

OBITUARIES

ALAN JOHN DELL (1926–2012)

Born on the 9th December 1926 in Harrow, Alan gained a scholarship to a central London school and went with it when it was evacuated to Somerset during the war. He left school at 14 and went to work in banking in Harrow as a junior clerk. However when he reached his ‘call-up’ age in 1944, he was selected by ballot to be a ‘Bevin Boy’, to serve in coal mines in South Wales. This was a challenging experience for a boy with Alan’s background, and his article about this period in his life makes fascinating reading: hopefully it will be published in a national local history journal. He always expressed regret that the ‘Bevin Boys’ were a lost generation, but was very proud when in recent years their existence was finally recognised and acknowledged. Sadly, working in the mines affected his health in later life.

It was not until 1948 that he was able to return from South Wales and resume his banking career. He worked in the Westminster Bank for 37 years, continuing to live in the London area, and retreating at weekends and holidays to his cottage in Somerset. He used to travel to and from the cottage using train and initially scooter, progressing to a full-blown motorbike! Car driving came late in life to Alan but he never enjoyed it as much as his bike.

In 1975 he moved to Buckinghamshire, for which he was to develop a deep affection. His first house was in Askett and he then moved to Stoke Mandeville in 1979. He left the Westminster Bank at this point to work for a local pharmaceutical company in their finance division. After retirement he was able to pursue his great loves of genealogy, family and local history.

Alan joined the Bucks Archaeological Society in 1981 and volunteered to help in the BAS Library with Lorna Head, Hon. Archivist/Librarian in the 1980s, until he became progressively ill and had to have heart surgery. Fortunately the procedure was successful and he made a full recovery. After the re-opening of the Museum in 1995, following major renovation, Alan returned to give intermittent assistance to Lorna with indexing of archive

material. When Lorna retired in 1998 from the Hon. Archivist post, and I added her job to mine as Hon. Librarian, Alan initially said that he would stay to assist me for a short time until I could recruit someone else. That short time became 17 years! He came to the Library every Wednesday and acted as my ‘right-hand man’. Amongst many other things he dealt with processing book orders, photocopying articles on request and accessioning new stock. However, his greatest contributions were helping with answering enquiries, using his extensive historical knowledge, and assisting me to enter details of our archive collection onto our computer database.

He wrote papers for Records of Buckinghamshire, based on meticulous research, on topics covering the Swing Riots, Lady Catherine Davall and the Goodalls of Dinton Hall, the latter published posthumously. His work on the collected letters of John Dell, John Wilkes’s agent, was published as a Bucks Paper in 2008. He served on the Council of the Society from 1987–2001. He successfully ran the summer excursions for BAS, with Tony Balfour, from 1999–2005. In 2007 he was appointed a Vice President in recognition of his services to the Society.

Alan joined the Society of Genealogists as a volunteer, and for many years each Friday he would be off on the train to London. At the Society he first helped with sorting and cataloguing a huge collection of documents: later, using his knowledge of the collection, he was able to assist the full-time staff on research for members. His extensive contribution was recognised in 1999 when he was appointed a Fellow of the Society.

Motivated by his practical background in banking Alan wrote “May the voters be free and the representatives Independent”, a biographical sketch of William Rickford MP (1768–1854). In 1992 he collaborated with Richard Pearce on “Stoke Mandeville: where there’s more crows than folks”. The authors felt that as there was so little documented history of the village it was time to set the record straight.

In 1992 he took on the role of editor of the Bucks Family History Society quarterly magazine, and continued in that role until 1998. In 1994 he won the prestigious national Elizabeth Simpson Award for the best family history magazine. He later took on the role of Chairman of the Society from 1994–1996. He collaborated with Jeremy Gibson to produce a number of ‘Gibson Guides’: these were handbooks for family, local and academic historians. In 2004 the Society recognised the enormous contribution that he had made to local family history by appointing him President, following in the footsteps of the Bishop of Oxford and Sir Timothy Raison MP.

Alan had many other interests and commitments. An early great interest was in acting, treading the boards in the Harrow area and in later years as an active member of the U3A play reading

circles. He was a keen walker from early days: in Bucks he was involved in the local Stoke Mandeville walking group and, on his retirement, he joined the U3A walking group. He enjoyed foreign travel and in particular the trips run by Ted Bull for BAS.

Over the last five years Alan’s health began to fail, with a return of his heart and chest condition. He became progressively more frail, but maintained his commitment to Bucks FHS and to us. He continued to come to the Library until a few weeks before his death.

Alan was a gentle man in every sense of the word, always courteous, with great knowledge and a lively sense of humour. He is greatly missed.

Diana Gulland

MAJOR J.G.B. CHESTER, MC DL (1925–2011)

Greville Chester, who joined the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society in 1964, was head of the family which had built Chicheley Hall near Newport Pagnell in the early 18th century. He never lived in the house himself, as it was let to tenants and then in 1952 sold to Earl Beatty, but he lived and farmed in the area. He served as an officer in the Coldstream Guards from 1944 to 1965, retiring with the rank of major, and always retained his dignified military bearing. He was awarded the Military Cross in 1945 for gallant and distinguished service in North-West Europe. In 1976 he was commissioned as a Deputy Lieutenant for Buckinghamshire.

He inherited a fine collection of estate records covering the 15th–20th centuries, which were used by the late A.C. Chibnall in his books *Sherington* (1965) and *Beyond Sherington* (1979). Major Chester deposited much of his archive in the Buckinghamshire Record Office in 1964, with subsequent additions in 1969, 1974 and 1982. An active member of the Buckinghamshire Record

Society, which he joined in 1969, he was elected to its Executive Committee in 1970 and became Chairman in 1998, chairing meetings with his customary courtesy and kindness. In 1973 he arranged for the Record Society to hold its AGM in Chicheley Hall, when he and Professor Chibnall spoke on the history of the house and the family, drawing on examples from the archive. A second AGM was held there in 1993. Major Chester continued to take a lively interest in the Hall, which now belongs to the Royal Society, and in a letter to the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies written in May 2011, only a few weeks before his death in July, praised the ‘marvellous job’ the Royal Society has done on the house, which he said now looks magnificent. When he retired from the Executive Committee of the Record Society in 2006 after more than 35 years’ service, he was deservedly made a Vice-President.

Roger Bettridge

RAY SHRIMPTON (1934–2012)

Ray Shrimpton was for twenty years or more one of the regulars at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS), travelling twice a week from his home in Chesham to do his research in the archive searchroom. He was a member of a long-established Buckinghamshire family and became a stalwart of the Buckinghamshire Family History Society (BFHS).

On leaving Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Amersham, Ray joined the RAF as an engineering apprentice and worked on the Vulcan bomber. He remained proud of his time in the air force and a photograph of him in his sergeant's uniform was reproduced on the order of service for his funeral; fittingly, the funeral was attended by members of the veterans' association to which he belonged. In 1958, he was seriously injured in a motor-cycle accident, from which he never fully recovered, but his gentle manner and uncomplaining attitude belied an indomitable temperament which did not allow his injuries to interfere with his life.

Wills were a particular interest of Ray's. As a member of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, which he joined in 1974, he worked on the

notebooks of Frederick G. Gurney held in the Society's Library, after which he moved on to the original wills held in the county archives at CBS, reading through well over 150 years' worth (particularly for the period 1686–1858) to create a database containing the names of all the persons named in the wills. This gives access therefore not only to the names of testators, which is how the wills are indexed, but also to the names of anyone else mentioned in them in whatever capacity, such as beneficiaries, executors, witnesses, relatives and neighbours. Along the way, Ray generously shared any information which he thought would help others in their own research. His deteriorating health obliged him to give up his visits to CBS with only a few bundles of wills left to look at but the work was completed by the BFHS. The final database contains some 236,000 names and is named the Ray Shrimpton Wills Index in his honour. It can be consulted through the BFHS, which holds and maintains the database, and also at CBS, where a copy of the database is available.

Roger Bettridge

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