

A SERVICE TO CELEBRATE THE LIFE OF



ALAN WARREN
WHITBREAD

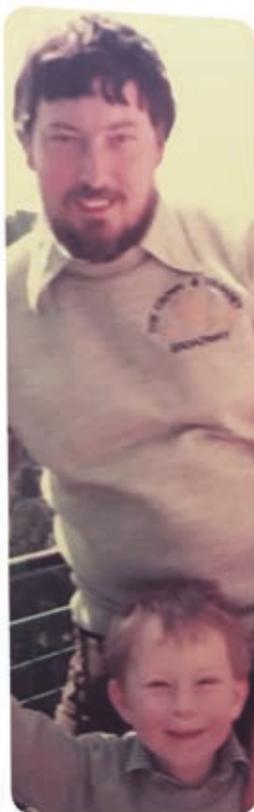
2nd January 1946 ~ 4th March 2020

The Vale Crematorium
Friday 3rd April 2020 at 3.00 pm

Funeral Celebrant – Ruth Jewell M.I.C.F.







ENTRANCE MUSIC

Nimrod from *Enigma Variations*

Elgar

WELCOME

JULIE'S MEMORIES OF ALAN

delivered by Julie

Being in the right place at the right time is always a good thing, wouldn't you say?

Well in 2004 I certainly was.

My friend Angela and I came to Sidmouth for the day to experience the festival and of course we ended up by going to the Chippy!

Whilst in the the queue we were saying what a great atmosphere there was, with the singing and the dancing, and a random chap said, 'If it's singing that you want, you need to go to The Anchor Pub.'

So in 2005 I did just that and what met me was a man in a hat, a mop of grey hair, a painted toenail in style of the St George flag and a booming voice.

Ten years then passed and each year he was there on the bench, that toenail so beautiful painted.

2015 - though Alan had a bit more to say to me and we all went The Bedford pub for a debrief (drink) after the hectic and successful shanty night led by Mike Gibson. It was here we got talking, made arrangements to meet at Whitby Festival and from there my whirlwind life with Alan Whitbread began.

Those who knew me already knew I led a busy life, up and down motorways seeing family and friends, foreign holidays and trips to Ireland. How was I going to fit in a relationship with someone 70 miles away?

Alan was very persistent. He sensed before me that we could make it work, and he was so right.

With a bit of juggling our calendars, we sorted out our social life and I then fitted in work and everything else around when Alan was on a trip with Ragged Robin or with his mates Dave and Frank.

There was no stopping this man. Each day he was on fire with endless possibilities of where we could go and at the end of the day, quite early in our relationship, he would mention about getting the most out of every day and that is how we led our lives.

This man was right up my street - he sang, he played his beloved concertina, he enjoyed life to the full, had great mates, enjoyed a laugh and a joke, had his beloved campervan and soon managed to convert me, which was his challenge, from lager to beer.

We first went away to Liverpool and stayed at the youth hostel - a first for me. Alan was performing at the Shanty festival, I'd never been to one of those before either.

Soon came other new experiences. Alcester Court Leet, never heard of that and here Alan was in his element, dressed up in all his robes and his frilly shirt - his love of enjoying tasting ale to see if was fit for consumption.

Pancake races where the school kids raced down the mainstream and the pubs also provided great atmosphere. Twice a year street markets where the town became even more alive.

My introduction to Camra and real ale at Stratford Beer Festival and being given a job by John to promote Camra, and I did manage to interest a few new members.

In time I met Shakespeare Morris, a team which made Alan so proud to be able to play for and heard about Ragged Robin, a bunch of Morris dancers from up north who travelled the world as they danced, which was a definite hit for Alan.

Later in the year there was Apple Day, Mummers Plays and St Nicolas's Night - all new experiences for me.

The Mop Fair came to Alcester too. Now, I had heard of that and experienced this but not since a child.

So:

Monday would be Morris practice.

Tuesday was Walker's lunch. Great! We just turned up - we didn't even have to do the walk!

Wednesday - Allotment club - but oh no, we don't talk of allotments.

Thursday night was The Fleece where we spent many a happy Thursday evenings, again with new friends, music and song, a jovial landlord and a roaring fire with decent beer.

Friday Drinkers Night - this was in the Three Tuns - run by Mandy and her wonderfully friendly staff.

Saturday/Sunday would be festivals or away in the campervan having a good time.

Not only did Alan sing shanties alone, but he was also part of a shanty group, Sharp As Razors. So here too I was introduced to a new bunch of festival friends where they sang and played.

As this wasn't enough, Alan would then say 'Well I think it's time for a holiday. Where shall we go?' And within the hour our flights and Airbnb would be booked. No tour guides with umbrellas to follow for us!

Our last holiday was in Asia, and although in the last year of Alan's life wasn't maybe as exciting as previous years, he did have a few new experiences which he enjoyed.

One was when staying up with his grandchildren, Fallon and Rowan, where he was introduced to the ice lolly. You will never probably know how much that changed your Gramps' life. Each day after our meal I would say 'Would you like a lolly?' 'Oh, yes please!' He would say. Always room for a lolly! So the months ahead I would try and find different lollies for him to enjoy, so thanks for that.

Also, another day in Autumn where we went to Derbyshire and watched Demelza begin and end her fell run. That was a proud moment for Alan.

We made a brief visit to Warwick Festival with Sharp As Razors and to sit on the bench at Sidmouth Festival and Falmouth Shanty Festival on the stage and Harwich Festival in October.

Lately I introduced Alan to McDonald's milkshake and their latest ice cream offer: Raspberry McFluffy which he enjoyed so much. The first time he suggested going again after our valentine trip away, but this time he preferred it without the chocolate.

We had a great life, cut short maybe, but wow did we pack a lot in that 4.5 years together.

Yes, Alan had a huge personality, kind, generous, knowledgeable and the patience of a saint when it came to my navigational skills (which are none!).

And it's thanks to Alan I have met all these lovely people who are taking part in their own way in this service at home. I am overwhelmed by the kindness and support you have all given me, not just in the UK, but from all over the world, and I thank you for that. And to my Mansfield buddies who I know will too be with me in spirit.

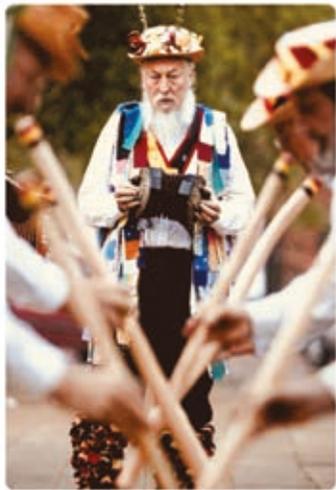
Alan, you will always have a strong place in my heart. I thank you for the great time we had, the fabulous memories and end by saying those famous words said by you:

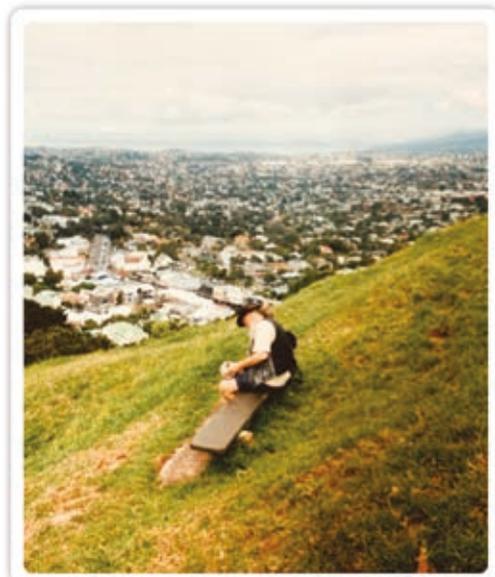
'Happy days, keep smiling.'

MUSIC

Fiddler's Green on melodeon
played by Simon







My Dad
delivered by Simon Whitbread

The world can be unfair at times. It was unfair to my dad with his liver cirrhosis and it has been unkind to him today, on what should have been a true celebration of his life.

So I will save much of what I want to say for next year, when we will meet in happy times on March 27th at The Fleece, and have proper occasion to raise a glass and sing a song for my dad.

So today I don't need to tell you all anything more than I loved my dad and I will miss him dearly. He has gone from this world far too soon.

I will miss our conversations, our catch ups, talking about life, Morris, politics, his travels and generally setting the world right.

He always had time for me. He was my confidant, my friend and my sounding board for all of my life's most important decisions.

All of you knew Alan Whitbread well, but only I really knew him as my dad. My dad had this confident, and some may say loud, personality, but with me he never was. He was curious, loving and supportive. He would occasionally start singing spontaneously in public, knowing full well it would embarrass me, but I can forgive him for that. His most precious gift to me was the knowledge that I was loved and that he was always there to support me. Even in the most difficult of situations he always put me first. Knowing that somebody is there to pick you up, love, listen to you without judgment and support you unconditionally is incredible. He gave me opportunities and support that he couldn't have dreamed of growing up in his small maisonette in Brixton. I was, and am, truly thankful to him and if I can aim to do the same with my own children, his beloved grandchildren, Fallon and Rowan, I won't go far wrong.

For those watching today and for those reading this, the number of messages of condolence that I have received is pretty overwhelming to be honest. Thank you all so much, it means the world to me, it really does.

To Julie, who has cared for my dad during his most difficult time of life, you allowed him to continue as long as possible to be the living the life that he wanted to live, 100mph, full throttle! As I've said before, I'll never truly be able to repay for caring for my dad in the way that you did. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To Demelza, my children, Fallon and Rowan and also to my mum. You have been my support and I love you all dearly. Thank you.

My Dad, 'The Shanty Man', has left us one song too soon. He won't be coming back on for an encore, but we will all remember his performance for the rest of our lives.

Love you, Dad.











MUSIC

Blessed Quietness
sung by Alan Whitbread

COMMITAL

CLOSING WORDS

EXIT MUSIC

New World Symphony, 2nd Movement, Part 1
Dvořák

MY LIFE by Simon Whitbread and Alan Whitbread

In later 2019, when it became apparent to my dad that his time was limited, he wrote down an autobiography of his life. Unfortunately from the middle of 2019, my dad's eloquence for pros, for which he was well known, had started to leave him. We therefore worked on it a bit together and the final version below is a combination of mine and my dad's words. It is written from my perspective, but by far the majority is directly taken from my dad's thoughts and direction.

My dad was born into post-war Britain, his parents living in a rented maisonette in Brixton. With them both having junior clerical jobs, he certainly wasn't brought into privilege. He always said though that he inherited his mum's brain and dad's sense of humour. His very early years, as he remembers them, were pretty uneventful, outside occasional trips to the seaside and the holiday camps. Although early on in his life he could have been accused of not being a quick learner, as the scars on both his thumbnails came from trapping his hand in a tube door not once, but twice!

With some helpful cramming from his uncle, he passed the 11+ to go to Henry Thornton's School, which was the local grammar school. Probably the defining event in my dad's early life was that he suffered from two bouts of osteomyelitis (a bone disease) over an 18 month period, at the age of 12. The scar on his arm, from the operations that he had, stayed with him all his life. Due to the fear of the disease returning, my dad wasn't allowed to play sports or really take part in any physical activity. As I think he was probably competitive even at an early age, he learned to play chess and became very good, winning the London Junior Chess Championship and being ranked in the top five in the country for his age. Early on in his chess career, he built up a rivalry with Raymond Keene who went on to become just the second person from the UK to be awarded the title of 'GrandMaster'. I have received a lovely tribute from Battersea Chess Club, remembering my dad's playing in the early 60s, including 1963 where he shared the club championship with Raymond.

Chess continued to be an important part of my dad's life and he spent nine years, from 1977 to 1986, as president of Stratford Chess Club, including in 1981 where he won all three club competitions: Lightning Championship, the Knock Out Cup and Senior Club Championship. While the mid-80s chess didn't play such a significant role in his life, in the last few years I think his interest peaked again, as both Fallon and Rowan (his beloved grandchildren) would also want to play against him, including a memorable game on a life-size board while we were holidaying in Geneva a couple of years ago.

My dad's mathematical mind, which he claimed was developed from his mum, provided him with a fairly obvious choice for university and he passed Imperial College's entrance exam. He was awarded a BSc and an ARCS (Associateship of the Royal College of Science) in mathematics. Certainly he was the first person from his family to go to university and get a degree. After Imperial and before attending Essex University for his Masters degree in Statistics, he married his childhood sweetheart, Susan, my mum.

He was always immensely proud of his Masters degree in statistics. His thesis was on Queue Theory, which I have tried to read a couple of times and being perfectly honest, failed at really understanding. Considering I also have a Masters degree in Data Communications, which included some basic Queue Theory, I think shows how advanced the stuff my dad was doing 40 years previously. He remained a member of the The Royal Statistical Society during his professional life. When asked about his qualifications or job, many times he would proudly reply that he was a 'statistician'. I remember that he told me a few times that the job he wanted to do was being involved in metrology and analysis of weather patterns. He was never happier than when messing about with numbers, for example doing his many sudokus.

After Essex University, my dad worked for a public sector management consultancy in Reading, living in Goring and Woodley near Reading, before moving to Warwickshire County Council Social Services Department as a senior researcher in 1974. It was now that he and my mum moved to Holbrook Road, a good-sized four bedroomed detached house with a double garage and double driveway in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was always amazed at the contrast to his early years in Brixton.

During the late 70s and early 80s, my dad was involved in a number of clubs and societies.

There was his commitment to the Stratford Chess Club that I've spoken about, but he was also along with the Rev David Capron and Bob MacVie, a founding member and the first Chair of the Stratford branch of Camra (Campaign for Real Ale), which was set up in 1981. My dad was a member of Camra for well over 40 years. Later in life he was a regular contributor and enjoyed writing articles about ale songs in over 30 editions for the 'Shakes-Beer', the beer magazine of the Stratford Camra branch.

He also played a lot of Bridge, which he was taught by his dad. With his long-term playing partner, Peter Lake, he played in national competitions and for the West Midlands. As part of the Stratford Bridge Club, he was involved in bringing the actor and famous bridge player Omar Sharif to Stratford for an instructional and a series of games, of which I am sure that he won a few games.

In 1980, I was born, but this didn't stop my parents doing the things they loved. In my opinion, the one true lifelong passion of my dad's was travel. Initially this was around Europe, for example; I was only four years old when I went to the Greek Island for the third time! I have been lucky enough to go on many holidays with my dad, to wonderful parts of the world: Tanzania, Egypt, Australia, Turkey, Greece, Lapland, Yugoslavia to name a few. A particular highlight for us both was the holiday that my dad and I went on our own to Tanzania in 1998 which included us climbing Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain at 19,340ft. Neither of us made it to very top, my dad made it to Kibo Hut at 15,400ft and myself to The Hans Meyer Cave at 16,900ft, with the effects of altitude finally getting us both.

In 1984, my dad joined Shakespeare Morris Men. That was a brilliant decision and from it he developed his rest-of-life interest in English folk traditions. He became Captain of Mummers, doing the job for 30 years. In 2017, he was awarded honorary life membership of the club, for his sterling service as Captain of Mummers. As my Mum had yoga on Mondays, I was given little choice but to join the team as well. Undoubtedly, Morris gave me and my dad our defining shared interest. It was our touchstone so to speak and we would spend hours talking about the finer points of dancing and playing.

Professionally over the years my dad got promoted to Assistant Director at Warwickshire Social Services, i.e. joint No. 3 in a department of 2000 staff and had 100 non-social people working for him. By the end of the 80s, my mum and dad had split up, but in the early 1990's he found love again and married Brenda.

During the 90s he worked hard and completed his MBA from Aston University, which I remember him working many hours over the weekends to complete. He continued to travel extensively, with trips to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Australia amongst others. It was in the mid to late 90s that he discovered how much he enjoyed the unaccompanied singing at folk festivals and started to join in the choruses.

He joined the Chameleonic MM and for over 20 years danced and played for them at international folk festivals in almost every country in Europe, as well as Ukraine, USA and Inner Mongolia. Chameleonic MM was organised by Dave Brewster from Thaxted MM, with whom he got very friendly with over the years. A shared enjoyment of train journeys meant that they went on many self-organised three week train tours around Japan a couple of times, India, Andalusian Spain and London to Montenegro.

Due to our time spent in Devon at our holiday home in Appledore, he also danced for Tarka MM from Bideford, going on two trips to China and dancing on a remote section of the Great Wall. We spent some good times in 'Muffy Cottage' and my dad always enjoyed drinking a pint in the evening in one of the pubs overlooking the confluence of The Taw and The Torridge. By the end of the 90s he also led his first song at the Middle Bar of the Anchor Inn at Sidmouth Folk Festival, which he describes as petrifying, but was encouraged by Chris Gorniak who became a very good mate.

My dad was lucky and retired from work aged 53 with cash compensation and a good pension. 'Lucky me,' he always said, but in many ways this was when the Alan Whitbread that many of you know really got into gear, so to speak. I use that phrase on purpose as one of my dad's hidden passions was Formula 1. He would record every single race of the season and go out of his way to avoid the results, so that he could watch the race "as live". We twice went to British GP to watch it live. As for his retirement, in my dad's own words: "I decided I'd use my retirement years to pursue my interest in foreign travel and the English Folk traditions. I also started to learn the English concertina initially with daily practice; what a joy that was."

My dad practiced long and hard on his concertina, spending hours in the front office of Holbrook Road. He threw himself totally into learning to accompany his own singing, improving his singing and was incredibly proud when he had improved enough to play for Shakespeare MM. He played for me to dance a jig at my wedding and it was lovely when I got the opportunity to dance to his playing. His two concertinas he described as his pride and joy, being a Lachenal Tenor/Treble Edeophone with metal ends dated c1920 and a Wheatstone Baritone with wooden end dated c1903. Sadly, my dad's wholehearted involvement in the Folk world meant that Brenda and his priorities diverged and they separated in the early 2000s.

Another life changing event happened in the early 2000s when he was diagnosed with diabetes, not a surprise as both his parents had it, but he managed to change his diet to keep it under control with pills. He soon met Sandy Waller who had similar interests in folk music and festivals. They spent many evenings at sessions together and enjoyed travel and festivals. At home he contented to develop his voice and enjoyed the singing mentoring he received from Chris Gorniak (RIP) whom he much missed. He joined the Shellback Chorus and performed shanties and sea songs at lots of UK festivals and on tours to USA, Netherlands and New Zealand. It was joining the Shellback's that my dad really caught the performing bug. After Chris's death in 2005, he took over as MC of the Sidmouth's Doom, Gloom and Despondency Competition, which he ran for 14 years.

Another health set back unfortunately reared its head. After a holiday in India he discovered that he had spherocytosis, a blood condition which early on was happily manageable.

However over the last few years this caused more issues for him and he had to return to hospital many times for blood transfusions, as this was one of the main reasons for his lack of energy in later years. While Holbrook Road was my childhood home and of great pride to my dad, he was rattling around in that big old house all on his own. Spending nearly all his time in just the kitchen or the front office. If he did venture into the lounge to watch TV, it would inevitably be an Agatha Christie type detective TV show. My dad would quite happily watch Miss Marple, Poirot, Morse, Lewis etc night after night. The ironic thing about this was, unlike the rest of his life where his memory and attention to detail were superlative, his ability to be surprised by the same episode that he watch only two weeks earlier was incredible! But in 2007 he downsized from Holbrook Road and moved to Alcester and into Newport Drive. Moving to Alcester was absolutely the right decision for my dad, as it was a lovely town and he meet many new good friends.

As with everything in his life, my dad threw himself into Alcester life. He became Ale Taster for The Alcester Court Leet, which has a proud history dating back to c1287, and enjoying a fun seven years in the role. He had two cracking trips with Frank Maher to Mexico, Guatemala and Belize and to Argentina, Montevideo, the Falklands and around Cape Horn to Chile. Sailing around Cape Horn was a particular highlight and I know that it was something that he considered a real life highlight. After 10 years or so enjoying festivals and travelling with Sandy, their priorities diverged and they split up, with my dad in particular wanting to travel and be on the move constantly. It became a bit of a running joke that his home was nothing more than a pit-stop during the summer months, as he travelled from festival to festival in his trusty campervan.

To say that he really enjoyed becoming a solo shanty singer with many annual performances in Liverpool, Falmouth, Teignmouth, St Ives, Harwich, Whitby, Scarborough and Gloucester, would be an understatement. My dad loved performing and being on stage. He performed sea shanties in Australia, Netherlands, USA, New Zealand and Japan. While he enjoyed the performance of singing, he also loved the history of the songs and telling his audiences the origins of the songs he sang. On his last of three trips to Japan, he gave a lecture/workshop on sea shanties at Kyoto Doshisha University.

By the early 2010s, along with three singing mates (Vaughan Hully, Des Patalong and Clive Brooks) he set up and enjoyed singing with Sharp As Razors as a shanty group with plenty of harmonies. With my dad as a member, Sharp as Razors recorded two albums. But in my eyes anyway, I am most proud of the two solo albums that my dad recorded (Soaring Enchanted and White Stocking Day). I don't think my dad would have ever imagined back in his office at Shire Hall in Warwick, dressed in his grey suit and tie, that one day he would be able to say that he was a fully fledged recording artist, with fans all over the world. He really was an 'International Shanty Man'.

Along with his great friends, John Gorton and Jenny Harper, my dad also set up Ragged Robin Morris Team to dance abroad and further his love of travelling. He really enjoyed playing for Ragged Robin in Alaska, Poland, France, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Certainly over the last few years, a particular feature of his many foreign trips would be the daily diaries that he wrote out on his trusty iPhone. My dad was reasonably tech savvy and always liked to have the latest Apple phone. It got to the point that his life was on his iPhone, with all the information that he would ever need to navigate the world. Prior to the days of smart phones, however, my dad would keep the smallest diary that you could imagine, all written in pencil, with notes and events and information all written in nearly illegible writing, but that made perfect sense to him.

From his time singing in the Middle Bar at Sidmouth, he met his partner, Julie Taylor. They enjoyed some great foreign trips, including to Iceland, Montenegro, Vietnam, Cambodia, USA, Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. Julie and my dad also had good times at numerous folk festivals throughout the UK, continuing to get to festivals even with my dad's declining health.

This being a biography of my dad wouldn't be complete without talking about my dad's hats. He had a hat for every occasion, bought from all over the world. Top hats, flat caps, panamas, fedoras, deerstalkers, bush hats, straw hats and even one or two Morris hats. A favourite hat of my dad's is probably a hat that most people won't have seen or even been told about. It's a traditional bowler hat that my dad had no intention of buying at all when he walked into the little antique shop in Chipping Norton. But the shopkeeper so skilfully sold it to my dad, that if I remember he parted with a lot more money than he had intended, and I'm not even sure that he ever really wore it. But he kept it safe and sound for nearly 25 years, as the shopkeeper that sold it to him was Ronnie Barker.

My dad had a life full of unique experiences and he attacked it with a vigour few will ever match. He travelled a long and winding way from 25A, Glenelg Road, Brixton.

But I'll leave the final words my dad as he wrote in late 2019:

"I was so sad that my health started to go downhill, with foot ulcers, a cracked hip and finally liver disease (Where did that come from? The medics are not sure).

I was so, so lucky to be with Julie who has brilliantly cared for and supported me.

Overall, therefore, I've been very lucky to have had such a fulfilling life.

*Many, many thanks to all my friends in Alcester,
CAMRA, Morris, mummers, folk singing and music.*

My particular thanks must go to the ladies in my life, for all the good times we enjoyed together: Susan, Brenda, Sandy and, in the last few years, Julie. Much pride and more thanks must go to my dear son Simon, his lovely wife Demelza, as well as my beautiful grandchildren Fallon and Rowan. I hope all of you whom I leave behind have a fulfilling life, with only a few downs and a multitude of enjoyable ups! Pity I'll miss my wake!

Live life to the full and stay healthy! Keep smiling. I always have! Alan."





Alan Whitbread's Wake

Saturday 27th March 2021

at The Fleece Inn, Bretforton, Worcestershire

A grand party to celebrate his amazing life.

Singing and tunes, and maybe even some dancing.

More formal details to be provided in the coming months.

Donations may be made in Alan's memory online at
<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/alanwhitbread>
on behalf of the
British Liver Trust.