

## Alan Simpson OBE Farewell Ceremony

It was a wet and blustery afternoon as the funeral procession, led by a horse-drawn hearse to the theme tune of Steptoe and Son, arrived on the pitch at Hampton & Richmond Borough Football Club.

The terrace and one of the stands of the ground known as the Beveree, were packed with mourners wishing to pay their respects to the great Alan Simpson.

I have lived in the local area for over 20 years and both Alan Simpson and Ray Galton are revered by the community. They have been my comedy heroes since I was a boy and I have been lucky enough to meet and chat with them on numerous occasions.

I stood on the terrace feeling sad but immensely privileged to be there and watched as Alan's family and friends arrived and took their places in the large marquee situated on the pitch.

The Reverend Martin Morgan gave a moving welcome introduction speech. This was followed by several excerpts from Hancock's Half Hour, Steptoe and Son and comments from Alan, played on loud speakers. The shared laughter around the ground amongst all present was something really quite special.

Paul Merton then came to the microphone to tell us of his memories of Alan. 'When I conjure up Alan in my mind's eye, I see that rotund, lovable Welshman, 5ft 5, blowing raspberries and singing Bread of Heaven at the top of his voice...' It was surreal, funny and moving as he went on to talk about his first meeting with Alan and Ray over drinks, the great honour of working with them and building up a precious friendship over many years.

Reverend Morgan asked the mourners to reflect on Alan's life as the beautiful "Autumn Leaves" by Oscar Petersen was played.

Jacques Le Bars then gave a very moving speech about his Godfather and broke down in tears on several occasions as he related touching, funny stories and an endearing insight into Alan the man.

The prayers and blessings followed and the cortege, clearly upset, left the pitch to the sound of "Unforgettable" by Nat King Cole.

The rain continued to pour down as we watched the procession of family and close friends leave the ground to attend a private funeral.

We headed off into the pouring rain to the nearest pub. I was about to say to the landlord "there's more water out there than there is in your beer." But I resisted. Just in case I got a punch up the bracket!

Alan, thanks for all the wonderful laughs. Your legacy will last forever.

Elton Maryon