

## Thomas James Beckett, BEM

Dates 27/03/1908 - 2001



Thomas and Marjorie on their wedding day 1945

Notes written by Thomas James Beckett, possibly around the time his wife, Marjorie was writing her life in February 1985, as had been requested of them.

I was born Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March 1908 at Mill Road Hospital, Liverpool. That was the day a horse, Rubio won the Grand National. My parents were working class, they had 7 children. Nellie, Tommy, Bella, Billy, Jimmy, John and Bob in that order. There was no child allowance in those days, so money was a bit tight.

My mother's name was Catherine O'Hara before she married my father. She had 2 brothers, James and John and a sister called Maggie or Ethel.

My father's name was George. He had three sisters, Nellie, Harriet and Maude.

Of my grandparents, I only remembered my father's mother, she came to live with us during the World War I while my father was away in the army. Life for me during the first world war was pretty tough. I was six when it started and 10 when it finished. During that time, the school I went to was Westminster Road and was used as a hospital, so we had only part time education. I spent a lot of time queuing up for potatoes etc and any food that was going. In 1918 there was a very bad flu and hundreds of people died of it. I can still remember walking about with a cloth over my mouth to keep the germs out.

The war ended November 1918. My father was demobbed 1919, things were still very scarce. Then in 1920, we got our school back, and I started full schooling at the age of 12, and I got a job as a butcher's boy taking out orders Friday nights and Saturdays. I was paid 2/6 (two shillings and six pence) for the job but had to give it to my mother. Things were very tight at home.

I joined a church band; they taught us music and lent us instruments. I enjoyed that. I played the cornet, but I had to go out of the house on the back fields to practice. I left school at 14. My parents wanted me to go to sea. They got me fixed up as a deck boy. I went on a six month trip. I can't say I liked it. I wanted to join an army band. They would not have that, but they did let me join the Territorial Army as a band boy. I thought I was a great cornet player until I joined that band, but I did enjoy myself in the band. I then started work at the A.T.M. where I served my apprenticeship. Money was not a lot 7/6 (seven and six pence) a week to start.

After about two years there, me and 3 other boys started to go camping over the weekend. We were still camping up until the outbreak of the war in 1939.

At home, things were getting better. Billy and Jimmy were working, and I was now keeping myself but still had to pay for my keep but managed to save a bit for holidays. It was to the Isle of Man each year. Life was going along ok until 1939, when war broke out.

Because I was in the Territorials, I was called up three days before the war was declared. Living in a school, sleeping on the floor, life was grim. I was sent to Aldershot, into Barracks. At least they did have beds. Not long there, then off to France. The Phoney War they called it. I was classified as a Tradesman; it meant more money.

Then, May 1940 the Phoney War ended, it was real fighting. The Germans had hundreds of planes and tanks. The unit I was in had 28 tanks. We were chased night and day, people being killed or wounded, it was a shambles. We were then back to Dunkirk, but before we reached Dunkirk I was wounded in the thigh and shoulder. Boats were coming to pick us up. I struggled to get on a boat, by now I was feeling sorry for myself, but I was on a boat sailing for England. The boat was the King Orry, one of the Isle of Man ships which I travelled on.



I finished up at Leatherhead Blind School Hospital where I was operated on to take the shrapnel out of my shoulder but they left the shrapnel in my thigh. It is still there.

After hospital I was sent to the Royal Military College, from there posted to Dover, building up guns along the coast against invasion. The Battle of Britain was going on overhead, shells were coming from French coast and bombs dropping. It was pretty tough going, but luck was with me.

Things started getting quieter about 1944. I was by now a Staff Sergeant R.E.M.E. In 1943, we had a party in the Sergeant's Mess and nurses from local hospital came. I dated one Marjorie Bains; things went very well and 31<sup>st</sup> July 1945 we were married.

I was demobbed Nov 1945, went back to Liverpool with Marjorie, and started work. The weather up in Liverpool did not suit Marjorie and I did not like working back up there. I had promised Marge's parents if Marge did not like it in Liverpool we would come back to Kent, which we did. I got a job at Mackeson's Brewery in Hythe. I had to work hard but finally was Chief Engineer.

Our daughters Gillian were born in 1946 and Christine in 1950.

Beckett Thomas James- Div. R.E.M.E Rank ART.S/Sgt. 3763743

Recommended by Major H.H. Grossman. Award B.E.M.

Action for which commended

He has been in Dover nearly three years, and for the last year has been responsible for the efficient maintenance of B.L. 8" Equipment.

This is modern complicated equipment requiring a high degree of skill for its maintenance.

This S/Sgt has always by his keenness, and untiring application to his job set a splendid example to the R.E.M.E. team working under him. He is extremely proud of his equipment, a spirit he has striven to imbue in others, R.E.M.E. and R.A. alike.

The R.A. know him for his real worth and realise what an important part he has played in the efficient maintenance of their equipment and all-including the Regimental Commander speak very high of him.

As a soldier he is also a pattern, and I am proud to have him in my unit. By his devotion to duty, he is unquestionably one of the outstanding Artificers who has been directly responsible for the praise that has, from time to time, been given by R.A. Commanders to this Unit.



BL 8-inch

Army Form W.202	
Brigade	Division R.E.M.E. Corps
Schedule No. (From last issue)	Unit H.Q. C.D.M.U.
Rank and Army or Personal No. ART. S/Sgt. 3763743	Brigade
Name BECKETT THOMAS JAMES	Division
	Army R.E.
Action for which commended (The nature of which need be stated)	
He has been in Dover nearly three years, and for the last year has been responsible for the efficient maintenance of B.L. 8" Equipment. This is modern complicated equipment requiring a high degree of skill for its maintenance. This S/Sgt. has always by his keenness and untiring application to his job set a splendid example to the R.E.M.E. team working under him. He is extremely proud of his equipment, a spirit he has striven to imbue in others, R.E.M.E. and R.A. alike. The R.A. know him for his real worth, and realise what an important part he has played in the efficient maintenance of their equipment and all - including the Regimental Commander - speak very highly of him.	
Recommended by MAJOR H.H. GROSSMAN	Holder's Name B.E.M.
P.T.O.	
As a soldier he is also a pattern, and I am proud to have him in my unit. By his devotion to duty he is unquestionably one of the outstanding Artificers who has been directly responsible for the praise that has, from time to time, been given by R.A. Commanders to this unit.	
Recommended by MAJOR H.H. GROSSMAN O.G. H.Q. C.D.M.U.	
RECOMMENDED BY C. B. [Signature]	
RECOMMENDED BY C. B. [Signature] D.D.M.S., T.O., 315-ARMY.	
If a casualty or under, fill in date.	
Name of Casualty	Date
Killed in action	
Died of Wounds	
Died	
Missing	
Prisoner of War	
5 MAR 1941	





BUCKINGHAM PALACE

I greatly regret that I am unable to give you personally the award which you have so well earned

I now send it to you with my congratulations and my best wishes for your future happiness.

*George R.I.*

Staff Sergeant Thomas J. Beckett,  
29th August, 1946.

Telegraphic Address :  
Seco.

HEADQUARTERS,  
SOUTH EASTERN COMMAND,  
HOME FORCES.

PERSONAL &  
CONFIDENTIAL.

7 June, 1944.

Dear *Sergeant*

I send you my sincere congratulations on the B.E.M. which has been awarded to you in the Birthday Honours List. I am glad that your keenness and untiring application to duty in the maintenance of B.L.8" Equipment at Dover, and the good example you have set to the R.E.M.E. team working under you, have been recognized.

Yours *Truly*  
*W. Schmitz*

D.D.M.E.,  
Headquarters,  
South Eastern Army,  
Reigate,  
Surrey.

11 June, 44.

*My dear Beckett,*

Most hearty congratulations on your B.E.M.

I am indeed glad that the fine work which is being carried out by R.E.M.E. on the Coast Defences has been recognised in this way, and in particular your own loyal and efficient service.

Yours *sincerely*

*C Bullard*

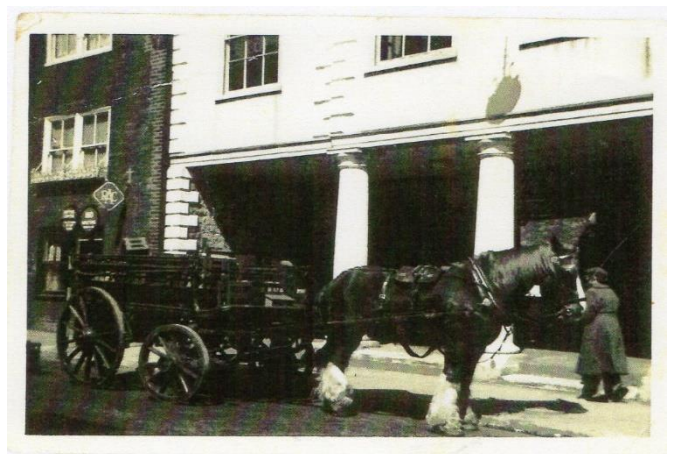
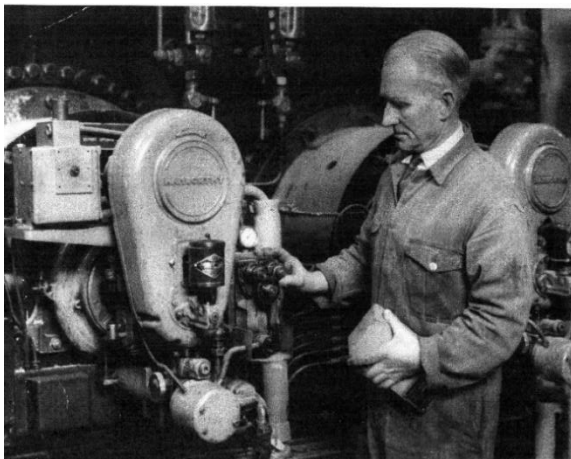






### Mackeson Brewery

*"I got a job at Mackeson's Brewery in Hythe. I had to work hard but finally was Chief Engineer."*



Brewery horse "McArthur outside Hythe Town Hall