

Alan McKinna

A Winchelsea Life Well Lived

Alan and Mal first appeared in Winchelsea in the 1980s, part-time at first, renting in North Street, and then full-time in Friars Road. *The Little House* attracted Ford Madox Ford fans who stared in at the windows and were disappointed to discover that there was no shrine indoors for them to visit. Alan didn't keep a shrine but he did collect the novels.

His literary interests made him one of the founder-members of Winchelsea Literary Society, not on the committee to start with but eventually taking on the key role of secretary, responsible for ensuring that the programme progressed smoothly.

He also - though most people didn't realise it - provided the wine that got each meeting off to such a convivial start. And it was at a Literary Society meeting that he made his final public appearance. It was the evening before he died and he read out, on Zoom, a piece by Alan Bennett. The speaking voices of the two Alans are uncannily alike. He took an active interest in so many things. Though he didn't claim to be a gardener, he would always make sure he had something to bring to a Garden Society show - a hydrangea head perhaps, or an exuberant rose. He joined the Art Group and painted watercolour landscapes. He went to Pilates and kept his aging muscles on the move.

More seriously, he was a great supporter of the Memorial Hospital, and he was a trustee of ARRCC, the Rye-based project that unlocked the creativity of people with physical and sensory disabilities. Alan was as disappointed as all of us when financial pressures led the charity to close in 2018. For several years he organised Carols Round the Town in the run-up to Christmas, fundraising for *Shelter*.

Alan was invited to join Winchelsea Corporation as a freeman, and in due course became deputy mayor, then, in 2007, mayor. One of my first memories as a new resident is of his hilarious Second Wednesday talk on the ups and downs of the mayoral year.

Wearing the chain of office, he beams out at us from the cover of today's order of service. It was a role he thoroughly enjoyed, ably assisted by Mal. He continued to support his successors afterwards, and engaged enthusiastically with the Cinque Ports Mayors Association.

Above all it is Alan's Christianity that is fundamental to understanding the person he was. From a Congregationalist background, he was a committed member of the church here in Winchelsea, as he had been in Dulwich before. He was a member of the PCC, he led our prayers in worship.

You can see the outworking of his faith in everything he undertook, in church and out. He was an encourager: he could persuade people to take things on that they didn't realise they were capable of. He was an enabler and a facilitator. When the life of the community got fractious, his instinct was to try and make peace.

And he was attentive to people. Several of you have told me stories of times when Alan held on to something you had told him and followed it up with a thoughtful invitation or an appropriate gift. He was enormously generous. He donated to projects and causes of all sorts and supported individuals as well - all very quietly and without fanfare. If anyone was ill or in trouble, he would see what he could do to help.

Alan was a father-figure in the town. He invariably acted to support and not to criticise. This surely was the outworking of his faith.

If ten years ago, or even five, we had gathered here to pay our respects to a leading member of the community, it would have been Alan speaking at this point. He would have led our tributes as someone who knew well and cared deeply about the person he was celebrating. He would certainly have been praying for them.

As one of you said to me, 'Alan's life preaches itself'. It certainly does. He was an exceptional man and an exceptional leader in this town. We are all richer for having known him.

David Page
7th July 2021