

EULOGY TO MR KEN DEACON
GIVEN AT HIS FUNERAL BY REV. VINCENT CANNING - 19TH JANUARY 2006

The Tribute

Ken Deacon was, and is, truly a legend in South Benfleet. He has had such a long and enriching life that it is difficult to sum up his 94 years of life on a few sides of paper.

He was born in Sutton, Surrey in 1911. He moved to the Southend area when he was 4 years old, living at various times in Southchurch and Leigh, then to Hadleigh. At age 19, his father had an accident which changed his personality a few years later. This parted Ken's parents and so Ken and his mum went to live in Clacton for a few years.

They moved back to the south east Essex area in the 1930s and rented a house in Kents Hill Road. There they lived through the 2nd World War until his mum passed away in 1968 and right up until Ken's passing on the 24th December 2005.

During all these years in South Benfleet, Ken was to establish himself as a real citizen of the area. He even wrote an extract on 'Old Benfleet', which is kept in the South Benfleet Library to this day. But the library became his life and in the 1940s he became a librarian in South Benfleet until he retired in the mid 1970s. He worked at South Benfleet library for the majority of his working life and was a well-known character as well as a respected librarian. There he formed friendships with colleagues. He had a kind nature and a good sense of humour, perfect for the job. Being widely read, he could advise many of the readers and their families about the various novelists and their works and writings. He also helped assist many of the children with their homework projects. Ken would always attempt the Sunday Times crossword each week and would take it into the library to share and compare his answers with others who did likewise.

He also worked summer evenings at the Benfleet tennis courts collecting the tennis court fees. He used to regularly organise weekend coach trips for people working at the library and locally. He would be navigator as well as courier. He knew which places to visit, where to get a good cream tea and also which conveniences to stop at en-route. This he considered quite important.

He loved his walks in Benfleet, frequently walking from his house to Canvey Bridge and back and to the outdoor Bowls club, where he loved to spend many a summer afternoon listening to the sound of bowling balls softly clunking each other. Ken would be affectionately known by members of the Bowls club over many years, who would often take him out a cup of tea and cake whilst he was watching. But he was totally 'tee-total' there, even though he might like the odd glass of whisky on more private occasions! The shopkeepers in the Benfleet High Road would all come to know Ken. He would love his kipper and Dover Sole from the Fishmongers and loved to walk the extra distance to his favourite Travel Agent to book his coach day trips and holidays to Austria, Switzerland and Germany. He also became a regular at local jumble sales!

He remembers seeing so much in the Benfleet area in his 70 or so years there, from the shooting down of the first Zeppelin, the Depression of the 30s, the dogfights in the sky in the Second World War, the expansion of the Benfleet area in the 1960s and 70s, to the knocking down of the old South Benfleet library and building of a new one in the mid 1990s.

Ken got to know his neighbours well and one in particular, Jean, has helped and stood by Ken's side right up to his passing. Jean, her husband Ray, son Ray and daughter Debby have always seen Ken as more than just the man next door. Ken would go on walks with young Ray and Debby and impart a knowledge and discipline that they would appreciate in years to come. Jean would always be there for Ken, particularly in the latter years by regularly getting in the shopping, seeing that the house was ok and having a good old chit chat, as well as listen to his moans!. The local supermarket, whenever they saw Jean, would always rush to stock up on Ken's favourite meal – Shepherds Pie! The value of the shares in that company would subsequently rocket! Jean was always kind to Ken, even in the toughest of times. Although Ken was a very independent man, he did trust in Jean and to just know she was there for anything. He will always be eternally grateful to Jean for this.

In 1971 he befriended Celia, a library assistant who sometimes got posted to work at South Benfleet library from Hadleigh. The combination of Ken and Celia would add fun to Ken's time in the library environment. But he had to be wary of his superior though, Miss Nugent, who was Hattie Jacques 'matron' equivalent in the library network. Pranks with Celia and mistakes by him were not tolerated, she like Queen Victoria was 'not amused'!

Celia's mum, Enid, father Maurice and brothers Vernon, Russell and Victor would soon become friends of Ken. He would often go round to visit the family in Lime Avenue, Leigh and spent many a Christmas with them. Although in his late teens, Victor, the youngest, would cycle from Leigh to pop round to Ken's to play cards, do fortunes and generally have a chit chat. It would be in 1986 that Ken and Victor started a 20 year long period of going out in the car. They went everywhere together. Using Mr Deacon's experiences with his coach tours and going out for rides with his dad in the Model-T Ford, Ken and Victor toured virtually every village in Essex, plus many more in Suffolk, Kent, Norfolk and Sussex. Also extending to places beyond, in particular Devon and even further afield into Wales, Scotland, France and Belgium. Ken loved steam engines and so would go with Victor on the paddle steamer "Waverley" and the steam trains at Bressingham Gardens in Norfolk. But you name it, they went there..... from tea tours to car auctions, classic car shows to B & Q's ! 2 years ago, a highlight for Ken was going inside a genuine Second World War U-Boat on a trip to Germany with Victor. He surprised himself by being able to climb amongst the torpedo tubes and squeeze through each section of the submarine at the grand old age of 92! And at 81, he experienced flying in a light Cessna aeroplane for the first time.

Through knowing Victor, Ken got to meet Victor's friends who became Ken's friends too. They were not only from home, but from around the world from countries such as Australia, Canada, India, Japan and Indonesia. They would all remark on how Ken was a good old-fashioned example of a true British gentleman. He will be missed by these people.

It is largely thanks to Ken that after 17 years of tea tours and acquiring so much touring experience, Victor would take up a career as a tour Coach Driver. Victor is eternally grateful to Ken ("Mr Deacon" as he, his family and friends would call him!) and is now, like Ken, able to pass on and help people to appreciate the history, architecture and countryside of Britain, Essex in particular. But Ken has also imparted to him an old-fashioned Britishness, unique to Ken's and pre-1960s generations, which has become rare these days.

Right until the end, Jean and Victor would be Ken's closest friends and link with the outside world. Ken used to say how his tours out with Victor and Jean's help, combined to prolong his life over the last couple of decades. They and his other friends such as Mrs Lunt at the South Benfleet Library, the South Benfleet Bowls club, the shopkeepers in the Benfleet High Road and others who knew KEN DEACON whether they be users of the library in the years he was there or others who would see him going on his regular walks in South Benfleet, will all feel a part of Benfleet has gone.

Being the independent man he was, Ken will have been pleased to remain living at home to the very end and was doubtless grateful to the carers, in particular, Patrick.

However, the memory of Ken will live long in the people of Benfleet and afar. Gone in person, but forever here in spirit through his kindness and gentle nature to others.

MAY HE BE BLESSED.