



**FÉDÉRATION AÉRONAUTIQUE
INTERNATIONALE
Ballooning Commission**

Hall of Fame

ANTHONY J. F. SMITH
Inducted 1998

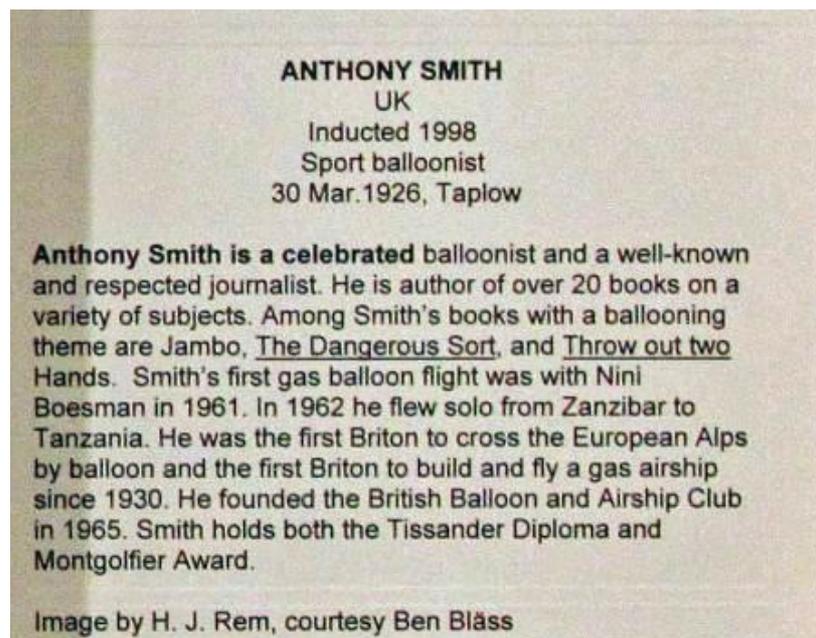


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A grandson of A.L. Smith, an eminent Master of Balliol College, Oxford, Anthony Smith was educated at the Dragon School. He served as a clerk in the RAF during the Second World War before returning to Balliol to read Zoology. He then embarked on a career as an explorer and author before turning to journalism.

His involvement with balloons began in 1962 when he was employed as the science correspondent for The Daily Telegraph. Alerted to the fact that the following year, 1963, was the 100th anniversary of the publication of Jules Verne's famous novel "Five Weeks in a Balloon" (in which a (fictional) science correspondent of the Daily Telegraph appears) Smith set about organising a real Balloon Safari to Africa to mark the occasion.

Frustrated by the British authorities inability to enact their own rules and provide him with a British Balloon Pilot's Licence, Smith took lessons in Holland from Jo and Nini Boesman and arranged to have a brand new gas balloon built for his African expedition by Albert van den Bemden in Belgium. The story of how Smith the novice pilot, accompanied by photographer Douglas Botting and film-maker Alan Root, transported his new balloon - which he named "Jambo" (the Swahili word for "Hello") - and several lorry-loads of hydrogen cylinders to the Island of Zanzibar, flew to the mainland and then survived a further half dozen flights over the African Plains in the full heat of the equatorial day, was told by Smith in his book "Throw out two Hands" (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1963). This became a best seller which was translated into 32 languages world-wide and appeared in the USA as "Jambo - African Balloon Safari" (New York : Dutton & Co).

Although the balloon (G-AVAT) spent barely a dozen hours in the air, The Sunday Telegraph Balloon Safari of 1963 also appeared on British Television as a series of black and white "wildlife" films that had a great impression on a whole generation of school-children. This first series of films was followed in subsequent years by further BBC films of Smith's adventures with his distinctive orange and silver balloon. In 1964 they crossed the Alps together from Switzerland to Italy and in 1965 they participated, with a dozen other gas balloons, in the BBC International Balloon Race from Stanton Harcourt. Thereafter Smith, with Jambo, appeared at several events in the UK and the couple became regular attendees, as the British entry, at such ballooning events in Europe as the annual mass ascent from the town square in St Niklaas, Belgium. The partnership ended sadly on the 20th of July 1968 when Jambo was destroyed by fire shortly after landing near Ardingly in Sussex. Luckily nobody was hurt and Smith was left to tell the full story of their adventures together in another book "The Dangerous Sort" (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1970).

As Britain's only civilian balloonist, in 1963, Smith had been invited to witness the pioneering flight of Ed Yost and Don Piccard, when they crossed the English Channel in one of their early hot air balloons – later named "The Channel Champ." Impressed by this new technology, and intent on finding a follow-up expedition to his success with Jambo in Africa, Smith embarked on a new LTA project in 1965. For his Warm Air-Ship Project (WASP) he employed the services of Malcolm Brighton, a young engineer with some experience of building inflatable shapes. Although the WASP never flew, the appropriately coloured black and yellow striped, 85,000 cu ft envelope (G-ATDK) was inflated several times before the project was abandoned.

The large propane burner designed by Brighton, for what was probably the world's first serious attempt to build a hot-air airship, was subsequently further developed by him. In 1967 it

became the prototype for all today's British modern hot-air balloon burners, when Brighton fitted an improved version to "The Bristol Belle" – the first British-built modern hot-air balloon (G-AVTL) – designed and built by him for the seven-man Hot Air Group (HAG) syndicate. This group, who learned to fly The Bristol Belle at RAF Weston on the Green, under the tutelage of Britain's last remaining military balloon pilot's licence holder, Wing Commander Gerry Turnbull, included Tom Sage and Don Cameron.

Following appearances on Television with Jambo, and their ascents from several events in Britain in the early 1960's, Smith received an increasing amount of correspondence from people interested in seeing or riding in balloons. This led him to issue a Newsletter and in 1965 he went on to found, and become first chairman of, The British Balloon and Airship Club (BBAC).

The club flourished as the sport of hot air ballooning grew through the 1970's and today it has some 2,000 members. Smith is now the club's President and his Newsletter – originally a single-sheet "Roneo" copy – has also evolved to become today a full-colour, 50+ page, glossy magazine "Aerostat." In 1973 Smith edited a compilation of highlights from the early Newsletters and published them as a book "The First Five Years" (published by BBAC).

While the world was occupied with the rebirth of ballooning, instigated by Ed Yost's invention of the modern hot-air balloon, Smith stayed loyal to gas. In 1967, his protégé, Malcolm Brighton, gained his Balloon Pilot's Licence by flying Jambo across the Channel to France. He promptly embarked on a career as a professional balloonist and in response to an advertisement, his company – MAB Balloons – was employed by the makers of the James Bond movies to construct a fully-functional airship for the film "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang." The resultant craft (G-AVSL) – designed and built by Brighton in accordance with instructions from the film's Art Department – proved hard to control in flight. Both Smith and Brighton, taking alternate flights as test pilots, had some hair-raising adventures, totting up a total of 11 airborne airship hours between them during the course of the filming. Despite their efforts this beautiful replica of a Lebaudy airship was not a success and only 8 seconds of the real airship flying appeared in the finished film.

Tragically, Malcolm Brighton died in 1970 after he was swept up in an Atlantic crossing attempt with a Roziere style balloon [a combination of a gas and a hot-air balloon] for which he enlisted as pilot. This was at the instigation of Pamela Brown, (sister of the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken), and her husband Rodney Anderson. Their ill-fated attempt - described by Smith in his book "The Free Life: The Spirit of Courage" (Pushcart Press : New York, 1995) - after a launch on 20 September 1970 from East Hampton, New York State, USA, had to ditch in the Atlantic about 600 miles southeast of Newfoundland. There were no survivors.

Undeterred, Smith turned his attentions to hot air ballooning and in 1972 was instrumental in training East African wild-life film-maker Alan Root (with whom he had flown in Jambo) to fly and in helping him to obtain a balloon ("Lengai" – G-BADG). This led in turn to Root's Survival Anglia TV Christmas Special film - "Balloon Safari" - which again captured the imagination of a further generation of school-children and ultimately resulted in the founding of today's booming African balloon-ride tourist industry.

But Smith also maintained his links with gas ballooning and in 1973 he purchased a small, second-hand gas balloon, again from Van den Bemden. With "Le Tomate" (G-BBFS) Smith made

several flights in the following years but his experiences with the Chitty film airship had left their mark. He conceived the idea of a small and simple blimp which might one day follow in Jambo's footsteps and form the basis of expedition. Smith enlisted the help of Jasper Tomlinson and Giles Camplin and in 1973 they embarked on the construction of a very basic blimp unconstrained by the demands of any film company Art Department. The resulting "Santos Dumont" (G-BAWL) evolved over the next three years and in 1975 became the subject of another BBC TV film "Mr Smith's Airship." All told the pilots, Smith and Tomlinson, totted up more than 30 hours flying between them. Although the airship lived to fly again, after a publically humiliating deflation following an impact with a tree at the Old Warden Air Display in 1975, in the end the team were unable to muster sufficient funds or enthusiasm to actually complete Smith's original intention of taking the blimp to film in an exotic location. The Santos Dumont was packed into a container and, a few years later, was sent to a friend of Smiths in the USA. It never flew again.

Smith completed his involvement with ballooning by making a series of radio programmes for the BBC. In these he flew in a hot air balloon with a different expert on each flight and his listening audience were able to learn what the countryside looked like through the eyes of a Geologist, an Archaeologist, an Entomologist, etc. A final ballooning book followed in 1998, written in collaboration with Mark Wagner and appropriately the beautifully illustrated survey of the state of the art at that time is entitled simply "Ballooning" (Patrick Stephens Ltd).

In between his many contributions to the sport of ballooning Smith has been a presenter of television and radio programmes and produced many other books on other subjects. In 2012, at the age of 86 he completed his latest adventure, a crossing of the Atlantic on a raft - The An-Tiki.