

# Derry Moore

1924–2020



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So 2020 strikes again! This time it has taken one of our most senior and accomplished past members, (number 631 and inspector number 106). Known to all as Derry, Alexander Joseph Moore was born on 26th April 1924 and lived past his 96th birthday. He died from age-related issues and passed away quietly in his sleep in the care home where he spent his last few years whilst unfortunately suffering acute dementia.

Derry had been flying balloons for nearly forty years. He held both a UK and Irish commercial pilot's licence, was a BBAC qualified instructor and one of only two Category 1 inspectors in the UK. Derry was also the NATMAC (National Air Traffic Management Advisory Committee) Officer, representing the BBAC for twenty-six years. Securing our original exclusive radio channel 122.475 was one of his many projects in this capacity. Derry had for many years fought the cause of balloonists amongst the powers that be in the CAA and more recently EASA.

My introduction to Derry came in January 2000 when my dear friend and instructor Norman Apsey, RIP, phoned to say that he could not make it over to inspect our balloon. He was sending a friend and said "I'm sure you'll get on with him, Tony". Derry turned up and went home two weeks later. He became great friends with both myself and Jeni and we saw a lot of each other up until Derry's long term partner Greta suffered an aneurism and sadly died on Friday 13th February 2004.

Norman called me soon after the funeral and said that Derry needed someone to look after him and it was him or me. Since then, up until his memory went on the back burner early in 2015, he spent about two months or more of every year living with us. He described our eldest son Morgan (then Oliver) as his best mate and became godfather to our younger son Harrison. He came to autism courses with us to help our family. Both boys grew up knowing him as Grandpa Derry, a name he was proud of.

People would often ask if he was my dad, but Derry would reply "No, he's my dad, him and Jeni look after me." He had a joke that followed this comment, but it's too rude for *Aerostat!* I flew with Derry many, many times and he always had a story to tell and so much knowledge to give. I assisted him with numerous inspections over many years, but in one year, he did over a hundred when in his eighties.

We did many things together, went to many places, and had many laughs and some tears. For the last five years his spirit has always been with me when I fly and he has always been loved by our family. So many times we'd share a glass of Sailor Jerry, his favourite rum, Crested Ten, his favourite Irish whiskey, or a pint of Guinness, his favourite beer.

Derry had served as a trainee engineer for the Navy during the Second World War and was deployed in the submarine service. He and a couple from his regiment unofficially took the surrender of a large area of Hong Kong when trying to fathom out how to restore the damaged cabling from the power station. A Japanese Officer appeared and offered their surrender. Derry told him to round up his men and meet him in the town centre. Half an hour later he radioed his senior officer to tell him he had captured some Japanese soldiers and needed a bit of help. When asked, "How

many?" he replied "Must be a few thousand." By the time reinforcements arrived the numbers had grown to even more. Whilst there, he helped to design, build and operate the winder that kept the cable car working.

Apparently, it wasn't unusual for a sailor not to be able to swim, so many years later, at the age of 89, I finally got him in the sea in Kefalonia and didn't give up until he was swimming and not sinking. The following year, at the age of 90, he swam without fear around our hired boat. It was my repayment for teaching me a thing or three about balloons!

Derry was always at the forefront of engineering innovation and whilst working for the navy, he joined forces with BICC on a project called Admiralty Winder and was connected to torpedoes up to and possibly later than Mk IV. Following this, Derry worked in a very senior engineering role at BICC. He was responsible for a few pretty impressive inventions. There is already documented evidence of some of his inventions connected to damping of overhead power lines so they didn't fall down in high winds, to inventing the machine to extrude correctly colour coded PVC onto household wiring including making sure the stripy earth insulation was always properly done.

While based at the BICC base near Alperton, Derry masterminded the establishment of a production facility for making tubular waveguides as a back-up for the GPO in case optical fibre development was slower than predicted. This was a major achievement to be able to mass produce three metre long glass fibre tubes that were lined with very fine wire coils that were "straighter than a gun barrel and more accurate than an engine cylinder". Enough of these were produced to make a trial link between Reading and Birmingham, however optical fibres did work so the project was halted.

He also invented a cable twinning machine and a telephone cord winding machine, thereby automating processes that would otherwise have been done by hand. Another idea he had was to produce an intelligent crane. The idea was a robotic crane would automatically move cable reels from process to process by holding many reels in an on-board storage unit attached to the traversing beams, thereby reducing the need for the crane to keep going back to the

holding area to collect another reel. The idea was to use route optimisation software to reduce the movements that the crane would have to execute. It was very advanced programming for 1985. The cable reels in question were several metres across and hold the very large power transmission cables (132KV and up to 400KV).

These were characteristic of Derry, who was always looking to come up with highly innovative and ambitious schemes right up until he retired. One of his more hare-brained schemes was to programme a general purpose robot to turn a control knob on a process, but it turned out this could be more easily achieved using a servo control system. Having said that BICC purchased two PUMA robots at Derry's request in the early 1980s for investigating opportunities for robotics. One of his colleagues at BICC made the following observation: "I only hope I still have THAT much enthusiasm for my job when I get to that stage in my own career."

His first hot air balloon had been commissioned for BICC (G-BREL), known as *Gabrielle*; he later bought it from BICC with co-owner, friend and colleague, Dave Green. Back in 1982 *Gabrielle* and crew were invited to Germany to see the 14th/20th Hussars being presented with a new Guidon by their Colonel in Chief, Princess Anne. They were invited by Major Jim Howard as he was then. Very early one morning after a night of partying in the Officers' Mess, they all prepared balloons for flight. Derry, however, managed to arrange Her Royal Highness Princess Anne as his passenger and

apparently she absolutely loved the flight and found Derry most charming.

Before his days flying balloons, it is believed that he was an accomplished glider pilot. He later took to the air by jumping off mountains using a hang glider built while he worked for Sky Balloons and Thunder & Colt as a test pilot. He donated the latter to a primary school to cut up the rip-stop nylon. Whilst freelancing for Thunder & Colt, Derry had set up a business called Sky Sailor & Company with Gerry Sweeney from Ireland.

One of his most exciting projects from 1986 was a two year contract to fly a hot air balloon, G-POSH, a Colt 56A, from the deck of the *Margaux Rose* in the Mediterranean Sea and later the Caribbean Sea for free flights out of Antigua, and again at St. Martins to entertain and fly passengers. Derry had taught the new captain, Mario Velona, to fly, but the balloon got ditched in the harbour in Monaco. Exasperated by the ditching, Derry designed and fitted water wings (a jacket or 'wet-liner' to go over the basket and a pneumatic collar to go around the jacket so that he was able to land on the surface of the water whilst keeping the balloon inflated. He could then accomplish stand-up landings on the surface of the sea up to wind speeds of 8kt and swells of a foot. He would then await the boat to position itself for re-launch and for him to land back on the deck.

More recently, Derry owned a collection of balloons including G-LORY, a Thunder 31Z envelope that had been stolen and later recovered, *Tinkerbelle* (G-BSUK) a multi-coloured Colt 77A and a Colt 56A called *Fanta* (G-BJYF),



Above: Derry flies G-POSH from the deck of the *Margaux Rose*, in 1986.

dating from 1982. Along with G-LORY he bought an air chair from Tony Patey, which was believed to be the original air chair made for and owned by Dick Worth. This had to be withdrawn from service when the new EASA rules came around 2005 as it has no drawings or paperwork. Derry talked about getting it back in the air as an Annex, but it never happened. It now hangs on my garage wall intact with its Hot Tom burner.

One of Derry's biggest connections was his relationship with Ireland and so many people there. He had acquired an Irish pilot's licence, which allowed him to fly and inspect the G registration balloons in Ireland. He was at one time the only inspector able to do this, therefore made many trips there and thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the Irish Internationals along with close friend Tony Gould. Derry would always relay to me the many stories and this culminated in him becoming Irish Champion in 2014 for his services to ballooning there.

Carol Davis commented "I first met Derry in the early 90s when he used to visit Ireland. He was meet director at the Sligo Balloon Meets and started off the Draperstown Balloon Meets. In 1997 he encouraged me to upgrade my Irish Licence (exemption) to a UK PPL, and organised for me to sit my exams with Chris Kirby. Later Chris came over to Ireland with Derry, where Johnny Kenny and I completed our test flights.

"Derry visited Ireland many times over the years and was a regular at the Irish Championships. I know Ireland was a large part of his multi-faceted life, and he had many adventures here! He often carried out balloon inspections during his visits. In 2014 he was crowned Irish Champion in Waterford. He last visited Ireland in 2015 at the Championships, also in Waterford. There he handed over the new Championship trophy to his great friend David Hooper.

"Derry will be sadly missed by his many Irish ballooning friends."

So, Sky Sailor has sailed on his final journey. God bless you Derry and may your wings fly you with Greta, Norman and all you friends past. RIP.

**Tony Knight**  
(with help and information from Dave Green and his colleagues from BICC, Pete Bish, Brian Rippon, Carol Davis, Joe Daly and Chris Dunkley)