

# **This is the story of Kenneth Beevor.**

Resident of Kent  
Lifetime Bee Keeper.

Wartime evacuee,  
Member of the Home Guard  
Navigator in the Royal Air force  
Coppersmith and instructor in Her Majesty's Dockyard at  
Chatham.

Traveller  
Photographer  
Builder  
Businessman  
Expert in his field  
Boyfriend  
Husband  
Father  
Grandfather

**An extraordinary life and character.**

*Written and researched by his eldest daughter, Linda Brinklow  
and his wife Audrey Lydia Beevor.*

Kenneth Beevor was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1924 at Marske-on-Sea in Yorkshire.

He was the third and last child to Herbert and Lilly Beevor of Redcar.

The First World War had brought about great grief and suffering among the working people of Britain.

Herbert Beevor, along with thousands of others, had been the victim of mustard gas, and although he had returned home after the war, his lungs had been damaged.

A year and a half, after the birth of Kenneth, Herbert caught pneumonia and died.

(November 1925). His body could not fight the infection.

Lilly Beevor was left with the three children, Arthur aged 16, and Gladys aged 14 and Kenneth only 18 months old.

Her widows pension of 10 shillings a week and 5 shillings for her son Kenneth, barely kept them alive.

Arthur, a Grammar School boy, had wanted to train as a solicitor. Instead, he was sent to Scotland to become a builder's apprentice.

Gladys was left to help bring an income to the house and to care for Kenneth.

Lilly Beevor, was multi-talented and hard working, but the death of her husband Herbert, hit her badly and the task of bringing up young Kenneth, was often left to his older sister.

The family survived by a number of strategies. They moved house often.

Each time, the house was decorated and repaired and put into a better shape ready to be sold on. Lilly Beevor could sew well. She also made and sold artificial paper flowers.

- Kenneth remembers fondly his years in Yorkshire. His visits to his aunt and uncles house in Maske. (where he was born). Collecting sea coal and drift- wood to keep the house warm in winter.
- Climbing over the shale tips to seek out nuggets of coal, discarded from the mines.
- Being caught stealing eggs from a local farmer. Life was very tough.

At the end of each Redcar street, there used to be a standpipe. In those days, there was no indoor plumbing. Lilly remembered queuing for water.

Time went by and Gladys married and moved to Kent. She and Stan, her husband, bought a house in Valley View Road in Rochester. Then there was a chance for Stan to go overseas to Singapore.

He and Gladys decided to go and asked Lilly and Ken to come south and live in their house. The move was to be for three years only, this being the length of the posting to Singapore. The year was 1937. Gladys was never to return to England alive.

The move to Kent was a new start for both Beevors. Lilly did not need to work so hard. With Gladys sending cheques for the mortgage from Singapore, a roof over their heads was secured. Kenneth was sent to the local technical school where he learned geometry and technical drawing, both skills that would help him in later life. As his main subjects he took metal work, carpentry, art and printing.

When Kenneth was about twelve years old, he met Audrey Miles.

Audrey was younger than him self and very pretty.

This was to be the start of a life long friendship that grew into something much more.

Audrey also went to Fort Pitt Technical School, only she joined a few years later than Ken. Audrey went to the girl's part.

In 1939, Kenneth took his first trip abroad. It was with the school and they went to Paris for ten days, returning home on the 14<sup>th</sup> August, just days before World War Two broke out.

Fort Pitt School had been well named. Its position right above Chatham and Rochester looking out on the River Medway and the Chatham Dockyard made it a very early target for enemy attacks.

For the first seven to eight months of the war, his school was evacuated to Sittingbourne.

In order to raise money for the welfare of the evacuees, Kenneth and his schoolmates helped with the harvest, picking fruit and hops

Even in Sittingbourne, the children were not thought to be safe and so the mass evacuation of children from London and the South East began.

Kenneth was sent to Caerphilly in Wales.

Audrey Miles, his girlfriend, decided to go home to mum and dad. She was terribly home sick.

Although to many, the evacuation was traumatic, to Kenneth, it was much more like a holiday.

To start with, school was only half a day, the school building being shared with the local children.

Kenneth lived with a miner's family and in his free time he went swimming and in the evening he enjoyed dancing in the village halls. He also joined the Home Guard.

He was expected to attend chapel.

This evacuation was very short for Kenneth.

At the age of 16 and a quarter, he had passed the Dockyard entrance exam and in August 1940 began a five-year apprenticeship as a copper-smith in the Dockyard at Chatham.

1940 was the worst of years for those living in Kent. It was the year of the Battle of Britain.

Night after night and day after day, there were air battles being fought over the skies of Kent.

Bombs fell in and around the area that the family lived in. It was impossible to not be involved in the war. As a member of the A.T.C. in Rochester, one of his night time jobs was to sit on top of Rochester Cathedral roof and watch for enemy aircraft. He was also sent out on patrol to spot enemy aircraft that had been downed in the area.

One night, when he and a mate were out on such a patrol, they heard a muffled sound. They took hold of their rifles, fearful that this was indeed an enemy airman. They challenged the sound with." Halt who goes there". Then there was an almighty sound of hooves running straight at them.

In the dark, they had challenged a herd of cows.

After completing only two years of his apprenticeship, Kenneth volunteered and was accepted as a trainee fighter pilot. This was the start of eight months initial training in the UK, which included some flying experience from Derby airport.

Training pilots in England however, was very dangerous and difficult and it was decided to send many of the new recruits to Canada to train alongside of the Canadian Airforce. Even the journey to Canada was risky and he had to wait for two months (from April to June 1943), in Manchester, before a ship could be found to take them to Canada.

The ship, The Empress of Scotland, was full, with 2.000 German prisoners of war held securely below deck.

The boat landed in America. From there he travelled by train to Monkton in

New Brunswick. The journey took three days. From Newbrunswick, he was posted to Calgary in order to take his pilots licence. He failed it.

He was posted to Dewinton on a Navigator/bomb-aimer course. This time he passed.

Frequent traffic across the Atlantic meant that sending parcels home was a regular occurrence. Wartime Britain was under rationing and parcels of underclothes and silk stockings were sent home to Audrey Miles, his childhood sweetheart. After 13 months spent in Canada, in six different locations, he was finally sent back to Britain in July 1944. Again he travelled on the Empress of Scotland.

**It is strange to look back and consider the reasons behind why so much time was given to the training of pilots, and the expense of sending the men away to be trained abroad, at a time when crossing to America was very unsafe for any shipping.**

**That is, until you visit the museums commemorating the Battle of Britain, or read any of the accounts of the time. Then the real importance to Britain of her air force becomes apparent.**

**As aircrew, it was impressed upon the trainees, that they were the cream of the country. They had a vital job to do. They must be confident at all times and able to make decisions. They must be able to cope with any emergency that was thrust onto them.**

**The need for such men, becomes all too apparent, when you realise that**

**Kent and East Anglia were at the for-front of both the defence of Britain and attack.**

**The huge loss of life and the sacrifices made by Britain's airmen and women was staggering; but they were perhaps the balancing power between winning and losing the war. The fact that there were replacement air- men being trained in Canada ensured that there would be an air force, even with some of the horrendous losses of life that Britain's aircrew suffered.**

**Being away from the country to train, also meant that Kenneth outlived the war.**

**Kenneth started the war as a quiet shy and retiring boy. He returned from training a confident young man.**

Even with the war still in progress, returning to England did bring about some kinds of celebration.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1944 Kenneth married his childhood sweetheart Audrey Miles.

His presents to his new bride included a watch and a wedding ring; from Canada ,of course.

Preparations for the wedding were far from romantic.

The Borstal branch of the A.R.Ps (Dads Army to you) had just disbanded, since the main war effort had turned towards the Far East.

Borstal Village Hall, where the reception was to be held, had to be scrubbed from top to bottom. Theirs was the first wedding to be held there.

Then there was rationing. All food was still rationed.

So the guests were asked, to each contribute to the food.

Then there was the bridegroom.

Ken had been posted to Stranraer in Scotland .He was flying Ansons and doing costal command work over the Irish Sea and Outer Hebrides. He was also instructing new crews. A minimum amount of leave was granted to him; just enough time to allow him to get married.

With all of the excitement, it was not surprising that on his wedding night, Kenneth Beevor, the dashing flying hero, was taken ill.

The couple spent their wedding night at Audrey's parent's house in Mount Road Rochester. Ken spent most of the night down the garden on the toilet.(The house being an old Victorian terraced house without indoor sanitation)

In the morning, Dr.Gross was sent for.

Their honey moon, was a quick weekend together at Tring in Buckinghamshire, the following spring .(1945)

Even then, Ken had to leave his wife in the middle of the night to fly, with a group of Wellington Bombers, over France and the Channel Islands, dropping leaflets.

By September 1945 Ken was based at Stradishall Suffolk.  
He was flying in Lancaster Bombers.  
The bomber crew were given leave but it was hardly the leave  
that they had dreamed of.  
Kenneth, along with the rest of the crew, had developed mumps.  
His leave was spent in Chatham Naval Hospital.

After that, married life became a little less tense and really quite  
enjoyable.

Disbanded from the R.A.F. Kenneth had to complete his  
Dockyard apprenticeship as a coppersmith.  
Chatham Dockyard would not have been a fit place at the time to  
receive apprentices and so he was sent to Weeton, Blackpool.  
Here at last was a chance to move away from home; to be  
together as a couple.

*Well ....one room in a farm labourer's cottage, with no flushing  
toilet and cooking on a black leaded stove.*

On the other hand, there were the pictures to go to once a week  
(Cinema to you). These were held on the camp. There were a few  
Whist Drives, but most of all there were the weekly visits to  
Blackpool. For one shilling and sixpence each, Kenneth and  
Audrey could go to the pictures, to the theatre, to the zoo, to the  
roof gardens and to dance in the famous Blackpool Tower Ball  
Room to a first class band.

After this they could dine on fish and chips.

On some Sunday evenings, they would go back into Blackpool to  
the Tower Ball Room to hear Reginald Dixon or Edna Baga play  
the organ. Reginald Dixon, in his day, being almost as famous as  
the Glen Miller Band.

Both Ken and Audrey loved to dance and music was a great  
spirit reviver after the war



They also visited Beth and Billie Bennet, relatives of their next-door neighbours at Mount Road, Borstal.

Billie ran the local dog track and they could spend time watching the hound's race.

After the wartime depravations, this must have been an exciting time.

Time came round quickly and Ken was posted, first to Devon, and then onto Suffolk.

Audrey, being three months pregnant by now, was sent back home to live with mum and dad. This was not a happy home coming, but with Ken away, living in a two up two down house was bearable.

With money in the bank, it should have been possible to buy a house of her own, but Audrey's mother persuaded her that this was not a good idea at the time.

No doubt she wanted to share in the upbringing of the Grandchild.

Whilst Grandma Miles was prepared to do the washing, cooking and cleaning, she was not prepared to allow Ken and Audrey any privacy.

The front room was strictly out of bounds, even to them. Every one had to use the back room.

The birth of the baby was full of dramatic circumstances.

There was no room at the hospital in Rochester. All of the hospitals were full of injured and dying people from the war. No one in the family had a car and so Audrey had to take herself on several busses across Kent to a place called Langton Green, which is near to Tunbridge Wells.

This time, Ken was able to be around for his wife. He was on "Demob Leave" and managed to get to Langton Green to greet the tiny baby after she had emerged into the world. They called the baby Linda, which means beautiful. After all the trials of their courtship and marriage, this must have been a beautiful time for the young couple.

The beauty of the moment was not to last.  
Four people and a baby living in such a tiny house was not ideal.  
The winter of 1946/47 went down in the history books as one of great severity.  
Audrey had very little idea of how to care for a baby.  
She had very little idea of how to be a wife.  
Kenneth was miserable in their cramped accommodation.  
Childcare experts at the time advocated the need for babies to have fresh air.  
The baby was given fresh air.  
The baby was also given frostbite on her nose.  
The cold winter, the cramped house, too many people giving advice, a father who had returned from an exciting life to a dull and difficult life, the situation was terrible.

In stepped Grandmother Beevor.  
It was she who rescued the situation.  
With her expertise in buying and selling houses, she secured for them a property in Weller Avenue, just far enough away from the Miles household to give the young couple the start that they needed.  
The cost of the house was £900.00. They paid £600.00 in cash and bought what furniture they could afford with the help of tokens.  
They also bought a hive of bees for £11.00.  
This was the beginning of the peace.