 3-4-40?

John

Oh, yes, I'm still a member of the 3-4-40 for some years, but just not really. I'm an I'm just just a member. At the moment, I should go to their AGM, which is this month, see how they're doing.

Jennifer

Excellent. You must have had some landings where you wish you'd never actually heard of the word balloon. Can you remember any of them?

John

That's an interesting question. No, the worst time, worst landowner relation I had that was with Christine on that flight. Yeah.

But mainly we. I've been very lucky. I think the van dens only had a few which obviously, then you avoid those areas. But now I think I've been quite lucky over the years. Thank goodness. Have been one or two.

Jennifer

I can't. I can't. Thank you enough. Actually, that has a wonderful life of ballooning, going from seeing one taking off from the Fiesta to actually partaking in hopefully eighth Gordon Bennett in a gas balloon. It's just, yeah, you're how many log books have you got?

John

I think I've probably, I've got that many. I'm quite new at ballooning. I started in 90. So I'm quite a newbie. I think I got flying in my on my six, six, log six. Yeah, well,

Jennifer

When you give up, maybe you can donate them to the BBM & L,

John

oh yes, of course.

Jennifer

Thank you so much for spending so much time with me, and hopefully we'll see you very soon.