

Ladies and Gentlemen

Before I begin this eulogy to my Father I am pleased to stand here with my elder Brother Dick and my Sister. Joanne has her own words to speak and my Brother is here to make sure I get through this, alternatively he will finish it for me. The term cometh the hour cometh the man is very true of my Brother. I saw first hand his care and compassion at Dad's bedside in his last days which is a great credit to him, and I thank him for doing the things for Dad I couldn't do. I also need to thank so many people for their kind words, their cards and sympathy during this difficult time. Their thoughts have been a great comfort to us all.

So, I am privileged to give this eulogy to my Father. It has some similarities to an address I gave to him on his 90th Birthday nearly four years ago, but first and foremost it is a celebration of his life.

This is a celebration of someone very special to many here – and to give him his full title - He was a member of the most excellent order of the British Empire – an MBE he received in 1987 for services to Agriculture, the chairman of A E Beckett & Sons Ltd, the chairman of A E Beckett & Sons Developments Ltd, an annual sponsor to the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, a past secretary to the British Egg Marketing Board, a great grandfather, a grandfather, a father, a husband, my best mate and his greatest title was that he was the head of the Beckett Family.

He was Mr Alan Magrath Beckett. Alan Magrath Beckett was born on 7th April 1930 and passed away peacefully on 18th February 2024.

Alan Beckett and the company A E Beckett & Sons Ltd were too closely linked to even try to separate them. The company began with Albert – Alan's father. The term from riches to rags in two generations is often coined, and perhaps one of the great successes of Becketts is that the business has radically changed generation by generation.

The family is from a farming background. Albert was a dairy farmer who moved to Wythall in the late 1930's. He farmed three tenanted farms with his two sons Alan and Ken. Following a Nuffield Scholarship Alan made Albert sell all his cows and the Company moved into intensive egg production just before the first farm was purchased by Alan in 1959. The Company grew to be the 5th largest egg producer in the country and, in the process; he bought most of the land we farm today. At the height of this success, he was buying a farm a year for seven consecutive years. The farms were bought to engineer one man units which was done for two reasons. Disease was difficult to control at that time so it was sensible to quarantine each unit, and secondly Alan had this belief that one man's output working alone would be 100% Put two men together and that output dropped to 160% between them.

This piece of wisdom he gained on his Nuffield Scholarship which he won in 1957. For those not familiar with this organization, Lord Nuffield who was a great philanthropist and the innovator of the Morris Motor Car, created scholarships to enable working farmers to travel the world gaining knowledge and experience which could then be shared by UK farmers.

Nuffield was a great part of my Father's life. - He was instrumental in the formation of the International CSC (the contemporary scholars

conference) and sat on the Nuffield scholar selection panel for 9 years. He enjoyed and delighted in thinking about the questions which would challenge prospective scholars and test their metal and resolve at interview.

“What are your views about the legalization of cannabis”? He would ask. There was no right or wrong answer, just an opinion to be sought and then backed up by a logical thought process.

I was fortunate to win a Nuffield Farming Scholarship also in 1987 and my daughter Holly was also awarded a scholarship in 2014. The Nuffield Scholarship Trust covers over 20 countries worldwide and we are the only family in the world to boast three generations of Nuffield Scholars. As a family we can actually boast 4 scholarships as Anne was awarded an honorary scholarship for her services to the Trust – a fact Alan was particularly proud of.

He and Anne were so passionate about the value of Nuffield Farming Scholarships that they decided in the mid 1990’s to personally sponsor a scholar each year and they now have an extended family of 27 “Beckett” Scholars, many of whom are here today. He loved the diversity of the group, delighting in the success stories and achievements of this extended family.

However, returning to his farming career, the success of the 1970’s was not sustainable. The profitability of the egg industry declined over the next two decades and I will always be grateful to the old man for his trust in allowing me to sell the chickens and move towards the Farm Retailing we now enjoy. The several sets of farm buildings owned by the company

were converted to various industrial lets, which meant more tenants and a greater rental income.

I could talk to you all about the many things he has done and achieved. Sometimes he was difficult to manage, and not every day has always been a sunny day, but then without rain there would be no rainbows.

He loved to travel – ending up with homes in Spain and America. The overseas homes were far more about the people than anything else having life-long friendships with the Anken family in the States and Pedro and Sebastiana and family in Spain and it is deeply appreciated to both those families that they are with us here today.

With age came degenerative macula which he managed to deal with for most of the time. Declaring himself blind gave him the white stick or “magic wand” as most of us refer to it as. He believed himself to be Harry Potter – waving his stick wildly in the air before stepping out on the dual carriageway on his daily walk to the shop. Me, from my office hearing the screech of car brakes leaping up to the window to see the chaos he had created with the magic wand. We were all so delighted that in the last months of his life Anne would drive him to the shop and he could remain safe. It most certainly goes without saying that macula in no way hampered his ability to spot a good looking woman – on these occasions his vision was 20/20 and he would then flirt outrageously with them.

On several occasions we travelled at Christmas to visit Liam and family in South Africa. At the busy airports I would tend to walk in front of him and he, brandishing the white magic wand following me; the general public giving space to this blind man, walking for the most part at pace. I

can remember on the one occasion he was lagging significantly behind me as we approached a metal detection gate.

“Come on and pick your feet up – there’s nothing wrong with your legs it’s only your eyesight that’s faulty”.

On this occasion there was absolutely nothing wrong with eyesight or the legs. He had spotted two attractive air hostesses who on seeing this old blind man with a white stick decided to assist him by linking arms with him one each side, to help him through the gate.

He was a Freemason and gained the rank of Past Provincial Senior Grand Warden. On the night he had his stroke he was upstairs getting ready to go to Lodge. He was a mason for over 60 years. He was the son of a Mason and a father of a Mason.

He was Worshipful Master of the Seymour Lodge and went through the chair twice in 1977 and 1993. He acted as Almoner in the Lodge for nearly 20 years – I think mainly because he enjoyed looking after the Lodge widows !!! He enjoyed his Freemasonry and the diverse group of friends and acquaintances it afforded him.

He loved his cars – whether it was the Jensen Interceptor FF Mark 3 Registration POH 66G – not that I remember it well - which he had while my Brother and I were at school making us the envy of all our peers; the Lincoln Town Car he acquired when he bought Three Holer Farm in the States, which was literally “a barge on wheels” or the Bentley Continental I was fortunate to chauffeur him around in from time to time – He enjoyed them all.

He loved to go fly fishing, whether at Packington or latterly at Bittle Lake near to Barnt Green. Jean as his driver and tying his lines for him. Les

Garside was the other member of the fishing party – a man who created his own swear dictionary, but Dad never seemed to mind.

He was a man very loyal to his friends, and enjoyed his trips to see Howard Aucote and Peter Evans -always hoping for the “snifter” at Howard’s and settling for tea with Peter.

We celebrate the life of a man who lived life to the full in every sense of the word.

To try to sum up Alan Beckett in a few lines is difficult, but words such as wise, generous, integrity, honesty, trustworthiness and many other superlatives all combine to illustrate that he was a straight man. His opinion measured, and sometimes tactfully delivered. He was a man who could always find the incisive question to be asked, which cut to the crux of the matter and that needed to be answered. A proper gentleman whose word was his bond.

I was unsure as to whether or not to go and see him at the funeral directors, and I’m glad that I ultimately did. My lasting memory will be of him with his tweed jacket and tie, with I’m certain a wry smile on his face and of course – wearing the battered old trilby hat.

He will be sorely missed by many.

Sleep well Dad