

# In the war room

The best-selling military historian and author of 'Stalingrad', Antony Beevor, invites York Membery into his headquarters

**Y**ou don't mind if I smoke?" asks the historian Antony Beevor, as he leads me up the stairs of his home to his first-floor office. "I gave up for a while but I find it helps with my writing. I try to wait until my 11 o'clock coffee before my first cigarette of the day."

It's a damp Monday morning at the handsome three-storey, late-Victorian terraced house near Parsons Green, south-west London, where Beevor, 64, lives with his wife, the biographer Artemis Cooper, who's just hurrying out of the door. "I bought the house after leaving the army in 1970, and shared it with friends, before marrying Artemis in 1986," says Beevor.

The author's sales – including his "triangle of second world war books" (acclaimed histories of the D-Day campaign, and the battles for Stalingrad and Berlin) – are "fast approaching the 4.5m mark", he notes with quiet satisfaction. Sales of *Stalingrad* (1998) alone stand at around 2m.

Books are scattered in the kitchen, on the landing and in the office. "It goes with the territory," observes Beevor, with a puff on his cigarette. "Besides, I'm currently working on a new history of the 1939-1945 war – a terrifyingly large project, far bigger than anything I've ever done, which looks like it's going to be around 900 pages long – so I need to make sure I've got the right books to hand."

The historian, who's dressed casually in an olive green jumper and faded jeans, adds wryly: "My wife thinks the publisher should give a roll of Tubigrip [a wrist-support bandage] away with the book." This is a reference to the fact that, at 300,000 words, it is guaranteed to be hefty.

The house has a comfortable, lived-in look. Beevor, his wife and two children – one of whom is at university, the other studying for A-levels – divide their time between London and a 300-year-old home in Kent.

Yellow curtains frame the windows of the ground floor drawing room. This space, with its family heirlooms, antiques from around the world and ancestral portraits against pale blue wallpaper, is the most striking. But the real life of the house revolves around the kitchen, where Beevor makes me a coffee, and the "his and hers" offices on the first-floor.

"I've only ever known one couple who were able to share an office. But we work just down the corridor from each other, so if one of us is going to get a coffee..."

Beevor, whose father was a British army officer, went to one of the country's most exclusive schools, Winchester. He joined



Bookish Antony Beevor in his study at his home near Parsons Green, south-west London, which he bought in 1970

Daniel Jones

the military and served in the 11th Hussars, a cavalry regiment based in Germany.

His five-year tenure was largely uneventful. He made senior lieutenant but never got to see action. The highlight of his time in the services was being taught by the military historian John Keegan at Sandhurst, the British army's officer training college.

"He was a very stimulating teacher – constantly challenging ideas – but the greatest debt I owe him is the idea of looking at war from the bottom up rather than the top down," says Beevor. "Earlier generations of writers have tended to describe warfare as a game of chess, rather than taking into account all the chaos and the fear, and this greatly influenced me."

After leaving the army, he wrote a critically acclaimed history of the Spanish civil war (1982). However, it was his story of the epic clash at Stalingrad – arguably the second world war's turning point – that made his name as a military historian.

Four years later came *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*, another critical and commercial success – although his recounting of the mass rapes committed by the Red Army in Germany sparked controversy in Russia.

## MY FAVOURITE THINGS

### Ancestral keepsakes

The historian is very fond of a portrait of his grandmother, Lina Waterfield, which hangs in the sitting room. "She was a formidable grande



dame who had little time for children," he says. "I remember her only too well. This oil sketch by Derek Hill was done in Italy in 1956 and captures her very well."

He is also proud of a magnificent north German marquetry desk in walnut dating back to the 18th century, pictured left.

"It has been in the family for a long time, and was used by five ancestors to write

their books," he says. Finally, there is "the strangely beautiful" hand made in gilded lead – a paperweight – which fascinated him as a child, above. "It was a present from the great French philosopher Victor Cousin to my great-great-grandmother, Lucie Duff Gordon, just before his death in 1867," he says. "Sadly, I have no idea of its significance."

## WELCOME TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF LUXURY & STYLE

Barbados Living at its Finest

Occupying a prime location, with spectacular views of Barbados' Platinum coast alongside a championship golf course, Moonshine Ridge is one of Apes Hill Club's most prestigious neighbourhoods.

For more information on this exclusive leisure and lifestyle community and the stunning luxury homes at Moonshine Ridge, please contact:

Tel: +1 246 432 6769  
info@moonshinebarbados.com  
www.moonshinebarbados.com



Winner of 4 Residential Property Awards including Best International Development



BREATHTAKING



EXCLUSIVE



COMMUNITY



MOONSHINE RIDGE

APES HILL CLUB - BARBADOS



UK: Knight Frank 020 7629 8171  
james.price@knightfrank.com



## Cut the cost of currency transfers on your overseas property

By using Caxton FX Mr and Mrs Gilfan saved over €5,000 when renovating their villa in Tuscany.



"Caxton FX were friendly, efficient and knowledgeable - we're very satisfied customers"

Lizzie Gilfan

Mr and Mrs Gilfan bought their villa in the Tuscan Hills five years ago with the intention of retiring there. With the final stage of their renovation underway the Gilfans needed to send a large sum of money to their contractors.

"We talked to another couple who had purchased in Italy and they told us about Caxton FX" explained Mr Gilfan. "We didn't use a specialist foreign exchange service when we bought - which was a real oversight."

"Our bank charged uncompetitive rates on the actual exchange and then charged transfer and receiving fees on top. It was all very unsatisfactory, but at the time we didn't know there was a better solution available." With no intention of wasting money that's vital for their renovations, the

Gilfans signed up for an account with Caxton FX.

"We have our own account manager who we can call to discuss the current strength of the euro. Plus Caxton send a daily email about currency markets which helps to keep us up to date." The Gilfans set up a target rate with Caxton FX when making their large foreign exchange transfer, and they are now happier knowing they received a great deal: "Not only was the service excellent but Caxton got us over €5,000 more than the bank could have. Obviously the currency markets are always fluctuating, and you have to take this into account when exchanging money from one country to another - but with Caxton FX we know we're not being charged any extra costs. Caxton FX have been incredibly informative and helpful, we'd definitely recommend them to others buying abroad."

To discuss your foreign exchange needs contact Caxton FX on 0845 303 8389 or from outside the UK, +44 (0)20 7201 0550.  
www.caxtonfx.com/mr

Money travels better with  
**CAXTONfx**

Caxton FX is Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Services Authority (No 431844)

4 Grosvenor Place, London, SW1X 7HJ