

Ode to Waterloo is Christine's tribute in verse

RIMINGTON poet Mrs Christine Thistlethwaite composed a special tribute to the local jet-set pioneers for their recent reunion.

To celebrate Waterloo Mill's wartime involvement in the development of the jet engine, she wrote the tribute in verse, which she read out during the gathering at Waddington's Moorcock Inn.

We reproduce here, as a tribute to those pioneers, the 'Ode to Waterloo (1943 — 50 years on).'

The whole world knows the history of the Battle of Waterloo —

1815, when the Iron Duke showed "Boney" a thing or two!

The deeds of Wellington's "Thin Red Line" are famous in song and story —

But we'll sing of another battle which was won for Britain's glory.

The 1940s, and once again, our country was fighting a war.

Desperate days and perilous times, with the enemy at the door.

Hitler was launching his "doodlebugs" — destruction fell everywhere.

The race was on and we had to win supremacy in the air.

So came the hour — and so came the men, the brilliant, the unsung few,

To fight, like the heroes of long ago, their Battle of Waterloo.

Their theatre of war was a little grey town in the shadow of Pendle Hill

And their battleground was the cold dark heart of the disused Waterloo Mill!

The troops were draughtsmen and engineers — and the mission of this fine team?

To develop Frank Whittle's brainchild — and bring to life his dream.

Secrecy was the watchword, as the testing went ahead

Of the "Thing" (the strange mysterious "Thing") down there in the old Cotton Shed.

Roaring away for hour upon hour with a great vibrating din —

'Til the nearby butcher's window (not surprisingly!) caved in!

Cows in the pasture behind the mill came nosily poking about

And they only missed ending up as roast beef when the flames from a start-up — went out!

Sometimes the odd turbine blade sheared off — bits of metal cartwheeled here and there,

But Rover and Lucas kept racing to launch their "baby" into the air!

Yes! — the FIRST JET ENGINE! For that's what it was, (with that magical power called "THRUST"),

Was born of determination and grit — sheer hard work, and mutual trust.

W2B23 was the lusty infant's name,

assured of a great and honoured place in our nation's Hall of Fame.

And the men who brought it to noisy life in Clitheroe's Waterloo.

(The original Jet-Set, one might say!) — Their names are honoured too.

Whittle, Watson, and Barrington, the Freemans — Wilks — R.J.I.

Drinkwater, Bamford and Lombard — among others who "reached for the sky."

Then, one momentous April the first, over a five-bob meal, a group of men who were far from fools struck an historic deal.

The engine, first nurtured in Clitheroe was ready for higher things,

So off to Rolls-Royce went the "Waterloo Babe" and triumphantly found his wings.

Let's fondly look back to those challenging years — the proud people who won the great race,

Who changed for all time the concept of flight from test-bed to Infinite Space.

So now when Concorde cleaves the shining air or some low-flying plane comes screaming through.

Salute those early jet-age pioneers,

Who fought — and won — their "Battle of Waterloo."