



SILVER CITY ASSOCIATION

CITIZEN'S PROFILE – KEN HONEY

As a wartime schoolboy all that I dreamt about was to be a pilot when I left school. Many others had the same dream. There were strong influences at that time, for example a chap who had left school a year or two before came back and beat the place up in a Hurricane. I was naive enough to be disappointed when the war was over as I knew that learning to fly would be even more difficult. It was.

The route from a South Devon farm in 1946 to Silver City in 1956 was varied and often difficult. The first move was to join B.O.A.C as an apprentice in 1946. Conscriptio into the RAF came in 1948 when I had high hopes of pilot training but I failed the course. I returned to BOAC in 1950 when at that time the corporation were running pilots courses for their redundant Navigators. I joined this scheme with my progress depending on how much money I could earn. The best paid job for me was to fly as a Steward whilst studying for a Commercial Pilot's Licence.

Fortunately I gained enough experience to be employed by Silver City. 1956 was an exciting time to join as the Car Ferry was expanding, there were brand new Mk 32's around and the morale was high. The Car Ferry struck me as a very slick operation that worked well. Thanks in particular to the hard graft by the loaders. My training on the Bristol Freighter was excellent; some very patient training captains gave me a good introduction to the aircraft. This aircraft had proven itself and was the only one able to do the job at that time. However I thought Mr Bristol should have tried harder during its development stage. The engines were wonderful, the flying controls left a great deal to be desired and the original air bag brakes in my opinion were just plain dangerous. Needless to say I did not express these views to the leadership.

In 1957 the opportunity for a two year posting to Tripoli was on offer and I took it. Beryl and I knew Libya as we had spent our honeymoon there in 1955. First a very rushed type rating on the DC-3 and off we went. Type ratings could be obtained very quickly in the fifties. I also flew the DC-2.

Libya had been independent for five years but there was still a very strong Italian presence.

Col Gaddafi was an unknown fifteen year old living in Sebha at that time but changes were already taking place and the pre-war Italian colonial state environment was soon to change for ever. To me the desert flying was fascinating, we flew over the whole of Libya by the never to be repeated system of dead reckoning navigation.

Tripoli was an attractive place to live and we enjoyed our stay there. After a boat trip to Sicily Beryl and I drove our Volkswagen home which was a fitting end to the posting.

Back on the Car Ferry all seemed very settled with no changes forecast and I had nightmares that I would be stuck on Freighters and DC-3's for the rest of my life.

Changes did take place and I received my command in 1962. Then in 1966 a Line training job led to a training captain appointment that lasted twenty years until retirement. On my days off I instructed at the Cinque Ports Flying Club at Lympne and now with two small sons there was plenty to do. The arrival of the Carvair opened another interesting phase with longer flights in to Europe. Ferryfield was buzzing again.

On the twenty third of December 1968 I flew the Freighter for the last time, the end of my stay at Lydd. Even though I did not play cricket or went fishing never again would I work in such a friendly environment where everyone knew each other.

We were all in BUA/BAF at this time and my next posting was to the 1-11 fleet at Gatwick. Right up to date this time with a modern aircraft.

Shortly after joining the fleet I was approached to take over the BUA flying group at Shoreham - "Mercury". This group grew rapidly with the help of a number of training captains, all of us giving free instruction. When BCAL was formed Sir Adam Thomson was keen that the expansion continued and guaranteed me to the bank to purchase aircraft. The only way to control this monster was to form a limited company and hire instructors - this was done. Many of the students and instructors of that time are now senior captains in B.A. including the first female Concorde first officer.

In 1978 BCAL started a scheduled service between Gatwick and Birmingham with two new Navajo aircraft. I was made managing captain of this fleet which meant hiring and training the pilots and starting the scheduled flights. Needless to say overnight I had a lot of friends in the light aviation world as a pilot's job with BCAL was greatly sought after.

In 1984 BCAL bought two Airbus A310 aircraft and I was lucky enough to get a training post on the aircraft so off to school again this time in Toulouse. This aircraft was state of the art and the world's first wide body with a two man crew.

I enjoyed my flying career, there were some downs but mostly ups and if anyone is still reading this I retired in May 1986 and have lived in Cornwall for twenty years.

