

## FLYING FREE

The next interview in our series about local residents is with **DAVID JONES**.

First Episode.

This is the story of a life that defies the expectations put upon it.

David Jones, born in 1934 in Cambridge, was an only child whose parents ran a wine and grocery store on Trumpington Street.



Picture: Chris Bishop - Credit: Archant

He was brought up in the traditional middle class way at that time when children were often confined by the social mores of their elders. They were sent to school, expected to perform and largely do as they were told.

However, the schooling he received did not serve David well and he actively disliked it.

The opinion of the school's career guidance officer at his minor public school was that as David was 'least bad at Maths he had better be an accountant.'

David's father made the necessary arrangements and as David passed the chartered accountants preliminary exam this qualified him to become an articled clerk. So he joined Slater, Dominy and Swann but hated it even more than school and failed all the exams there.

As this was 1952 the normal pattern for men was to join the National Service.

Luck was on David's side when one lunch hour he saw an advertisement in the window of the RAF recruiting office in Cambridge.

Something encouraged him go into the office where they agreed to send him for an assessment.

Here was a chance to leave behind the boredom of the office!

At the age of 21 he left the chartered accountant's offices and because he had passed that preliminary exam, he was entitled to join the RAF as an officer and train to be a pilot. The dreariness of his childhood education quickly faded away and life took on a new and exciting turn.

As an acting pilot officer he was paid £1 a week. He spent the next four months training at RAF Kirton-in-Lindsey where he was pushed to his limits learning how to abseil and use tear gas amongst other things. And then half the trainees were chosen to go to Canada to continue their training.



David was amongst those who found themselves making the journey by sea from Liverpool to Montreal. He was literally taking off, leaving behind him all that he knew as the world was expanding before his eyes. Canada offered new sights as the trainees were shown around and started an acclimatisation course. Next stop was Alberta in the mid-West. In a township named Penhold, fifty miles north of Calgary, he was taught

to fly the Harvard. This was a big piston aeroplane with a propeller at the front.

David was in his element – he loved learning to fly and it was clear that he had found his metier.

His next aeroplane was a jet plane – the Silver Star T-33 and it was on this machine that he got his Wings.



His training complete in Canada he returned to the UK in 1957. Here at RAF Worksop he learnt to fly the De Havilland Vampire which was an early English jet plane and one of the fighters in use at the end of World War 2.

He also had to learn to navigate in the industrialised atmosphere of the Midlands. In the 50s the mist, fog, smoke and pollution made flying more difficult than in the clearer airs of Canada where the visibility was seldom less than 50 miles!

It took 5 months to get used to flying in these conditions but once he had conquered them he requested to move on and fly fighters because he wanted that challenge. Being young and now in touch with his daring and courageous self, he relished the idea of mastering the skills needed to fly such planes.

During the post war period of the late 50s young men joined the RAF to fly planes and not to fight. The war was well and truly over, even though there was a lingering concern about the Russians. The idea now was prevention– the fighter planes had a role in this strategy. David was taught how to fly the plane accurately, how to use and fire guns, and above all how to use the machine safely.

It was thought at this time that the bomber planes would deliver the arsenal needed to protect sovereign countries, even though the USA, Russia, France and the UK had nuclear weapons. This was the pre-missile era.



In April 1958 David was moved to RAF Chivenor in Devon. Here morale was high and he learnt to fly the fastest plane the RAF owned – the Hawker Hunter jet. This single pilot plane appealed to David and it was during the process of mastering this plane that he flew beyond the speed of sound. This exciting procedure of learning to understand what the Hunter could do was achieved by flying over Lundy Island. Here he climbed up very high and then pointing the plane directly down, he descended going supersonic for the first time which was an exhilarating and heady experience.



The flight envelope was about understanding everything the Hunter could do and this appealed enormously to David.

His progress in the RAF was going very well and he was now posted to No.74 Squadron at RAF Horsham St. Faith, which is now Norwich Airport. No 74 Sqn was a well-known Battle of Britain squadron with one of its men – ‘Sailor Malan’ being famous for his actions as a pilot in the Battle of Britain.

Here David flew the very latest model of the Hunter. At this time in 1958 there was trouble between the Greeks and Turks in Cyprus. On a short detachment of 2 months David was sent to Nicosia Airport to help keep the peace. The task was to interrupt the two sides getting together.

He describes this episode as ‘great fun’ because he was keeping the peace without firing a gun.



David Jones beside an English Electric Lightning – Photo MoD

Back in Norfolk the squadron was moved to RAF Coltishall in preparation for the Lightning plane made by the English Electric Company. This was the first and only totally English aircraft that could fly at twice the speed of sound.

The only problem was there was no one to teach them how to fly it! David and his fellow officers, being the ingenious and highly proficient men that they were, taught themselves.

For your first flight in this incredible aircraft you would have a friend flying a Hunter nearby should there be any problems.

He said of this experience: ‘The biggest challenge was staying mentally ahead of the aircraft which was desperately trying to go supersonic in the climb!’.

As the post war years moved on to the 1960s David’s growing expertise was being used in different ways. Now the RAF was demonstrating the skills of the Lightning plane to the public and at the Farnborough Airshow David provided the commentary.



In 1962 he flew the Lightning at the Paris Airshow to display its prowess again.

It was not all easy going with this plane however; being such an early model there were many technical problems and although it was advanced for its time it was not totally reliable.

Despite this it attracted attention from many important people who were impressed by its speed possibilities. One of these was Herb Elliot the Australian '4 minute miler' and a world record holder. He came to visit RAF Coltishall and much to David's huge surprise he was asked to host him.

The two became lifelong friends.

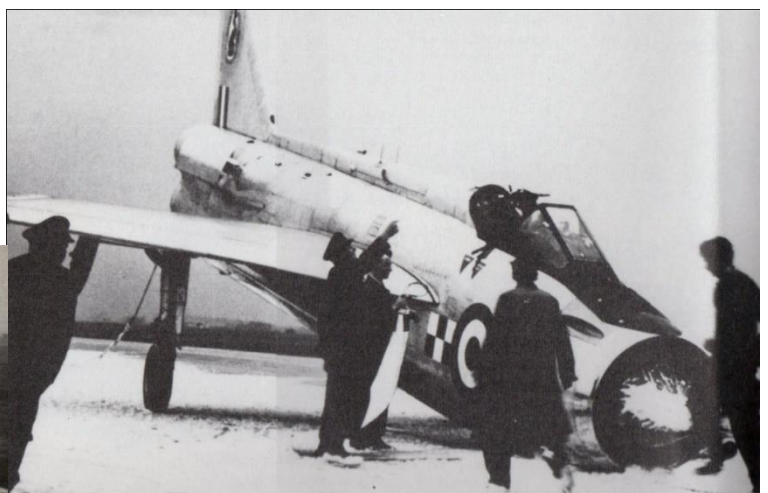
Life was good for David – he was doing what he loved, he was living in a part of the country he loved and he was surrounded by friends. Was there anything missing? Well possibly! Visiting the Trowel and Hammer pub in Norwich one day with his fellow officers, he met a young woman called Helen. Her part in his story is brief however because it transpired she had a sister who really appealed to David.

And so it was at this juncture in his life Canny entered the frame – 18 years old, about to sit her A levels but looking for adventure. And she found it!

## Interview with David Jones – Part 2

Life in the RAF was never static for David. Having just met Canny he was then posted to Leconfield in Yorkshire where the Lightning F2 plane was situated. He took part in the initial trials of in-flight refuelling of the Lightning and successfully flew all the way to Cyprus using this technique.

He also experienced a major problem on one flight when the nose wheel refused to lower for landing, so he had to land with just 2 wheels instead of the normal 3.



Photos courtesy MOD

But he now wanted to settle down with Canny so in 1964 they married and moved into married quarters. Yet another move saw them return to Coltishall where there was now a

Lightning Training Unit and David joined the staff that trained others to fly the Lightning plane. The task of learning how to fly this plane was a complex one as it required such a lot of coordination.

Whilst David was busy with training, Canny was equally busy having babies and caring for them. Their first child was born in 1965 and a year later their second son was born. There was no time to put down roots however for in 1968 they were off to Little Rissington in the Cotswolds where David was formally taught how to become a flying instructor. This seemed slightly strange as he had recently been teaching pilots to fly the Lightning! However, he enjoyed being back in a student role but with his usual aptitude he did very well and he won the Cooper Trophy in an aerobatic competition.

Now qualified as a teacher he was moved to Leuchars in Scotland in late 1968 and not very much later he was promoted to Squadron Leader and posted to Wales. Here he was in charge of the University of Wales Air Squadron. At this time the RAF gave free flying lessons to students who then joined up as graduates. This was a successful scheme - the current Chief of the Air Staff started his training on a University Air Squadron.

The way of life that David and Canny were now leading was a hectic one. With two young children and another born in 1971 and with moving every 2/3 years a lot of responsibility fell on Canny to uphold the domestic side of things.

But the RAF culture with married quarters provided, eased things somewhat as Canny found it was like living in a village; everyone knew each other and they were all in the same boat. This suited her but a big change came about when David was posted to MOD in Whitehall, London.

He was now working in a secret department in intelligence. The pattern of his working life was never to be the same and he did not particularly relish this new change.

Suddenly he could not talk about his work to anyone and he was travelling daily up to London from Kent where he and Canny were in married quarters again.

However, the work also required that he fly to the US and in case of hijack he had to use an RAF VC10 and not a civilian airline.

These were changing times – Harold Wilson the Prime Minister organised cutbacks in the Services and 20,000 people left their jobs in two and a half years. David recalled:

There were 100,000 people working for the RAF when I joined up and there are now less than 35,000.

The days of flying were sadly over for David as he paid the price for promotion and then in 1976 he was made redundant along with his boss. This could have been a very difficult time for the family but for the chance meeting with one man. David went on a resettlement course and he encountered a very good lecturer who helped him to look at the situation positively. Having been inspired by his teacher he chose to move back to East Anglia from Kent and during his final period at the MOD he was given time off to work for a certified diploma in accounting. The wheel had come full circle!

This proved to be an astute choice as hardly had he left the MOD than he saw a job for a deputy regional donor organiser for the National Blood Transfusion Service based at Addenbrooks in Cambridge. He got the job and was delighted to find that his new boss was a retired army major.

The family was now settled in Whittlesford near Cambridge. A mile up the road was the Imperial War Museum at Duxford and in 1976 David joined the Duxford Aviation Society. He became a valuable member of the society and in 1979 he was approached to organise a flying display. From then on every other year he took this on; the benefit of running it was

that the profit made went to the society and from these foundations David helped to build a successful organisation. Such was his expertise in handling such events that in 1986 he was asked to arrange for Concorde to fly in the display. He planned a tremendous display involving the Red Arrows who finished their act with a downward bomburst and as the red smoke dissipated Concorde came into sight. He gave a sigh of huge satisfaction with the exclamation: 'Perfect!' as he recounted the occasion.

At work with the coming of the computer age David took on the challenge of running the computer system for the Blood Transfusion Service in Cambridge.



By the 1990s the children began to leave home. It was time for David and Canny to embark on their idea of moving to the countryside where Canny could keep a pony and trap. They bought a small bungalow with 3 acres of land where the ponies could be kept.

In 1999 David retired. All did not go smoothly however as after 2 years David was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had to have a major operation. This slowed him down for the best part of 6 months.

Canny driving with David hanging on for dear life.

During this recovery time they used to come up to the north Norfolk Coast a lot. The idea of living there began to take shape and so they moved to Hunstanton in 2004.

This was most fortunate for the community of Hunstanton as well as David and Canny. They joined the Hunstanton Civic Society and also attended an RNLI coffee morning – the rest followed quite swiftly! David ever a man to help and contribute to the general effort he became treasurer of the RNLI shop and the Fundraising Guild. That led to the Lifeboat treasurer's job which in effect meant 3 jobs! These responsibilities he shouldered for over 10 years. At the same time he became Vice Chair of the Civic Society.

He even found time to join the Council for a while.

The expertise he had gathered all through his working life he put towards helping to put the foundation of the Civic Society in order. He researched and set up a revised and updated constitution, and he organised the sound and vision for the talks which the society offered. Along with Brian Holmes and John Maiden he became part of a trio that went about promoting the Civic Society. David's technical skills combined perfectly with Brian's artistic skills and John's local knowledge.

If ever there was a life lived to prove that its beginnings were not indicative of the richness that followed, then David's is it. His natural abilities have contributed hugely to the development of the prowess of the RAF in this country.

As each part of his life unfolded he revealed more and more of his talents to develop successfully whatever he applied himself to.

Nor did he stop when it came to his retirement. His generosity of spirit and his tireless energy have found a true home in Hunstanton where the community has benefited so enormously from his skills and expertise. Here is a man who has never let adversity stop him

and here is a man who now walks 3 miles a day to prove that life for him is always about the next adventure!

Margi Blunden June 2022.