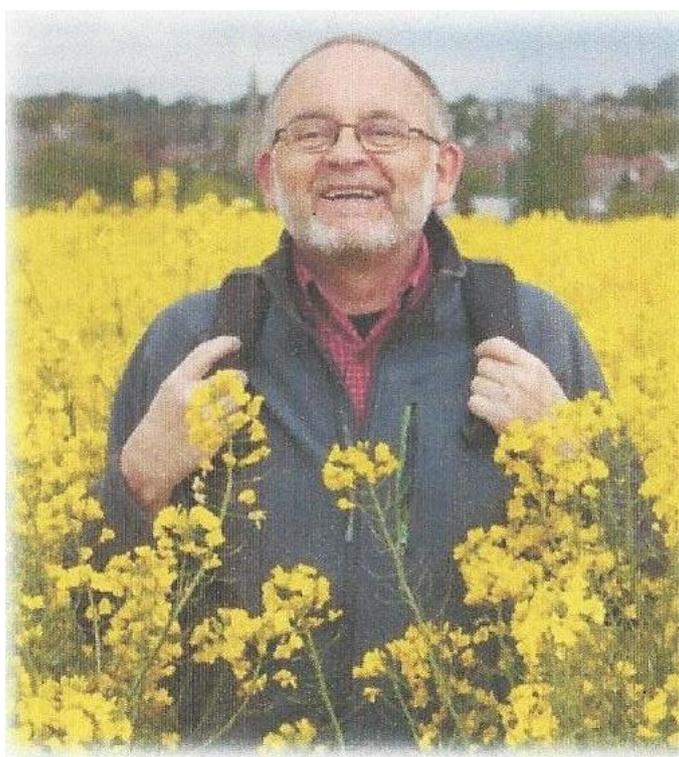


A celebration of the life of Alan Duggan

23 July 1949 – 29 October 2018

19 November 2018, Gedling Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Tribute for Alan Duggan - 23.7.1949 - 29.10.2018

The second child of Ronnie and Nellie Duggan, Alan was born on July 23rd 1949, and grew up in Newcastle's West End alongside his older brother, Joe. It was a modest upbringing, and Alan often spoke about not having a bath in the house until he was eleven, but what the family lacked in amenities, they more than made up for in love. As was typical of working class areas at the time, the local mothers took joint responsibility for the care of the children, so Alan grew up knowing all of his neighbours, engendering a sense of community which - along with the pride in his Geordie heritage - stayed with him for life. Like everyone else in the city, he supported Newcastle United. He was a season ticket holder at St. James's Park for many years and after moving away, he continued to support them from afar. Alan was a very bright child who achieved the highest A level grades in his year at Rutherford Grammar School. He accepted a place at Hull University where - on his first day - he met Pete Bussey, who has remained a close friend ever since and who will be speaking later. Influenced by the inequalities he had witnessed, Alan's innate sense of fairness and justice impacted on every aspect of his behaviour, from the subjects he studied, to the people he mixed with. He was passionate about his politics and his principles, and remained so throughout his life.

Returning to his home city after university, Alan spent around 18 months working as a store porter in Fenwicks before applying to the Civil Service and - after an exhaustive selection process - being accepted for a role as a trainee tax inspector. The initial training was in the North East, but he then moved to London to be based at Somerset House. Although he was a newcomer, Alan already knew other people who lived in the city, so he had no trouble finding accommodation, and was soon enjoying a good social life. It was at a party in early 1981 that Alan met Louise, and in October of the same year, they were married. Through Louise, Alan discovered much more of London than he had previously known but just as he began to appreciate what the capital had to offer, he was offered a promotion to District Inspector in Nottingham. In his early thirties at the time, Alan's arrival caused quite a stir amongst his much older colleagues, but he threw himself into the challenges of the work, and they soon realised how capable he was. Dealing with the tax affairs of large multi-national corporations, Alan enjoyed pitting his wits against them, ensuring that they paid whatever was due. His firmly held principles of fairness would not be compromised.

Alan and Louise chose Bingham as their home and within a few years of moving, they had become parents to Alice, and then to Ben. Looking back on their childhood, Alice and Ben describe Alan as a loving, supportive and encouraging dad who got involved with everything they did; a good example being his stint as coach for Ben's football team. It wasn't something that he especially wanted to do, but in the absence of any other volunteers, Alan was determined that the youngsters would not miss out. Whether it was proof reading essays or taxiing them to their various sporting endeavours, Alan was always happy to help out, although Alice claims that his motivation for taking her ice skating on Sunday mornings was the MacDonald's breakfast he treated himself to. Alan was well qualified to help Alice and Ben with their essays, because he had a passion for literature and was a prolific reader. He kept abreast of national and international news, and felt deeply about any injustice in the world. As many of you may have witnessed, Alan had an expressive way of voicing his views!

Alan stayed working for HMRC throughout his career, gradually reducing his hours before retiring in his early 60s. It was a demanding job with ever increasing pressures, so it was fortunate that Alan had interests outside of work to help him relax. Food was a passion, and he loved to experiment with new recipes and ingredients. And of course, once the meals were prepared, he took great pleasure in sharing them with family and friends. Many have commented that Alan would always answer the door with a big smile and a hug, and warmly welcome guests into his home, whilst often wearing an apron. He continued to take an interest in the fortunes of Newcastle United, but after moving to Nottinghamshire, it was cricket rather

than football that became his favourite sport to watch live, with regular visits to Trent Bridge for Twenty20, One Day Internationals and Test matches with Malcolm, Richard, and a host of other friends. Holidays were also important to Alan. He had fond childhood memories of visiting the coastal town of Warkworth with his parents, and that area became a favourite destination for him and Louise to take their children. They also did house swaps with American families, and when Ben was studying in America, Alan and Louise took the opportunity to visit him several times. More recently, Dan and Izzy were warmly welcomed into the family, as partners of Alice and Ben, and along with Alan and Louise enjoyed some wonderful European city breaks which - unsurprisingly - were always very food focused.

Alan greatly looked forward to finishing his working career and retirement clearly suited him well. He was extremely happy and his great big smile since retirement has been commented on by many friends reminiscing about him. He enjoyed meeting ex-colleagues, Pat, Roy, John and Carol for curry nights, and he became a National Trust volunteer at the Southwell Workhouse. He was initially a room guide, and then began scripting and taking part in the performances which were put on for visitors, all of which he loved, eventually travelling all over the local area in his pauper costume to deliver performances to community groups. He also joined a creative writing group and put on occasional public performances with some of his fellow members. To anyone who knew Alan, he appeared fit and well, with no sign of any underlying health problems. He was a regular at the gym and loved to walk with Richard and John - especially if there happened to be a nice pub at the end of the route. To celebrate turning 60, Alan returned to the north east with his good friend, Pete, to walk Hadrian's Wall. As I mentioned earlier, the two of them had been friends for many years, and Pete will now share some of his memories.....

Alan and I met one afternoon in early October 1967, we were both starting at Hull University, and had been allocated rooms in a private house in Cottingham, just outside Hull. I can remember seeing him through the window as I walked up the path. Each of us was leaving home for the first time. Each of us was, for the other, the first student we met.

We'd clearly been paired because we shared a subject in our choice of degrees - sociology; Alan's other subject was politics, mine philosophy. What could not have been known was that we also had a lot in common in our backgrounds.

Born just a few days apart, four years after the war, to working class families, Alan in Newcastle, myself in Birmingham, we were two of the lucky baby boomers being given a chance, through rigorous secondary education and free university places, no fees and a living grant, that our parents never dreamed of.

Alan was definitely impelled by the sense of this privilege he was experiencing, but he had the added impetus of coming from an area which had experienced real deprivation and in response had developed a fierce pride and inter-dependence a strong sense of community and a tradition of left wing politics to which Alan subscribed all his life.

He was the first Geordie I'd met, and in the early weeks our conversations included a lot of nodding from me as I tried to work out what he was saying. In later years his accent mellowed to a soft but unmistakable burr, but it was an indicator that Alan never forgot where he came from.

It was an exciting time to be at university; even in unfashionable Hull we had Philip Larkin, one of the country's great writers, and in freshers week we were stunned by an eloquent talk from student newspaper editor Chris Mullen, later to become one of the truly great north eastern Labour MPs. In a time of great change when so much seemed to be up for grabs, everything was endlessly discussed. Alan's sharp intelligence was already apparent but he didn't get carried away with new ideas. He had a steady, rational and judicious approach - another lifelong trait. University undoubtedly expanded Alan's horizons, giving him a sense of what life could be, without really changing his core values.

By our final year I had fallen in love and married as soon as I graduated, with Alan as my best man. It's an interesting test of friendship when you meet someone more important than the friend. Alan's reaction was to become Margaret's good friend as well: he never wanted exclusivity in friendship, his way was always inclusive.

At this point it would have been easy to lose touch. I'd decided to train as a teacher and headed, just by chance, to Newcastle to train. Alan planned to become an FE lecturer and re-located to Bolton. Very quickly he realised he'd made a mistake, and came back to his parents' house in Newcastle, so we found ourselves together again.

It was a difficult year for both of us: Margaret and I felt isolated in a place where we didn't know anyone and Alan, back at his parents' and working as a porter in Fenwick's department store, was uncertain about his future. Fortuitously we were both there to support each other.

We were living in Whitley Bay, the closest seaside town to Newcastle, which Alan had known as a child. He came to see us most Saturdays, we would go out for a few pints of Exhibition, Alan would sleep on our settee and get the train back home in the morning. What must have been a very humdrum job for him was enlivened by a fellow porter who was also a people's poet. Alan would regale us with his verses, only one of which I can remember, and it started, 'There's blue tits in our garden, the wife won't wear a bra'. By the end of the year Alan had decided to join the Inland Revenue and to say a final goodbye to his childhood home.

Fast forward a few years: I'm teaching, we have a young family, Alan is in London, a successful and affluent young tax inspector, still unattached. On his regular visits he is re-invented as Uncle Al, the kiddies pal (I think that was his phrase). He came bearing gifts, for the adults, good wine, at a time when all we could afford was cheap supermarket plonk, for the children - books. Always well selected, those books are still on our shelves, and those of our children, and are still read to a second generation, our grandchildren.

Books were a huge part of Alan's life. He was the best read person I've ever known. His tastes were eclectic, from obscure 18th century novelists like Tobias Smollet through the classics to the popular: my eldest son recalls, as a teenager, being guided by Alan through 1950s and 60s American science fiction. He read quickly, but his recall was prodigious; he could summarise books he's read decades ago. Reading wasn't an escape to him, it was a constant re-immersion into the great stream of human life and ideas, an enrichment. And being fascinated with writing techniques led him to one of his most fulfilling retirement activities, the writing group which afforded him so much pleasure.

Romance took a little time to arrive in Alan's life, but when he met and quickly wed Louise, it was a delight to see him so happy and fulfilled, and when Alice and Ben were born he became a proud and devoted father. Our friendship had survived several transformations from that of young, unattached students to now include wives and children on both sides. As the years went by and our parental responsibilities diminished to some extent, there was more time for ourselves again. As we were both approaching 60, Alan asked me if I'd like to celebrate the occasion by doing the Hadrian's Wall walk with him. I agreed. He organised the whole thing: the cottage we stayed in, maps, routes, daily start and finish places. Louise and Margaret were our back up team dropping us off and picking us up each day, giving us food and encouragement. Alan and I spent more time together than we had in forty years whilst walking the wild and beautiful Northumbrian countryside. We ended in Wallsend, Newcastle, with a celebratory night out. It seemed a fitting conclusion for someone who was always proud to be known as a Geordie boy.

Holidaying with Alan was wonderfully easy: basically all you had to do was turn up: he did all the researching, organisation and booking, with countless references to Trip Advisor.

Quite recently we were together in Marrakesh, in one of the indoor markets. Margaret and Louise were walking together a few yards ahead. As Alan and I passed a stall an enterprising young man called out, 'Viagra, sirs'. We exchanged glances and caught up with the ladies. 'God that made me feel old', I said. 'Made you feel old', replied Margaret. 'They saw us first and must have thought those two old fellows obviously need all the help they can get.'

Alan's political hackles were raised many times over recent years, no more so than on the night of the Brexit result. We were dining out somewhere close to Bingham, and were right next to a table of very loud and exultant Brexiteers. I could feel Alan's irritation rising steadily, until there was a lull in celebrations and he raised his voice for all to hear. 'Well, we've got nothing to worry about now, have we. We've got £350 million a week for the NHS!' His political convictions and the strength with which he held them didn't change at all.

All of us in this room have known Alan in some way, and I suspect that the Alan I knew was pretty much the same as the Alan you knew too. His personality wasn't a performance, he had about him a solidity, a reliability. You knew where you were with him. Shortly after the shock of hearing of his death, it came to me that a pillar of my life had been taken away.

The flood of cards that were sent to Louise, Alice and Ben were a testament to how he was regarded; people wrote not just condolences but their thoughts about him, and the same words kept recurring: calm, kind, intelligent, funny, warm, caring.

I will remember Alan as a man of principle. By hard work and intelligence he had risen in society and had provided amply for his family, but he was not at all materialistic, nor was he driven by ego. He really did believe in and value the many, not the few. Most of all, for myself and my family, he was the truest and most loyal of friends.