

In memory of Alan Shearer 1929 - 2021

15th December 2021 1:30pm

The numbers gathered here today are testimony to the affection and respect afforded to Alan from all walks of life. Our thoughts and sympathies are naturally with Fay and the family at this difficult time, but I know Alan would not want us to be sad or tearful, but to celebrate a happy, fruitful, and successful life.

The Shearer family, farming in Strathavan in Scotland in the late 19th Century, chartered a train from Strathavan, with all the cows, wagons, horses, furniture, and the family. They stopped in a siding to milk the cows on route and eventually arrived at Ore Station. The horses were harnessed to the wagons and the cows driven to Church Farm. They agreed to take the tenancy of both Church Farm and Warren Farm in Fairlight, producing milk that was sold very successfully on delivery rounds in Ore, Clive Vale, the Old Town, and Fairlight.

Alan, or Bunt as we all know him, was born in 1929 and went to school at Fairlight Primary School which was conveniently next to the farmhouse. His two older siblings, Richard, and Robert were already attending, and Bunt crept into school to listen to lessons long before he was old enough to attend. He simply loved school!

He passed his 11-plus exam and went to Rye Grammar School in 1941 which had already been evacuated, in June 1940, to Bedford due to the imminent threat of German invasion. He loved the school, the sports facilities and most of the billets he stayed in. He was joined by his brother John a few years later. His cousins, Peter and Tom Shearer and Jimmy Jury were also there at the same time. In the Summer of 1944, Bunt, Jimmy Jury and two boys from Winchelsea cycled home from Bedford for the school holidays. This must have been an interesting journey cycling across London with all the bomb-damage from the Blitz and the war still in progress. The school eventually returned to Rye in the Autumn of 1945. Bunt continued to excel at school, passing both his School Certificate and later his Higher Schools Certificate with distinction at the age of 18 in 1947. He was an outstanding scholar and was encouraged to become a doctor by the schoolteachers, but Bunt loved the farm and everything to do with it.

Bunt loved sport and in particular football and cricket. He was a very useful footballer, was Captain of Rye Grammar School Football Team and played for Icklesham Casuals. Quite early on in his career, aged 19, he broke his leg in a tackle so badly that he had to retire from playing. The double-break was so serious he spent 18 months in plaster and told never to play football again or risk serious disability. He took up refereeing and became a hugely respected Class 1 referee, taking charge of games across Kent and Sussex. He once refereed Hastings United vs. Tottenham Hotspur in a friendly, and only gave up refereeing when his age became an issue, much to his annoyance.

He loved working on the family farm when not at school including delivering the milk but with his two older siblings already established, there was little scope for Bunt to work full time when he left school. He was offered a job by Herbert Smith

Snr. at Wakehams Farm in 1948 which he took and married Christine Cooke the same year, moving into one of the farm's cottages, where daughter Marrie was born in 1949.

After about two years, an opportunity to be a farm foreman for Bill Cooke arose at Playden and after about a year a second daughter, Lorna, arrived. Three years later, he took a job as a farm rep for the feed firm Silcocks and moved into a house at the Glebe in Pett for about 2 years. The firm then moved him to Gloucestershire where he worked for a further four years, travelling back to Fairlight to visit family frequently. This became a strain on the whole family, and they moved to Tunbridge Wells, still working for Silcocks, before moving back to Fairlight in 1961.

Around this time, Bunt joined the local Coastguard Cliff Rescue Team and spent many hours keeping watch from the small wooden lookout on the Firehills when the weather was bad or when regulars needed a break. After 20 years of watch keeping and the occasional dramatic cliff rescue, Bunt became First Auxiliary-in-Charge at Fairlight. On retirement, he was awarded a Gold Medal and, as a leaving present, the Hastings in shore Lifeboat crew offered him a trip out to sea in their boat. Bunt had confessed a tendency to sea sickness, which merely encouraged the coxswain to put the boat through its paces whilst Bunt turned green!

So, on returning to Fairlight in 1961, Herbert Smith once again offered him his old job back this time managing the dairy herd. Bunt took up this opportunity on the* condition that he could have Saturday afternoons off to play cricket.

Bunt's father J. Y Shearer was an excellent wicket keeper playing for Hastings Priory and Sussex. Bunt was a very good all-rounder and played his first game for Pett Cricket Club in 1946. He was exceptionally good at catching and held the club catching record on six occasions, five consecutively. He played his last game for Pett in 1984. He was a very successful Sunday Captain for several years where he always encouraged the young players and less gifted to be involved.

The club records show that Bunt scored 2,235 runs, took 309 wickets, and held 154 catches. My father's report at the end of the 1984 season quotes the following: In my opinion Bunt was one of the 2 best captains the club has ever been fortunate enough to have and an absolutely 1s Class sportsman in every sense of the word'.

In the early 1970s, Pett Cricket Club were enjoying some splendid cricket on an ever-improving wicket. There was a new crop of post-war cricketers growing up in the village blending in with the old guard. The Royal Oak pub had reopened after an absence of over 70 years without a pub in the village.

The Saturday team was Captained very successfully by the somewhat debonaire Noel Spendlove, with Captain Mainwaring tendencies! In the 1973 season, Noel had become exasperated by the younger generations' reluctance to leave the Royal Oak, often with the away side ready to start. After several weeks of nagging, unsuccessfully, Noel asked Bunt aka Sergeant Wilson, if he could go over

and get the boys out of the pub, not least of all because three of them were his nephews.

Bunt, already changed into his cricket whites, proceeded out of the gate, down the slope to the Royal Oak, where he was spotted by the boys who quickly ordered up a pint of Guinness before leaving by the back door. When Bunt walked in, Sid the landlord gave him the pint and engaged him in conversation. Meanwhile, Noel Spendlove was letting off steam and decided to walk over to the pub and investigate ... only to discover Bunt drinking his Guinness!
...probably the only time Bunt was lost for words!

Bunt rarely missed the Annual Pett Cricket Club Dinner which up until 1972 was a stag affair held at The Two Sawyers. It then moved to the Smuggler where wives and girlfriends were allowed. It was around this time that Bunt met Fay and they were married in 1977 moving up to the Fairlight Coastguard Houses.

Bunt was elected Club Chairman in 1992 and served until 2002, when he was made a Life Member. He was elected President of the club in 2010. During this 30-year period, Bunt and Fay attended most home fixtures, always on hand to give support, praise, and advice. He was very insistent that good behaviour and sportsmanship should be on display and was very quick to step in, to protect the good name of the club, in the event of an indiscretion.

This 75 years of service to the club is without doubt the longest in its entire history and the bedrock on which we have come to depend, especially in difficult circumstances.

Bunt was also Chairman of the Pett Sports Association for several years in the 1990s. The umbrella organisation that kept the four member clubs in order. After Bunt retired from working at Wakehams Farm in 1988, he worked briefly for Michael Gregory, who owned the Mermaid Inn, growing vegetables on a Market Garden in Fairlight for the restaurant. When Fay's father, Bill Griffin, retired from running the very successful Griffins Farm Shop, Bunt and Fay took over the running of the shop in the late 1980s until it closed in 1997.

Bunt was a member of the Beach Club for most of his life, both when it was at The Smugglers site and when it became the New Beach Club on its current site. He served on the Committee for many years, including a spell as Chairman and Treasurer. He eventually became a Trustee when his calm wisdom could be called upon to defuse difficult situations. As a boy, I remember driving flocks of sheep up and down the road all day during shearing with my father. It was a hot July evening and as we were passing the Beach Club for the umpteenth time, Bunt typically came out with a cold pint of bitter for my father and a shandy for me. Apart from his kindness, one of the most striking features to me about Bunt was his extraordinary voice. Apparently, his rich, Sussex brogue was acquired from spending so much time as a young boy with the farm Carter called Clem who had a very broad Sussex accent. Bunt used to copy him, and the voice stuck, resulting in him being called Turnip at school.

Bunt has led an extraordinary, varied life working in an environment that he loved, enjoying playing and watching sport combined with a commitment to public service. He was a wonderful man, and we are all so lucky to have known

him and had him in our lives.

Andrew Dunlop