

Hotel's tribute to "Dam Busters" mastermind

A Lake District hotel will unveil a special tribute to one of Britain's greatest ever inventors later this month as they honour a famous former guest.

A luxurious £30,000 suite will open at the Scafell Hotel in the Borrowdale Valley near Keswick - dedicated to the late Sir Barnes Wallis.

Sir Barnes, born in Ripley, Derbyshire, is famed for inventing the bouncing bomb called "Upkeep," which was immortalised in the 1951 book *The Dam Busters* and the 1954 war epic of the same name.

Both tell the story of the series of daring war-time raids by the RAF's 617 squadron, to destroy vast water supplies powering Hitler's war effort.

Unknown to many, Sir Barnes made regular sojourns to the Scafell Hotel in the Lake District during the early 1940s and was a regular guest for over 30 years.

Such was his affection for the area, Sir Barnes's headstone is made from original Lakeland slate from Honister Slate Mine; which has helped provide the special slate for the suite.

Chairman and one of the current owner's Miles Jessop met the leading aeronautical engineer when he took over the hotel in 1971, and along with co-owner (since 2004) and Managing Director Andrew Nelson have decided to honour their famous guest.

Now as part of a major £300,000 refurbishment of the hotel's 23-rooms supported by Jon Halliday from RBS/Natwest, Mr Jessop and Mr Nelson will unveil a suite dedicated to Sir Barnes. Guests will be able to learn more about the great British inventor and spend the night in the original room he stayed in - number 13.

To honour the occasion, Mr Jessop and Mr Nelson via Flt Lt Ed Stephens have linked up with the 617 squadron, based at Lossiemouth, Scotland, and are very privileged to enjoy a fly past of one and possibly two RAF Tornado GR4s.

The fly past the hotel and over Derwentwater will take place at midday on April 22nd.

As well as local dignitaries and guests, the event will be attended by representatives from the 617 Squadron Aircrew Association (Veterans) and serving RAF officers

Mr Jessop recalls how when he bought the Scafell Hotel in 1971, he met Sir Barnes and back then, the famous inventor expressed the hope that he wouldn't change it. Over the years, Sir Barnes also wrote many letters on Scafell Hotel headed notepaper.

Mr Jessop said: "*Sir Barnes and Lady Wallis had been coming to The Scafell for many years. They loved the Borrowdale Valley, and walking, often with their family over the fells. On wet*

days he would use the drawing board in his room to dabble about on engineering designs. Sir Barnes was without doubt a very great, talented, and notable man. A man whom I have been very privileged to meet and know as a guest at The Scafell. I feel that if he was to return today, he would truly appreciate these improvements would bring added comfort, and enhanced service to the already unique ambience for which The Scafell has been renowned. It was with this in mind that we felt we should proudly re-name the new suite "The Barnes Wallis Suite " to the honour and memory of a great and distinguished gentleman who had done so much for our country."

As part of the hotel's extensive research into the Barnes Wallis story with current 617 Squadron Leader Paul Crutchlow, one local legend appears to have been scotched. According to some residents of the valley, Sir Barnes got his idea for the bouncing bomb by skimming slate stones across the surface, although the history books record it differently.

Actually the idea for the bouncing bomb was developed using a "marble and washtub experiment on the terrace of his home, before using the facilities at NPL Teddington."

Mark Weir, of Honister Slate Mine, has an interest in Barnes Wallis's aeronautical exploits as a helicopter pilot. Mr Weir said: "Barnes Wallis is one of those untold stories of the Borrowdale Valley but he clearly loved the area."

"It was obviously well known that he had a strong affection for us because the mine created his headstone so it seemed fitting that we help with the suite dedicated to his memory."

Andrew and Miles from the Scafell Hotel sincerely hope this will be a wonderful day to remember the life of a great man, and to celebrate investing in a great business to ensure we do our bit and offer a great product to our Lake District visitors. We would also like to thank 617 Squadron for all its efforts in organising the fly-past, mainly Squadron Leader Paul Crutchlow who has acted as the main point of contact and Robert Owen for ensuring the accurate memory of Sir Barnes Wallis is preserved.